

GAY MEN:
NEGOTIATING PROCREATIVE, FATHER, AND FAMILY IDENTITIES

By

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To my family and diverse families everywhere

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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GAY MEN:
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This qualitative study explores the social psychology of gay men's experiences with their procreative consciousness and father identity. Analysis is based on in-depth interviews with 19 openly gay childless men and 22 gay men who have fathered through non-heterosexual means. This research investigates the processes by which gay men construct, negotiate, and experience their procreative, family, and father identities. My findings demonstrate the extent that gay men's procreative consciousness is shaped within a complex web of institutions and other ruling relations. Gay men's procreative consciousness evolves throughout their life course as a dynamic phenomenon and is profoundly shaped by adoption and fertility agencies, assumptions and myths about gay men and negotiations with birth mothers, partners, and others.

Gay men's procreative consciousness is situated in a socially constructed historical context that is rapidly changing how gay men think about the possibility of fatherhood. However, gay men's procreative consciousness has been constructed in a societal context that assumes heterosexuality as normative and privileges heterosexual parenting. The men I interviewed describe how they negotiate gender, sexuality, and real or imagined families within explicit gendered and heterosexist social boundaries. The fathers and childless men alike drew upon traditional ideas about gender, biogenetics, respectability, sexuality, and kinship. Whereas

the closet as a strategy of accommodating to heterosexual domination is becoming less salient, this does not necessarily denote that heterosexual domination is a remnant of the past. My conversations with these men show how heterosexual dominance is deeply rooted in the institutions and culture of American society and must be understood as not simply a product of laws or individual prejudice, but institutionalized pervasive dominance. Such findings underscore the need for a comprehensive sociological theory that can capture how gay men's reproductive decision-making and fathering experiences are constructed and constricted by institutionalized patriarchal and heterosexual dominance.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

As the old saying goes, “It takes two to tango.” Yet, in some cases the beat has changed. Sometimes it actually takes more than two people to “tango,” or in this case, to make a baby. Today, gay men can actually decide to become “pregnant,” and this inevitably requires the assistance of a woman. Understanding gay men’s motivation and approach to creating and doing family bonds through fatherhood draws attention to gay men’s experiences with the procreative realm. The purpose of my study is twofold: first, to examine how gay men develop, express, and negotiate a procreative consciousness over time in the context of a socially constructed world that privileges heterosexual parenting, and second, to advance theoretical understanding of how gay men experience and do fathering under the watchful eye of a society fueled by heterosexism, homophobia, and constricting gender norms.

This study builds on Marsiglio and Hutchinson’s (2002) qualitative study exploring how young heterosexual men perceive and express aspects of their procreative consciousness—their awareness of their ability to create human life. Their analysis highlights how heterosexual men experience the procreative arena through their sexual and romantic relations while anticipating and experiencing incidents of miscarriage, abortion, pregnancy, contraception, and births. Heterosexual men’s procreative consciousness is heightened, at least temporarily, by encountering various objects, people, and situations that are a part of the heterosexually-defined procreative realm. Yet, what happens in the absence of heterosexual intercourse and intimate experience with fertility-related events like miscarriage, abortion, and pregnancy? Absent an imaginary or real sex partner capable of giving birth, does a gay man’s procreative consciousness still emerge and develop? If it does, what are its distinguishing features and relationship to a gay man’s desire to become a father?

Issues of gay marriage and gay parenting continue to evoke controversy in our society. Significant segments of society devalue same-sex relationships, waging battles in the popular press, legislative forums, and courts in order to prevent gay men and lesbians from having the legal right to marry. Despite these obstacles, gay men and lesbians have created families through adoption and other artificial means, and the definition of “the family” has changed dramatically over the last few decades to include such family forms (Dunne, 2000; Mallon, 2000). Yet, there is little understanding of how gay men experience the procreative realm in terms of fatherhood motivations, reproductive decision-making, and fathering experiences. In fact, no research to date has examined how gay men experience the transition to fatherhood (Mallon, 2004). Thus, it is timely to extend Marsiglio and Hutchinson’s model to a sample of gay men. My analysis fosters a deeper understanding of how gay men conceptualize and negotiate their sense of self as procreative beings and/or fathers.

This research strives to answer three important and related questions:

- How do gay men become aware of and express their procreative consciousness and father/family identities over time?
- Within a socially constructed world privileging heterosexual parenting, how do gay men negotiate, with themselves and others, their dual experience of being gay and having desires to become a father?
- How does the larger social/cultural context affect how gay men develop and experience their procreative consciousness and father/family identities?

Because little research has examined gay men’s procreative consciousness and fathering experiences my study advances the literature on the sociology of gender, sexualities, reproduction, and families. Informed by symbolic interactionism, the procreative identity framework, and feminist sociology, I present a novel lens through which to view gay men’s perceptions, decision-making, and experiences about having and/or raising children. Using in-depth interviews with childless gay men and gay fathers who constructed their families through

nonheterosexual intercourse, I generate new insights about how gay men perceive themselves as both potential and active fathers.

Theorizing Gay Men's Experiences in the Procreative Realm

Consistent with the tenets of grounded theory methodology, this study does not attempt to apply a single theoretical framework a priori. Grounded theory involves the discovery and development of theory from data, systematically obtained and analyzed from social research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Such a theory fits empirical situations, is understandable to both sociologists and laypeople, and provides research with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications. Glaser and Strauss argue for grounding theory in social research and for generating theory from the data. The authors have linked this position with a general method of comparative analysis, a strategic method for generating theory that is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems. Grounded theory advocates a type of comparative inquiry, requiring that one's explanatory conceptual categories be generated from the everyday social world. These categories are valid because they have been created from a process of data collection and because they reflect the experiences of the participants under investigation.

I stray from the traditional grounded theory approach since I am already quite familiar with some of the substantive and theoretical issues relevant to this study and because I borrow concepts from Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002). Similar to Marsiglio and Hutchinson, I use grounded theory methodology to generate new concepts and their properties about how gay men experience the procreative realm. Consequently, I am not attempting to produce a complete grounded theory. Rather, my goal is more modest in that I strive to develop a conceptual framework that accounts for how gay men construct and negotiate their procreative identities over time, in different situations, and through interactions with others.

For the purposes of this research I use multiple theoretical perspectives to investigate a single phenomenon: the construction and negotiation of gay men's procreative consciousness and fathering experiences. Employing multiple frameworks to examine a single phenomena provides for an in depth exploration of how gay men experience both the procreative arena and fathering. Themes from the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism (SI), identity theory, procreative identity framework, Mills' (1959) concept of the sociological imagination, and Dorothy Smith's feminist sociology (1987, 1990) inform and guide my research. I use each of these perspectives as theoretically sensitizing lenses to develop my research questions, interviews, and analysis.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a paradigm that relies on the crucial assumption that human beings possess the ability to think and imbue their world with meaning. Individuals are viewed not as units that are simply motivated by external forces beyond their control; rather they are viewed as reflective or interacting human agents (Mead, 1934). This unique capacity for thought is shaped and refined by social interaction, which in turn is shaped by different ways of thinking.

In social interaction, humans learn the meanings and the symbols that allow them to exercise their unique capacity for thought (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980). Symbolic interactionism focuses on how individuals use and interpret symbols as a form of communication. These symbols are used to create and maintain impressions of themselves and to construct a sense of self (Mead, 1934). The SI perspective also illuminates how individuals use and interpret symbols to create and sustain what they experience as a specific situation's reality. Through social interaction, people symbolically communicate meanings to the others involved and individuals behave toward symbols based on the meanings that are attached to them.

Heterosexual men's ability to become biological fathers rests on their ability to produce sperm, and typically to engage in sexual intercourse. However, fecundity perceptions represent the central principle for theorizing men as procreative beings when viewed through a SI lens (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002). Viewed through this lens, the entire procreative experience involves how men manage and negotiate their awareness of their ability to procreate. Accordingly, the sphere of the procreative man can be extended to include all men who perceive themselves as individuals able to procreate.

However, for gay men, the experience of becoming a father, whether biological or social is distinct from that of their heterosexual counterparts. Although many gay men are technically able to procreate in the same way as heterosexual men, many choose not to. Gay men are raised in the same social milieu as non-gays and despite obvious impediments, many gay men still have comparable desires to procreate and/or experience fatherhood. SI illuminates how the meanings gay men associate with aspects of the procreative arena are assumed not to be inherent or essential. Rather, they are viewed as emerging out of a social, interpretive process. I attend to the social processes by which participants assign meaning to situations, events, others, and themselves as they encounter facets of the procreative realm. Specifically, I explore how gay men negotiate with themselves and others, their dual experience of being gay and having desires to become a parent. The meanings gay men construct are critical in understanding how these men conceptualize their sense of self as a procreative being. Furthermore, it is crucial to identify how these meanings emerge from gay men's interactions with others, specifically through exchanges with romantic partners, their own parents, other gay men, and adoption and fertility practitioners.

According to the SI paradigm, social action is based on the process of social interaction. With this in mind, the SI perspective emphasizes how gay men develop their self-images within

the context of their relationships with others (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980).

Similarly, this perspective emphasizes how gay men develop their prospective selves as future fathers at an intrapsychic level and interactional level (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980). I view gay men as active agents constructing their identities while defining their relationships.

Identity Theory

The concept of identity is key to symbolic interactionists. According to Stryker (1980), identity refers to who or what one is, to the various traits or meanings attached to oneself by the self and others. In a sense, identities are the most public aspect of the self. Identities are significant because they help individuals to define and frame interaction by supplying shared meanings for behavior and situations (Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism posits that identities are socially constructed (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990). Viewed in this light, identities are representative of a synthesis of diverse social experiences that individuals have endured and interpreted throughout their lives.

Consistent with ideas on the looking-glass self, individuals adapt to their perceptions of how others see them (Cooley, 1902). As social beings, we see ourselves through the eyes of other people, even to the extent of incorporating their views of us into our own self-concept (Cooley, 1902). As a result, individuals come to develop an identity through either imagined or real interactions with others. Although an actor may stake out an identity claim such as “father” or “gay man” the validity of the claim depends on the responses of significant others within the actor’s networks (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990). This sheds light on the phenomena of many gay men internalizing anti-gay myths and stereotypes about themselves as future fathers.

Accordingly, this study illuminates how the gay man and the gay father identities are social and dynamic. Gay men’s identities depend on both personal meanings and interpersonal interactions.

Furthermore, if we are to understand how gay men subjectively experience various facets of the procreative realm, we must consider how these men actively construct their past, present, and future selves. I therefore attend to how men evolve in their ability to conceptualize themselves as prospective fathers. The dynamic features of the self and of identity are a primary focus of the current project. By viewing these men as active agents who play a critical role shaping their own experiences and identities, analysis centers on the ways by which these men organize their self-perceptions (see discussion on possible selves in this chapter; Strauss & Goldberg, 1999).

Here, a temporal focus comes into play because I sensitize myself to how gay men draw on previous concrete experiences to frame their thinking. In fleshing out their thoughts about fatherhood, men can manipulate their past, present, and future-oriented conceptions of self to interpret meanings of becoming a father. Similar to findings in research on heterosexual men, when the men I spoke with fantasized fatherhood, whether in an abstract sense or in a more concrete way, they consciously renegotiated their past, present and future experiences. However, the very fact that my participants were gay caused them to reinterpret what it meant to be a gay man in contemporary American society and how this identity was complicated, expanded, or challenged with a future father identity. In conceptualizing gay men as dynamic procreative beings, I examine how their intimate worlds involve procreative and fathering experiences.

Expanding the Procreative Identity Framework

In this study I expand upon the procreative identity framework--a conceptual lens that was initially developed to explain how heterosexual men experience the procreative arena. This framework is a useful conceptual lens to explore gay men's experiences in the reproductive realm. Procreative consciousness is viewed as the cognitive and emotional awareness and

expression of self as a person capable of creating and caring for life. Moreover, the framework treats this self expression as a process-oriented phenomenon tied to situational contingencies, global sentiments, and romantic relationships. Although gay men's experiences are distinct in some ways, the basic conceptual lens is relevant to gay men because it accentuates how men's procreative consciousness is activated and evolves. Furthermore, the model's emphasis on both individual-based and relationship-based modes for expressing procreative consciousness draws attention to how gay men, on their own and in conjunction with partners, learn to frame their view about becoming fathers.

Although it is sensible to extend the procreative identity framework to the experiences of gay men, extending a model originally conceptualized for heterosexual men is complicated. I hesitate to take knowledge developed by and for heterosexual men and risk incorrectly extending this knowledge to gay men's experiences. Although gay men's desire for parenthood may be similar in some situations to heterosexuals' feelings, gay men's access to fatherhood and fathering experiences are constructed within a heterosexually-defined realm embedded with ideological proscriptions.

Thus, extending the procreative identity framework requires a better understanding of how gay men's private experiences are rooted in social conditions. Gay men's procreative consciousness emerges through actions that are shaped by sociohistorical circumstances. For example, circumstances associated with prevailing definitions of families and stereotypical images of gay men have had a radical 'break' over the past few decades. Consequently, a nuanced understanding of gay men's procreative consciousness requires that personal thoughts and fantasies about fathering be situated within a socially constructed historical context that is transforming how gay men think about the possibility of fatherhood.

In order to achieve a more complete understanding of how gay men's procreative consciousness is situated in a sociohistorical framework, I draw upon the work of two key sociological theorists. First, I use C. Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination, a paradigm that helps to better understand the relationship between personal biography and social structure (1959). Mills' key premise is that individual experience is situated in specific social and historical environments. These environments shape not only what our experience might be, but also how we think about these experiences. Mills' framework is useful here because it details how gay men's reproductive decision-making processes and fathering experiences are highly influenced by aspects related to a specific cultural and social context.

I also draw upon the theoretical contributions of feminist sociologist, Dorothy Smith. Smith maintains that women's consciousness has been created by men occupying positions of power (1987, 1990). I borrow from and expand on this framework positing that gay men's procreative consciousness has been constructed within a world that has traditionally assumed heterosexuality and continues to privilege heterosexual parenting. Smith maintains that consciousness is not merely something going on in people's heads, rather it is produced by people and it is a social product (Smith, 1990). Thus, in order to more completely understand gay men's procreative consciousness and their possible fantasies of fathering, there is a necessity to link this consciousness with the institutions that create, maintain, challenge, and eventually change how gay men have historically imagined fatherhood and families. This study is an analysis of gay men's procreative consciousness and fathering experiences that anchors personal thoughts, decisions, and experiences to the political, historical, economic, and social process that shapes them.

Smith's feminist sociology is also a useful addition to this conceptual framework because a detailed analysis of gay men's fatherhood motivations and experiences must move beyond individual motivations and take a closer look at how various institutions shape and construct these processes (1987, 1990). Smith's theoretical paradigm highlights how certain institutions and ruling relations, such as adoption and fertility agencies, and the institutionalization of both fatherhood and the gay subculture shape the processes by which gay men contemplate and experience fatherhood. For example, even though gay men's desire for parenthood may be similar in some situations to heterosexuals' feelings, gay men's access to adoption and assisted reproductive technologies is mediated by a bureaucratic apparatus that affects the conditions under which they can father (Lewin, 2006). This is especially important for this study because the majority of data were collected in Florida and New York. The former is currently one of the only states with explicit statutes prohibiting adoption by gay men and lesbians and in the latter state all use of surrogate mothers is illegal (Horowitz & Maruyama, 1995; Mallon, 2004; Weltman, 2005).

Smith's feminist sociology expands our understanding of how consciousness is a social product. However, consciousness is itself biographically framed. Thus, the body is not only an object, "it is also that through which our consciousness reaches out toward and acts upon the world" (Williams, 1984, p. 197). I do not treat consciousness merely as a social product, but one that emerges through gendered and sexualized bodies. The connection between gay men's awareness of themselves as procreative beings is limited due to their gendered bodies and gay identities. It is the absence of this mind-body intersection more so than its presence that shapes how men view themselves as potential fathers (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002). Gay men's procreative consciousness is a social accomplishment in that it is conditioned by their gendered

and sexualized identities. Thus, certain gendered and sexual processes “fashion the opportunities [gay] men have to give meaning to their personal experiences in the procreative realm” (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2004, p. 14). Although these processes exist for all men regardless of their sexual orientation, the experience of sex for gay men is disconnected with reproduction. The question of how gay men improvise sexual scripts when reproduction is not an issue is fascinating in and of itself, but beyond the scope of this study. Thus, I do not attend to how gay men experience sex and other intimate relations. Indeed, when I asked my participants if they ever thought about reproduction during sex, all unanimously replied no. My starting point for this research moves beyond sexual acts and focuses on how gay men’s procreative consciousness manifests itself outside the privacy of the bedroom. Even when sex and reproduction are disconnected, a procreative consciousness emerges. The procreative and fathering stories that surface in this study constitute a highly unique expression of the interrelationship between bodies, self, and society.

Conceptual Lenses

Seeing as my study is based on Marsiglio’s conceptual model for heterosexual men discussed at length in *Procreative Man* (1998) and in *Sex, Men, and Babies: Stories of Awareness and Responsibility* (2002), I employ many of the concepts and properties he either employed or developed as a flexible analytical framework to better understand the experiences of gay men as they navigate various facets of procreative and fathering worlds. Because the experiences and social-psychological negotiations of gay men are quite different from heterosexual men, I modify some of these concepts to better correspond with gay men’s subjectivities. Further, because Marsiglio’s research is limited to social-psychological thoughts about fathering, I supplement his framework with an analysis of how the gay fathers in my study actually did fathering. I detail below some of the broad theoretical concepts that guided every

phase of my research process: procreative consciousness, fatherhood readiness, possible selves, turning points, and doing fathering. Although I integrate various concepts into my analysis, these five frame my project.

As further discussed in chapter 3, I use these conceptual tools as sensitizing concepts to provide a general sense of reference and orientation without overly restricting new avenues for theoretical discovery. Employing these concepts as guiding tools allowed me to refine and expand analyses of how gay men traverse pathways to fatherhood and actively do fathering.

Procreative Consciousness

Consciousness, by definition refers to an individual's awareness of or attentiveness to his or her experience at a given moment (Schutz, 1970). When consciousness is contextualized with regards to procreation, it captures the multi-faceted emotions, thoughts, and experiences associated with reproduction and fathering. According to Marsiglio, procreative consciousness refers to "men's ideas, perceptions, feelings, and impressions of themselves as they pertain to various aspects of procreation" (1998, p. 16). This concept describes some of the crucial dimensions of men's procreative experiences.

Men's procreative consciousness has both an ephemeral and enduring quality, and as such, Marsiglio distinguishes between men's situated and global procreative consciousness (Marsiglio, 1998; Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002). On some occasions, during involvement in a specific activity, in a conversation, or as a result of various procreative triggers, men actively attend to their procreative selves and potential abilities for a fleeting moment, an experience Marsiglio refers to as situated procreative consciousness. Men are also likely to possess more permanent and stable thoughts about themselves as persons capable of birthing and fathering human life, an experience referred to as global procreative consciousness.

When this concept and its respective properties are situated in the current study with respect to gay men, they illuminate the distinct processes by which participants' experienced procreative fantasies. For example, some men I interviewed spoke about experiences caring for or interacting with children as moments when they became aware of their fatherhood abilities and desires whereas others spoke of a more enduring effect these experiences with children had on their sense of a future fathering identity. Zack is a 34-year-old Chinese-American restaurant manager who once a month during the school year participates in an after-school program for neighborhood grade school children. During these few hours each month, he reflects on the possibility of becoming a father. He explained that he relishes the opportunity to be a role model for these children and that these precious, infrequent moments in his hectic schedule remind him of what his distant future might entail. However, a short time later, Zack leaves this innocent world of children and re-enters the crazed life of a high-end restaurant manager once again.

On the flip side of the coin, let's consider Frank's experiences with children. Frank is a 28-year-old graduate student who at one time was considering a career in childcare. Frank worked at a daycare center when he was between the ages of 15 and 20 and again following his college graduation. He recalled many of these experiences quite fondly and referred to them as "preparation to be a good father." For Frank, these childcare experiences were more enduring than were Zack's, in that they formed the basis of his prevailing perspective on becoming a father. Yet, later in our conversation, Frank divulged that one specific incident within this context of childcare actually activated his desire to be an eternally childless openly gay man. Frank ceased to work in childcare following an incident where a young boy's mother accused him of "touching him in an inappropriate manner." Despite Frank's assertion that nothing of the sort ever occurred, this traumatic incident heightened his awareness of the public scrutiny and

surveillance surrounding gay men and young boys. Immediately following this confrontation, Frank swore that he would never become a father and bring another human life into this world. Frank's experience highlights how gay men's global procreative consciousness is "built upon and shaped by their various situational experiences" (Marsiglio, 1998, p. 17).

Frank's experiences emphasize how gay men's procreative consciousness and thoughts about fathering are distinct from that of their heterosexual counterparts. Gay men may not have nearly as many instances that generate their procreative consciousness because they are not engaging in sex that could produce a pregnancy. Yet, whereas heterosexual men's procreative consciousness tends to be more short-lived and dispersed, the marginalized status of gay men enables them (or rather, forces them) to be overly conscious of their views and feelings in relation to the procreative and fathering realms. Because ideology subsumes the reality of lived experience, lived experience is mediated through ideology. Hence, one's lived experiences are only understood through the filter of ideology (Smith, 1990). Guided by ideologies that stereotype gay men as pedophiles, overly promiscuous and irresponsible caregivers, gay men are likely to interpret experiences with the multi-dimensional procreative realm by drawing upon a complex set of politicized ideas and images that are distinct from the mosaic of beliefs that structure heterosexual men's experiences.

Fatherhood Readiness

The fatherhood readiness concept captures features of how well prepared gay men believe they are to assume responsibilities associated with being a father (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002). When asked about their thoughts on fatherhood, many childless participants spoke of future sacrifices, in terms of finances, time, and leisure. Many of the men had vivid visions about their future experiences with fatherhood, what type of sacrifices they would need to make, and the type of father that they would be. A common theme that emerged was that in order to be

an ideal father, one would need to sacrifice a large part of themselves, specifically with regards to their career aspirations and leisure activities. Aiden, a White college aged man contemplating fatherhood illustrates this perfectly when he said:

It's a lot of time and commitments that you have to be willing to put into this kid. You're going to have to be sacrificing a lot. Some instances, maybe a little bit of your career. Even just like little things that you might consider that you're missing out on, like, I might not be able to travel as much, which is something that I do want to do, and even if I did travel, I would have to make things okay for the kid. And I also have to look at the stress. You know, just worrying, "Am I doing a good job?"

Similar to some of the men Marsiglio and Hutchinson spoke with, Aiden recognized that in order to be an ideal father, he would eventually have to surrender various luxuries that he now takes for granted.

As discussed in greater detail in chapter four, more is at stake than simply sacrificing career, time, leisure, and the financial responsibility typically associated with fatherhood. Furthermore, for many gay men who cannot simply accidentally become pregnant, fatherhood readiness may begin to be experienced years before one actually decides to become a father. Regardless of which fatherhood pathway is chosen, the substantial planning, navigating, and structure that many gay men experience is tied to fatherhood readiness.

In chapter four I also attend to the degree to which and how gay men collaborate with a partner or assess their state of readiness independently. Gay men vary in how certain they feel they are to have a child at this point in their life, in general or with a particular partner. Accordingly, men's perception of an ideal fathering situation is inextricably intertwined with how they perceive the type of relationship they want, their relationship and experiences with their own father, and their financial situation. For men mulling over fathering possibilities, they must also consider their own personal characteristics, the availability and composition of their social networks, and for gay men, their perceptions about their place in particular gay networks.

Possible Selves

Researchers who explore any prospective identity have drawn upon the discourse of possible selves to capture the notion that individuals can project themselves into the future. Possible selves represent the cognitive expression of long-lasting goals, aspirations, and fears. This concept provides the connection between one's self and one's future motives (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999). Consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective the self is a dynamic and multifaceted fusion of various social experiences in an individual's life. Accordingly, the self has reflexive abilities, as individuals can and often do express themselves as both subject and object. As individuals mentally construct images of their future, they juxtapose these against their past and present self-images. Thus, as gay men think about themselves as future fathers, they "mentally traverse their previous and projected life course to express their subjectivity and assign meaning to their self" (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002, p. 12). In order to get at a richer understanding of how gay men subjectively experience the procreative realm, we must attend to how men work with a past, present, and future self.

Because my research draws on two distinct subsamples, the multiplicity of time dimensions emerged as a critical construct. As discussed above, the concept of possible selves is useful to grasp how the childless men conceived of their future. However, because talking about their family usually paved the way for a chronological order of narrative events, the fathers I spoke with frequently reflected upon their possible past selves. Events and experiences were reconstructed in such a way in which the vantage point of the interview determined the telling and as such, the present and future were shadowed backwards (Nelson, 2006). As men spoke about transitions to fatherhood, they discursively reconstructed their past, present and future selves. Spencer is a father who I interviewed who became a father through two different scenarios--first, by co-parenting with a lesbian woman and second, by adopting a special needs

child almost a decade later. When I asked him how he pictured his future prior to having his children, he expressed forlornly that “it was a sad thing to think about if I didn’t have a [romantic] partner who was younger than me, who would be sitting by my bed when I was dying. It was a source of some sadness. I’m not sure if back then I said to myself all I need to do is have children, it was just sort of a sadness.”

The present realities of the men I spoke with were contingent upon choices involving self, identity, and kinship (Nelson, 2006). My reliance on two subsamples of childless men and fathers illuminates how gay male identities and father identities are discursively merged through talk of time. As the childless men fantasized their future, they fused the possibility of fatherhood within their possible self-concept. As the fathers told me their stories and touched on the alternative future they could easily be living, their possible selves emerged as a present construct of the future with a different past. Throughout this study, we will see past, present, and future selves become entangled in a complex web of talk, as the men narrate their selves through time.

Turning Points

The turning point concept was useful for Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) and is of similar use to my research because of the “dynamic aspect of men’s careers in the procreative realm” (25). A situation, experience, or incident may be regarded as a turning point if it prompts an individual to experience a break in consciousness and motivate them to become something different than they were before. As the turning point process unfolds, individuals become exposed to their possible selves. Whereas some turning points may be discrete events that are direct triggers to men’s procreative consciousness, others may be more gradual transitions typical of emerging adulthood.

In chapter 4, I discuss turning points at length. I attend to the ways that transitions take many forms, referring to these as observational, institutional, cultural, interactional, and gradual

turning points. In the context of my discussion of turning points, I emphasize how gay men's procreative thoughts are dynamic and how these transitions in consciousness emerge through their gendered and sexual identities.

Doing Fathering

I draw upon the concept of doing fathering to show how the men in my study engage in fathering actions, behaviors, and processes. This concept emerges from West and Zimmerman's construct of doing gender (1987). The metaphor of doing gender was one of the first to reconceptualize gender as not so much a set of traits residing with individuals, but as something people do in their social interactions. "A person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but more fundamentally, it is something that one does, recurrently, in interaction with others" (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126).

By using this doing concept in my research, fathering and more broadly, family is viewed as situated accomplishments of my participants, and when fathering and family are viewed as such, the focus of analysis moves from matters internal to the individual to interactional and eventually institutional arenas. Thus, one is not only a father but one does fathering. The concept of accountability is of primary significance here because given that much of society still defines family as a heterosexual two-parent nuclear structure, the families in my study came to be held accountable for every action each member performed. Accountability is relevant to both those actions that conform and deviate from prevailing normative conceptions about family. I stress that while individuals are the ones who do fathering and family, the process of rendering something accountable is both interactional and institutional.

In chapter 6, I draw extensively upon the framework of the doing fathering and family perspective, highlighting how my participants who had children navigated playgrounds, neighborhoods, schools, and their families of origin. I also attend to the various ways by which

men narrated concerns and experiences with gender, sexuality, fathering, and family. The concept of accountability becomes critical as I move into a theoretical discussion of how heterosexual domination influences how gay men do fathering and family.

Overview of Dissertation

I organize my project in accordance with the typical chronological processes involved in how many of the gay men I spoke with became fathers. The chapters entitled, “fantasying fathering,” “becoming a father,” and “doing fathering” describe the processual development of what ultimately becomes the culmination of a gay father identity. Where I could have organized my final product according to emergent themes, such as the awareness of barriers, sociohistorical changes, changing social networks, and thoughts and negotiations about engendering of their children, I opted to structure this project as if I were telling the reader a chronological story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. However, these themes appear in every phase of the procreative and fathering process.

Chapter two offers readers an in-depth overview of the existing research on gay fathers. The possibility of openly gay men choosing fatherhood is a result of various demographic, historical, social, institutional, and cultural changes. As such, I discuss each of these separately within my review of the literature. In chapter three I summarize methodological approaches and strategies I used and I explore how my awareness of my heterosexual privilege unexpectedly surfaced through the course of studying gay men’s procreative consciousness and fathering experiences.

Chapter four details men’s fathering fantasies and explores how the dual experience of being a gay man is reconciled with possible desires to father in the future. In this chapter, I begin with narratives of three participants who came of age indifferent decades. By deconstructing their stories I capture their procreative experiences and illustrate how major social

and historical changes shape how gay men conceive of themselves as fathers. I then explore the various turning points that my participants experienced. Some of these turning points are cognitive transitions in their desires to parent, while others are mental realizations that they are able to parent. Within this discussion of fantasizing fatherhood, I discuss how gay men's procreative consciousness is intimately tied to their ideal fathering visions, their child visions, their awareness of emerging reproductive opportunities and looming constraints, and their fatherhood readiness. I also specify how gay men's procreative consciousness and decisions about fatherhood are shaped within a socially constructed world that assumes heterosexuality, privileges heterosexuality, and has irrational and homophobic beliefs about gay men in general and gay men with children in particular.

In chapter five I discuss the process by which the fathers in my sample became parents. Where almost all of the men I interviewed meticulously planned fatherhood, we will hear more about one father, Andrew who became a father rather accidentally when his partner discovered a newborn baby abandoned on a subway platform. We will learn about another man, Aaron, whose partner passed away at the tail end of their pregnancy and he is now parenting in very different familial arrangement than he had imagined. Interestingly, some men I interviewed did not identify as fathers, but had prolonged "fathering" experiences that left lasting impressions on their selves as men capable of fathering human life. For the majority of fathers in my sample, the journey to fatherhood was complete with twists and turns as they navigated their way through attorneys, adoption agencies, surrogacy agencies, hospital staff, and various other institutions. Here, I discuss in great detail how the identity of the birth parents, in particular, the birth mother becomes intertwined with men's father and family identities. Finally, I expound on how some

men become fathers through multiple procreative pathways at different times in their lives, an experience which had a distinct influence in shaping how they saw themselves as fathers.

Chapter six centers on doing fathering and family and the life changes these men experienced when they entered into fatherhood. As gay fathers in a heterosexist society, these men had to contend with their dual status as openly gay men who also happen to be fathers. Some men spoke of how having children closets them, while others spoke of the closet as a revolving door in that their paradoxical identity forced them to come out of the closet again and again to strangers on the street, new social networks, and various persons involved in their children's lives. As their social world changed from gay bars, opera clubs and urban gay ghettos to suburban houses, playgroups, and PTA meetings, men spoke of the paradox of how their identities simultaneously shifted but also very much stayed the same. Men spoke of both, negative discrimination and positive feedback and reinforcement. For men, the specific family form they were able to construct conditioned their psychological and physical negotiations. Men who co-parented with lesbian women had very different daily negotiations than those men who adopted. More obviously, single fathers had different experiences than coupled fathers. Regardless of their family arrangement, all fathers had to negotiate issues associated with socialization, negotiating gender and sexuality and some also had to navigate matters of race and ethnicity. I conclude this chapter with a look into the debate of whether gay planned families open the door to new familial possibilities or if they simply reconstruct traditional familial norms.

The final chapter revisits the research questions that informed this study. The bulk of this chapter proposes a theory of gay men's procreative, father, and family identities grounded in the data. My original extension of the procreative identity framework with Mills' sociological

imagination (1959) and Smith's feminist sociology of knowledge (1987, 1990) helped to frame an initial analysis of how gay men develop and negotiate their procreative, father, and family discourses, identities, and experiences. However, in a more nuanced attempt to bridge social structure and process, I borrow dimensions from a Foucaultian discipline and punish framework (1975) to propose a novel lens to conceptualize queer parenting. I conclude by detailing the limitations of my work, recommending ideas for future research and discussing the implications of my study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

For many, the term gay father might set off two distinct alarms. The first is related to ingrained heterosexism. The concepts of heterosexuality and parenthood are so inextricably intertwined in society that the mere suggestion of gay fatherhood appears strange, abnormal, and even impossible (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Mallon, 2004; Strah, 2003). The second alarm is related to sexism and the perpetual belief that parenting is women's natural domain. Even in contemporary America, fathers are viewed as secondary, rather than primary parents (Mallon, 2004). Men as sole parental figures in rearing a young child are historically an unfamiliar phenomenon. Although families headed by single men are increasing (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998), traditional gender scripts still regard the female as the primary parental figure. Accordingly, gay men who choose to parent, either as a couple or singly, must cope with the fact that they will be challenging societal notions regarding the obvious absence of a woman as the primary caregiver (Mallon, 2000). Under this assumption, many men, both gay and non-gay, will struggle with questions concerning their ability to parent based solely on their exposure to traditional gender scripts. Even more, the very existence of gay fathers and even gay men who want to be fathers challenges traditional assumptions about gender, sexualities, and families.

Demographic Changes: Gay Men Choosing Fatherhood

Although the social construction of the homosexual-heterosexual binary is a fairly recent phenomenon, it is likely that men who would now define themselves as gay have fathered children since ancient times (Bozett, 1989). Various dimensions of gay fathers' experiences are well-documented (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Bozett, 1985, 1987; Lewin, 2004; Mallon, 2004; Miller, 1979; Stacey, 2006; Strah, 2003). Gay men can become fathers in a variety of ways. The majority of gay men who are fathers probably experienced a

delayed coming-out process because of the negative stigmas associated with homosexuality put forward by our heterosexist culture. This group of gay fathers once were in a heterosexual union, became fathers with their female partners, and since then have divorced. This particular group of fathers has received the bulk of academic attention. Consequently, most of the work examining gay fathers centers on the experiences of gay men who parented through the course of heterosexual marriages and other heteronormative relationships (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Bozett, 1985, 1987; Miller, 1979).

However, today, it is openly gay, more so than closeted or married gay men who are becoming fathers. Furthermore, since the mid-1980's, gay men have fathered children through a myriad of "non-traditional" ways (Lemon, 2004). Some gay men have fathered with a surrogate mother (Lev, 2006; Strah, 2003), others conceived and raised children jointly with a woman or women with whom they were emotionally but not sexually involved. Another group became fathers through foster parenting, adoption, and the development of kinship ties (Mallon, 2004; Savage, 1999; Strah, 2003).

Although accurate statistics on most aspects of homosexuality are impossible to obtain, rough estimates of the number of gay fathers can be made. The Kinsey studies based on a non-random sample (Kinsey, Pommeroy, & Martin, 1948) suggested that 10% of men in the United States were homosexual, and this figure was considered the reference point for years. However, recent research with more representative samples estimates that approximately five percent of men in the U.S. are gay (Gagnon, Laumann, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Furthermore, it is estimated that 20 to 25% of self-identified gay men are fathers (Bigner, 1999; Bozett, 1989; Miller, 1979). According to Mallon (2004) the United States is home to between one to two

million gay fathers. However, because many gay men remain closeted, the actual number of gay fathers is most likely higher than these numbers suggest (Mallon, 2004).

In one national survey of gay male couples, one-third of respondents younger than the age of 35 were either planning to have children or considering the idea of doing so (Bryant & Demian, 1994). Another smaller-scale study conducted among gay men in New York found that a majority of gay men who were not fathers would like to raise a child, and those who said they wanted children were younger than those who did not (Sbordone, 1993). Furthermore, research shows that since the early to mid-1980s the number of gay men forming their own families through adoption, foster parenting, and kinship relationships has risen dramatically (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Mallon, 2004; Patterson, 1995; Stacey, 2006; Strah, 2003). A very recent analysis of the National Survey of Family Growth found that roughly 52% of gay-identified men between the ages of 15 and 44 want to have a child (or another child) (Jeffries, 2006, Unpublished paper. Sociology Department. University of Florida). Thus, the social phenomenon of men who openly identify as gay, who lead publicly gay lives, and then decide to create a family, is an emerging trend that warrants attention.

Historical Changes: Beyond the Closet

In order to understand completely how the social phenomenon of openly gay men choosing fatherhood has emerged, I briefly describe the historical changes that have shaped what it means to be a gay man in contemporary America. These historical transformations are part of a larger and multifaceted GLBT movement including revolutions in identity politics of gay men, lesbians, transgender persons, and even heterosexuals. Although the historical comparisons of these socially constructed groups are beyond the scope of this study, I acknowledge that the history of gay men's identity politics has not occurred in isolation from these other categories.

Historical analyses of gay identity politics detail how the notion of the “closet” took shape in response to a culture that tainted homosexuality and regulated behavior by stigmatizing gender and sexual nonconformity as a sign of homosexuality. Through the repressive practices of the state, the homosexual was ostracized from public life and by the 1950s; the closet had become the defining reality for many young gay Americans as a strategy of accommodating to heterosexual domination (Seidman, 2004). The historic and now monumental Stonewall victory in 1969 when gay bar patrons successfully rebelled against the violent practices of the police birthed a novel time for gay men. Homosexuality emerged not as a pathological desire or impulse, but instead, as a core signifier of an “out” and proud identity. Consequently, the general gay men’s agenda post-Stonewall saw the rise of national movement that championed this core gay identity.

Currently, however, as a result of myriad contemporary social and cultural changes, there has been a cultural transformation in the place of gays in America. As gay and lesbian political agendas move beyond the post-Stonewall expectations of tolerance, a push for acceptance is emerging and such acceptance includes the acceptance of families. A social dialogue that focuses on coming out of the closet, advocating a core gay identity and gay pride, and the migration to gay urban enclaves are less explanatory of gay life today than they were years ago (Seidman, 2004). According to Seidman, the gay generation after 1980 is the first to come of age in a social setting more friendly than the previous one, in that these gay men’s parents were baby boomers, a generation who are typically viewed as somewhat liberal, tolerant, and to a lesser extent, accepting of gay rights (2004). As such, there is a drastic social change in the political agenda of gay men, wherein the stereotype of gays as anti-family is being challenged. Increasingly, gay men expect to be recognized as members of families, and today, many gay men

not are unwilling to surrender strong family ties as the price for living a satisfying and open gay life.

As a result, the family has become a metaphorical war zone in the conflict over the meaning and place of gays in America, and a battle is being waged over the meaning of family. For a very long time, American culture has assumed that gays are not supposed to be in or have families. However, as gays demand recognition of their own families, the war over the family becomes an institutional, interpersonal, and intrapsychic struggle whereby “this deeply intimate personal sphere has become a highly charged political battleground” (Seidman, 2004, p.97).

Institutional Dimensions: Emerging Opportunities

The trend of openly gay men beginning to achieve fatherhood speaks to larger developments in postmodern transformations of kinship in that we are currently witnessing a reconfiguration of what we have always termed “the family” (Stacey, 1996). As we begin the new millennium we can clearly see how families are in a constant state of flux, with individuals constructing and creating novel types of kinship arrangements other than the dominant traditional nuclear family popularized in the 1950’s (Coontz, 2000). Many discussions of family transformations have placed gay and lesbian parents on the frontier, deeming them postmodern family pioneers (Stacey 2006). Yet, despite the pioneering status gay and lesbian families have been ascribed, many resist identifying as such, longing to normalize their familial constructions as much as possible (Clarke, 2002a). Even more, gay and lesbian families are simply a small part of a broader process of social and cultural changes that include varying forms of emerging family constellations (Nelson, 2006).

Particular forms of gay fathers were literally inconceivable before recent groundbreaking developments in reproductive technology and changing legalities in the adoption system (Stacey, 1996). Although the field of foster care and adoption remains one in which homophobic

discourses and practices frequently surface (Hicks, 2006a; 2006b), 39 percent of all adoption agencies in the United States reported placing a child with gay or lesbian adopters in 1999-2000 (Brodzinsky, *et al.*, 2003). Even more, *Growing Generations*, an agency that specializes in surrogacy arrangements explicitly for gay men was founded in 1996 and has since worked with approximately 500 families, birthing 230 babies (Lev, 2006). The gradually increasing legal tolerance of gay planned families coupled with GLBT family rights campaigns has piloted the emergence of novel familial pathways that at one time were virtually nonexistent.

The narratives of the younger childless men in my sample illustrate how as novel opportunities surface for gay men to construct families and father children, fatherhood and childlessness become voluntary constructs rather than compulsory ways of life. Gay men's lens into the future has shifted from an imagined life of childlessness to a life with new potentialities that include many familial possibilities, some of which involve becoming a parent and some of which do not. Clearly, as more men come out of the closet, they create more choice about how to be a gay man (Seidman, 2004).

As gay men across America broaden their psyches to the idea of fatherhood outside heterosexual intercourse, they challenge proscriptions that have traditionally banned them from parenting (Dunne, 1999). Over the past two decades, some gay men have "turned the adoption world on its head" while others are taking charge of their own physiological capabilities and employing the assistance of surrogate mothers in unprecedented numbers (Lev, 2006, p. 73). By using these emerging opportunities and creating planned families, gay men challenge normative definitions of family, fatherhood, and even established gender and sexual norms of the mainstream gay subculture. Stereotypical constructions of gay men as being sexually

promiscuous, anti-family, and having few financial obligations are gradually being contested as they increasingly traverse the paths to fatherhood (Stacey, 2006).

Cultural Dimensions: Stereotypes of Gay Men

For many, the very idea of a gay man as the primary nurturing figure rearing children is still implausible. Many laypersons, professionals, and practitioners cling to a belief system grounded in negative myths and stereotypes about gay men (Mallon, 2004). Many of these myths and stereotypes emerged because of the dearth of scientific studies on gay fathers. These myths have persisted largely unchallenged because few gay fathers have a significant political voice and emergent research is politicized (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

In the past three decades, researchers have begun to realize the critical role fathers play in their children's development. Furthermore, the advent of second wave feminism, changing gender norms, and the greater acceptance of homosexuality among professional and scientific organizations has prompted a new conversation. The age of gay parenthood has surfaced from the closet and phrases like "gayby boom" are becoming more commonplace (Barret & Robinson, 2000). Researchers are debunking common myths and stereotypes about gay fathers shedding light on the irrationality of these misconceptions. I discuss each myth to show clearly through scientific evidence how each is unjustified and irrational.

The child will become gay as a result of having a gay parental role model. A prevailing belief about gay fathers is that interactions between these men and their children will lead to transmission of homosexuality. In other words, children of gay fathers will turn out to be gay themselves (Barret & Robinson, 2000). However, the vast majority of children of gay men and lesbian women actually turn out to be heterosexual (Cramer, 1986). Miller's (1979) groundbreaking study of gay fathers assessed the sexual orientation of 37 daughters and 21 sons, ranging in age from 14 - 33 of 40 gay fathers aged 24 - 64 from metropolitan locations across the

United States and Canada, and found that only eight percent of the children were gay (one of the sons and three of the daughters). Although Miller's study can be challenged for not employing a random sample, the fact that he uncovered very few instances of second generation homosexuality is still a significant conclusion. Another study of 702 parents of gay men and women indicated that 90% of the parents were heterosexual, 4% were bisexual, and only 6% identified as completely homosexual (Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989). Another study showed that only approximately 10% of children of gay and lesbian parents develop homosexual identities (Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mikach, 1995). Each of the above statistics is only slightly above the prevailing estimates that roughly 2 – 5% percent of men in the U.S. are gay, regardless of parental sexual orientation (Gagnon, Laumann, Michael, & Michaels, 1994).

The above studies indicate that the homophobic myth that children will be gay simply because they have gay fathers is unsubstantiated. However, recently, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) have dissected much of this prior research on children raised by gay and lesbian parents and have pointed out that while these children do not become gay per se, they are more likely to engage in same-gender experimentation. Rather than searching for sameness or difference in these children, the larger question should focus on why homosexuality has become so devalued in contemporary American society.

Gay men are more likely than heterosexual men to molest children. The stereotype of gay men as child molesters remains so ingrained into the psyche of the majority of the population (including social service professionals) that the idea of gay men as parents seems dangerous (Mallon, 2004). This myth stems from the idea that men in general, and gay men in particular, are sexual predators unable to control themselves sexually (Mallon, 2004). However, Miller's research (1979) uncovered that gay fathers seldom exploit their children. Moreover, according to

police statistics, 90% of sexual abuse of children is committed by a man who identifies as heterosexual (Voeller & Walters, 1978). Similarly, of the cases studied involving molestation of a boy by a man, 74% of the molesters were or had been involved in a heterosexual relationship with the boy's mother or another female relative of the child (Jenny, Roesler, & Poyer, 1994). Hence, all the legitimate scientific evidence supports the assertion that there is no connection between homosexuality and molestation.

Gay men do not have stable relationships and thus would not know how to be good parents. Gay men are viewed as having fleeting and superficial relationships and are regarded as completely incapable of having a lasting and committed relationship (Barret & Robinson, 2000). There is a widespread belief that gay men cannot sustain relationships with men, and thus, must not be able to commit to the idea of fatherhood. If one were to buy into this myth, then it is understandable how a gay man's commitment to his children would seem unusual. But, similar to many adults in this country, the majority of gay men are in fact involved in committed relationships (Mallon, 2004). All the empirical evidence debunks this myth and highlights the notion that gay men can and do make good parents. In 1995, the American Psychological Association reported that not a single study had found that children of gay and lesbian parents were disadvantaged in any way that differs from those children raised by heterosexual individuals. This same report concluded that, "home environments provided by gay parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children's psychosocial growth." Furthermore, the Child Welfare League of America and the North American Council on Adoptable Children assert that gays and lesbians seeking to adopt should be evaluated the same way as any other adoptive applicant, regardless of their sexuality (Mallon, 2004).

Children need a mother and a father to have proper male and female role models.

Many people, especially those who draw from religious passages condemning homosexuality, assert that a child will not develop their gender identity fully if they are without a mother and a father as role models (Clarke, 2002; Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005). Similarly, functionalist views of the family maintain that a primary function of the family is to socialize children. Although sociology has abandoned much of its functionalist underpinnings, we still cling to the belief that a principle function of families is to socialize children. Moreover, proscriptions of family socialization include the importance of socializing children to act in accordance with normative gendered standards of behavior. Through the assistance of gendered toys, books, clothing, and communication patterns, parents are expected to teach children to behave in ways that are synonymous with being a proper male or female. One of the major reasons why gay and lesbian families are viewed as such a threat to the normative family is their perceived lack of ability to properly socialize children with appropriate gender norms. Yet, academics and laypersons alike might want to first ask, what is so good about the way girls and boys are currently being socialized in heterosexual nuclear families?

A critical feminist exploration into gay and lesbian families reveals that children raised in these families are being taught not to conform to such gender ideals that have traditionally inscribed boys and girls with the separate and unequal standards that have fostered gender inequality. Stacey and Biblarz's (2001) review of gay and lesbian headed families exposes a myriad of intriguing findings that tell us a great deal about gender socialization. Lesbian mothers reported that their children did not behave in ways that conformed to sex typed cultural norms. For example, 53% of daughters raised by lesbian mothers aspired to such careers as doctors, astronauts, lawyers and engineers as compared with only 21% of the daughters raised by

heterosexual mothers (Green, et al 1986 as cited in Stacey and Biblarz, 2001). Similarly, sons raised by lesbian mothers reported lower levels of aggressive behavior and preferred to play with more gender-neutral toys than those sons raised by heterosexual single mothers (Green et al 1986 as cited in Stacey and Biblarz, 2001). However, Patterson's review of the literature in gay and lesbian families reveals that gay fathers were more likely to report encouraging their children to play with gender-typed toys than were lesbian mothers (Harris and Turner 1985/1986 as cited in Patterson, 2000). Yet, Patterson's report does not divulge anything about how these practices compare with heterosexual couples. Interestingly, Dan Savage, satirical columnist and gay father explains that he has a desire for his son to show interest in the masculine-typed toys that he himself never enjoyed (Johnson and Connor, 2002). Thus, although the evidence is unclear, it is safe to assert that gender and sexuality interact in unique ways to produce distinct child socialization practices.

The above myths, stereotypes, and images are a result of an institutionalized heterosexual dominance that affects the work of child welfare professionals. Even worse, gay men have internalized these irrational myths to the extent that many incorporate these into their own self-concept. In turn, many young gay men are apprehensive of becoming fathers even if given the opportunity because they are overly concerned with how outsiders would perceive them. Even though all empirical evidence highlights the notion that one's sexual orientation does not determine one's ability to love and care for a child, such unsubstantiated myths persist, affecting laypersons, social service professionals, and even gay men themselves.

Clearly, we are moving "beyond the closet" (Seidman, 2004). Nevertheless, as the notion of the "closet" becomes less salient, this does not necessarily denote that heterosexual domination is a remnant of the past. Whether it is the 1970s, 80s, 90s, or today, gay men are still

growing up in a world organized by heterosexuality. Although many individuals today can choose to live beyond the closet, they must still reside in a world where most institutions maintain heterosexual domination. The very notion that some gay men have apprehensions about becoming and being fathers because of public scrutiny illuminates how heterosexual dominance is deeply rooted in the institutions and culture of American society and must be understood as not simply a product of laws or individual prejudice, but institutionalized pervasive dominance (Seidman, 2004).

Interpersonal Dimensions

According to Robinson and Barret (1986), the reasons gay men choose to be parents are every bit as diverse as those given by heterosexual men. Similarly, Bigner & Jacobsen (1989) affirm that there is little difference between gay fathers and non-gay fathers in their desire for children. They both cite the desire for nurturing children, the constancy of children in their lives, the achievement of some sense of immortality via children, and the sense of family that children help to provide.

Gerald Mallon explored the fathering trajectories of 20 openly gay men who have adopted children in New York and the surrounding areas. Mallon (2000; 2004) posits that the desire to parent is unrelated to sexual orientation and asserts that gay men and lesbians become adoptive parents for some of the same reasons that non-gay persons adopt children. However, unlike their heterosexual counterparts who couple, become pregnant, and give birth, gay and lesbian couples who wish to parent must carefully consider a variety of other variables when contemplating parenthood (Dunne, 2000). Such considerations include the couple's decision on how they should go about creating a family; whether it should be through adoption, foster parenting or through Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART). Similarly, the couple must decide whether to

be honest about their sexual orientation and disclose this potentially damaging information to the respective agency (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Mallon, 2000, 2004; Strah, 2003).

For many gay men, coming out as gay is synonymous with the automatic assumption that fatherhood is not an option. In fact, many men view being gay as equivalent to being childless. Don, an openly gay man and father in Mallon's study elaborates that "the coming-out process for me was not so much about people knowing I was gay as it was more about losing the idea of having children" (Mallon, 2004). Similarly, gay father, Dan Savage elaborates on this when he explains, "when I came out in 1980, it didn't occur to me that one day I would adopt a child. I assumed, incorrectly that it was illegal for gay men to adopt children. After all, gay men didn't have families, we were a threat to families" (Savage, 1999, p. 22).

How do gay men move from one extreme, regarding themselves as forever childless to another extreme, eventually fathering children? Mallon (2004) offers insight into several turning points that gay men experienced. Many men noted their fatherhood realizations were influenced by meeting lesbian mothers, meeting another gay man who chose to be a father, taking care of a friend's child, the death of a partner (usually due to AIDS), and being exposed to adoption organizations.

Furthermore, many studies and personal memoirs underscore the significance of institutionalized service agencies, organizations, and child welfare agencies in breaking through organizational biases to promote gay adoption and heighten gay men's awareness of fatherhood opportunities and possibilities (Green, 1999; Mallon, 2000; 2004; Savage, 1999; Strah, 2003). Mallon (2000) illuminates these processes with a narrative describing a gay couple's journey toward foster care and adoption:

We always wanted to be parents but we just assumed that because we were gay that we would be discriminated against and not be permitted to be parents. At a gay pride event

about two years ago we saw information from GLASS (Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services in Los Angeles). The social worker at the table told us about the foster parenting process and we could not believe that it might be possible for us. We went home and talked about the idea about becoming foster parents...we did all of our paper work, had our home study completed...and waited for a child to be placed with us...The day the adoption was finalized was the greatest day of our lives. If it weren't for GLASS, we never would have been able to have our dream.

This narrative is important because it highlights the significance of social service agencies, organizations, and child welfare agencies in promoting gay adoption while simultaneously heightening gay men's social psychological awareness of these possibilities. Thus, a thorough analysis of gay men's procreative consciousness and reproductive decision-making requires attention be given to understanding how the increased awareness of fathering opportunities, such as those discussed above, may transform gay men's awareness. Moreover, although this narrative does not go into detail, it underscores how gay men experience specific thought processes when deciding whether or not to father. Such dialogue as "we always wanted to be parents...we went home and talked about the idea" demonstrates how gay men embark on distinct negotiations when contemplating parenting (Mallon, 2000).

Intrapsychic Dimensions: Social-Psychological Processes

Gay fathers have a unique and more multifaceted social psychological environment than both their heterosexual counterparts and other gay non-fathers in relation to identity concerns, acceptance of self, and acceptance by other homosexuals (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989).

Researchers have expressed the idea that the man who is both gay and a father is the victim of a divided personal identity (Bozett, 1981, 1985). Gay fathers are regarded as marginal to the cultural worlds of both heterosexuals and gays alike, because each identity is to some extent viewed as unacceptable to the other way of life. In one of the earliest memoirs on gay men choosing fatherhood, Jesse Green recollects a gay party in The Hamptons and the negative reaction he received when he showed up with his young son, "some [gay partygoers] turned their

backs to block out the interference; others looked over with sour expressions that suggested we were about as welcome as a chaperone at a prom” (Green, 1993, p.158).

The gay subculture is one that has traditionally been regarded as singles oriented, and gay men are seen as having few long-term commitments to partners and few financial obligations. Similarly, the gay subculture has been stereotyped as emphasizing personal freedom and autonomy (Bozett, 1981, Mallon, 2004). In contrast, the gay father is someone with “emotional and financial responsibilities to others, time restrictions, different living arrangements, obligations to others who are dependent on him, and so on” (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989, p. 164). Consequently, research has noted that it is not uncommon for gay fathers to experience rejection and discrimination from their gay peers who are not fathers because of these restrictions to freedom (Bozett, 1981; Mallon 2004).

Although the gay subculture is changing and becoming more accepting of children, these changes are gradual strides at best. Gay and lesbian parenting support programs are emerging in metropolitan cities, most notably, *Center Kids* in New York City and *Pop Luck* in Los Angeles. The 2000 census dispelled the notion that gay men only live in well-known urban centers on both coasts (New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco) and revealed that many gay men reside in rural areas, suburban neighborhoods, and small towns (Strah, 2003). Consequently, many gay men do not have access to the recourses and support that the above organizations provide.

In Mallon’s (2004) research many participants reported having to reframe their role in the gay community. For these men, the experience of coming out as fathers meant dealing with the judgment that they were trying to be too much like straights; that they were selling out to the straight way of life. Thus, the experience of fatherhood was characterized by a loss of friends and diminished standing in the gay community (Mallon, 2004). Because gay fathers hold two

social statuses that are to some degree inconsistent with one another, (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Mallon, 2004) it is reasonable to assume that a gay man's decision-making processes for becoming a father are quite different from his heterosexual counterparts.

Within a socially constructed world privileging heterosexual parenting, my research considers how gay men negotiate their dual experience of being gay and having desires to become a father and ultimately become fathers. Because of the combination of sexism, stigmas associated with being gay, myths regarding gay fathers, and the conflicting identities of being a gay father, gay men's parenting motivations and fathering experiences are quite different from that of their heterosexual counterparts and therefore require further investigation. Further, the qualitative approach I propose is uniquely designed to answer the considerations and research questions that warrant attention. Moreover, this approach generates theoretical and practical insights about the social psychological processes by which gay men experience the procreative arena and fatherhood.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHOD

As I theorize about the men in this study, I aim to advance knowledge of how gay men construct, express, and negotiate their identities as future and/or active fathers. Consequently, my goal is not to estimate how many gay men are fathers or want to be fathers. Such questions are best left for studies based on large, statistically representative samples. Whereas this study is limited in its ability to generalize results with confidence to all gay men, it is ground breaking because it explores gay men's inner worlds with respect to reproduction and fatherhood consciousness. Hence, a qualitative methodological approach is most appropriate to study the processes by which gay men become aware and express their procreative consciousness, as qualitative methods are sensitive to the distinctive quality of different life experiences, the contextual nature of knowledge, the production of meaning, and the interactive character of human action.

Aside from the concepts borrowed from *Sex, Men, and Babies* that are discussed in chapter one, the knowledge from this study emerged through interplay between myself and my participants throughout every phase of the research process. Since the methodological strategy was intensive interviews, information emerged through conversation and dialogue. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, I treated my project as a loosely structured and evolving process whereby theoretical ideas were generated from the conversations I had with my participants. My ideas were shaped and reshaped throughout the course of the research through a process of "gradual induction" and "gradual deduction" and interview questions were altered as novel ideas surfaced.

Sample and Recruitment

My analysis draws on audiotaped, in-depth interviews with a sample of 19 childless gay men and 22 gay fathers who have created families through nonheterosexual means. I use a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure the selection of information-rich cases for detailed examination. Information-rich cases are those from which the researcher can learn a significant amount with regards to issues of central importance, depending on the purpose of the researcher (Patton, 1990). The purposeful inclusion of both fathers and childless men of varying ages should not be viewed as a strategy to compare these two groups of men. Rather it is a methodological tactic I employ to better understand how emerging social structural opportunities, shifting constraints, and historical developments shape the process of gay men's reproductive decision-making and fathering experiences throughout their life course.

I recruited through a variety of methods in diverse locales from July 2004 - May 2006. Recruitment for the gay childless men began with acquaintances and colleagues of mine who defined themselves as openly gay men and who were childless at the time of the interview. To limit the subsample's homogeneity, participants were recruited in two very different cities, Gainesville and Miami, Florida. Gainesville is a college town populated with students and academics. Miami is metropolitan city deemed by many as gay-friendly. After speaking with these friends and colleagues, I then posted flyers (see appendix D) in areas frequented by members of the gay community such as gay community centers, shopping malls, eating and drinking establishments, hair salons, and PRIDE unions. The flyers for the recruitment of childless gay men were a broad call for participants who might be interested in discussing their thoughts about fatherhood, without screening them for whether they intended to have children. The flyer outlined criteria for involvement as well as my contact information. Upon this initial contact, the potential participant was informed of the nature of the study and given a brief

screening interview to ensure that the specific participant met the outlined criteria. Following the screening process, the potential participant was asked if he was still interested in partaking in the study. If the potential participant agreed, I collected contact information and scheduled an interview for a later date. As I ended each interview, I inquired if the participant had any friends or acquaintances that fit the criteria and might be willing to participate in my research. This recruitment strategy of posting flyers and snowball sampling was a highly useful tactic for recruiting fifteen childless gay men in Florida; four others were recruited in New York and New Jersey.

Recruitment for the gay fathers took a separate route and occurred both in Miami and out of the state of Florida. Because the goal of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of openly gay men's procreative consciousness, I only recruited gay fathers who became parents through non-heteronormative means. Since Florida is a state where gay adoption is illegal, it was difficult for me to contact men who have fathered through this process. I did speak with a gay man in Miami Beach who recently adopted two children (by adhering to the 'Don't ask, Don't tell' policy). He was gracious enough to spread the word about my project to other gay fathers in the Miami area and I was able to interview three men who had fathered through nonheterosexual channels, one using the assistance of a surrogate mother and two (including the previously mentioned man) using domestic adoption.

Recruitment for the majority of the gay fathers took place in New York City and its surrounding areas from June – August 2004. After researching major urban areas that were gay-family friendly, New York City was the most obvious choice, primarily for financial and networking reasons. My financial motives were simply that I have a wide range of friends who live in Manhattan who offered me a place to stay in exchange for a relatively small financial

contribution. Prior to going to New York for the summer, I spent many months ensuring valuable contacts for this project. My first contact was with Terry Boggis, founder of *Center Kids*. Founded in 1989, *Center Kids* gives children ongoing opportunities to befriend others from similar families, while their parents have a chance to meet, socialize and build their own support network. *Center Kids*, which advocates at state and local levels for the rights of alternative families, has become a national and regional model for GLBT family organizing. Currently, more than 2,500 families in the tri-state area utilize *Center Kids* programs. Before going to New York City, Terry Boggis gave me permission to post flyers in the center and recommended that I volunteer at the GLBT center, the building that houses *Center Kids*. Another significant contact that I made was with Gerald P. Mallon, the author of *Gay Men Choosing Parenthood*. When I arrived in New York, I met Dr. Mallon and he was kind enough to introduce me to three gay fathers who I ultimately was able to interview.

Similarly, I have a cousin who is an active member of the gay community in New York City and she has many gay male friends and acquaintances that are recent fathers. My cousin is a member of a gay and lesbian religious organization in New York City, Congregation Beth Simchat Torah (CBST). CBST is New York City's synagogue for the New York metropolitan area's 200,000 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Jews. Founded in 1973, CBST has become the largest gay synagogue in the world and arguably one of the most influential. Prior to leaving for New York, I corresponded with Rabbis Kleinbaum and Cohen who agreed to allow me to attend their services and recruit members of their organization. In exchange for their kindness, I agreed to volunteer my services to the synagogue.

Life in New York City: Reflections on heterosexual privilege. Prior to leaving for New York, I anticipated that recruitment of the gay fathers would begin with the above contacts and

snowball from there. However, things do not always go as planned, and my three months in New York City were no exception.

I arrived in New York June 10, 2004. Less than one week later, Pride week began. My trip began with a slew of meetings. After meeting Gerald Mallon and the three participants he recruited for me, I was confident enough to brave the NY subway system and venture out into the gay ghettos of New York City, the areas of Chelsea and the West Village. I spent my first three days in the city putting flyers in every gay identified area imaginable. I had researched the area thoroughly, and placed flyers in every religious organization, activity center, gym, and bookstore. Next, I went to CBST for a Shabbat service and after years of never attending synagogue for a weekly Shabbat service since I was thirteen, I found myself reciting vaguely familiar prayers with family members I hardly knew and a community of gay and lesbian men I had never met. I then tried to meet with Terry Boggis, the woman who founded *Center Kids*, to find that she was completely booked until the beginning of July. Yet, I took her advice and registered for a training session to volunteer at the GLBT Center in the West Village, the place that most gay New Yorker's refer to as the Mecca of gay life in NY.

I clearly recall walking into the massive school-like building inquiring as to where the orientation met. After receiving directions to walk up the stairs to the right, I entered a room with five other people. I sat, reading the literature I had gathered on my way up the staircase. Within five minutes, a short, skinny man walked in the room and introduced himself as the volunteer coordinator. After a short spiel of how wonderful the center is and what amazing contributions we could make by volunteering, he asked the five of us to introduce ourselves. I went third and plainly explained that I was from Florida and was a student working on my dissertation on gay fatherhood. He replied, "Well, it is always nice to have an ally with us." I

smiled and wondered, “What, how does he know I am not gay? Nobody else said, hi, I am gay...I never said I was straight, but nobody else did either.” So began the first of what would eventually become hours upon hours of odd discomfort with my sexuality that is discussed more fully below. I left the meeting with the short skinny man taking my number and telling me that he would get back to me when something came up. This was not the plan. I was under the impression that I could immediately infiltrate this organization and find participants for my study. I was disappointed in myself for my naïve optimism and decided that I would flyer the entire building top to bottom with the multi-colored papers I had printed out asking for participants for my study that listed the goals of my project, outlined the criteria for involvement (gay men who had become fathers through nonheterosexual means) and listed my contact information. With my confidence not yet completely shattered, I spent the remainder of the afternoon braving the scorching heat, walking up and down the streets of the West Village posting flyers wherever I could find an empty space.

The next night, my aunt’s partner invited me to go with her to the Garden Party, the kickoff event for PRIDE week. Before I begin explaining the events of the evening, let me first divulge that I hardly knew my aunt and had literally just met her partner a week before at synagogue the previous Friday evening. So here we were, me and this fifty-something year old woman I had met once walking toward the Hudson River about to embark on my first Pride festivity. Naturally, I was excited, anxious, and extremely nervous. We entered the pier onto a scene I will never quite forget. It was like a child stepping into Disney World for her first time. There was music, dancing, food, and thousands and thousands of people. There were booths that lined the entire pier giving out pamphlets, rainbow key chains, bracelets, wristbands, and stickers. The two of us walked up and down the pier grabbing all the free goodies we could. I

decorated myself in my gay Pride gear and felt like I appeared to be fitting in with the crowd. I decided not to flyer at all that evening, and instead began to form a connection (albeit a superficial one) with the massive GLBT community in New York City and even with my aunt's partner. After a few hours, the two of us exited the pier and spoke about the evening. That night, we spoke about homophobia, heterosexism, feminism, and she told me how wonderful it was that a heterosexual woman wanted to understand the reproductive decision making of gay men. I felt great. We had bonded, I experienced my first Pride festivity, and I was finally feeling comfortable in the concrete jungle of Manhattan. We jumped on a cross-town bus and parted ways on 14th and 6th so I could grab the subway to my new residence in the East Village. As I got off the bus, she hollered to me in a matter-of-fact tone, "Make sure you take off those stickers and bracelets or people are going to think you are gay."

As I headed down the filthy steps toward the subway, I thought about what this out and proud, 50-year-old feminist lesbian had just said to me: "people are going to think you are gay." On that pier I was the other, the outsider, the heterosexual. As soon as we left the safety of that pier, she became the other, the outsider, the lesbian. It was then that I really began to consciously reflect on my privileged heterosexual status in a way that I was never able to previously. I thought about how uncomfortable in my own skin I was on that pier, knowing that I didn't quite fit in there and then, I wondered, beyond the haven of that pier, is this how she felt? Although my privileged consciousness had been temporarily activated for that ten-minute subway ride, it was a short-lived epiphany. Yet, it would be only three more days before the discomfort of my privilege took hold once again.

That Sunday was the parade for PRIDE parade. Nobody I knew of was marching, let alone even going to the parade, so I jumped on the train at around 10:30 in the morning to venture

uptown and exited on 42nd and Broadway. I walked up the dark stairs into the one of the most incredible sights I had ever witnessed. The streets were filled with people lining up to march. Once again, the consciousness of my heterosexuality, that feeling that I didn't quite belong started to overwhelm my body. I decided to stand up straight, swallow my discomfort and simply follow the parade. I walked along the sidelines, handing out flyers and talking to any man I saw with a child. Within only fifteen minutes of my walk, I saw a man with a baby on his shoulders. I bravely approached him, introduced myself, and explained to him the nature of my study. After I completed my spiel, he smiled and calmly replied, "That is great, but I am not gay. I am here to support my brother." I was flushed with embarrassment, apologize, and handed him a flyer just in case he knew anyone. Oh crap, I thought. Just when I finally worked up the nerve to approach someone and he's straight! Extremely embarrassed, but not yet utterly disheartened, I spent the remainder of the afternoon trekking through the crowds of the parade talking to anyone who would strike up a conversation with me, handing out flyers, braving the 97 degree heat, and mostly, just people-watching. I was constantly aware of this strange sense of uneasiness, of knowing that I was an imposter who was only there for my own personal academic gain. Every time I would begin to get swept up in the cheering and the chanting, I was reminded that I am not gay, I am not one of them, and I am the other. Where I am an ally of the GLBT community, I was forced to admit that had it not been for my research-driven intentions, I would not be walking over fifty blocks to actively support a cause that I could easily dismiss. There it was again, that biting cue that I was different, that I was an outsider.

By 5:30, I had given out over 30 flyers, was dripping in sweat, was ashamed of my purpose for being there and was ready for a cocktail. I had arranged to meet an old friend of mine from college who had recently come out and was returning from a weekend in the

Hamptons with his new partner and a few of their friends at a Mexican cantina for margaritas at 6:00. Suffice to say, after the day I just had I was ready to play catch up with an old friend over chips, salsa, and a margarita. Little did I know that this casual drink meeting would ultimately be the gateway to the success of my summer. I sat with my old friend Peter and his new circle of friends talking about my dissertation and the strategies I had been using for recruitment. One of them looked at me and plainly retorted, “no offense, but do you really think people look at flyers? I mean, I don’t – especially those cheap looking ones you have there.” Before I could even get defensive, Peter excitedly screamed out, “Dana, I have the best idea—for my new job I have access to all these listserves that might help you. Why don’t you send me a blurb about your work and I will forward it to them.” Not really thinking that Peter’s suggestion would actually work, I agreed to send him something in the next few days. All of a sudden I felt ashamed about my recruitment strategies, my entire research agenda, the poor quality of my flyers and my naiveté for coming to New York in the first place.

That next week, I began my volunteer efforts at the CBST office, and again was the only straight person in the building. Being the only heterosexual in a gay and lesbian populated social setting for three days a week for a two month period permitted me the space for my already budding critical reflexivity to burgeon even more. I found myself always answering questions about why I was there, what was I doing, why gay men, why fathers, why was I interested in a population to which I clearly did not belong?

Whereas my experiences volunteering at CBST taught me invaluable lessons with regard to my relationship with both my research and my religion, I had been volunteering there almost three weeks and they had yet to put me in contact with any participants. Also, and not a complete shock to me, (since I was now aware that my flyers were an eyesore that no self-

respecting gay man would pay attention to) out of the thirty-something flyers I had given out at the Pride parade and the hundreds I had posted around Chelsea and the West Village, I had not received a single phone call or e-mail from a gay father who would be interested in participating in my study. Fortunately, I had been able to interview the three men Dr. Mallon had put me in contact with, but this was all I had. I was beginning to freak out. I was running out of money (in New York, every time you leave your apartment, you spend at least \$ 20 on absolutely nothing at all!), I had only three participants, I was still ashamed and feeling that I was exploiting a community I was supposedly trying to help, and I had less than six weeks remaining before I had to be back in Florida.

Finally, one morning, I awoke to check my e-mail only to find that it was full with interview requests from gay fathers who had heard about my interview. What the heck had happened? How did I manage to finally catch a break? It certainly was not my poorly constructed flyers or my volunteer efforts at CBST. Rather, these requests were a direct result of my dear old friend Peter. Who would have thought that my afternoon of margaritas would be the ultimate savior to my dissertation! Peter, the man who I had drastically underestimated, had saved my life (or at least my summer). It turned out that Peter's new job was the marketing director at LOGO (the first gay television network, and a division of MTV) and happened to be a very high-status position, privileging him access to various gay and lesbian listserves that could access the personal e-mails of gay men across New York city and its surrounding areas. I was able to interview nine gay fathers and four more childless men by way of this fortunate e-mail, and these men were able to introduce me to five other men who I ended up interviewing over the telephone after returning to Florida. These final five telephone interviews included men from New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. After almost six weeks, my volunteer efforts at

CBST finally paid off and I recruited four men through the assistance of the rabbis and office coordinators.

My experience in New York taught me more than I ever imagined. Aside from the obvious lessons I learned about the pitfalls and perils of conducting qualitative research with a population that I am not a member of, I learned an incredible amount about my heterosexual privilege and myself. Heterosexual privilege refers to unearned civil rights, social privilege, and advantages granted to individuals based solely on their sexual orientation (Allen, 1995). Examples of my own heterosexual privilege are that I have always been able to freely display pictures of my romantic partners without fear of retribution, I have no fear of harassment or physical violence based on my sexual orientation, and perhaps most importantly, I never have to answer the question when did you decide you were heterosexual. While I have been aware of these social advantages I am given because of my heterosexual identity, for some time, I now know that heterosexual privilege extends far beyond these concrete examples. The abstract, but very real sense of uneasiness I felt walking down the street at PRIDE events, sharing an office with all gay men and lesbians, and attending synagogue with a mainly GLBT congregation made me aware of what it is like to be different. This sameness that I have always had as an invisible luxury now was gone. The unearned rights, privileges, and advantages of being a heterosexual that are often invisible to heterosexuals, became all too apparent to me. Yet, I will never truly understand what it feels like to live in a heterosexist society and not have these privileges because although I became the outsider within these settings, I always had the privilege to get up and leave. However, the very fact that my consciousness was raised and my privilege was challenged speaks to ways by which activists might consider facilitating social change, because

the very fact that heterosexual privilege is often unseen by the dominant group is the greatest barrier to ending heterosexism.

The summer after I lived in New York, I went to visit some friends and family in Southern California. I figured since I was already going to be there, I would try to recruit some more participants for my research. After reading Judith Stacey's (2006) ethnographic work in Los Angeles about gay men and kinship, I decided to contact the organization that she based much of her research on, a group similar to *Center Kids*, called *Pop Luck*. The *Pop Luck Club* is a Los Angeles-based organization of gay dads that, according to their website is the largest known gay father organization in the world, with hundreds of families and continued strong growth. Its mission is to advance the well-being of gay prospective parents, gay parents, and their children. I sent a brief e-mail to the contact on their website and after my experience with *Center Kids* in New York, honestly wasn't expecting much. Needless to say, I was quite surprised when only two days later I received an e-mail from a gay couple who was more than happy to speak with me. Two days into my trip on the West coast, I met with this couple and conducted a two and a half hour interview with them. After our conversation, they immediately offered to refer me to a mass of other gay headed families in their neighborhood. However, my trip was only to last a few short days, and without a car in Los Angeles, it is quite difficult to get around. I decided not to conduct any more interviews in LA while I was there, but I still have their contact information, and if I decide to expand my project, I now know that I have resources on both sides of the country.

Participants

The group of childless gay men differed substantially from those who chose to become fathers through nonheterosexual means (see Table 1 for detailed subsample descriptions). The demographic data depicted in these tables are artifacts of my recruitment strategies and should

not be regarded as substantive findings of my research. The childless gay participants were more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse than the fathers. Three of these men were Black, one was Chinese-American, two were Latino, and thirteen were White Non-Latino. Three participants had not completed college, five were enrolled in college with the intentions of graduating, seven had graduated from a four-year university, and four had an advanced graduate degree. Two participants were Jewish, one was Presbyterian, three were Christian, four were Catholic, one was Buddhist and Catholic and eight reported to have no religious affiliation. Six of the participants were students, (five in college and one in graduate school), five were in the service industry (food and beverage and cosmetology); three were employed in the non-profit sector; two were attorneys; one was a professor; and the remaining two were involved in business and the technology industry. Annual income for these men ranged from under \$15,000 to over \$75,000 annually. Ages of the childless men ranged from 19-45 and the median age was 34.

Consistent with other research on gay fathers (Johnson and Connor, 2002; Mallon, 2004), the gay fathers participating in my research were predominantly white and upper-middle class. All but two of these men earned over \$75,000 annually, and the remaining two earned between \$30,000-\$60,000. Additionally, all fathers were White. Fathers' ages ranged from 33-55 with a mean age of 43.5. The majority of participants were employed in the professional sector, many as attorneys, physicians, media executives, and real-estate investors. Similarly, all participants except two had completed college and eight had an advanced graduate degree. Nine participants were Jewish, five were Catholic, three were Christian, two were Unitarian, and four claimed to have no religious affiliation. Recall that recruitment efforts were made at a GLBT synagogue in

NYC. This recruitment strategy coupled with my religious affiliation and social networks led to an unusually large proportion of Jewish men in my sample.

One unfortunate aspect of my research is that it relies on white, fairly affluent fathers' experiences. It is especially problematic in terms of gay and lesbian families because according to the 2000 United States census, we know that forty-four percent of Latina same-sex couples are raising children under the age of eighteen (Cianciotto, 2005). Furthermore, black female same-sex households are raising children around the same rates as black heterosexual households (61 vs. 69%) and at about twice the rate of white lesbian households (Dang & Frazer, 2004). These rates are somewhat comparable for same-sex male couples of color. It should be understood, then, that gay families of color do exist although they are not represented here. Furthermore, my participants' procreative, father, and family negotiations are not only products of their gay identities, but also their whiteness and middle-class status (es).

Participants created their families in diverse ways. Four men were known sperm donors to a lesbian couple, although only three of the men were co-parenting with the women and defined themselves as fathers in this context. The other man was one of five men who fathered through the assistance of a surrogate mother. One couple (two fathers) produced a set of twins through the assistance of a gestational surrogate mother and an egg donor. The remaining twelve became fathers through adoption or fostering, with two using the public foster care system resulting in legal adoption.

Interviews

My research methodology entailed in-depth semi-structured interviews with the 19 childless gay men and 22 gay fathers. Participants were encouraged to discuss their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and personal narratives as they relate to their own feelings and conversations with others with regard to fatherhood decisions.

Interviews took place in a variety of settings, depending on the participant's convenience. Such settings included participants' households, or work offices, coffee shops, eating and drinking establishments, in my office, and five were conducted over the telephone. Interviews were audio-taped and lasted between 45-150 minutes. Interviews were supplemented with a background survey asking the participants a handful of questions focusing on their biographical information, such as age, race/ethnicity, nationality, and relationship status (see appendix A). All participants were administered informed consent. Prior to the initiation of each interview, I explained the nature of the project to each participant, conveyed the importance of the study, and requested permission to audiotape the interview. Each participant was informed of his right to refuse to answer any question he felt was too personal, inappropriate, or uncomfortable. He was also informed of his right to terminate the interview at any time if he so desired. None of the forty-one participants refused to answer any question or opted to terminate the interview at any time. Following each interview, I wrote brief memos to myself detailing the major themes that surfaced in our conversation. I transcribed 15 of the interviews and a professional transcriptionist transcribed the other 26 verbatim.

Creating the Interview Guide using Sensitizing Concepts

In order to ensure that all topics of interest were addressed in the interviews, I structured the interview guide (see appendices B & C) around various "sensitizing concepts" (Van den Hoonaard, 1997). Sensitizing concepts are theoretical tools that emphasize the distinctive properties that may be associated with a class of data—in this case, gay men's parenting decisions and motivations. These concepts offer researchers a general sense of reference and orientation without constraining new paths for theoretical discovery. Viewed broadly, they also refer to concepts that may have been generated from other research or theoretical speculation.

The use of such sensitizing concepts should not be confused with definitive concepts, in that sensitizing concepts do not create closure, rather they provide a general source of guidance.

I borrow some sensitizing concepts from Marsiglio and Hutchinson's (2002) work on heterosexual young men including; procreative consciousness, turning points, fatherhood readiness, fatherhood responsibility, possible selves, fathering visions, and child visions. I expanded these concepts in such a way as to explore how gay men's procreative consciousness is constructed, evolves, and is negotiated. I advanced the concept of turning points to understand the extent to which they are tied to the coming out process. Child visions refer to participants' images of children they might eventually sire, while fathering visions captures men's mental descriptions of themselves engaged in fathering. In Marsiglio and Hutchinson's book (2002) each of these constructs emerged as properties of procreative consciousness and fatherhood readiness, respectively. I elaborate these properties to account for how gay men's visions might differ because of the likelihood of interracial and interethnic adoption.

In addition to borrowing the model developed by Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002), I expand it to the experiences of gay men and extract other sensitizing concepts from relevant literature and preliminary interviews with 10 gay non-fathers. These novel concepts included the dual marginalization of gay fatherhood, myths surrounding gay fathers, individual hardships, and institutional constraints. These concepts were used as primary guides for conversation and analysis. Although I used the sensitizing concepts, I was also consciously reflexive in order to avoid the trap of forcing the data into preconceived categories. These initial categories were conceptual guides to frame my research without constraining it.

Prior to completing the defense of my dissertation proposal, I conducted a pilot study of 10 childless gay men. This pilot study allowed me to test the relevance of the initial formulation of

my interview guide. Initially, I was disappointed to find that the first three interviews only lasted approximately 30-50 minutes. However, following these first few interviews, I developed new questions based on participants' feedback and the interviews grew substantially longer. After the fifth interview, the interview guide was significantly altered and by the ninth interview, interviews grew to over 90 minutes in length. Novel issues were introduced by participants, including the importance of the gay social scene to that particular person, images of growing old with or without children, and the presence or absence of a male partner. Throughout the interview process, these issues were added to the guide. However, the greatest alteration of the interview guide occurred following the fifth interview. It was here that I significantly changed the beginning of the interview, and consequently, reformulated the entire conversation. Originally, the interview began by asking, "How would you define your sexuality?" I decided to change the guide so that the initial questions simply stated, "As a gay man can you tell me about your life?" and "As a gay man can you talk to me about how you see your future?"

With this simple change in wording emerged an entirely new conversation. Participants first began by telling coming-out stories, continued with reactions from parents and friends, and concluded by narrating on how they envision their future. Of the five men who were interviewed using this format, three men mentioned fatherhood in the absence of any direct questioning or probing. Although it is likely that the issue of fatherhood was salient to these men because they had just read the informed consent describing the nature of the study (an investigation of gay men and fatherhood); I was surprised by the fact that these men mentioned fatherhood so eagerly. This pilot study provided me the opportunity to assess the relevance of my questions to a small sample of gay childless men.

The Active Interview

Increasingly, sociological researchers who rely on interviewing to gather data are coming to the realization that interviews are not neutral and unbiased tools. Rather, the interview is a setting in which two (or more) persons actively constructing a unique social situation. As assumptions and ideas associated with social constructionism expand throughout the discipline of sociology, new spaces and claims regarding interview settings are emerging. The broad recognition that social reality does not exist independent from human action lends itself to the implication that within the interview setting, there is continuous construction and reconstruction of meaning through a dialectical process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Thus, in my interviews I employed the active interviewing approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The active interview illuminates the interplay of the artfulness of constructivism with the practicality of the interpretive resources at hand. In the active approach, the participant is not a passive vessel of knowledge, but is instead somewhat of a researcher in his own right, “consulting repertoires of experience and orientations, linking fragments into patterns, and offering theoretically coherent descriptions, accounts, and explorations” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 29). The participant is the narrator, or the storyteller of his multi-faceted experience and calls upon different stocks of knowledge depending on which experience or position is activated.

The methodological strategy of active interviewing is especially useful here given that the passage of time and sociohistorical dimension was consistently intertwined within participants' narratives. In the interview setting, the fathers spoke of constructing their families, an approach which usually paved the way for chronological description. However, inquiring about a participant's past does not necessarily invoke an objective and ahistorical discussion of the participant's past experiences; rather, the past is intimately linked with the present. In other words, the participant and I were mutually involved in activating different aspects of the

participant's stock of knowledge. When I encouraged a gay father in the interview to discuss thoughts he had about becoming a father prior to having a child, he drew upon these past thoughts as a father with children and narrated past experiences and thoughts through his present standpoint as a father. When I spoke with a gay man who is not yet a father and queried what his thoughts are on becoming a father, he anticipated a vision of the future through his present standpoint as a young gay childless man. The active interviewing approach sheds light on how the participant's future or history is a future-in- the- making or a history- in- the- making, complexly unfolding in relation to that participant's present standpoint (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Whether we are talking about visions of a future or recollections of the past, the active approach allowed me to see how these were just as much versions of the present as they were memories and foresights.

The active approach to interviewing also allows me to understand how conceptualizations of the present depend upon the different stocks of knowledge my participants call upon. One particular situation that I recall involved Spencer, a gay man who became a father through donating sperm to a lesbian woman who lived in the same neighborhood as him. Almost eight years following this experience, Spencer became an adoptive father to a mentally handicapped boy who he became involved with through a big-brother organization. Spencer not only had two very different stories to tell me, but he spoke of these two experiences in terms of two very different standpoints; the first as a biologically connected father who saw his child periodically and second as an adoptive father intimately involved in the day to day tasks of raising a handicapped son. By treating the interview as an active process I was able to encourage and appreciate Spencer's shifting standpoints and had the unique ability to explore the distinct and sometimes contradictory stocks of knowledge that he called upon to explain and understand his

experiences as a gay father. Rather than searching for one single truth or one answer, the active interview capitalizes on these diverse stories to get a more complete (yet still partial) understanding of how gay men navigate their way through the reproductive arena.

Within the active interview both the interviewer and the participant are viewed as actively involved in the construction of knowledge. Accordingly, it is important to remember that the interviewer does far more than ask questions; she “activates narrative production” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 39). It is the interviewer’s task to guide and channel the participant’s narratives to the research at hand. Unlike the positivist interviewer, the active interviewer is not reprimanded for invoking a certain vocabulary to guide the participant to speak in terms of the research at hand. In my interviews, I purposely invoke the language of turning points in order to encourage my participants to imagine certain events in their lives that were central in triggering their fathering fantasies and desires. I am not dictating how my participants’ lives are to be portrayed, nor am I contaminating my findings. Rather, I recognize that in my role as collaborator I can guide my participants as to keep our speech on “narrative course” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 50). Also, within the active approach, as well as in feminist and constructivist approaches, reflexivity is paramount. In the active approach, both, the interviewer and the participant are mutually engaged in a process of reflexivity (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In my interviews, I always inquire as to what else I should be asking regarding gay men’s experiences in the reproductive arena. My participants have filled me in on aspects of their lives that I would have never imagined to ask or even consider had I been limited to a structured and positivist format.

The active interviewing approach also illuminates how the inclusion of multivocality shapes the interview process and the subsequent knowledge that emerges from this process

(Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). While in New York and in Los Angeles, I conducted four interviews with committed couples that had fathered children together. Although I count these as eight participants and eight stories, the active approach reminds me that these interviews should be viewed not only as individual experiences, but also as “their story” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 69). When I spoke with Drew and Nico, a couple who had two-year old twins, about their fatherhood experiences I heard three different narratives: Drew’s story, Nico’s story, and ‘their story’ of how they separately and collectively experienced their pathways to fatherhood. The multivocality within the active interviews allowed new and rich linkages of “horizons of meaning” to emerge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Such new meanings would not have surfaced in more structured settings that neglect to take advantage of these connected interpretations and constructions.

Characteristics of the Researcher and Reflexivity

I have already detailed how a more nuanced understanding of my heterosexual privilege emerged throughout various stages of the recruitment process. Now, I briefly discuss how my heterosexual identity influenced the interview process. Unlike race or gender, sexuality does not have to be a blatantly obvious marker. Although I did not purposely disclose my sexuality to my participants, naturally, many were curious. Two situations immediately jump out at me. Before conducting one interview, a participant asked, “Are you gay? Not that it matters.” I replied “no, I am not gay,” and explained how my interest in gay fathers was a result of the lack of research in this area and my desire to give voice and visibility to an understudied group of men, and if applicable, their families. Another time, I was conducting an interview in a coffee shop and my participant and I actually caught one another glancing at the same attractive man who was sitting at the counter drinking his latte. Needless to say, he turned to me and with a sly grin announced, “So you’re not one of us.” I responded that “no I am not gay” and jokingly said, “you caught

me!” In both of these situations I did not feel as if these men then regarded me as an “other” to be weary of. I maintain that this is directly related to my ability to make my participants feel at ease and comfortable due to my easygoing and casual demeanor.

I now take a moment to briefly touch on the advantages and disadvantages to studying a population to which one does not belong and address how I negotiated my differential social status and identity in the context of the interview. Because I am not gay, or perhaps, more obviously, not a man, there was always the risk of being an outsider or being regarded as “the other” by the men I am interviewing. I was consciously aware of the possibility that these men might not trust me, and because of the sensitive nature of this study, men might feel as if I am judging them. Thus, to counteract these potential risks, I attempted to make the men as comfortable as possible by using strategies common to qualitative researchers. First, I tried to conduct interviews in a private and comfortable setting. Whereas most of these men’s interviews took place in private residences or my office, a few also took place in public coffee shops. The interviews that did take place in coffee shops were conducted in alcoves or semi-private areas of the establishment. While conducting these interviews in public spaces, I would always offer the men the opportunity to refuse to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable responding to or encouraged participants to speak in a low voice. None of the participants who were interviewed in coffee shops stopped the interview at any time, although some, at various points in the interview did lower their voices ensuring that other patrons did not overhear our conversation. In my attempts to ensure that the interview setting was regarded as a safe space for these men to tell me their stories, all participants, regardless of the interview location were given time to read over informed consent and were encouraged to ask questions about my study. I always provided my participants the opportunity to ask me questions and at the end of the

interview I asked them to share their thoughts with me about their reactions to our conversation. None of the participants replied that they felt uncomfortable talking to me about these issues. When I specifically asked if they would have felt more comfortable speaking with an interviewer of a different gender, race, or sexuality none mentioned that any of my personal characteristics hindered the interview or their disclosure. Interestingly, three Jewish participants responded that my identity as a Jewish woman was helpful in finding a common ground, in that I understood the nuances of Jewish life, from the stereotypical image of the Jewish mother and grandmother to the social and religious importance of Bar-and Bat-Mitzvahs.

A significant advantage of speaking with participants of a social group that I am not a member of is that I have absolutely no personal or experiential knowledge of what it is like to experience life as a gay man. Although I will never know for sure, I believe that I received a more detailed explanation of these men's lives than a gay male interviewer would have because of my outsider status. Although my gender and sexuality certainly influenced the outcome of my interviews, I believe that this effect was minimal and to some extent, beneficial. Moreover, I maintain that my personal characteristics, in particular, my ability to facilitate trust, rapport, and open dialogue in the interviews helped to mitigate my potential status as an other.

Analysis: Grounded Theory

The initial textual material was analyzed with grounded theory methodology for qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Consistent with the grounded theory approach, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. My aim for this study was significantly more modest than what is expected in traditional grounded theory, in that my overarching goal was not the generation of a theory with explicit dimensions and properties. I sought a more nuanced understanding of gay men's procreative consciousness, reproductive decision-making and fatherhood experiences. I employ the process of grounded theory

methodology for the two reasons that Marsiglio (2004, p. 261) mentions in *Step dads: Stories of Love, Hope, and Repair*. First, the process of grounded theory analysis allowed me to “deepen, expand, integrate, and ground in empirical data previously proposed theoretical notions” concerning men as fathers and to generate new theoretical concepts and ideas for the specific experience of gay prospective and active fathers. My aim, then, was not to develop a complete grounded theory, but rather to expand on already existing theoretical frameworks for understanding how gay men develop, negotiate, and express their fathering identities and fathering experiences in a socially-constructed world that privileges heterosexuality and heterosexual parenting.

I use the constant comparative process of comparing incident with incident, category with incident, and category with category. As ideas, terms, moods, and the like surfaced in multiple interviews, they were coded and given tentative labels during the open phase of coding. Open coding is a process of comparing concepts found in the text for classification as examples of some phenomenon. As I noticed similarities in experience, patterns, and emergent themes, categories of phenomena were labeled in the margins and entered into a code list. This process of open coding enabled me to create an analytic process for identifying key categories and their properties (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Core or central categories were the roots that anchored their properties. For example, a central category in my research is nonprocreative turning points in activating fathering desires and indicators that are associated with this category include coping with death of a loved one, moving to suburbia, seeing another gay couple with a child, and ultimatum by a partner.

This coding scheme allowed me to label categories and properties that represent distinct happenings and to describe other instances of the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The next

stage of coding involved axial coding, wherein I explored the relationship between and among concepts and began to construct a theoretical explanation of how gay men's procreative consciousness is activated, developed, and negotiated (LaRossa, 2005). At this point, I typed all the codes up in a Word document and began to cut and paste each code into a list which eventually formed the outline of chapters four through six for my dissertation. Next, I went through my transcripts electronically and cut and pasted phrases, sentences, and entire paragraphs into folders with separate documents. For example, one folder included various topics, or indicators about changes in families. Indicators in this folder included broad changes in postmodern kinship, the role of assisted reproductive technologies and changing legalities in adoption, families of choice, and children as a choice. This folder was then linked with another folder that included indicators about changes in meanings of gay men to a broader category labeled, sociohistorical transformations. Sociohistorical transformations became the broader category, and changes in families and changes in meanings of gay men were the properties that contributed to broad sociohistorical transformations that have changed how gay men think about fatherhood.

The purpose of axial coding is to answer questions about the phenomenon in order to give the concept greater explanatory power (Duchscher & Morgan, 2004). The development of axial coding continued as I sought out the processes, conditions, and consequences of identified categories throughout the research process. My final stage of selective coding entailed comparing themes identified in this study to the existing literature exploring fathering among both gay and heterosexual men. This final coding phase is where I identified the theoretical contributions that ultimately advance our understanding of procreative consciousness and fathering experiences, as they pertain to both gay and straight men. Admittedly, despite the urge

to offer readers a step-by step guide of how I analyzed the data, coding did not occur in distinct phases. Instead, “the picture slowly emerged as a patchwork mosaic” (Dey, 2003, p. 86).

I realize that grounded theory recently has come under attack primarily because of the positivist roots of the methodology, its assumptions of a neutral researcher who discovers data, and because it assumes a reality *sui generis* from its members (Charmaz, 2000, 2002; Dey, 2003; LaRossa, 2005). Similarly LaRossa (2005) argues that despite their sensitivities to symbolic interactionism, Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin come extremely close to subscribing to epistemological realism, an orientation closely associated with positivism. Hence, it is of import to note that consistent with the constructivist and interactionist approaches, I emphasize how these categories and codes are not factual realities. Rather they denote a way of asking and seeing, coupled with participants’ ways of experiencing and narrating (Charmaz, 2000, 2002). My categories are not simply products of the data; they emerged through interplay among the mutual construction of the interview and coding process. Nonetheless, the themes derived from this process of mutual construction unveil how gay men’s procreative consciousness is activated, developed, and negotiated and how gay men experience fathering in a socially constructed world that privileges heterosexuality.

Analysis: Case Studies and Narrative Accounts

While grounded theory is advantageous in developing an abstract model, it can often miss accounts of how concepts and categories are part of a larger story and lived experience. Thus, I supplement grounded theory analysis with the collective case study method. This methodological strategy was chosen because a richer understanding of specific cases can lead to further insight, and ultimately better theorizing about a larger collection of cases (Stake, 2002). I select three cases in chapter four to illustrate the way in which sociohistorical transformations shape the procreative desires of gay men. I detail and compare the narratives of three different

men coming of age in three distinct sociohistorical contexts to demonstrate how the stories of one man might relate to the stories of another man, and so on. The narrative accounts I have extracted illuminate how gay men's procreative consciousness is not simply an abstract concept but emerges through a process of telling, "whereby the mundane incidents and events of daily life are given some kind of plausible order" (Williams, 1984, p. 178). The men's stories about the procreative sphere reveal the reciprocal relationships between individuals and their social world. The collective narratives of the three men I focus on accentuate the multifaceted "reality of biographical existence as it relates to both self and society" (Williams, 1984, p. 178). Consistent with the constructivist orientation, I note that that a researcher can never tell a whole story, in that a whole story exceeds anyone's knowing or anyone's telling. Rather, what emerges is ultimately my dressing of a particular story (Stake, 2002).

Table 3-1. Descriptive Statistics for Gay Childless Men and Gay Fathers

	Age	Religion	Education	Occupation	Current Relationship	Fatherhood Pathway
Gay Childless Men						
Participants from FL						
Evan	38	Jewish	College	Nonprofit	Partnered	na
Luke _B	28	Christian	College	Waiter	Single	na
Todd	28	Christian	HS	Waiter	Single	na
Nick	29	Presbyterian	College	Waiter	Partnered	na
Zack _A	34	Christian/Buddhist	College	Restaurant manager	Single	na
Frank	30	Catholic	College	Student	Single	na
Clark	20	Atheist	HS	Student	Single	na
Aiden	20	Christian	HS	Student	Single	na
Taylor	23	Roman Catholic	HS	Student	Single	na
Anthony _L	19	None	HS	Student	Single	na
Ross _B	35	None	College	Realtor Attorney;	Single	na
Blaine	45	Catholic	JD	Business	Partnered	na
Larry	34	Jewish	JD	Attorney Information	Partnered	na
Jake	33	None	Masters	technician	Partnered	na
Carlos _L	22	Catholic	HS	Cosmetologist	Partnered	na
Participants from NY						
Segal	38	Atheist	PhD	Professor	Partnered	na
CJ	39	None	College	Nonprofit	Single	na
Noah	22	Agnostic	HS	Student	Single	na
Participant from NJ						
Walter _B	53	Spiritual	College	Public health	Single	na

Table 3-1. Continued.

Gay Fathers						
	Age	Religion	Education	Occupation	Current Relationship	Fatherhood Pathway
Participants from CA						
Simon _a	53	Jewish	College	Television production	Partnered	Adopt
Theo	54	Catholic	College	Actor	Partnered	Adopt
Participants from FL						
Brian	47	Catholic	Some college	Politician; Realtor	Partnered	Adopt
Parker	37	Jewish	College	Information technician	Partnered	Adopt
Mark	45	Jewish	MD	MD	Single	Surrogacy
Participants from NY						
Andrew	37	None	College	Graphic artist Full-time	Partnered	Adopt (foster)
Craig	34	None None; Ethical	College	homemaker dad	Partnered	Adopt (foster)
Laurence	51	Humanist	Masters	Statistician	Partnered	Adopt
Tommy	36	Catholic	PhD	Psychologist	Partnered	Adopt
Randy	47	Unitarian	Some college	Realtor	Single	Adopt Surrogacy and sperm donor
Drew _b	35	Jewish	College	Television production Full-time	Partnered	Surrogacy
Nico _b	33	Catholic	College	homemaker dad	Partnered	Adopt
Ethan	55	Jewish	Masters	Teacher	Partnered	Surrogacy
Eliot _c	37	Jewish	MD	MD	Partnered	(gestational) Surrogacy
Billy _c	47	Catholic	College	Event coordinator	Partnered	(gestational)
Art _d	48	Jewish	JD	Party decorator	Partnered	Adopt
Rick _d	53	Jewish	Masters	Hospital administrator	Partnered	Adopt

Table 3-1. Continued.

	Age	Religion	Education	Occupation	Current Relationship	Fatherhood Pathway
Participants from NJ						
Guse	48	Episcopalian	Masters	Consultant Information technician	Partnered	Coparent
Robin _e	45	Christian	College	Realtor	Partnered	<u>Coparent</u>
Aaron	45	Catholic	College	Information technician	Single	Coparent
Participants from MA						
Leonard	43	Jewish Unitarian	College	Headhunter	Single	Coparent Coparent & foster
Spencer	47	Universalist	College		Single	foster

Note: I employ pseudonyms and have altered identifying details to protect the privacy of my participants. All participants are White unless noted by the following subscripts: _A = Asian, _B = Black, _L = Latino. Participants with the same lower-case subscripts are members of the same couple

CHAPTER 4 FANTASYING FATHERHOOD

Understanding gay men's motivation and approach to creating family bonds through fatherhood draws attention to gay men's experiences with the procreative realm. In this chapter, I examine how gay men develop and express a procreative consciousness over time in the context of a socially constructed world that privileges heterosexual parenting. First I draw upon the collective case study method to detail three different men's procreative fantasies that have come of age in three different sociohistorical contexts with the intention of highlighting how emergent social transformations shape how gay men fantasy fatherhood. I then explore how gay men's procreative consciousness is highly self-reflective due to a combination of their reproductive physiology and legal barriers that shape how they are able to imagine fatherhood. Nevertheless, for some men, fathering fantasies and desires are both naturalized and essentialized as a result of traditional gender and family socialization and life course patterns.

I discuss how after coming out to themselves and to the world as gay men, many men undergo life changes that heighten and activate their respective procreative consciousness and fathering desires. Yet, as this social psychological process evolves, many men become aware that their desires to father are mediated and even constrained by structural and institutional barriers. Here, I address these considerations. First, I touch upon the various turning points the gay men experienced with regard to activating their fathering desires. Next, I discuss how discriminatory beliefs about gay men's gender and sexuality interact to create barriers for how these men think about fatherhood. I then examine how institutional and financial barriers shape gay men's procreative consciousness. Finally, I discuss how gay men's fantasies regarding a readiness to father, visions of an ideal fathering experience, and child visions are constructed within a socially constructed world that privileges heterosexuality.

Three Men, Three Different Decades and Three Distinct Stories

As is detailed in chapter three, I supplement grounded theory analysis with the collective case study method (Stake, 2002). I selected these three cases to demonstrate the way in which sociohistorical transformations shape the procreative desires of gay men. The first story I tell is Lawrence's, a gay man in New York who became a father through adoption in the 1980s. Next I describe the experiences of Marc, a recent father who constructed his family with the assistance of a surrogate mother in South Florida only five years ago. I conclude this chapter with Clark's story, a college-aged man living in North Central Florida who is not yet a father but who ultimately wants to be. I deconstruct each of three men's stories, detailing how the sociohistorical context frames how they describe their past, discuss their present, and envision their futures with regards to fatherhood.

Lawrence

Lawrence was fifty-two years old when I first met him at his house tucked away in a middle-class suburb in Queens, New York. He is now the proud father of two teenage boys who he adopted with his ex-partner in the late 1980s. As we sat in his backyard having a light snack, I asked him to tell me about how he became a father. He remembers that it all began in 1984 when his nephew was born. After he announced the news to his partner he was shocked that instead of finding him smiling, with joy "he was in complete distress...it just kind of hit him in a wave, [he said] you know I've chosen to follow my natural gay feelings and this means now I can never have kids." For Lawrence, this is how his long and arduous trek to fatherhood was set into motion. Lawrence never really considered the idea of having children, as it simply did not seem like a feasible reality to him. Nevertheless, he calmed his partner by explaining that "maybe it's possible, there may be some way we can have a child." As they began to consider seriously becoming gay fathers in the mid-1980s, they started to look for options, resources and

leads. Although they came across a decent amount of gay and lesbian parents in the New York area, he recalled “nobody could give us a straight answer as to how to do it.” Even more, as they began to examine various pathways to fatherhood they decided to share their plans with their circle of friends, the majority of whom were also gay men approaching their 30’s. Lawrence explained to me the difficulty his friends had with him and his ex-partner’s news: “they would say why do you want this kind of life? Why do you want to be heterosexuals?” He continued the conversation highlighting the lack of a welcoming attitude from his friends attributing it to “internalizing their own homophobia and society’s homophobia...not even realizing it...just assuming that as a gay person you can’t have kids...you just internalize it and you don’t even question it, especially back then.”

Ultimately, in 1988, after years of effort, Lawrence and his partner finally found an adoption agency willing to work with them. Yet, in 1988 in New York State, only one of the men could legally adopt and the other man had to remain hidden. Although the social worker that agreed to work with them was well aware that they were a gay couple, she made it clear that “I will be filling out your answers, but only as if one of you were answering...I’ll ignore the other person, he will be invisible.” When the agency representatives finally brought their son to their home, Lawrence had to go upstairs and hide. Lawrence and his former partner did achieve fatherhood a second time only a few years later and despite having fewer boundaries to overcome, it still was no easy feat.

Lawrence explains that until his partner mentioned the possibility of fatherhood on the day his nephew was born, he had never imagined a life with children. In fact, when I asked Lawrence how his thoughts about fatherhood changed once he came out as gay, he proclaims that he “never needed to have children to have a full life to begin with.” Without the influence of

his former partner and the subterfuge of the social worker, Lawrence might never have fathered the two boys that are now such an enormous part of his life.

Marc

Marc was one of the first fathers I spoke with during the course of my interview process. Marc is a single gay man living in South Florida who became a father five years earlier to a little girl. Because of legalities prohibiting gay adoption in Florida, Marc decided to construct his family with the assistance of a surrogate mother. Marc had a unique coming out story because at the same time he disclosed his sexuality to his entire family, he told them he was leaving the next day for Massachusetts to meet a potential surrogate mother. Marc was well into his late thirties when he came out to his family and his friends about his sexuality. He explains that he remained in ‘the closet’ for so long but to some extent “always knew in the back of my mind that I was gay, but hoped that I could find the right person and go off in a conventional route, get married, and have a family.” Marc’s narrative is reminiscent of the stories of gay men who experienced a delayed coming-out process because of the traditionally negative stigmas associated with homosexuality in American culture. This group of gay fathers once were in a heterosexual union, became fathers with their female partners, and later divorced. In recent years, however, gay men like Marc have been exposed to fatherhood possibilities through channels other than heterosexual intercourse (Dunne, 1999). When I asked Marc how his fantasies about fatherhood might have changed as he was coming to terms with his sexuality, he asserts that:

I mean before, in my early 30’s or 20’s, or when I knew I was gay, I’d just assume that I’d never have children. That was one of my big disappointments. I just thought well, I’ll be childless for life. It wasn’t until later on that I considered it, that I said wait a minute. At that age, fortunately, I had financial means, I don’t need to be childless, so I was pleasantly surprised to myself when I realized that I could change that situation without, but for a good long stretch there, I just assumed that I would never have children.

Marc dismantles the dominant ideology that if one chooses to live in accordance with one's sexual preference one automatically chooses not to have children. His narrative begins with a discursive link between coming out and not having children. Initially, Marc's future is one that he constructs as being eternally childless; however, we then hear a turning point in his narrative whereby an alternative reality is discursively created (Nelson, 2006) and Marc's imagined future shifts from a predestined childless life to a reality made possible due to societal and cultural changes. Moreover, as a relatively well-off physician, Marc had the resources necessary to bypass Florida's discriminatory legal prohibitions on adoption and construct his family through the assistance of a surrogacy agency. As opposed to Lawrence's experiences in the procreative realm, only slightly more than a decade earlier, Marc explains that his process of finding the necessary resources only took a few short months. Yet, although Marc is a single father he did not venture on his pathway to fatherhood alone. Marc benefited from the assistance of a network of professional acquaintances that could legally guide him through the procreative process. Thus, Marc's financial status coupled with a greater abundance of lawyers and other professionals well versed in gay adoption and surrogacy policies contributed to him being able to navigate the procreative realm with far fewer obstacles than Lawrence.

A comparison of Lawrence and Marc's stories illustrates how a wide array of societal shifts both trigger and shape gay men's thoughts about fatherhood and their ability to pursue fathering. Recall that prior to his former partner's declaration of wanting children, Lawrence never even pondered the possibility of fatherhood and thus his procreative consciousness could be deemed inactive. Marc, on the other hand struggled to reconcile his desire for children and a 'traditional family' with his choice to follow his gay feelings, a time where his procreative consciousness could be viewed as in flux. While Lawrence narrates his past comfortably

identifying as a gay and eternally childless man, Marc, in the context of being a present father, explains that he never felt at ease with the possible future of childlessness. These transformations in the procreative consciousness of gay men are inextricably intertwined with major sociohistorical changes in contemporary American society.

Clark

The final narrative I detail is that of Clark, who was a twenty -year old college student when I spoke with him almost two years ago. He is a self-proclaimed activist and is well known among the LGBT community on his campus. As I read over our interview, it dawned on me that I was hearing something very different from what I had heard from the older men I spoke with. I began the interview by asking him to describe how he envisioned his future. Clark immediately proclaims that he was raised in a traditional family and prior to coming out at age sixteen he had always planned to “have a wife and 2.5 kids just like my parents had and their parents before them.” Following his coming out experience, he simply stated that he wanted to keep his plans as intact as possible, “you know, maybe have a husband and 2.5 kids.” Now that he is in college however, he questions whether he wants to follow his fantasies of becoming a father and construct a novel twist on the traditional family arrangement or whether he would rather go the career route. Clark is well aware of the financial and emotional complications involved in the pursuit and experience of fatherhood, and is beginning to ponder if it is all worth it. The following narrative is an excerpt from Clark, whereby he considers the costs and benefits of contemporary parenting:

It was just sort of an expectation that I would be a father throughout most of my life and it wasn't really until college that I started to question that and you know started to think that being a father is a time-consuming, fiscally consuming lifestyle. And so I really have been considering whether it is really important that I take care of a child and rear a child to exist in this society that we have set up for ourselves. I started to question whether I would be happier with my time and my money and the ability to spend more time with a partner.

And so, I really haven't come to a strong decision yet, but I'll feel like I will probably end up deciding that I want kids.

Within Clark's narrative, we can see how he wavers between two very distinct futures; the first as a gay father with familial responsibilities and the other as a childless gay man with substantial monetary assets and unlimited free time. Although even as an openly identified gay man he had always pictured his future with children in it, with college came the knowledge that a child requires self - sacrifice. Clearly, Clark is like many college students (regardless of their sexuality) coping with the impending responsibility of adulthood.

Later in the interview I asked Clark to reflect on the experience when he first came out as gay and how his thoughts about fatherhood were impacted or altered by this coming out experience. He recalls, "I actually think that once I found out I was gay, I definitely wanted kids...I almost wanted to normalize it as much as I could...or maybe to prove them [society] wrong." Unlike Lawrence and Marc, Clark does not ever question his ability to overcome "relational fertility" (Murphy, 2001). Interestingly, for Clark, whether or not to have children as an openly gay man is a choice rather than the forced reality it was for the other men who came of age only a few decades earlier. Nevertheless, Clark is well aware of the difficulties involved in pursuing fatherhood, as he listed with great detail the discriminatory policies that plague paths to gay fatherhood both nationally and locally, specifically attending to the unfair policies in Florida (the state in which he currently resides). Despite these obstacles, and despite his relatively young age, he was very much aware of his fathering abilities. In fact, Clark even spoke about fleeting conversations he had on dates with men about the possibilities of fatherhood. As we concluded the interview, I asked Clark for any final thoughts. He predicts that as homosexuality becomes increasingly tolerated and even accepted in contemporary Western society, "we will have a lot of

younger gay men who will say to themselves, I do still want kids and I can have kids...we will be seeing a lot of growth in these groups of gay men who want and will try to have children.”

Lawrence, Marc, and Clark are three very different men who came of age in separate decades marked by distinct sociohistorical changes. Nevertheless, each of their stories resists dominant assumptions that presume that coming out as gay inevitably results in a life without children (Nelson, 2006). Clark’s concluding remark, however, challenges the dominant notion of a gay identity as incompatible with parenthood more so than Lawrence or Marc. His final comment also elucidates how the imagined familial futures of gay men coming of age in contemporary society are much more fluid and flexible than their older counterparts.

A critical analysis of how gay men construct and act on their self-awareness of being both gay and capable of creating and/or fathering human life must be situated within a sociohistorical framework that addresses larger social and cultural changes. I employed participants’ excerpts to illustrate micro-level examples of how each individual experience was shaped by distinct opportunities, proposing that this denotes large scale or macro-level social change. I suggest that a mutual and reciprocal relationship exists between gay men’s procreative consciousness and broader sociohistorical transformations. While gay men’s fantasies about fatherhood and family are constructed within distinct social and cultural changes, gay men themselves are at the forefront of instigating these changes.

Gay Men’s Procreative Narratives

Three key themes surfaced in how men narrated their procreative desires. First, and consistent with research exploring gay men’s fathering trajectories (Stacey, 2006), participants spoke of their procreative consciousness as emerging through a highly self-reflective process. Second, and consistent with research on heterosexual men, some participants especially those who were under the age of 30, talked about fatherhood as a natural life course transition

(Marsiglio, 1995; Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002). Finally and perhaps most intriguing is how some men narrated their procreative desires in ways that were consistent with biological essentialism and gender traditionalism.

A Self-Reflective Procreative Consciousness

Regardless of one's sexuality, parenthood has become a reflective process in contemporary Western society. "Paths to parenthood no longer appear natural, obligatory, or uniform, but are necessarily reflexive, uncertain, self-fashioning, plural, and politically embattled" (Stacey, 2006, p. 28). Children have moved from an economic asset to an economic responsibility and even a liability. Thus, "an emotional rather than economic calculus governs the pursuit of parenthood" (Stacey, 2006, p.28). Openly identified gay men who seek fatherhood face these dimensions of postmodern parenting in an exaggerated way. Furthermore, it has been documented that the thought processes that gay men undergo to become fathers are quite different from those experienced by their heterosexual counterparts (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Mallon, 2004). Many of the men I spoke with were well aware of emerging legal and reproductive opportunities that made their once outlandish daydreams of becoming a father now a viable reality. Yet, they also were well aware of how structural and institutional constraints shaped their experiences in the procreative realm. Taylor, a shy and soft-spoken college student explains how a gay man's journey to fatherhood is much more purposeful than the often spontaneous and even accidental process of fatherhood for heterosexual men:

It's business like...you gotta find who. You gotta pick a date. You know, it's so, it's so organized. It's not, like, it's not romantic. It's not anything. It's not accidental. It's, you gotta sit down, discuss, plan, pick everything out. Like, it's kind of structured. It's overly structured that it kind of makes it more difficult, like, to actually make every decision.

Taylor's narrative underscores the absence of spontaneity in many gay men's passage to fatherhood. Admittedly, Taylor's comments may only be applicable to the experience of White

middle-class relatively privileged gay men who are not closeted. Nonetheless, his narrative further emphasizes the idea that, unlike heterosexual men who may get a woman pregnant accidentally, a gay man who desires a child by means other than heterosexual reproduction must undertake a substantial amount of research and preparation.

Similarly, Evan, a childless man explains that as he has grown older, and started considering the possibility of fatherhood, he has become:

Daunted by the challenge of it, it's very expensive. A gay man can't you know accidentally have a child no matter what...I feel the unfairness of it all in that regard, but it is what it is. So you know, I've paid attention and done some research to you know what the options are, and there all very expensive, no matter how you look at it...One of the aspects of being gay is that you're forced to be more aware of things, you have to think about them more because they don't just happen by accident. You're different in society...and so it forces one to be more introspective about parenting.

Evan emphasizes that because of their reproductive physiology and legal obstacles, openly gay men fantasizing fatherhood are much more introspective and reflexive than are their heterosexual counterparts. These narratives underscore how a gay man's journey to fatherhood is shaped by a variety of mediating factors. In addition to the men acknowledging the planning, structure, financial sacrifices, and possible homophobic prejudice and discrimination involved in becoming a father, they discussed the various legal obstacles involved. Some participants in Florida recognized their place of residence was the only state in the entire country with statutes explicitly prohibiting adoption by gay men and lesbians (Mallon, 2004). Clark, a childless man was the most knowledgeable participant on the legal status of Florida. He explains:

I'm in Florida. So, um, reading this stuff about what I can and can't do in the country was just, uh, I really thought to myself this was never going to happen unless I get out of the country...but, I mean, more and more, the country is becoming a little more accepting [of gay parenting]. There's, you know, Massachusetts, New York, and California.

Clark is quick to comment that he currently resides in a state that overtly forbids adoption by gays and lesbians. Yet, as an active member of a university GLBT student group, Clark increasingly realizes the options available to him in this country.

Other men were critical about the discriminatory legalities of adoption, especially in Florida. Segal is a gay childless man considering fatherhood. Segal was one of the more outspoken men I spoke with, as he is a sociologist well versed on gender and sexual politics. When I told him I was from Florida, we spoke at length about the discriminatory policies of gay adoption in Florida. He maintains that:

I find it ironic that perhaps those who are constructed to be the best parents in our society are those that are most handicapped from being able to take care of the mistakes that heterosexuals make... Heterosexuals are irresponsible...And when gays and lesbians come along like in the state of Florida, where there's whatever, 3500 kids that want adoption, and there's more than 3500 gay couples who want to adopt them, then when queers come along and say, we'll take care of the mess you made they refuse to let queers do it.

Fatherhood as Natural Progression

Clearly, many gay men choosing fatherhood are highly reflective about their fathering desires and quite critical about the barriers that make it difficult for them to make their fantasies into a reality. However, for some men, the transition to fatherhood was one that was simply a natural and a logical part of one's life course. For example, recall Clark's assertion above of wanting "a husband and 2.5 kids." In some ways, his fatherhood fantasies were a simple and normal part of his adult life. While men were fully aware of potential barriers to achieving fatherhood, their fantasies of fathering were also part of a broader process of individual maturation and growth. Similar to the heterosexual men Palkovitz interviewed (2002); fatherhood is described by some gay men as an inevitable and logical step and part of their development into adulthood. There is a sense of continuity apparent in men's perception of this

step. Men in this category always imagined that their futures would include children; the only uncertainty was when this would happen, not if this would happen.

Similarly, many men spoke about how their families of origin influenced their desires to father. For example, Evan proclaims that he “wants to have a connection to people that are mine. And my own family is very small and you know won’t necessarily be around for my old age. And so I cherish the connectiveness of them.” Evan’s desire to have children of his own was augmented by the fact that his family was very small and only consisted of his mother and his grandmother. His desire to have someone to care for him in his old age was a significant reason as to why Evan desperately wanted children. Somewhat differently, Larry a childless attorney asserts that his tight knit family was of tremendous value to him. As the youngest in a family of four kids, when he watched his brothers’ and sister’s children play in his parents’ yard, he would become upset at the fact that he had not yet contributed grandchildren to his aging parents. He referred to his parents, siblings, nieces, and nephews frequently throughout the interview and it was clear that family meant a great deal to Larry. Larry, like Evan was clear that he wanted children in his future. Although the sizes of Larry and Evan’s families of origin differed, they both cite their strong familial bonds as critical in shaping their present desires to want to become fathers. For each of these men, fatherhood is simultaneously a normal life course expectation and an anomalous desire.

Fatherhood as Essential

Some men explained that their desire to become a father was actually augmented once they came to terms with their gay identity. Nick, a soft-spoken 26-year old who moved from the Midwest to Miami Beach only one year ago eloquently discusses his burning desire to father as equivalent to a woman’s natural drive to mother:

Because I was always gay and I did have some maternal instinct. Maybe at the time that I first started thinking I want to have a child...the older I got the more I considered it the same way of finding Mr. Right...this very important thing that would complete me. The only thing that could [complete me].

Nick cites identifying as gay as being tantamount to having a maternal urge. Further, he recognizes that as a human being, the only thing that would fully complete him was creating a family of his own. Ross, a childless single man echoes Nick's sentiments regarding a desire to father. He asserts that fatherhood is "the greatest thing that somebody can do. I think it enriches your life...you can give back to someone your good experiences, so they can become a good person."

That men discussed their procreative fantasies in terms of having a "maternal instinct," "the greatest thing that somebody can do" and "needing something to complete me" clearly speaks to our contemporary pronatalist milieu. It also touches on the notion of generativity, or the nurturing quality in individuals whereby they seek to "create and guide younger generations" (Marsiglio, 1995, p. 84). While some refer to gay men choosing fatherhood as postmodern pioneers (Stacey, 2006), the yearning to procreate, father, nurture, and have someone depend on you is a particularly modern characteristic. What is unique about this desire is only that it is being articulated by gay men, a population who because of gender and heterosexist norms are not expected to have these yearnings. Clearly, because gay men are raised within a socially constructed society that stresses pronatalism and generativity, their procreative desires and discourses are not so different from their heterosexual counterparts.

However, when we listen to how gay men negotiate these modern desires for fatherhood with their gay identity, essential ideologies associated with gender and sexuality surface. For example, while Luke wanted children in his future, he maintains that:

Gay men were not meant to be that way, if it was meant to be that way then two people would have stood beside each other and had a baby. Obviously there is a reason that our bodies are built to procreate and for a woman to go through that process.

Luke describes his procreative urges within the constraints of a heteronormative discourse.

If we take Luke's statement and juxtapose it against those of Nick and Ross it illuminates how gay men's reliance on dominant familial, heterosexual, and gender discourse underscores the need for a more inclusive way of talking about parenting. Furthermore, because we live in a society that conflates and confuses gender and sexuality, gay men's procreative fantasies are narrated within the constraining framework of Western conceptions of gender and sexuality. Yet, while many of the men describe their procreative desires within a gendered and heteronormative context, there were a few exceptions. Not surprisingly, one of these exceptions surfaced in my conversation with Segal, a fellow sociologist who is a leading scholar on gender and sexuality. He actually mentioned that my study should critically examine how heterosexism "hinders and hurts gay men." This reliance upon dominant gender and familial discourse is a theme that surfaced more than I would have ever imagined and confirms Segal's statement of how heterosexism constrains gay men's narrative abilities.

Fatherhood Identity Transitions

I now look at the processes by which gay men undergo meaningful shifts in the way they reflect and behave with regards to their future father identity. I emphasize the subjective and fluid nature of gay men's procreative consciousness and fatherhood fantasies while simultaneously highlighting how the gendered and heteronormative nature of the procreative realm affects gay men's identity related transitions. Such social psychological transitions are qualitative changes that reorganize the inner social psychological world and the external behavior of an individual (Hawkins, Christiansen, Sargent, & Hill, 1993).

For many of the men, their procreative consciousness was triggered by specific moments, experiences, or social processes. Consistent with other studies and personal memoirs (Mallon, 2000, 2004; Savage, 1999; Strah, 2003), gay men note that their procreative consciousness was either heightened or activated through taking care of a child or children, interacting with lesbian mothers, encountering another gay man or men who chose to father, the death of a partner or family member, and being exposed to adoption and/or surrogacy organizations. For other men, transitions were not sudden or critical shifts in their consciousness, but occurred rather gradually and subtly.

Father identity transitions for childless men and fathers differed substantially in the types of responses they triggered. These responses were inextricably tied to the sociohistorical context by which men came of age. Consistent with Clark's experience described above, childless men and younger aged fathers, for the most part, did not experience identity transitions that activated their awareness of their ability to father. Rather, these men experienced transitions that activated their desire to father, as most were well aware of their 'non-traditional' procreative abilities. Anthony's experiences with children discussed below underscores how simply because gay men are aware of their available "reproductive" options does not necessarily mean that they will desire to father a child in the future. Moreover, Frank's story that I detail in chapter one highlights gay men's complex negotiations of their fathering desires in a world that privileges heterosexuality and scrutinizes gay men's intimate interactions with children. Although these younger gay men were more likely than their older counterparts to experience identity transitions in their fathering desires rather than their fathering awareness, not all young men responded to these transitions with subsequent plans to eventually sire a child.

Nonetheless, these father identity transitions are quite different from those of the older fathers in my sample. Older men typically reported specific moments or processes that activated their *awareness* of procreative possibilities. Clearly, this opposing response to father identity transitions highlights the influence that social and historical changes have had in shaping gay men's procreative consciousness. Art and Rick's chance encounter with a gay couple at a grocery store in Fire Island discussed in more detail below illuminates how even though many older men are cognizant of their desires to father, their awareness of the "reproductive" options available to them is limited. Attention to the nature of the cognitive responses transitions trigger in gay men's procreative and father identities clarifies the complex nature of the meanings men attach to such events and how these meanings are intertwined with larger social, cultural, and technological transformations.

Turning Points

Where every man in my sample experienced an identity transition with respect to fatherhood, not all men experienced distinct turning points in activating their procreative consciousness and fathering desires. Turning points are "instrumental transitional moments in men's lives when men come to see themselves in a new light or to adopt a significantly different perspective on some aspect of life" (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002, p. 111). Turning points can be distinguished from identity transitions in that the "the individual is aware on some level that these events and related processes have altered his or her identity and perspective" (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002, p. 25). I use Strauss' (1969) typology of turning points and Marsiglio and Hutchinson's (2002) variations of his framework to organize my analysis of the processes by which gay men experience significant change in the way they think, feel, and act in regards to the procreative realm. The insights I generate advance theoretical understanding of the events

and situations that gay men identify as turning points that trigger their awareness of both, their knowledge of their ability to father children and their desire to father children.

Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) differentiate procreative turning points from those that occur in the nonprocreative realm. Because gay men are less likely to engage in heterosexual intercourse, they are not faced with events or situations in the procreative realm (pregnancy scares, miscarriages, abortions) as often as their heterosexual counterparts. Thus, the vast majority of turning points discussed here are nonprocreative. Note that while I explore these turning points separately, I also stress that many men experienced multiple turning points in their procreative fantasies. For example, I discuss how Drew and Nico experienced turning points that were institutional as they became exposed to a gay-oriented surrogacy agency, and interpersonal, when Nico gave Drew an ultimatum.

Experiential: engaging with children

Many of the men discuss both prior and current experiences with children as critical episodes in activating their desires to one day become a father. For the majority, experiences with children were formative events in constructing their identity as a prospective father. Many, fathers and childless alike, discuss experiences with nieces, nephews, and cousins. Others speak about working at a camp, working or volunteering at daycare, and partaking in various mentoring programs. For example, Luke, a Black childless man from New Zealand, talks about his year-long experience raising and mentoring his nephew. In a conversation about experiences with children, he cites this particular year as a highly significant time in his life: “he [my brother] was a slack-ass and it was important for me to be a good role-model for him [my nephew]...he became like my side-kick...for some reason he listened to me.” The year he cared for his nephew was one of the most influential periods in shaping Luke’s prospective father identity. Recognizing the importance of becoming a decent role model for his nephew when his brother

failed heightened Luke's awareness of his fathering ability. Likewise, Evan, a childless man living in Manhattan who was raised in Kansas City, Missouri remembers that he was interested in becoming "a parent from a pretty early age, and I actually think it ties back to my early relationship with a cousin...I can't say I helped raise him, but I did a lot of things that are associated with parenting." Evan explains that his relationship with his cousin sparked his awareness to the idea of having a child.

Yet, experiencing a heightened procreative consciousness based on interactions with children does not necessarily mean participants will desire to become a father someday. Anthony's experiences with children actually confirmed his original decision not to have children of his own. A career driven theater major and a childless gay man, Anthony is adamant about not ever having kids. He explains some of his previous encounters with children:

I guess when I approach kids, I'm kind of like a little too grown up because I can't be like, "Hi kids!" Like, I can't be all happy and smiley and, like, childlike, like, I just can't do that. I worked at a daycare center for a few weeks, and, like, there were these three little kids that would just, like, climb up my leg, which was cute. But, for the most part, like, kids just kind of like keep their distance from me.

Similarly, recall Frank's story from chapter one. Frank worked at a daycare center and recalled many of these experiences quite fondly, often referring to them as "preparation to be a good father" and "fatherhood training." Yet, Frank stopped working in childcare following an incident where a young boy's mother accused him of "touching him in an inappropriate manner." This traumatic incident heightened Frank's awareness of the public scrutiny and surveillance surrounding gay men and young boys. Immediately following this confrontation, Frank swore that he would never become a father and bring another human life into this world. Frank and Anthony cite their prior experiences with children as confirmation that they did not desire children in the future. Nevertheless, for the majority of men, experiences with children were

influential in heightening their procreative consciousness and shaping their identities as future gay fathers.

Observational

Consistent with previous research, participants shared that seeing other gay fathers, lesbian mothers or even other adoptive parents triggered their fatherhood fantasies (Mallon, 2000, 2004). Ross, a childless man living in Miami Beach explains that his gay mentor, the person who gave him the confidence to come out, recently adopted two children. Ross describes his mentor as “the father I never had, and a great role model to me.” Watching this man adopt children was a turning point in Ross’ procreative consciousness that triggered his desires that he too wanted to father children one day.

Most of the time, however, men reported not previously knowing the persons who prompted their fathering desires. Lawrence explains, “My ex had met somebody at the gym who knew somebody who knew a gay man who adopted a kid.” Eventually, this man escorted Lawrence and his former partner to a picnic of gay prospective fathers who he describes as “hungry wolves” wanting to know everything possible about how to navigate the legalities of adoption.

Art and Rick, a couple who created their family four years ago by adopting a son explain how they almost abandoned their fantasies of becoming fathers because of the continuous difficulties they experienced with agencies and attorneys. A chance encounter at a grocery store in Fire Island changed everything. Art explains how he saw two men and “the most beautiful baby you wanted to see” exiting the store. He approached them with a mouthful of questions and later that afternoon, the four men spoke for eight hours detailing the adoption process. For Art and Rick, this chance encounter was a turning point in their forming father identities. Like other

men I interviewed, they were actively contemplating fatherhood, but their enthusiasm required the direction that this couple provided.

Daryl, a single gay father who adopted his boys in the 1980s owned and operated a natural food store. One day, a woman came in asking about natural baby formulas and he replied that the healthiest and most natural thing was to breastfeed. She retorted that this was not an option because she was adopting. When he replied, “but I thought you were single.” She explained that she was a single woman adopting. Daryl immediately followed with “do they let single gay men adopt?” She lowered her voice and said, “well, there are two guys in our group, New York Singles Adopting Children (NYSAC), and I don’t know for sure, but they both appear to be gay.” Needless to say, Daryl was at the very next meeting for NYSAC and met these men who ultimately guided him through the adoption process. For Daryl, Art, Rick, and Lawrence, exposure to gay parents and adoptive parents served as turning points that either heightened or activated their desires to become fathers themselves. Whereas Lawrence, Art, and Rick were already contemplating fatherhood and simply needed an extra push, Daryl had never even imagined fatherhood until that chance occurrence at his shop.

An observational turning point does not have to occur in person. C.J. is a 39-year-old childless man living in Manhattan. He remembers his turning point quite vividly. He explains that he had read a story in People magazine in 1987 that told the story of a young girl in India who was going to be put to death in her village because she had a discoloration on her face and the villagers thought she was possessed by the devil. The story continued with a heartwarming account of how a gay man in San Francisco adopted her even though the villagers said that God was going to condemn him. C.J. still had the article and e-mailed it to me prior to the interview. This article was brought up several times throughout our conversation and clearly struck a cord

in his procreative desires. Reading this article was a turning point that generated a lasting desire in C.J. to adopt children one day.

Institutional

As discussed in detail in chapter two, the trend of openly gay men beginning to successfully achieve fatherhood speaks to larger developments in postmodern transformations of kinship (Stacey, 1996). Furthermore, particular forms of gay fathers were literally inconceivable before recent groundbreaking developments in reproductive technology and changing legalities in the adoption system (Stacey, 1996). Many of the fathers in my sample spoke about exposure to these emerging opportunities as events in their lives that triggered their fatherhood awareness and desires. Recall that Nico desperately wanted children of his own and was attempting to persuade Drew into constructing a family via surrogacy. Drew was assigned to write a series of articles on reproductive issues for gay families for a magazine and read about Growing Generations, the surrogacy agency discussed in chapter two that caters specifically to the needs of gay prospective fathers. This realization was enough to inflate Nico's already heightened fathering desires, and ultimately, Drew and Nico fathered a set of twins only two years later.

Likewise, three participants, Evan, Segal, and Spencer, participated in the Big Brother organization. Spencer discusses the impact that the Big Brother organization had on shaping his identity as a future father. Because the organization does not usually place a child who is free for adoption with a brother, and his son, Reggie, was free, Spencer maintains that the odds were already in his favor. Further, the woman who was placing him with Reggie described him as "having this problem and that problem...he was living in a children's residential facility and has no relationships with anyone... if you really don't want this kid we can keep looking." Rather than scare Spencer away, he immediately asked to meet Reggie. After they were matched up Spencer's life changed dramatically and for the next two years he was his big brother, and then

eventually became his adoptive father. Although Spencer was a known donor to a lesbian and father to a daughter, like Drew, he was not an active participant in the day-to-day child-rearing activities of her life. Spencer explains that his experience with Big Brother was a turning point that triggered both, his desires to be an active father and his awareness that he could indeed be a full-time dad.

Cultural

Cultural turning points included September 11, media influences, commitment ceremonies, and realizations that one could be a part of one's religion. The media is a large part of American culture and both shapes and reacts to our cultural landscape. Many men spoke about media influences in shaping their awareness and desires to father. The summer that I conducted most of my interviews was the final season of *Six Feet Under*, a sitcom on HBO. The series ended with one of the main characters, a white gay man named David and his African American partner Keith, adopting two young African American brothers. This became a topic of conversation amongst my participants, childless and fathers alike. It was not uncommon for men to refer to David and Keith in our conversation. For example, Tommy, a psychologist who recently became an adoptive father used examples from *Six Feet Under* as an image he weaved throughout our conversation. Similarly, Noah, a childless man, repeatedly referred to this television show throughout his interview. His constant reference to the show and its characters served to prove to him that fatherhood could in fact be a possibility in his future. While *Six Feet Under* for Tommy and Noah did not necessarily serve as a turning point per se, it did highlight for these men the visibility of gay planned families and shaped how they viewed their social landscape as well as how they structured the interview.

A cultural milestone represents an "incident that hammers home a message to men that they have experienced some type of change and developed a new perspective. It enables them to

see that they are in another place in life and have different ideas” (Marsiglio, 2002, p. 112). This shift in identity and consciousness may be a result of acquiring a new status. Separate, but related to the idea of cultural milestones, is a ceremonial announcement, whereby men “make a public proclamation or are acknowledged for acquiring a new role in an institutional setting” (Marsiglio, 2002, p. 112). Commitment ceremonies for gay men are both a cultural milestone and a ceremonial announcement. Not surprisingly, participants spoke about how commitment ceremonies sanctified their relationships and prompted them to want to take the next step in forming a life together. Many times, this next step entailed having children.

Numerous cultural milestones in American society are religious in nature. Thus, it was not unexpected that some men invoked religious experiences as turning points in activating their fatherhood identities. Ethan, a 55 - year-old father of a young teenage girl explains that once he came out in college, the two aspects of his life he felt he had abandoned were his Jewish heritage and his desire to have a family. For Ethan, the choice to follow his same-gender attractions and lead a gay lifestyle was always darkened by the feeling that he would never have these two essential aspects in his life. He describes his experience of finding a gay synagogue when he was in his early 30s as a critical event that activated his procreative consciousness. With the discovery of this organization, Ethan realized that if he could participate as an openly gay man in the synagogue and retain his Jewish identity, then what was to stop him from having the family he had always fantasized about. The above examples illustrate how gay men’s procreative identities are embedded within a cultural web of nonprocreative influences that include but are not limited to media representations, secular rites of passage, and organized religion.

Interpersonal negotiations

Whereas some men experienced their turning points mostly on their own, others negotiated their turning points with others. Many times, this other person involved was their romantic

partner. Nico had always wanted children and was ecstatic when he met Drew, a gay man who had served as a known sperm donor to a lesbian couple in another state. Although they lived a three-and-a-half hour drive away from the couple, the friends saw each other somewhat regularly. For Drew, the experience of “having kids without having kids” was enough to satiate his familial desires. But Nico yearned for children of his own and periodically broached the subject of fathering with his long-time partner. After much deliberation, Nico gave Drew an ultimatum: “if you don’t want to do this, then maybe this relationship isn’t going to work out because this is something I really want.” Drew claims he “had to go back to the mental drawing board” and seriously consider if he could live his life without Nico’s companionship and intimacy. Although Drew was already a biological father, he did not see himself as a prospective social father who would be engaged in the day-to-day activities of his children. It was this conversation and Nico’s ultimatum that finally prompted Drew to begin to integrate a physically and intimately involved father identity into his sense of self.

Another interpersonal turning point that Drew and Nico experienced together was the death of Drew’s father. They explained that they “contracted with the surrogacy agent a month after he [Drew’s father] passed away. It was kind of a kick in the ass, you know, like life is short, let’s go do it.” Although Nico’s ultimatum caused them to seriously begin to contemplate becoming fathers sometime in the future, the death of Drew’s father hurried the process along. Losing Drew’s father after a lengthy battle with cancer prompted their desire to create a family and in essence, sped up the reproductive process.

Consistent with previous research on all procreative identities regardless of sexuality, coping with death and illness emerged as turning points among men whose procreative identities were in flux (Mallon, 2000; Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002). Both Daryl and Leonard

experienced the deaths of their partners and in different ways; their experiences with death prompted a desire to father. Leonard and his partner, Ariel had been in a committed, but open relationship for five years. In these five years, Ariel was diagnosed with HIV. The two of them and two lesbian women eventually decided to have a child together. It was a well-known fact that Ariel was sick, but the four were optimistic and chose not to think the worst. At the tail end of the pregnancy, Ariel fell very ill and passed away. While death was not necessarily a turning point for Leonard, the impending passing of his partner served to push him to create a legacy of he and Ariel's relationship. On the other hand, Daryl's partner fell ill and passed away in October and he became a father to his first son in December. He reflects, "I'm sure there is a connection there. I'm unconsciously and consciously aware that my son sort of filled in for a partner, you know, somehow filled the void." The death of a loved one, whether it be a romantic partner or a father is a central dimension of one's sense of self. These changes in how men perceive themselves following death or during grave illness serve as central turning points in men's procreative identities and father desires.

We have already seen how a partner's ultimatum can serve as a turning point prompting fatherhood and how a partner's death or illness can trigger fathering desires. However, in some cases, a man and his romantic partner's unresolved disagreement as to whether to have children can also serve as a turning point. Spencer's former partner was adamant about never having children. So, when Spencer was approached by a lesbian woman wanting a known donor, Spencer thought it was the perfect arrangement; he could have a child in his life and his romantic relationship could continue as planned. However, his life as a distant father, or kindly uncle was not enough to satiate his fatherly desires. Spencer decided to enroll in the Big Brother organization and met Reggie who he began spending much of his time with. So, when Spencer

was a big brother to Reggie for the two years prior to adopting, he was also living with his partner of many years. However, his intimate relationship with Reggie began to cause a rift between them. Spencer remembers:

Part of the reason my partner left was because of Big Brother and I sort of abandoned him for Reggie. We couldn't have kids because of my partner...he never had the ability to express his emotions...he shied away from physical affections...all of a sudden with Reggie I had an intimate relationship in a very different way, but it was so much more satisfying than wishing things would be more intimate with my partner and I. So Reggie pretty much got all of my attention because he gave me back so much and that may be part of the reason my partner left. But it's a good thing.

For Spencer, Reggie filled the void in his romantic relationship. Spencer had always wanted children and rather than sacrifice his fatherhood desires for an abysmal romance, he opted to choose Reggie over his partner and live his life as a single gay father. The multiplicity of interaction and collaboration (or in some cases, lack thereof) involved in gay men's procreative turning points illuminates how procreative and father identities are intimately interwoven with other relationships.

Properties of Turning Points

Now that I have identified some of the key turning points that participants experienced, I turn to a brief analysis of the properties differentiating their features. By identifying such properties, I am able to attend to the conceptual intricacies associated with turning point experiences relevant to gay men's procreative identities. In their analysis of young heterosexual men, Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) identify eight properties of turning points: 1) degree of control, 2) duration, 3) presence of subjective or behavioral changes, 4) individual or shared experience, 5) vicarious or personal experience, 6) type and degree of institutional context, 7) centrality, and 8) emotional response and evaluation. I draw selectively upon the types of turning points I mentioned above and other relevant examples that participants invoked to illustrate briefly how these properties relate to gay men. Similar to the types of turning points

discussed previously, these properties are often interrelated and overlap. As I discuss the properties, note that the symbolic meanings associated with men's experiences are "social constructions that emerge within a value-laden social and cultural context" (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002, p. 127). Where these experiences are indeed subjective, they are embedded within and shaped by a larger social, cultural, and historical milieu.

Degree of control

For young heterosexual men, turning points varied in the degree to which men were able to plan and control them. Many men in Marsiglio and Hutchinson's (2002) sample believed they did not have substantial control over the onset and evolution of their procreative turning points. Two of my participants dealt with unplanned pregnancies that served as turning points triggering their awareness of their procreative consciousness. One of these unplanned pregnancies ultimately resulted in an abortion and the other served as an impetus to get married. Both men reported they were not in any position to control these processes; yet, similar to the men in *Sex, Men, and Babies*, each was able to have some say in the outcome. Luke and his girlfriend at the time mutually decided to terminate the pregnancy and Robin whose experience is detailed further at the end of chapter five hurried into marrying the mother of his child.

However, because openly gay men's reproductive physiology largely constrains them from accidentally "getting pregnant," gay men, especially the men in my study, typically plan their families. An indirect consequence of this necessity to engage thoroughly in reproductive and family planning is that to an extent, gay men have more control over their experiences in the procreative realm than do heterosexual men because they generally are not faced with unplanned pregnancies. Yet, because their father identities are contingent upon other individuals and institutional dimensions, they simultaneously have less control. Similar to their heterosexual counterparts, gay men still have to cope with the uncertainty of miscarriages. But their gay

identities add an extra layer of complexity to their lack of control. Men in my sample also had to cope with agencies and birth mothers' refusals to work with them and with birth mothers' last minute decisions to keep their children (phenomena further detailed in the following chapter).

Duration

Where some turning points can be traced back to specific moments, others present themselves in the form of unfolding processes. Unlike the sudden turning points discussed at length above, I now detail those that were more gradual and subtle in nature. Rick's experience highlights a gradual, natural shift that represents a different quality of change. Rick, a 53-year-old Jewish man with a 4-year-old boy discusses how thinking about fatherhood simply progressed as the "next logical step in his life." He elaborates, "Well, settling down, buying a home, having the space to do it, knowing that you have a school system here to work with...being part of suburbia." For Rick, the defining realization that he was becoming an adult heightened his awareness that he was also ready to embark on a new stage in his life. Relocating to a suburban area that included families with children helped to shape his identity as a prospective gay father. Rick's narrative reveals much about the place of family, fatherhood, and children in American culture. Although gay families are marginalized from mainstream definitions of American families, Rick's procreative consciousness is still very much influenced by heterosexual assumptions and prescriptions of what defines a family and where such families should reside.

Parker also spoke about a gradual shift in his procreative consciousness, and one that coincided with him and his partner growing out of the stereotypical gay circuit in Miami Beach. He asserts that he does not want to think of it so much as growing up, but simply as a growing out of the gay club scene. He humorously articulates that he decided to "trim the fat" from his life and to "stop hanging out with the people we see at night and don't call during the day." This

“trimming the fat” and growing out simply happened to correspond with him and his partner beginning to research fatherhood possibilities.

Participants also referenced their biological clock or the notion that they did not want to become old fathers. Elliot and Nico both separately reference the fact that their biological clocks were ticking. The reference to a real and essential biological clock was somewhat shocking. For women, the time of the body is more culturally apparent than that of their male counterparts, in that as a woman, I am constantly made aware of my ongoing menstrual cycle and the eventual finitude of my fertility in middle age. However, for men, we do not hear about the “endogenous body time, that is the time which is governed in the body” (Nelson, 2006). For gay men, a sense of inevitability is present in their narratives and men’s bodily time emerged as a principal theme when they discussed their procreative identities and prospective futures.

Another component of the duration property concerns the longevity of the consequences associated with the turning point. Frank’s story about a mother’s accusing him of touching her child in “an inappropriate way” had a lasting effect on his father identity. Prior to this event, Frank’s future included children; however, following this encounter, Frank vowed to never father a child. Thus, this turning point was not only monumental in shaping Frank’s procreative and fathering identities, it also left a permanent impression in how he mentally constructed his future.

Presence of subjective/behavioral changes

By definition, turning points bring about transformations in how men perceive themselves. However, turning point experiences can trigger both subjective and behavioral changes. Some young heterosexual men that Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) interviewed reported how certain turning points triggered behavioral changes. Such behavioral transformations were usually triggered by experiences in the heterosexual procreative realm. For my participants who typically did not engage in heterosexual intercourse, behavioral changes were rare. Because

participants were faced with the reality of meticulous planning, transformations in behavior typically occurred prior to or in conjunction with turning points in father identities. For example, Parker's gradual disengagement from the gay club circuit in Miami Beach that preceded his fathering experience involved drastic behavioral shifts. He explained that he "stopped going out every night, stopped partying...I was sick of always wondering where the next bump [of cocaine] was coming from and what I was going to wear that night." During this unfolding transitional experience, Parker began to imagine his life as a father, infusing this identity into his sense of self. These behavioral changes were accompanied by a gradual shift in the way he thought about himself as a man capable of creating and caring for human life.

Individual or shared experience

Some participants experienced turning points on their own, promoting an identity transformation with their own self-reflection. Marc, for example, discussed how he came to the realization that in his financial state, there was little reason why he could not pursue his fathering fantasies. Some men, like Drew had to labor through their turning points with the assistance or even a push from others. Drew admitted that he was content "having children without having children," in that his fathering identity prior to Nico's ultimatum was constructed solely in the context of being a distant, and known sperm donor to a lesbian couple. In realizing that his future life with Nico depended on his ability to take on a more residential and active fathering role, his fathering identity dramatically shifted to accept this possibility. Thus, Drew's turning point that triggered his desires to father was facilitated by his discussions with his intimate partner. Clearly the impetus for his change in perspective incorporated visions of a shared life together with Nico.

Vicarious or personal experience

Witnessing friends or acquaintances become parents was a formidable experience for some participants. Ross, a childless man expressed that his close friend and “gay mentor” recently adopted two children from Guatemala. He drew upon his “gay mentor’s” experiences, asserting that when he decided to have children he wanted to be just as financially secure as this man was, so that he can have “a live in nanny and the support he needs financially...so that he has time with his kids and less outside stressors.” Because this man was a mentor for Ross, his emerging identity as a father was being shaped to mirror those of his role model. While some men did speak of vicarious experiences in triggering their procreative consciousness, for most men, it was their own experiences (discussed at length above) that had an enduring effect on the formation of their procreative and father identities.

Type and degree of institutional context

In stark contrast to the heterosexual men in Marsiglio and Hutchinson’s (2002) sample, many of the experiences that my participants regarded as critical turning points in their procreative and father identities occurred within institutional dimensions. Recall that Evan, Segal, and Spencer participated in the Big Brother organization and viewed this institutional context as a crucial factor in shaping their identities as future fathers. Furthermore, exposure to adoption and surrogacy agencies that were willing to work with gay men were critical in forging the father identities of both Daryl and Drew. Because many of my participants who were fathers constructed their families via the help of institutions (adoption surrogacy agencies, fertility clinics), the degree of institutional context was substantially higher for gay men than for their heterosexual counterparts.

Furthermore, while gay men are clearly active in shifting their own identities to choose, or at least consider the possibility of fatherhood, these identity transformations are surfacing within

broader sociohistorical changes. One of these major changes concerns the growing visibility and the changing imagery of gay men. Segal explains:

Culturally and institutionally as a gay man, we've gone from being, I've gone personally from being the pariah of men's lives to now being esteemed...At least in an urban, metropolitan settings, so being an openly gay man now is a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful blessing. Whereas before I thought, you know, I was suicidal in high school because I couldn't you know I couldn't deal with it. If things continue to go about the way they are, despite the current administrations backlash, things are getting better, and better, and better, so, I'm rather optimistic about my personal future and the future of gay men in society in general.

Zack echoes Segal's position when he discussed the decline in the marginalization of gay men from heterosexual society, "I think that I live in relatively liberal times, and it seems like more and more, even in the last 5 years, being gay is not as much of a stigma as it was 5 years ago." To an extent, the gay male subculture has become institutionalized to symbol a brotherhood of sexual promiscuity and freedom. However as more gay men slowly embrace fatherhood they transform the dominant imagery and stereotypes of gay men. Specifically, gay men's procreative and fathering identity transitions are surfacing within a social milieu where gay men are becoming increasingly tolerated. Thus, much more than their heterosexual counterparts, gay men's turning points in their procreative consciousness and fathering identities transpire within the contexts of institutions and other social structures.

Centrality

As Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) assert, not all turning points are similar in the effect they have on men's lives. For young heterosexual men, their perception of their procreative ability was significantly less important than was their sexual identity for how they defined themselves. Yet, for my participants, it was their lack of ability to reproduce via heterosexual intercourse that was central to their sense of self. Thus, when turning points triggered participants' *awareness* that they could indeed become fathers through non-heterosexual

channels, this was significantly more central to their sense of self than when turning points prompted men's *desires* to become fathers. This is because such turning points tapped into an already significant feature of their procreative consciousness; these men already desired children, they simply thought they could not merge the dual identities of gay father (without engaging in heterosexual intercourse). Fatherhood for these men was already a highly salient and positive identity; it was simply one that was unable to be meshed with their gay identities prior to their turning points.

Spencer's story about his participation in the Big Brother organization was fundamental in transforming his procreative consciousness and fathering identities. He had wanted to be a father, but his romantic relationship constrained him from fulfilling these fantasies. When his participation in the organization began, it served as a substitute and escape from his "emotionally empty" life. However, time progressed and his relationship with the child deepened. When he was notified that adoption was indeed a viable option, he began to adjust his everyday life to embrace the prospect of fatherhood. This example highlights how turning points were more central to men's sense of self when they awakened their latent procreative desires.

Emotional response and evaluation

Because turning points motivate individuals to see themselves in new ways, they frequently correspond with emotional responses. When men became aware that their futures could indeed include children, they often experienced some kind of emotion. Frank's emotional response to being accused of improperly touching a child clearly evoked an emotional response that coincided with his awareness of the public scrutiny and surveillance surrounding gay men and young boys. He expressed that he "felt hurt and damaged" that he was singled out in the day care center for this inappropriate (and illegal) behavior. Similarly, when Art and Rick came across a gay couple in Fire Island that could tell them what they needed to know about gay men

navigating New York's complex adoption system, they were "overwhelmed with joy and relief." It is not at all shocking, then that these were the turning points that men drew upon in the context of our conversations. The emotional intensity of a response is a crucial factor in determining whether men perceive a particular event as a turning point (Marsiglio and Hutchinson, 2002).

The men's stories underscore the importance of turning points, whether sudden or gradual, in activating their fathering visions and desires to father some day. These men all experienced some sort of change in their life that triggered their awareness of either their desire to become fathers or their awareness that fatherhood was possible. Nevertheless, gay men's fathering desires are mediated by myriad social and institutional factors. The majority of men do not simply become fathers immediately following this realization. Rather, there are various twists and turns in the months and sometimes years to follow.

Reconciling Gay identity with Prospective Father Identity

Judith Stacey maintains that we are living in "a transitional and contested period of family history" so that gay men are buffeted in their procreative deliberations by contradictory influences at the same time (Stacey, 1990, p. 18). Although Luke, a black immigrant identifies as openly gay, when I asked him how he envisioned his future with regards to fatherhood, he maintains that "it's kind of strange...in the back of my mind, I still only see a wife and kids...I guess it is just my mental state clashing with the way I live my life and the values I was raised with." Luke's explanation illustrates how his desire to live as an openly gay man with a family of children contradicts the traditional family values he was raised with as a boy growing up abroad. Yet, my interviews detail how it is not only young gay men of color or immigrant men who have clashing values, desires, and experiences. Nick is a childless twenty-six year- old who I met in Florida, but spent the bulk of his life growing up in small-town Arkansas. He eloquently explains his apprehensions about bringing a child into contemporary society:

I guess before you have a child, regardless of who you are...you have to consider the environment that the child will be brought into. If you were in a country waging war, it seems you might hesitate, and if you were in a country that ostracized a child because his father was gay, you might hesitate with that too.

Although these younger gay men in my sample are aware of possibilities allowing them to contemplate parenthood outside of heterosexual relationships, their private procreative consciousness is still constructed within the constraints of public prescriptions and proscriptions. These younger men's procreative consciousness is emerging in the midst of a cultural battle with respect to family. On one end, they are being exposed to a wide array of right-wing political discourse that refuses to acknowledge the rights of gay parents. On the opposite end they are hearing and learning about varying opportunities permitting them parenthood. What results is that gay men end up mentally juggling contradictory ideological discourses as they construct fantasies about their future families.

Myths of Gay Men

For some of these men, being socialized into a world that stereotypes gay men as pedophiles constrained their ability to envision themselves as future fathers. Luke explains, "when people see a single gay man with a kid, they think, you need to watch him...what is he doing with that child in there? [Thinking] are you a pedophile?" Similarly, Aiden, the politically active college student, discusses how he was genuinely worried that society would look at him as someone who would want to father simply to raise a gay child:

What if I do raise my kid to be gay? I just think that there's a lot of fears that society, you know, puts on, you know, um, like, the gay community having kids...They might actually want to replicate this kind of lifestyle because they think, you know, that's the gay way to be.

Many laypersons and even child-welfare professionals cling to a belief system grounded in negative myths and stereotypes about gay men (Mallon, 2004). Even worse, as both Luke and Aiden express, it is not uncommon for gay men to incorporate these heterosexist myths and

irrational stereotypes into their own self-concept. Consistent with ideas on the looking-glass self, individuals adapt to their perceptions of how others see them (Cooley, 1902). Like Luke and Aiden, many young childless gay men are apprehensive about becoming fathers because they are overly concerned with how outsiders would perceive them. Even though empirical evidence confirms that one's sexual orientation does not determine one's ability to love and care for a child, nor is it linked empirically to child abuse, the unsubstantiated myths persist, affecting laypersons, social service professionals, and even gay men themselves. (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Mallon, 2004).

Gender Ideology

While fatherhood can be a rewarding experience for men, the status of fatherhood does not achieve the status of motherhood, in that men are not defined by their parenting status in the same way women are. Since the beginning to mid 1900's, there has been a call for men to be more involved as parents (Pleck and Pleck, 1997). Yet, despite these changing ideals of fatherhood, the primary responsibility of fathers is still that of the family's provider and fathers for the most part are often a "shadowy figure at best, difficult to understand and typically unavailable" (Daly, 1995:21). Some men I spoke with were weary of societal assumptions that distinguish men as incapable of being primary caregivers. Evan expresses that "Men in society are not expected to be parents. Certainly not involved parents." Correspondingly, Segal articulates, "I don't want to generalize to all heterosexual fathers, but...men make horrible parents."

As gay fathers fantasize about creating families of choice, they continuously negotiate and challenge prevailing assumptions about men and fathers. Further, they also contend with the absence of a woman as the primary caregiver. For example, Evan tells me that he has read:

Plenty of stories of either single gay, or gay couples dads walking down the street or you know, going to a store or getting on an airplane and being asked, oh what a cute child, where's the mother and things like that... I've read that gay parents have to always have the child's birth certificate with them and you know proof of parenthood.

Thoughts about the absence of a female presence in the lives of their child were not only reduced to how outsiders would view their families. Later, as I move to an analysis of child visions, I highlight how participants also speak of how this absence of a female presence influences how they think about raising a girl. Similarly, in chapter six I detail how gay fathers negotiate the gendering of their female children and how the notion of a female presence becomes a paramount concern.

Thinking About the Future

Many childless men talked about their potential children's futures in dealing with hardships, discrimination, and teasing. Clark wants children in his future but voices concern about his future child's possible experiences in school. "They'll be picked on at school. What will the children tell the neighbors and their teachers? What will they tell their friends? The truth is, kids and teachers can be really cruel." Clark recognizes the ignorance and discrimination that would possibly plague his prospective children's lives and consciously mulls over these impending hardships. The fathers in this study seldom report actual discrimination from schools, neighbors, and other parents. Nevertheless, prior to becoming fathers, they too were fearful that their children's futures would be overwhelmed with adversity, primarily based on others' criticism and discouragement. Art and Rick, the Jewish couple residing in suburban New York, explain that when they told Rick's mother about their plans to have a child, she retorted "what is all this bullshit...nobody is going to give you guys a baby." Despite harsh censure from others, men such as Art and Rick had lives similar to those of many other parents, and rather than their days being filled with the discrimination and hardship that many anticipated, they were filled

with the mundane tasks of childrearing. Nevertheless, images of homophobic discrimination surfaced for every childless man I spoke with.

Todd expresses that while fatherhood is a possibility in his future, he worries about how his children might be treated in society:

I see society and I see that it is possible but I see what the repercussions are of having children...I see how people are and how kids are going to be treated...how ignorant some people are, and these are going to be the parents of the kids my kids are going to be with. The fact that my son or daughter won't be able to sleep over at their friends' home or that they wouldn't be able to sleep at my house because of the fear that there is a gay parent or that he is a child molester. To me that is not fair.

Likewise, Noah envisions the possible hardships of his future children:

I definitely understand like you know there would be some hostility or there would be some you know maybe name calling or something like that because it's not, it's not that kosher to be gay still...so there's always going to be like the one kid or like several kids that you know are going to poke fun only because you have two dads.

Not only did prospective fathers mull over the discrimination of their future children, they also speculated about how they would eventually explain to their children that their family was different from the normative heterosexual family. Noah wonders, "when I would tell them, you know, hey you know daddy and daddy, we're gay, you know, homosexuals, this is what being gay is or like you know, when they start to wonder like you know where's mommy." For men, it was not only the absence of a mother that was an issue, but more so than this absence was the distinct presence of another man.

Thus, consistent with the literature, gay men experience distinct thought processes when deciding whether to become fathers (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Mallon, 2000, 2004). Even though gay men might be conscious of their procreative abilities and opportunities to become fathers, they are simultaneously aware that much of society devalues them as human beings, especially as parents. Evan articulates prospective parental concerns when he says:

I mean it really does take a special person to want to be a gay parent because as individuals we already face discrimination and hatred in our society and by becoming a parent we're taking on additional challenges. We're taking on additional likelihood of discrimination against our family, against our child, our children...I'm not trying to pat myself on the back, I'm, I guess I'm looking with admiration of other people who've already done it.

That men were genuinely concerned about future hardships of their children speaks to the teasing and sometimes brutality that they themselves experienced during their childhood. They remember with disdain the experiences of their youths and are apprehensive about purposefully exposing another generation to this discrimination and bigotry. D'Augelli indicates that up to half of gay men and lesbian women have experienced some form of bullying in their school-aged years (1998). Furthermore, homophobic bullying is frequently used as an argument in opposition to same-gender parenting. While there is no denial that these men were bullied and teased in their youth and that their future children may indeed experience taunting because of their families, it is of import to mention that it is a socially constructed heterosexist ideology that problematizes these families, it is not the identities and practices of the families themselves that is the social problem.

Thinking about Reactions from the Gay Community

Early literature and personal memoirs by gay fathers report that it is not infrequent for them to experience rejection and discrimination from their gay peers who are not fathers because children restrict freedom (Bozett, 1981; Greene, 1993; Mallon, 2004). Some childless men that I interviewed actually brought this issue up on their own when I asked how their experiences would be different from a heterosexual father. Tom, an Italian-American man who recently got over a difficult break-up discusses this, "It is different in this society to be a gay father...because it is harder. If you are going to be a good father and you have a child you need to give up more of a social life than straight men." Tom acknowledges that the "gay lifestyle," more so than the "straight lifestyle" is one that is characterized by independence and autonomy. He argues that

children are viewed as an interruption to this lifestyle, and simply don't quite fit in. Hence, according to Tom, a gay man would have to sacrifice more of his social life than a straight man would in a similar parenting situation.

Nick, a young man who recently moved to Miami, explains how children basically don't fit into the gay way of life in the urban community that he currently lives in, "it is a great place to live if you are single. As far as children are concerned, I guess it is not. If there is one rule to South Beach, it is not to procreate."

Even those gay men who are not yet fathers have a significant understanding of the ramifications that a child brings into the gay community. Whether it is that a child disrupts the stereotypical gay independent lifestyle, interferes with a gay man's social life, or gets in the way of dating opportunities, prospective gay fathers consider the unique consequences of having children.

The procreative consciousness of the younger childless men is emerging in a time where they have visible openly gay fathers to model after who in their everyday actions are transforming what it means to be a gay man. Similarly, their fatherhood desires are emerging in a time where gay men are becoming increasingly tolerated. Yet, these men's narrative fragments suggest that tolerance is simply not enough. Clearly, heterosexist society has some serious catching up to do with the procreative consciousness of gay men. Even the youngest gay men in my sample developed and negotiated their procreative consciousness within a heterosexist society that tolerates gay men as long as this does not entail imagining them as possible parents. By conceptualizing gay men as pedophiles, or persons looking to reproduce homosexuality, or by constructing gay men as sexually promiscuous and irresponsible, heterosexism infiltrates gay

men's procreative consciousness in devastating ways. Such homophobic stereotypes constrained some of the younger gay men's ability to envision themselves as future fathers.

Fatherhood Readiness

Participants reflected on the nature of their readiness to become fathers and assume the everyday tasks of fathering. A dominant theme associated with fatherhood readiness (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002) was financial readiness. When Craig and his partner talked about having children, his partner laid down the law. He explains, "he had all of these requisites...we have to own our house, we have to have \$20, 000 in the bank in our savings account." Likewise, other men spoke about assuring security in their relationship. Before Billy and Elliot began researching fatherhood options, they agreed that they would have to live in their apartment together for a full two years. These financial and relational negotiations highlight how gay men's preparation for fatherhood occurs years before one is actually ready to take on the tasks of parenting.

Many of the childless men had vivid visions about their future experiences with fatherhood, what type of sacrifices they would need to make, and the type of father that they would be. A common theme that emerged was that in order to be a responsible and prepared father, one would need to sacrifice a large part of themselves, specifically with regards to their career aspirations, leisure activities, and sense of gay identity. Luke clearly articulates that while he wants children in the future, right now is simply not the time for him to assume the responsibilities of fatherhood. He remarks, "I'm too focused on myself right now, leading the life I want to live and being comfortable...I don't want to share my life right now...that is why I had the abortion." Luke is one of the few childless men I spoke with who had heterosexual experiences in the procreative realm. While he viewed this time in his life with sadness, explaining that he had somewhat forcibly urged his then girlfriend to terminate her pregnancy, he

does not regret his actions. He recognizes the connection between his personal maturation and his future fathering abilities. He ended our conversation by stating, “Figure out yourself before you figure out if you want to be a father.... If you don’t figure out yourself how are you going to be able to raise a child?” As is discussed in Marsiglio and Hutchinson’s research, when men come face-to-face with a pregnancy scare, this turning point can trigger some men to look more closely at their life and construct a sense of fatherhood readiness as a part of the attempt to acclimate themselves to a possible emergent father identity (2002).

However, it is possible for young childless men to realize this connection between their individual development and their future with regards to fathering even if they have never had a pregnancy scare or any experiences in the heterosexually-defined procreative arena. Aiden illustrates the notion that his present identity as a young man wanting to focus on his personal life is at odds with his future father identity when he says:

It’s a lot of time and commitments that you have to be willing, you know, to put into this kid. You’re going to have to be sacrificing a lot. Um, some instances, maybe a little bit of your career.... I might not be able to travel as much, which is something that I do want to do. Um, and even if I did travel, you know, I would have to make things, you know, okay for the kid, you know. And I also have to look at the stress, you know. You know, just worrying, “Am I doing a good job?”

Similar to some of the men that Marsiglio and Hutchinson spoke with, Aiden recognizes that in order to be an ideal father, he would eventually have to surrender various luxuries that he now takes for granted. In his descriptions of what his life would be like as a father, it seems that Aiden is well aware of the responsibility and commitment that the role of fatherhood entails. An interesting description of fatherhood readiness surfaced in my conversation with Zack. Zack, a high-end restaurant manager in Miami Beach explains that when his sister went away for six months to China she asked him to take care of her two dogs. Zack immediately refused to take on the responsibility of caring for her pets. Zack talked about his inability to care for dogs at this

point in his life and made the connection that this example clearly underscored what he claimed as an obvious inability to care for a child. While caring for a dog is certainly not the same as caring for a child, for Zack this entailed a comparative sacrifice of time and energy that he was simply not ready for.

The above narratives show how in organizing their thoughts about fatherhood readiness, men reveal a complex manipulation of past, present, and future selves as a strategy to unravel the meanings of becoming a father. As Marsiglio and Hutchinson maintain, “when they anchor their assessment in their image of a former or current self, they implicitly or explicitly convey an understanding of what the future would hold for them.” (2002, p. 193). Men interweave images from past, present, and future selves into their fatherhood fantasies and the subsequent narratives that surface as they mentally and discursively construct their sense of readiness.

Other men discussed fatherhood readiness in a different way, as something they needed to emotionally prepare for, as something that entailed much more than simply career and leisure sacrifice. Nick, the soft-spoken Midwesterner explained:

The responsibility to a child would be, should be, more than having an accessory. It requires a very stable and loving environment. That we would want the child to have as much attention as possible, and that it would be something that we would do very seriously, not just because it was cute.

For Nick, the experience of fathering required additional responsibilities than the obvious career and social life sacrifice that other men spoke about. It appears that Nick is able to see beyond the traditional father-as-provider role and view his future experience as one that would involve love, attention, and nurturance.

The very idea of gay fathers challenges traditional assumptions and images of gay men (Stacey, 2006). Stereotypes of gay men as having few financial obligations and familial responsibilities are gradually being contested as more and more young gay men embrace

fatherhood into their future constructions of self. However, not all young childless men were willing to intertwine fathering identities into their future selves. Carlos maintains “I don’t want any children...I just don’t have time for it...When am I going to have time for a child? I would rather be traveling and working hard for what I want and being able to go wherever I want.” At only twenty-two years old, Carlos was one of the younger participants in my sample. However, other men his age and even younger discussed in-depth about how having a child would definitely be in their future. That some gay men do not want to have children is not at all surprising, given that not every young man wants a child. However, what should be noted is that these men do not want to father; they have clear knowledge that they can have children, but they simply do not want them. Presently, gay men have a diversity of conduits by which to form their families of choice. Whether these families will ultimately include children or not is now just beginning to be placed in the hands of the men themselves.

Fatherhood Readiness and Degree of Collaboration

Some men in my study acknowledged their sense of readiness by reflecting on it alone, while others assessed readiness within interactive negotiations with partners or parents. Many of the men reported at least fleeting conversations with others about their sense of fatherhood readiness. Some of these conversations tended to reinforce the men’s orientations to fatherhood discussed above. However, others tapped into procreative desires that some of these men did not necessarily have. Recall Lawrence’s story from the beginning of this chapter. While he had never fantasized about having children, his partner’s sudden realization that he had wanted kids triggered Lawrence to begin imagining a life with children in it. Similarly, one of the main reasons Nico reported falling so hard for Drew was because he assumed he wanted more children (recall Drew had two children as a known sperm donor). Where Drew maintains he was content

with his current status as a father who saw his kids from time to time, Nico urged Drew to consider thinking about fatherhood in the context of their relationship.

Interestingly, some of the men I spoke with, especially the fathers, formed relationships based on whether or not their prospective partner wanted children. Craig and his partner Darrell spoke about fatherhood on their very first date. Craig explains, “I just wanted to put it out there.” He continues by saying, “I was basically like I want to have kids...you don’t have to have a second date with me.” Similarly, other men discuss evaluating the status of their relationships based on whether the other person was willing to consider fatherhood. Elliot explains that when he and Billy were dating for approximately three months, he was approached with an important conversation:

The gist of the conversation was I have always wanted to have children. I feel like you and I are getting more serious and I want to know where you stand with children, if you would consider having them. Because if you can’t, if that is not something you want, then we cannot go forward.

The examples above illustrate how men can collaborate with partners to fashion and develop their sense of fatherhood readiness. Nonetheless, it is not always a partner that heightens readiness to become fathers. Men’s real or imagined conversations with their own parents sometimes can trigger an introspective analysis of their procreative desires. In the early phases of their coming out process, men discussed how the realization that they might never have children would affect their parents. Clark expressed that while he is very much aware of his reproductive options, and has been for some time, his early struggles with his gay identity were fueled by guilt for his parents. He laments, “my parents are never going to be grandparents...a lot of this guilt was rooted in my parents’ expectations...what would my parents think? You know, my mom really wants grandkids. This is horrible for her.” Clark’s concerns were entrenched in his parent’s desire to one day become grandparents and it was this parental guilt that pervaded Clark’s coming

out experience. Similarly, Drew told me that the night he confided in his father that he was gay, his father cried to him expressing a sorrow that he would never have the opportunity to be a father. This made Drew realize that a consequence of choosing to follow his same-gender desires was that he would never have children. Billy echoes this when he says, “parents in particular look with disappointment at their gay children’s lives because they think they won’t have children...they feel a loss for their children.”

When men came out a dominant theme was overwhelming guilt that their parents would be disappointed at the inevitable absence of grandchildren. However, as some men aged and time passed the relationship of their mother’s guilt with their conceptualizations of themselves as fathers shifted drastically. As broad social, cultural, and technological transformations surfaced that heightened men’s parents’ awareness of their sons “reproductive” abilities, this guilt shifted to some parents urging their sons to hurry up and “get pregnant.” Evan articulates the trend of men’s mothers frequently harping on wanting grandchildren when he talks about his own mother:

[She is always saying] When is my grandchild coming, when are you having my grandchild? In fact, it was very funny, once I came back to her, came back at her and I said, do you think that I should have the child just for you, like when it’s right for you. And she said, yes. And I don’t think she was kidding.

While quite humorous, Evan’s example of his mother’s desire for grandchildren was not uncommon. Evan later exclaims that he is not yet ready for children, and every time his mother asks, he is reminded of how much he is not ready to be a father. He jokes that he should just have children for her, because she is ready to embrace her role as a grandmother. One of the reasons Evan claims not to be ready for children is because he is not yet involved in a romantic relationship whereby he could imagine himself constructing a family, a theme further discussed in the following section. Whether they trigger the guilt of a childless future or the guilt

associated with pronatalist family values, men's parents are crucial in constructing their sense of fatherhood readiness.

Ideal Fathering Visions

Men's sense of fatherhood readiness is intertwined with their ideas about how men should ideally express themselves as fathers. I now detail how participants narrate their ideal fathering experience, their fantasies of how they will act as fathers, and how they want to construct their ideal family arrangement. I consider these men's mental constructions of engaging with their future children, their relationships with their own fathers, how they imagine their ideal family pathway, what their family and fathering experiences look like, and how a partner fits into these visions.

Engaging with Children

Generally speaking when I asked men how they envisioned their fathering experiences, their focus immediately shifted to direct forms of interaction with their children. Men engaging in fun activities typically characterized such interactions. Taylor joyfully described playing with his future children, "just like playing...like a wrestling type thing. You know, like, kids laughing and stuff like that." Evan expressed that he wants his child to do things that I already like to do, which means going to amusement parks or you know helping the kid appreciate different things in life, be it art, be it travel, or you know, again all things that I already like." Taylor and Evan both imagined themselves playing with their future children and engaging in activities that they as fathers also saw themselves enjoying. Such findings are consistent with young heterosexual men's fantasies (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002) and with findings on heterosexual fathers' behaviors (Coltrane, 1995; Hawkins, Christiansen, Sargent, & Hill, 1995; Lamb, 1987).

Relationships With Their Own Fathers

Most men expressed fond and loving relationships with their own fathers. Many times it was these positive experiences that set the stage for their fatherhood fantasies. For example, Drew maintains that his father was a “kind and loving man...we could talk about anything.” Later he spoke about how he strives to be the kind of dad that his father was to him. Drew’s images of a “good father” are modeled after those qualities that he saw in his own father (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Daly, 1995; Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002).

However, on the other side of the spectrum, some men spoke about their strained relationships with their fathers and how from their fathers, they learned what type of parents not to be. Taylor divulges intimate details about his experiences with his father growing up and the effect these had on his own fathering visions. He explains:

He [father] was very, just he wasn’t really there as much as I would have wanted him to be...Like, he was just more authoritative, like, administrative...Oh, I think I’d let my kid or kids be more, I’d wait for them to make their own decisions. Like, I’d try, I’d give them many options, but I’d never force a lot of things upon them.

While Taylor spoke about not wanting to replicate his father, he still wanted children in his future. Other men looked back at their strained childhood relationship with their fathers and in their determination not to repeat these patterns, vowed not to have children themselves. Anthony said his experience growing up with a distant father was an identifiable factor in why he never wants to have children. Anthony remembers:

My father is a very selfish man...if I were a father, I’d want to be there emotionally for my children also, and I’d want to, you know, I’d want to come to their performances. I’d want to, you know, be there when they’re getting a certain award. I’d want to be there when they’re graduating from high school. Like, all these things that my dad just never did, and I will never understand, like, I’d be the total opposite because I can’t imagine what, like, even something as

simple as all this work. Like, you had this kid. Look how much money you put into it. And then you're not going to go see him, like, reach these milestones? It's like you almost deserve it. Like, you need to be there because you made this investment. But, in that respect, I definitely would be completely opposite from my father. Um, but I think I did inherit that kind of, you know, um, not self-centered but, like, that kind of self-interest from him. But, unlike him, I'm deciding not to have kids so I don't screw up another life.

Later in the conversation, Anthony explained to me that his father was in prison for most of his formative years. However, even after his father was released from prison, their relationship continued to be strained. Thus, Anthony's negative experiences with his own absent and distant father played a large role in shaping his desires to remain eternally childless. Regardless of whether men wanted children or chose to remain childless, for each and every participant, fatherhood was not something that was taken lightly; rather it was a status that entailed a great degree of responsibility, care, and intimacy.

Ideal Family Construction

Participants' ideal fathering visions were contingent upon how they envisioned their ideal familial pathway. Men diverged in whether they desired a child who was biologically related to them. Some men explained that they preferred a child who would have blood ties to them, whereas others talked about wanting to adopt their future child.

Zach, a childless 33-year-old Chinese-American restaurant manager confesses that the only way he would have a child was if that child was biologically related to him. He elaborates:

I would love more than anything to have a child. My own as well...If I am going to have a child, I want it to be a part of me...I want it to have some of my characteristics... I want to have a little piece of me...I think that if anything, that is really what drives all of it. I do want to have someone, a little piece of me out there doing a little something to contribute to the world.

Zach is one of the few childless persons so explicit in his desire for a biological child. A handful of other childless men claim that although a biological tie is preferred, adoption would be a second option. Taylor, also childless, explains, “adoption would just be the second option, like a fall back...I’d rather conceive a child with someone I know and trust...I guess I would rather have my own...but if that’s not an option, adoption wouldn’t change anything.” Although Taylor and a few other men ideally preferred a biological relation between themselves and their child, as gay men and as prospective fathers, they realized their options were quite limited. Many other men, both childless and fathers, questioned their ability to feel the same level of affection for a child not biologically related to them as compared to a genetically related child. Evan expresses that he wants “a physical relationship to my offspring.” When I asked him to clarify what he meant by physical, he answers:

A biological relationship that I can say...that’s my family and that’s my trait... It seems trivial on the one hand and important on the other. While it’s something that a lot of people would say that they want, it’s hard to explain why you want it.

However, like Taylor, Evan is becoming more and more open to the idea of adoption. He explains:

I’ve started to be a little more open perhaps to the idea of adoption because the, well first of all the inherent challenges to start with and the expense is very great on the biological relationship options. And philosophically, I’d like to say adoption is better because there is already plenty of children in the world who are unloved, or have no parent.

The tail end of Evan’s narrative fragment foreshadows the rationale many men drew upon to justify why they would opt for adoption. Segal, the sociologist, was quite vocal about why he would construct his family via adoption. In his narrative, he employs a clever metaphor of abandoned dogs to construct a social criticism of the privileging of biological relatedness:

I find it ironic that most Americans are much more willing to go to the pound to adopt a pound puppy, a dog that needs a home, and they rather find it disgusting that people spend an incredible amounts of money to make a pure bred dog, when there’s all these poor little doggies that need a home. Yet, when it comes to adopting children, it’s just the opposite,

they all want to run and spend their money to make a kid, when there's all these poor kids with wide eyes who need a home, and I find that rather ironic and rather sad. I find it a rather sad state of affairs of Americans' notions of responsibility for your own children only.

While Segal's metaphorical commentary stood out as a creative way to discuss his rationale for adoption, his perception of employing women to conceive and carry a child was not anomalous. As is further detailed in the following chapter, those fathers who opted to construct their families via adoption had similar remarks regarding the elevated status of biologically related families in American society.

Other men looked at surrogacy and other assisted reproductive technologies with skepticism, equating this with a scientific and commodified way to construct a family. For example, when I asked Luke about assisted reproductive technologies, he retorts, "You are kind of making a baby into a scientific project...it becomes less about them and more about what you want...it's really crappy to stick a tube in someone just to have a baby." Similarly, Todd expresses, "I don't think I would pay someone to have my kid, that is too unnatural...it feels too much like you are getting fast food. It's like looking for the mother and paying for it, and too scientific for me." Although we live in a socially constructed world that privileges biological relatedness and adoption is often stigmatized as a last resort, many men viewed assisted reproductive technology with more cynicism than adoption.

Ideal Family Visions

As alluded to above in my discussion of fatherhood readiness, participants pictured their ideal families and fathering experiences with a visual portrait of what exactly their family would look like. For some men, this included whether their ideal experience would include a partner or whether they thought they were able to take on the task of parenting alone. Todd, a childless man who just experienced a traumatic break-up with his partner of four years conveys that he

doesn't see it as feasible that he would find a man who would be willing and able to take on the tasks of parenting. He expresses cynicism at gay men in general, when he says,

There are a lot of gay men that are selfish, and I don't think that's their fault. I think society made them like that because they aren't allowed to have marriage, and kids, and you have no other choice then to be selfish. I think it's been bred in them.

Todd's words illuminate how the dominance of heterosexism influences the procreative consciousness and fathering fantasies of young gay men. Specific to his mental picture of his future family, this statement indicates how he envisions his future as a single father.

Yet, most of the men I spoke with perceived their futures as residing in an intimate partnership raising children. Noah articulates that, "I know that that's going to be the only way for me to have a kid, but I would like to, I would like to provide that child with more of a structured family than just a single parent." Walter echoes Noah's sentiments when he explains, "I'm not religious, but I think God made it so that two people have to create a child because it usually takes two people to parent a child." In an ideal family, most men see themselves raising children in a (post)modern nuclear family: two men, two children, a pet, a suburban style house and a white picket fence. While gay men are marginalized from traditional family arrangements, my participants' narratives underscore that their ideal visions of family and fatherhood are forged within a dominant understanding of normative images of family. More, men's visions of an ideal family are fashioned with the dominant mother-as-nurturer/father-as-provider family ideology.

Noah fantasizes that his ideal parenting experience entails:

I definitely see myself being the quintessential little housewife, if a gay man can be a housewife. I very much take on the maternal role in the family, and in a relationship, I'm very much the little wife. And I'm always cooking and cleaning for them, and taking care of them, and so I think it's, when I think of myself having kids, I very much think of myself being the soccer mom...I think about...where we would live and like our family and I'd have my Volvo Sedan, my Sedan, my Volvo SUV with my SLK hardtop convertible, for when I want to have mommy time, and be the soccer mom.

Noah's ideal fathering, or rather, mothering visions take place within a 1950s glorified and somewhat postmodern conception of a *Leave it to Beaver*-esque family. The reliance by so many men on a dominant gender and family discourse points to a very uninclusive way of speaking about family. That Noah envisions his parenting roles as a caretaker and nurturer and automatically equates these roles with taking on the role of a soccer mom speaks to the insidiousness of socially constructed gender norms within the family. The way that Noah envisions his ideal family is both at odds with and consistent with how some fathers spoke about how they actually did parenting in their families, a theme discussed in great detail in chapter six.

Child Visions

A final theme that surfaced in fantasizing fatherhood involved men's visions of their future children. The visions most relevant to fatherhood fantasies are the images that participants mentally constructed of these children. Other men like Clark invoke imagery of personality characteristics, "our kids would just be the most brilliant, polite, clean little children possible." Similarly, Clark attempts to visualize the physical characteristics, personality attributes, gender, and even sexuality of his future children:

I used to always want to have a girl and have that child be daddy's girl...she'd be my little princess or something... but I could now easily see myself doing that with a boy too...I always pictured that I would have a blonde girl. Like, she would be blonde, um; she would be like athletic, too. Um, and then for the boy, like, I always picture that he would be, like, um, I guess I could say metro sexual. He would be straight. But, I know that both of them would have to be prim and proper because, like, I've always been that way. Um, and I definitely would want intelligence in both, well, looks I guess. I guess I've always pictured them to be good-looking kids.

That participants envisioned what their prospective children might look is consistent with how the heterosexual men in *Sex, Men, and Babies* spoke about their child visions (2002). However, what surfaced as a fascinating theme is how men narrated the racial and gender characteristics of their children.

Envisioning and Planning for Gender

Many of the gay men's narratives underscored uncertainty with regards to how they envisioned coping with public bathroom issues, menstruation, bra-shopping, and the first dates of their future daughters. A vast majority of gay fathers painted a mental picture of a menstruating, bra-shopping, sexually active teenager and I heard constant concern from these men inquiring if two dads could adequately deal with the harsh realities of a thirteen-year-old girl's pubescent phase. Rick spoke about how he and Art fantasized about the challenges of having a little girl because, "we knew boy issues; we knew what to expect...we also thought girls were more difficult in terms of later on, with puberty and all that." Both Rick and Art question if two dads could adequately deal with the harsh realities of a 13-year-old girl's pubescent phase, as they envisioned images of a menstruating, bra shopping teenager.

When envisioning raising a girl child, many men discussed the importance of securing a suitable role model for her, particularly during her pubescent phase. Noah explains:

I like to think that like my mother or my partner's mother or my female friends would be there and that they would...like help her out and like if she's having like maybe, if I had a daughter and she's 12 years old, and she's got her period, and like I'd like to have help with that, but I understand where she would feel uncomfortable coming to me, so, I see that you know the presence of like other women or a mother or someone who'd be involved is beneficial.

When men envision taking up the tasks of raising a girl, preparation and planning become critical. Such planning always includes guaranteeing a suitable role model for their female children to assist with such milestones as menstruation. The inclusion of a female role model further surfaces as an important theme in chapter six when I detail the nuances associated with how men actively engage in fathering young girls.

Social meanings associated with raising a girl include experiencing important and critical milestones in her life. Such milestones include her first menstruation, her first date, and of

course, her wedding. Gus, a gay father co-parenting with his partner and a lesbian couple describes his apprehension when he discovered he was having a baby girl. He explains he was overwhelmed with emotion and could not help but fantasize about various milestones in his future daughter's life. When I inquired further as to what he meant by these milestones, Gus responds with, "Her wedding day, of all stupid things. Me walking her down the aisle. Something I never, ever fantasized about because I never thought I'd be a parent...I find myself getting angry about her first boyfriend." Within Gus' narrative, the fatherly pride associated with his daughter's wedding day is juxtaposed against protective anger he anticipates feeling at her first boyfriend. Thus, there is this notion of a fatherly desire to protect young girls from societal influences until she ready to be handed over to new protector-her husband.

If I were to follow a folk logic, it makes sense that two men would have anxiety about raising a girl child because in their minds, their own experiences would not easily parallel hers. However, some participants wondered how their gender and sexuality would interact to negatively affect their boy child's future socialization. Marc, the proud single father of a four-year-old girl explains, "if I have a boy, will I be as good as a role model? You know, dads take their sons to ball games and things like that, which I am just not into...if I had a boy, it might be somewhat difficult to do that 'macho' role model." Because Marc was never the stereotypical masculine athlete, he questioned whether he could participate with his imagined son in "normal" male-bonding activities. In most cases, it is taken for granted that someone can appropriately raise a child of the same gender, but in some cases, like in that of Marc, his own gender atypical behavior is cited as a reason for him not being a suitable parent to raise children of the same gender. Hence, the men's perceptions of their future children's gender socialization help forge the men's child and fathering visions as well as their procreative and father identities.

Envisioning Race

Few men conjured up actual visual portraits of what their children might look like. However, various men discussed that they would most likely have children that did not look like them. In fact, two men explicitly mentioned that their future children would probably be Asian due to popular images of transnational adoption. Clark remarks that his children would probably be “little Chinese children.” Aiden on the other hand discusses at length that his visions of having a blonde, athletic girl and a metro sexual are most likely an ephemeral vision rather than a reality. He talks about the likelihood that he will adopt transnationally and the ramifications this might have on his child visions, “I’ve always pictured my kids to look like me, you know, to have those basic features, which if I went and Chinese adoption they obviously wouldn’t because I’m white.” Similar to Aiden, C.J. expresses that:

I used to baby sit and there was this one kid that looked like almost like me when I was little...And people always thought that he was mine, and so I always thought that he would look like me, you know...Like, I mean it would be unrealistic because I know that I would probably end up with some ethnic baby just because ethnic kids are just easier to adopt, you know.

Men seemed to be mentally juggling two very different visions of their future children, one picture resembled them as children and the other, seemingly more realistic one resembled the children displayed in commercials and advertisements for needy children. Interestingly, Noah, a childless White man who had recently ended a long-term relationship with a Black man mentioned that he envisioned his future with a family of “at least like two kids, two little Mulatto kids.” When I inquired further as to why he envisioned fathering mix-race children, he responds, “I don’t know, my only like really, really serious relationship, like I’ve had a couple serious, but like the most serious one I had was with a Black male.” He concludes by explaining, “Everyone is going to be a mutt one day. Sooner or later, we’re all just going to be mutts.” Although Noah

and his former partner could not physically conceive a mixed-race child, his mental portrait of his future children was shaped by his only serious relationship. These narratives emphasize the notion that some gay men are actively constructing their identities as future gay fathers with an acute awareness of increasing opportunities associated with transracial and transnational adoption. In an era of Internet-based circulation of information and the publicity of Angelina Jolie and now, Madonna adopting children from impoverished and war-torn nations, gay men are able to mentally construct child visions that mentally resemble those they are exposed to in the media.

Now that I have generated a nuanced understanding of how gay men fantasy fatherhood, I turn to an analysis of the complex ways by which gay men navigate the procreative realm and eventually become fathers. The subsequent chapter details how gay fathers negotiate the various institutional hurdles of the nonheterosexual procreative arena.

CHAPTER 5 BECOMING A FATHER

The process of becoming a father can take many paths for gay men. The majority of my participants' families were carefully planned. Nonetheless, some families were not meticulously constructed and some men even became fathers through multiple pathways. In this chapter I elaborate on how gay men's procreative and father identities are developed and negotiated throughout various phases and processes of becoming a father. First I detail the story of a participant who became a father almost instantly via a chance occurrence on a subway ramp and discuss the fathering experiences of two other men who had children thrust into their lives almost overnight. Next, I move to an in depth discussion of planned fatherhood, from co-parenting to adoption to surrogacy. I begin with a brief discussion of the participants who constructed families via co-parenting arrangements and explore why they chose to become fathers in this way. I then discuss the adoption process in all its phases, attending specifically to why participants opted to use this route and it can be both time consuming and financially draining. I move toward an analysis of why biological relatedness surfaces as an important construct for some men and not others and how assumptions associated with genetics shape what procreative pathways men choose. I then discuss the ways by which father and family identities are intertwined with the identity of the birth mother, regardless of which arrangement is chosen. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how and why some of my participants became fathers through multiple pathways and how one's father identity is contingent upon sociohistorical changes and transformations. Regardless of how men become fathers, the journey preceding fatherhood is a fascinating process abundant with contradictory opportunities and constraints.

Unplanned Fatherhood

Twenty-one out of 22 fathers I interviewed meticulously planned how they would become fathers. Whether through co-parenting with lesbian women, the assistance of a surrogate mother, or public or private adoption, the path to fatherhood was one embedded with structure, and for many, a lack of spontaneity. For gay men planning fatherhood, it is quite difficult for them to “get pregnant by accident.” However, accidents do happen and Andrew’s story illuminates how an “accidental pregnancy” though quite rare, can indeed occur for gay men. I chose to use Andrew’s own words to tell this story, as any attempt I make to summarize his words or retell his tale will not compare to the feelings that arise when you hear him tell it. So, sit back and absorb Andrew’s story of how he, his partner Carey, and his son Lucas became the family they are today.

Andrew’s Story: Carey [Andrew’s partner] was coming to stay with me that night, August 28th, and he got out of the subway at 15th Street and 8th Avenue. He starts to exit, he’s going up the steps, and looks down at the ground, and he sees it sort of before he walks out and it’s sort of an isolated exit, not a lot of people, nobody can enter, at that time nobody can enter through there because there weren’t Metro cards. There wasn’t a Metro card entrance; you have to go to a token booth to get through. So there was only an exit, it was an exit only, and not a lot of people were using it. He saw legs sticking out of this sweatshirt. He thought, oh somebody left their doll on the ground. He kept walking and he got to like the first step and he looked back and he saw the legs moving. And he went down and he loosened up the sweatshirt and there was the baby in the sweatshirt, wrapped up, and didn’t, wasn’t crying. Just sort of was there and wiggling around a little bit. Carey was trying to scream at people inside the subway to help him, and I guess they thought he was a crazy person. Everyone just ignored him, and for like 15

minutes, 20 minutes, nobody used that exit. He didn't want to touch the baby because he didn't know whether it was hurt or injured or just didn't want to cause any more harm to the baby.

So, he didn't have, we didn't have a cell phone back then. He ran up the stairs to the telephone booth that's at the subway, called 9-1-1, went back down and waited. I guess to him it seemed like 9-1-1 was taking a really long time to come, so he ran back up and called me. And said, you won't believe it, I just found a baby, come down here, and flag down a police officer or somebody on the street while I wait with the baby. First of all, I was like "WHAT. You're kidding me." I ran down there, ran down one block, and by the time I got down there, the police had arrived, and they were carrying the baby, Lucas up the stairs. And it was really, it was interesting because sort of in that moment, I talk about it now with Carey, but I didn't tell him then, I said, well actually I did say then, I said "you're going to have a bond with the child for the rest of your life, you know that." Internally, I said, "That's our son." I don't know why I thought that; I had no idea why I thought that because we went on with our lives for the next three months. We didn't pursue anything except for that Carey tried to find out a little bit in the hospital, about how the baby was, and nobody would tell him anything because he wasn't the relative. And we had heard a rumor from somebody, a friend of a friend of a friend, who worked at the hospital that the biological grandparent had come forward to claim the child. That never happened. Later we found out that didn't happen. Went on with our lives, we said OK, the baby's in good hands, it's with a relative. We went on with our lives.

Three months later, Carey gets a telephone call from the legal aid society or someone working the court with the judge, and says, the judge wants to hear from the hero that found the baby, can you come down to the court and tell them your story. They wanted to hear the story. You know, Carey's like well I thought someone came forward, and they said no, no one came

forward, they're in the process of terminating the biological parental rights so they can place him in a permanent situation. So Carey goes down and he testifies, tells the story to the judge how he found Lucas, just like I told you and says, "I really need to get back to work, how much longer do you think this is going to take." And she says, "I think you should stick around to the end of the hearing." And then he said, "I really need to get back to work, you know how much longer do you think it's going to take." And she goes, it's not going to take long, usually in these cases, she explains to him we try to place the child in a home, blah blah blah. A police officer testifies and she turns to Carey after the hearing and says, "Would you be interested in adopting this baby." And Carey's like, "yes I would be, but I know it's not easy, it's not that easy." And she said, "Well it can be."

And she started barking off court orders and directives to like set up a home visit with us with Carey, and just doing all this stuff to start the home study of us, get people in here to make sure our home was safe, everything. He called me from the subway station after the courthouse. And I'm at work, and he says you're never going to believe this. And I said, what, but I knew... I had a feeling. "The judge asked me if I wanted to adopt." And I said, "No, you don't, go back there and tell her no." You know, I was, you know we weren't financially set for a child, we hadn't even emotionally; we were just not prepared for a child. He got home that night and we said to each other, well let's just go ahead with the process, we don't have to go through with it, we can, maybe we'll get prepared, maybe it'll be six months before he's placed with us, maybe we'll have time, all that stuff, but we won't say yes. That just ends it right then and there, you know. So what happened was, they started the home study, somebody comes like 3, 4 nights in a week and interviews you for hours, pretty intensely and we went up to visit him in the home he was in, and we said, we can't let the condition of the home he's in affect our decision. Well, it

did, it did. It was disgusting. It was filthy, there was wires, there were cobwebs hanging from the ceiling. There were 3 or 4 other kids, 3 biological kids, and 2 or 3 other adopted kids, or foster kids in the home. The parents were both unemployed. The father actually answered the door in his underwear when we got there. I mean the social worker's coming over; he knows the social worker is coming over. If you answer the door like that, it just doesn't make any sense to me. Lucas was bug eyed. When we held him, he let us hold him. He didn't blink. It was clear to us that he wasn't getting kind of affection or attention. And he probably just sat in the bouncy seat, stewing in his own diaper for days watching TV. So when we finally did get him, like a week later, he had diaper rash that was like from mid thigh up to here. I mean literally right above, right by his belly button to his mid thigh, and than all around. He was not being taken care of.

So anyway, after we visited we said, yes we'll do this. We went back to court, it was December 20th, 21st, 20th, I forget the date. It was a Wednesday, and we had to declare our intentions to the judge that we would want to go ahead with becoming his foster parents leading to adoption. And we thought that the process would take, like I said, another, at least until the beginning of the year, February, March of the following year. The judge said, "well how about, how about a holiday visit." You can take him home with you this weekend. So that was Wednesday night, and we got him on Friday morning.

We just had nothing; you know no crib, nothing. Like my whole family went shopping. Everyone just did, everyone just pulled together and got us everything we needed. And we were supposed to bring him back the day after Christmas. Christmas was a Monday that year, so we picked him up on Friday, had him Saturday, Sunday, Monday, I was supposed to bring him back to the agency on Tuesday to go back to that family. Well, we had been treating his diaper rash

and taking care of him. And the whole weekend, I was like playing with him, he was lifting up his arms, and so he was starting to, he was laughing a lot, and his diaper rash was going away, we were treating it regularly, and we were changing his diaper regularly. And we said, “he’s going to be our son, there is no way he’s going back to that family; absolutely no way.” So I never brought him back on that Tuesday and the agency called me on Wednesday, and said, “you know you were supposed to bring him back yesterday.” I said, “oh well the judge said you know we can have it for the holiday visit.” I told the caseworker, I said, “she said holiday visit and New Year’s is coming up. I just assumed that meant through the beginning of the year.” And they were like “well, you’re security, your finger prints haven’t come back from Albany yet, clearance, you know.” I said, “oh”, and she said, “Well let me see what I can do. Keep him today and you know you’re going to have to bring him back tomorrow, on Thursday.” She called me later on Wednesday, and this is between Christmas and New Year, she said, “we’ve just gotten the mail, your clearance, you can keep him. Basically and definitely.” So, that’s it, it was sort of like we just became like almost instant parents, and we, by the time Carey first went to court and she asked, he was with us two weeks later, two or three weeks later. It was just instant; it was almost instant, shockingly instant.

Andrew’s story illuminates how gay fatherhood is not always meticulously planned. With a chance occurrence on a subway ramp, Andrew and Carey became instant fathers. Two other men I spoke with had similar experiences with children falling into their lives practically overnight. Yet, while Andrew regards himself as a father to Lucas, these other two men did not consider themselves fathers per se, for differing reasons. Thus, I discuss Walter and Ross’ stories as fathering experiences; as each of these men had extended times in their lives when they cared for children as if they were their own.

One afternoon almost ten years prior to our interview, Ross was driving in the car with his mother and they received a telephone call. It was his sister. Her abusive ex-husband had entered their home on a violent rampage and was holding her youngest son, Joseph hostage at gunpoint. Somehow, she and her other two children had managed to escape the house. She explained to Ross that the SWAT team was surrounding her home and they needed to get there quick! Ross and his mother drove twelve hours to reach them and when they had arrived, they waited over a full day until Joseph was finally released. That day, Ross packed up a moving truck with all three of the children's things and moved them home with he and his partner while his sister stayed at her home to "wait until things settled down." Eight months went by before Ross's sister returned to her children. During these eight months, Ross and his partner opened their two-bedroom beach condo to three young children. When I asked Ross, if he felt like a father to these children, he replied, "No, I would say I am their friend." When I inquired further as to why he considered himself a friend and not a father, he expressed that only eight months of their relationship occurred within a shared residence. Further, now that the children are in their late teens, he partakes in certain recreational activities with them that are usually reserved for friendships (i.e., drinking, and sex-talk).

Walter, the second man with fathering experiences had a slightly different, and sadder tale to tell than did Ross. Walter and his partner were involved in an interracial relationship, he was African American and his partner was White. They had been living together for three short months when their lives suddenly took an interesting turn. Walter explains:

The day before Thanksgiving, 1982, his wife came by. He had been married previously, had 3 adopted children by the previous marriage, and I had met the kids, seen the kids, and didn't get along with the wife because she thought that I was the reason he was gay. She brought the kids over with all of their clothes and toys and announced that she was tired of parenting. And he always told her that if that happened, she would not give the kids up to the adoption agency. That she should bring them to him. So we became instant parents of a

3, 5 and 7 year old. It was a marvelous experience for me. We were gay parents, an interracial couple with 3 black children. Most people assumed the children were mine by a previous marriage and thought it was generous of me to give them his last name. We eventually ended up in court and him assuming custody. The social workers all knew the truth and listed me on the court papers as the live-in tutor, because there was no gay adoption in Illinois at that time.

Walter and his partner assumed parenting responsibilities for these children for four years.

For these four years, Walter expressed that he was a father to these children. However, like many couples, Walter and his partner began to fall out of love and ultimately broke up. They attempted to maintain an amicable relationship following the break-up and this arrangement did work for a short time. But, people move on and Walter began to date another man. Fueled by jealousy, in 1986, Walter's ex-partner moved the children far away from their home in Chicago and forbade Walter from ever seeing them again. When I asked Walter how he felt when he realized he would never see these children again, he replied, "When I look at my life and when I try to deal with things in life, I don't know anything that has ever brought me more pain. I describe it as having broken up with 4 people at once instead of one." Walter's story underscores the need for legal interventions in gay families that can accommodate situations when such families experience separation. With the privilege of marriage also comes the privilege of divorce and Walter's story is only one example of the many gay families with children that dissolve. With proper legal protection Walter's painful experience could have been alleviated at least in some small ways.

Despite the diversity of these men's stories, their experiences can help to deconstruct the prevailing images of fatherhood in contemporary America in myriad ways. While all of these men did not explicitly plan to construct families with children, both Andrew and Walter, more so than Ross felt fatherly bonds to the children that instantly became a part of their lives. These stories and others throughout this study illuminate how fatherhood can be a social identity more

so than a biological one. When I began this paper, I was prepared to deconstruct dominant definitions of sexuality. However, what surprised me more was that in the context of these specific families, fatherhood more so than sexuality became the focus of deconstruction. Walter, Ross, and to a lesser extent Andrew show how a father is a loosely defined identity that extends far beyond biological conceptualizations and is dependent on and emerges through shared experiences and interactions.

Planned Fatherhood

Where the stories above illustrate how gay men might in fact “get pregnant” by accident, for the majority of my participants, the road to fatherhood was a highly structured and planned endeavor. As is discussed in detail in the previous chapter, participants, and both fathers and childless alike were well aware of the planning that would be involved for them in their journey to fatherhood. For these men, this planning was the most significant aspect of their families that distinguished them from the procreative experiences of heterosexual men and women. When I asked Parker, an adoptive father how his procreative or fathering experiences were any different from that of heterosexuals, he expresses that:

I think that the biggest difference between gay and straight people is like gay people that want kids are not like straight people that say...oops, I'm pregnant...Like I said, you want kids and so you will do anything in your power to get kids... straight couples that want to have kids, can normally just have kids.

Consistent with Parker, Drew, a 35-year-old recent father concludes that the rigorous planning and ability to negotiate the logistical and discriminatory challenges might benefit families created by gay men:

I think the biggest difference between us and straight dads is that there aren't any mistakes or unwanted children...it is really a conscious decision that you have to jump through hoops to accomplish, either financially or legally...we might not be able to trace exactly when we thought about it, but once you do decide, it is like a mission to get it done.

A critical analysis of Drew's and to a lesser extent, of Parker's narrative indicates a somewhat hierarchal pattern to how families are perceived (Hicks, 2006a). Parker and Drew's comparison of their families with that of heterosexuals and closeted or married gays and lesbians emerge as simplistic and rather categorical statements about gay parents who have undergone such extensive planning (Hicks, 2006a). With such comments as "there aren't any mistakes or unwanted children", "you will do anything in your power to get kids", and "it is really a conscious decision," Parker and Drew distance themselves and gay-planned families from other familial arrangements and practices that are generally formed through less privileged and structured means, such as the ones discussed above. Such glowing discourses tend to raise certain gay families to a romanticized pedestal of responsibility and choice. Although some gay families, such as the majority of those discussed in this dissertation, are formed through such conscious planning, many others are not. The kinship arrangements discussed in this section can be respected without treating them as privileged.

Negotiating Options

When men decided that they wanted to become fathers, many were unsure how to begin, where to go, and what to do. Lawrence, one of the pioneering fathers of the 1980s remembers his experience in the mid-1980s when he was first exposed to the possibility of adoption:

So there were all these people at this adoption conference, you know talking about all the different ways of adopting, you could do domestic adoption, but domestic had two ways, you could do public or private. You could do your own private adoption with a lawyer, you can go to these, also these places like Friend of Adoption or just facilitators; you could do international adoption. There were just all these options, and we came home and we were like exhausted because we had all these things to think about. And it just seemed overwhelming.

Recall that Lawrence's experiences occurred in a time when assisted reproductive technologies were not as easily obtainable as they are now. For Lawrence, adoption was his best possible option to becoming a father, yet he still found himself overwhelmed with every different

type of adoption prospect. Unlike Lawrence, Parker was not set on adoption and pondered various fatherhood pathways, ranging from surrogacy to adoption. He reflects on the time he and his partner researched fatherhood possibilities:

There are so many options, but we did it, look, we bought books, lots of books on adoption, on different forms, what, how, IVF, we researched a lot. We took like a good like 2 years doing just research. And I'm not talking about every day, I'm talking about like on the weekends we would like we would sit down and talk about it and you know, figure it out.

Parker and his partner did eventually decide to use the adoption route to create their family. However, Parker lives in Florida, one of the only states that prohibit same-gender adoption. This posed another obstacle for Parker and he describes how he navigated the discriminatory legalities in his state of residence:

My partner is the adoptive father and they hold his last name and that's you know, fine...It's one of those things that if you live in Florida, you, there are sacrifices that you make and there are things that you know, you do to get to where you want to be.

Brian, another adoptive father explains how he and his partner went about navigating legal barriers in Florida:

We looked at a couple adoption agencies here in Florida and also around the country. The lawyers in Florida were saying that one of us could adopt and don't say you're gay and then the other can eventually be a guardian, but we said no, that won't work ...we looked at some other states and we ended up settling with the state of Vermont where we adopted our daughter which recognized both of us as parents. We are both on the birth certificate and Florida is forced to recognize it.

Legal discrimination was not reserved to those men who lived in Florida. Even in a more liberal state such as New York, participants' extensive research and preparation is followed by overt or covert discrimination by the respective agency with whom they decide to work.

Lawrence remembers his experience with agencies and attorneys over 17 years ago when he and his former partner adopted their first son. He explains:

This is what you get, you know when you're gay, it was like the last bastion of a place where people could be prejudiced and biased and not be reprimanded, not be punished for

it...they were allowed to kind of push you aside...if you wanted a child, you had to put up with this.

Although I would like to report that much has changed since Lawrence became a father, changes are slight and gradual at best in the United States. On a positive note, in 1999 - 2000 nearly 60 % of all adoption agencies in the United States reported that they had accepted applications from self-identified gay men and lesbian women (Brodzinsky et al., 2003; Lev, 2006). But only 39 % of these agencies had actually placed a child with gay or lesbian adopters (Brodzinsky et al., 2003; Hicks, 2006a). Clearly, contemporary adoption agencies still serve as a ruling relation wherein underlying homophobic practices regularly surface and shape how gay men approach the transition to fatherhood and even manipulate their self-presentations to those persons in power (Hicks, 2006b). Fortunately, Lawrence, Brian and Parker are men in the upper echelon of society and were able to afford the luxury of an attorney to help them navigate their way through these legal barriers. Because it takes substantial financial resources to overcome these bureaucratic obstacles, the above stories illuminate how opportunities associated with middle-class status and privilege mediate family formation for some gay men planning fatherhood.

Nevertheless, these narratives underscore how a gay man's journey to fatherhood is shaped by a variety of mediating factors, including interactions with the agency, attorneys, and even the state. In addition to the men acknowledging the planning, structure, and possible homophobic prejudice and discrimination involved in becoming a father, they discussed the various legal obstacles involved.

Similarly, men in New York had to cope with the issue that surrogacy is illegal in their state. Billy and Elliot are a unique couple who had the financial means to hire both an egg donor and a gestational surrogate mother in order to create their three-week-old twins. Because of

various legal barriers, they hired “an egg donor from one state, a surrogate mother from another state, a surrogate agency in another state, the paternity clinic in a fourth state, and [we] were in a fifth state.” Although Billy and Elliot were the only men who employed the assistance of an egg donor and a gestational surrogate, the substantial amount of effort, travel, and monetary resources these men invested in creating their family was not atypical.

Gay men’s desires and pathways to parenthood are inextricably tied to legalities mandated by both local and national government. So even though gay men’s struggles are similar in some respects to heterosexuals’ stressful, time-consuming efforts to achieve parenthood through adoption or by using assisted reproductive technologies, gays are further burdened by heterosexist norms about family building.

Building a Family: Which Pathway?

The men’s procreative, father, and family identities are contingent on the type of pathway they chose to construct their family arrangement. Note that while co-parenting can imply a variety of arrangements, I use the term to refer explicitly to those men who share parenting responsibilities with a lesbian woman or women. I employ the language of co-fathering to designate those men who are in a parenting dyad with another gay man. Those men who formed families through co-parenting had very different experiences than those that chose adoption or surrogacy. Thus, I take the time to elaborate each path in detail.

Co-parenting

Six of the men in my study became fathers through co-parenting with a lesbian woman or women. However, for Spencer, Drew, and Robin also became fathers later through adoption, surrogacy, and heterosexual relations. During the interview, for Drew and Spencer—more so than for Robin, it was these other fathering experiences that were salient rather than the experiences and identities that were constructed via their co-parenting arrangements – a phenomenon that is

discussed in further detail towards the end of this chapter. Gus, Robin's partner, and Aaron and Leonard, two single fathers, are all men whose fathering identities and procreative experiences were forged solely via co-parenting arrangements.

Interestingly, for all these men, fatherhood was not their idea. Rather, while many were casually pondering the possibility of having children one day, women who wanted a known and somewhat involved donor approached them all. Gus explains that when Arlene and Shelley approached him and Robin with the possibility of having children, Robin was "ready to go, he had always wanted more kids." But, Gus, on the other hand "always said I would never have kids living with us, and I still to this day don't." Co-parenting arrangements for Gus and other men emerged as the opportunity of "having kids without having kids." While the level of involvement of men who co-parented ranged from seeing their children once every few months, as in the case of Drew and Spencer, every few days as with Aaron, or every day as with Robin and Gus, each of these men did not partake in the day to day tasks of child-rearing. In fact, Aaron maintains that he never even changed a diaper for his daughter, a point I elaborate on in chapter six.

However, all of these men maintain that they are indeed fathers to their children. Many of these fathers spoke about the importance of biological relatedness in their families, especially Gus and Robin who each biologically fathered a child – one with Arlene and one with Shelley. Yet, social and legal ties were never taken for granted. Both Gus and Robin expressed almost tearfully that after their children were born the most painful experience was when they each had to relinquish their parental rights to Arlene and Shelley. Robin remembers the day that he had to relinquish the legal rights to his son, "I cried the day they I had to give him up...and I warned Gus ahead of time about this and I told him it was a horrible feeling, I felt like I was going

through a divorce again.” Similarly, Aaron and Leonard spoke extensively of the everyday struggles of negotiating their social ties to their children as they described conflicts involving time and activity decision-making with their co-mothers, a discussion that surfaces more in chapter six. Where the processes to becoming a father and the experiences involving fatherhood were different for each of these men, the common thread linking their procreative experience is that fatherhood was not necessarily their idea, and if it were not for the women they currently co-parent with, their lives might be very different from what they are now.

Adoption

The adoption process varied widely for the men. For some, it occurred without any obstacles and rather quickly, while for others it was plagued with discrimination, uncertainty about the birth mother, and took years to complete. Here, I detail the various phases of the adoption process. I begin with the mental negotiations involved in the decision to adopt and move through an analysis of how men navigated the processes associated with adoption. Such processes include the home study, choosing the child, and negotiating the risks of adoption.

Of the men I interviewed who adopted; all chose domestic public or private adoption. For those men who chose adoption, many were quite vocal as to why they decided to go the specific route they did. Spencer defends the importance of gay men having the legal right to adopt when he argues that:

My son was 10, he was 8 when I met him, and he was 10 when he moved in and 10 is deemed the point of no return because when a boy turns 10 he is not going to be adopted. You know I think its funny that people who are opposed to gay parenting...I say well who's going to adopt these very hard to adopt kids?...It's the gay people because you folks certainly are not doing it.

Spencer continued to assert:

I think it's really fantastic that people adopt internationally because every child that does not have a family needs a family, but I personally just have this emotional draw to the

"DSS" (department of social services) kids most of whom have you know been abused and traumatized and so forth and have lots of challenges.

Spencer criticizes public and legal discourses that ban gays from adopting, and maintains that while he is not critical of those gay men who choose to adopt abroad he himself is simply drawn to those children who are "unwanted" here in the United States. Yet, not all men I spoke with were this forgiving. Craig and his partner are an interracial couple who also adopted through the public foster care system. Craig was well-read on the politics of adoption and was significantly more vocal and critical than Spencer regarding the trend of gay men adopting abroad:

Some people go to Guatemala or you know Honduras or whatever to adopt babies and I think again, it kind of gives them a false sense of security about what kind of treatment you know the mother may have had or you know, make sure they're not somehow handicapped in some way or other. But they're much more reluctant to get an African American or Latino American child. I talked to some guys last week about their adoption in Ecuador. It took them 6 months to get their kid home. 6 months. One of them had to live there for 3 months...and I'm thinking, people don't want to go through the public system because of the bureaucracy, but their willing to go get a yellow child in Ecuador, give up 6 months of their lives.

Craig's take on transnational adoption is synonymous with Rothman's analysis in her autoethnographic book, *Weaving a Family: Untangling Race and Adoption*. Both Craig and Barbara Katz Rothman (who both coincidentally reside in Brooklyn) maintain that the enticement of transnational adoption is the availability of almost-White children. The world of transnational adoption offers some interesting insights into how people can create the kind of baby they want to raise. While to some extent, all adoptive children are devalued; transnationally adopted children are at least not racially devalued (Rothman, 2005). They are what Rothman terms, "a discreet shade of White, not White perhaps, but assuredly not Black" (2005, p. 49).

Craig was not only critical of transnational adoption, but was also outspoken about gay men constructing families via surrogacy: “Surrogacy is a strange choice, honestly, but to each his own...I just never felt any need to be biologically connected to my child. That just, that just wasn’t a priority. The priority was just having a child.” Men like Craig and Spencer who opted to construct their families via adoption claimed that biology is not what makes a family; rather family for them was defined as the symbolic social ties that encompass the daily activities of child-rearing. Men who chose adoption focused on the connections that were being formed in the everyday interactions in their families. For these men who did not have the physiological means to reproduce, adoptive children served as a resource by which they could construct their families of choice. Whereas adoptive families are sometimes viewed as second best because of the stigmas surrounding illegitimacy and infertility, these men were quick to assert that the social ties in their families were of equal or even more importance than were biological ties.

Ethan is the adoptive father of a thirteen year old girl who eloquently summed up how many of my participants spoke about their bonds to their adoptive children:

I feel that before you adopt, you ask a question that you never ask after you adopt. The question was am I going to feel the same about an adopted child as I would about a biological child...Once you hold your child, I mean, I couldn’t feel more attached to my daughter if I carried her in my own belly for 9 months and there’s no, it’s like a strange feeling of that there was no question that I am her father, and I was meant to be her father, and she was meant to be my daughter.

Thus, a consistent theme amongst adoptive fathers was that love makes a family, not genetics.

The adoption process

Once gay men decide that they will go through the adoption route, sometimes a substantial amount of time and energy is required to navigate the adoption process. Daryl, an adoptive father who like Lawrence became a father in New York in the 1980s remembered that his experience with adopting his first child was very different than that of his second child. With his first son,

the adoption process happened surprisingly quickly and he only had to wait 3-4 weeks for the application. Yet, two years later, with his second son, the application process lasted 7 long months. When I asked him why there was such a marked difference in his adoption experiences, he maintained, “It was just a very different process, which is true of adoption, but every year, every month, every day, it seems like the laws have changed.” When I asked for further description of his experiences with social workers and his home study, he explained the process involved in his first home study:

The social worker that did the home study, I was open with her. She was from Long Island and she had a brother that was gay and she was friendly. But when I first called, then you know I’m applying, she said, oh I’m not doing any more home studies with gay men. I don’t want to get in trouble, you’re going to have to wait, because you see, she thought she was going to end up in the cover of New York Times like too many gay adoptions...I didn’t take no for an answer, so I just went full speed ahead so she had to do the home study, which kind of pissed her off, but she did it anyway...So I was open to her. But at no point on the application does it have your sexual status. However, there is in the form, who lives in your house and what’s their relationships. But as a single parent, I didn’t have to lie about it.

Despite the visible obstacles involved in gay adoption in the 1980s, Daryl had the financial and community resources available to navigate the adoption and home study process.

Furthermore, because Daryl was a single gay man pursuing adoption, unlike Lawrence, he never had to conceal his gay identity.

The process of constructing a family through adoption takes a substantial amount of time and money. Brian, the man in Florida who adopted in Vermont explained that he and his partner had to rent an apartment in Vermont for two years in order to establish residency and were required to make monthly visits to confer with the social worker and the adoption agency. When I commented to Brian that the adoption for him required a substantial financial contribution, he declared, “No, it didn’t cost too much. We flew Jet Blue and rent in Vermont is more reasonable than in South Florida.” Needless to say, Brian was somewhat jaded by his privileged status and

was completely unaware that the majority of gay men choosing fatherhood do not have the ability to make monthly flights and additional housing payments. While Brian was not conscious of his privileged status in relation to other gay men, his experience illuminates how many gay planned families require substantial financial resources in order to navigate the complex legal barriers that exist in many states. It is not just being a gay man that shapes the adoption process for gay men; financial and racial elements are crucial elements of how potential parents, regardless of their sexual status negotiate the adoption system. Men with high incomes can circumvent discriminatory practices in adoption by traveling to other parts of the United States to locate more supportive agencies and lawyers.

Even for those men who can adopt within their state of residence and choose the public system, adoption can still be a costly and time-consuming endeavor. Spencer remembers the lengthy process:

Well the first thing I had to do was to take an 8 week parenting course and it was specifically for people adopting from DSS and the parenting is taught is essentially parenting traumatized kids who have attachment issues and behavior problems and so forth...I do think they design it for people who would just not be able to handle it. But for me...it convinced me to go ahead and do it.... Then you're committed to the adopting process and you go through a home study. The social worker came to my house I think four times, they look for cleanliness, safety hazards, they look for 16 beer bottles behind the house, I passed that with flying colors, I had identified a bedroom for him and there was ample play and closet space and a decent bathroom. Then the time came for him to transition into my house.

Although Spencer receives a monthly stipend from the state of \$600.00, his son's status as a DSS child forced him to quit his high paying job at his firm where he had been employed for over a decade and become a private consultant; resulting in a substantial decrease in his annual income. Thus, although gay men choosing fatherhood have many options that are not as costly as some assisted reproductive technologies, it seems that the pathway to fatherhood is still a financially draining endeavor that requires a significant amount of time and energy.

Nonetheless, although the adoption process is rife with complications, barriers, and obstacles, many saw this process as a blessing in disguise. Simon sums it up perfectly when he asserts, “unfortunately in the real world any bonehead can make a baby and not be responsible for it, but in the adoption world they make you very responsible, which is a good thing.” Simon’s concluding statement underscores that while these men’s procreative stories are constructed within their relatively privileged status, their experiences illuminate that the efforts involved in becoming a father ensure a readiness to parent.

Choosing your child

A common theme amongst gay men choosing fatherhood is the aspect of a choice involved in selecting their future child. In fact, Rothman states that, “adoption becomes an exercise in thoughtful comparative shopping” (2005, p. 52). While this might conjure up images of an assembly –line of prospective children waiting to be adopted, consider the notion that heterosexuals have the unearned privilege of choice all the time. To an extent, the selection of an intimate partner and for those who have class privilege, the advent of genetic testing, allows heterosexuals to control the type of child they want to bring into this world. However, for the most part, the ability to choose a child remains unrecognized for heterosexuals.

This aspect of choice surfaced as a way for fathers to negotiate within themselves and with their partners and what kind of child they were prepared to raise. Lawrence reflects on the decision-making processes involved in he and his partners’ conversations about adopting a child:

We also had to think about, you know do I want a child who has disabilities, if so, what kind of disabilities, you know. What about race, you had to be really honest with yourself. Do I want a child who’s Black, do I want a child who’s White... You had to be completely honest about what you wanted. It couldn’t be like, oh yes, wouldn’t it be nice to adopt a Black child and not really mean it, you know. Wouldn’t it be nice to adopt a child who’s mentally retarded and not really mean, you had to say, you had to say to really express to each other what you want, and what you could live with.

Parker echoed Lawrence's point when he claimed, "I did not want to deal with severe retardation or Down's Syndrome...because we're talking my first kid and I was not prepared to deal with that...But you have a choice...that's one of the great things about adoption."

Choosing a child based on racial characteristics and a disability was not uncommon for these men. In America, we define responsible behavior as informed behavior and we value knowing what we are getting into and controlling our present and future experiences (Rothman, 2005). Further, we live in the age of information, of marketing, of excess knowledge, and of genetics. It is not shocking, therefore, that this language of choice emerged in discussions about adoption. Through the lens of genetics and choice, the ability to hand pick a child does not seem that odd when we think about it...but should it? Is it simply responsible family formation or is it more than this? While many of these intriguing questions are beyond the scope of this study, pieces of this discussion will further surface throughout this chapter. As I move to a detailed discussion of surrogacy and open adoption in just a few short pages, it becomes more lucid how this choice is based not simply on the child, but also on the characteristics of the birth mother.

Negotiating the Risk of Adoption:

Gay men who adopt or employ surrogate mothers have the distinct dilemma of negotiating bonds with their future children when another party could decide to back out of the pre-birth agreement of their adoption. Often, because of these considerations, gay fathers-to-be discover innovative ways of securing their emotional investment.

Craig and Darrel, an interracial couple who became fathers of their two young girls through fostering by use of the public adoption system discussed the risks involved in this route. Because of legal privilege to the biological mother, Craig and Darrel did not have any law-binding tie to their first daughter until after they fathered her for two years and still do not have

legal rights to their second daughter who they have only been fathering for two and a half months. They choose to deal with the impending risk of the birth mother returning to claim her children, yet navigated their way through the foster care system in a highly cognizant and careful manner. Their first daughter was the eighth child in succession given up for adoption by her mother and their second child is the third. By consciously choosing to foster daughters who have mothers that have relinquished their other children, these men minimize the chances of having their family taken from them. Craig and Darrel realized that in order to completely invest their love into these children, the risk of the biological mother coming back must be as slim as possible.

Simon and Theo, a couple living in Los Angeles adopted two children from two separate birth mothers. As they were in the process of adopting their second child, the original birth mother changed her mind and decided to keep her child. Following this distressing setback, they continued in their quest for a second child and the agency they worked with gave them the option of two new birth mothers from which to choose. As they weighed their options, they too strategically evaluated which of these two women to place their faith. Simon explained the decision-making processes he and Theo underwent as they decided between an African American birth mother and a White birth mother:

We were told by an African American friend of ours that it's risky, she said African American women don't give up their babies. They find someone in their families to take care of them or they take care of them themselves, but they don't generally give up their babies. And whether it is true or not across the board, it was certainly true in this case...when push came to shove, she couldn't do it.

Rather than risk another upset in their path to fathering, Simon and Theo trusted the words of a reliable insider who could offer them information on familial trends within African-American communities.

Where Simon, Theo, and Craig all chose to take their chances with adoption, others viewed these impending risks with much more caution. Drew and Nico discussed their apprehensions of creating a family through adoption because of the risks of the birth mother returning:

The thing about adoption is...that even though that child or those children are legally yours, they are never your children. And that is very frightening to me. That [we] would have this wonderful child or children through adoption and then at some point, something could happen, either through the courts or a change of the birth mother's mind...it is very unsettling to me and scared me. It scared me that the family we would create would be shaken by the birth mother or the genetic father coming back into our lives or the baby's life.

For Drew and Nico, the impending fear of the biological mother or father returning to claim their children was simply too much for them to handle. Rather than deal with this risk on a regular basis, the couple chose to construct their family through using a surrogate mother. With the authenticity of a blood-tie, nobody could deny the legitimacy of their family allowing Drew and Nico to invest the entirety of their affection into their children without concern that it could one day be taken from them.

All future parents must invest in expected bonds with their future children. However, gay men's emotional investments in their future children are distinct from the assumed nature of such investments in conventional heterosexual families because of the conscious efforts to juggle the limitations of physiology and discriminatory legal practices. The gay headed families in this study are for the most part carefully planned. Therefore, investment in these future families began months, even years, before pregnancy. Nevertheless, there is a heightened negotiation with this investment that becomes paramount as we turn to a discussion of surrogacy. Before analyzing surrogacy negotiations, I briefly elaborate on men's narratives regarding their decision to construct their families via surrogacy arrangements.

Negotiating the meaning of biological fatherhood

The formation of a father identity for some of the men is mediated by the anticipated or actual presence of biological ties. For all the men who chose to construct their families through surrogacy, the presence of biological ties was of critical importance. As I listened to Drew and Nico converse about the negotiations that manifested during their fatherhood quest, the significance of how biological relatedness influences the legitimacy of family dawned on me.

Drew explained that:

What it came down to was that he wanted biological children and I had that experience, and I didn't care whether our kids were biologically mine or not. This is why I wanted to adopt in the first place. Nico had some issues whether or not he could feel a bond with an adoptive child...I understood his urge to want to see what his own biological children would be like so we found out a way to do it.

The presence of biological ties was so important to some of my participants, and for some, it didn't matter whether these ties were real or simply imagined. An unusual story illustrates how gay men sometimes negotiate their biological relatedness. Billy and Elliot, romantic partners and fathers of three-week-old twins, decided to mix their sperm before inseminating their chosen egg donor. At present, it is unknown which of them is actually the biological father of the three-week-old twins. They maintain that because there are two children and two "fathers," each man is the biological father of a twin. Although these men are uncertain about their biological paternity status for each twin, their story illustrates how meanings associated with aspects of the procreative arena emerge out of a social and interpretive process. Billy and Elliot's negotiations of their procreative identities show how some gay men assign meanings to situations, events, others, and themselves as they construct their father identities in nontraditional scenarios.

Interestingly, there was only one man worth mentioning who chose surrogacy that maintained that a genetic tie was not what prompted him to use surrogacy. Rather, Marc, a man

living in Florida saw surrogacy as his only viable option to having a child. He maintained that because of legalities in Florida, a surrogacy arrangement was his best option to constructing his desired family.

The meanings that gay fathers assign to interpersonal ties not rooted in shared biology are often embedded in a rather loosely defined web developed through social rather than biological means. Many of the narratives discussed above, however, illuminate how the men I spoke with still greatly value biogenetic ties. Although there was a great deal of creative negotiation within these families, it is significant to recognize that these negotiations were regulated with the conventional privileging of biological relatedness at the forefront of many of these men's procreative consciousness.

The Relationship of the Birth Mother (and Father)

When gay men become fathers they do not do so as individual entities. Rather, their procreative and fathering identities are constructed through various negotiations with others. Whether it is through conversations with their intimate partners or through struggles with agencies, lawyers, and other legal bodies, gay men's fathering identities are characterized by a dynamic and interactional process. Recall that sometimes it actually takes more than two people to "tango." Where today, gay men can actually decide to create families of their own, this inevitably requires the assistance of a woman. As the procreative stories of the fathers I spoke with unfolded, one of the focuses of my research became to better understand the nuances by which gay men's procreative and fathering identities become intertwined with the identity of the child's birth mother. Gay men pursuing fatherhood via surrogacy, open-adoption, or co-parenting (with a lesbian woman or women) develop and negotiate relationships with these individuals who become indispensable entities in the construction of their family.

Evaluating the Characteristics of the Birth Mother

Many men spoke of evaluating the birth mother in terms of such biographical characteristics as age, race, physical attractiveness, medical history, intelligence, athleticism, and artistic ability. For example, Drew and Nico spoke to me about the conversations that occurred as they navigated their surrogacy agency of choice's website that depicted hundreds of potential surrogate mothers. Drew explains:

Well on the website a lot of the women were 4 foot 2, Guatemalan women, it just wasn't going to work for us...we wanted to find a surrogate who was white and like get rid of one other problem that these children, or child would have to deal with, you know, to be mixed race...We wanted someone who was fairly young, who had done it before and who was remotely attractive.

Drew's narrative fragment emphasizes his desire for a racially homogenous family. For these fathers, the difficulties of two gay men raising a child was enough without adding in another complication surfacing from the child's mixed-race identity or unattractive looks. Drew and Nico spoke about the importance of a white child and although they never explicitly said that they wanted their children to physically resemble them, their child's whiteness would in fact make them appear more like a "normal" family.

Similarly, Billy spoke about how he and his partner, Elliot, evaluated a series of egg donors from a catalog. He explains, "It's funny how you can read these profiles. After you read a couple of them, you sort of really hear the voice of the person...it was like a yearbook. You know, a photograph with a site description." When I inquired further as to what Billy and Elliot looked for in the physical characteristics of the genetic contribution to their future child, they declare that:

We both sort of went with education, health, physical attributes, that were similar to our families, you know we are both Mediterranean, in a sense that we don't have blond hair and blue eyes... we had a lot of conversations about height, hair color and eye color and athletic prowess, and intelligence.

Billy and Elliot eventually went with an egg donor that “was a little bit artsy, a little bit athletic, you know she had a little bit of academic background too, so we pictured a balanced person.” Similar to lesbian mothers who choose sperm donors and infertile couples who evaluate the genetic tie to their child, gay men choosing fatherhood make conscious decisions about how they want their future child to look, and what physical abilities they want their child to possess. Although it is clear how gay men’s evaluation of the birth mother or egg donor to their child is similar to lesbian women and infertile couples, it is less obvious how this phenomenon is parallel to what heterosexual men and women sometimes indirectly do in the context of romantic relationships. As heterosexual women and men become intimately involved with one another, there is a conscious evaluation of what characteristics or qualities the other might bring to the relationship (Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962; Murstein, 1970). To an extent, the merging of these qualities is what ultimately constructs the physique and personality of their potential child (pending they decide to engage in reproduction through heterosexual intercourse). This phenomenon becomes more apparent when we examine the experiences of Aaron, a gay father who is currently raising a daughter with two lesbian women.

Whereas Billy and Elliot and Drew and Nico somewhat blindly began to evaluate the genetic tie to their child, Aaron had the ability to conduct an initial evaluation in person. Aaron, a single gay father co-parenting with two lesbian women was set up on a blind date with Raquel and Abby, the two women who he would ultimately conceive and rear his daughter. He explained the dinner:

Well at the dinner, we were really just socially getting to know one another and realized that we all come from very similar backgrounds...I grew up in New Jersey and the others were from Connecticut and Long Island, sort of middle and upper middle class families, private school...they have similar interests in music, classical music...similar in age, race, economic background, social background.

Quite like the above examples, Aaron was assessing this couple in terms of ensuring a family with similarities in class and racial background and one that could participate in similar activities with one another. Regardless of whether this evaluation process occurs from a distance through a catalog or website, or in person at a casual dinner meeting, the significance of forming a homogeneous family was a critical consideration for many of the men.

Interestingly, some men spoke of how this process was not one sided. Simon and Theo explained that their first child's birth mother was very involved in the selection process because this way, "she feels like she's, you know, chosen a family for her kid, she feels better about giving it away." Similarly, Art and Rick spoke of courting the birth mother of their adopted son and spoke about how they sent her balloons, flowers, and other gifts in order to influence her into choosing them to be her child's adoptive family.

Gus, a partnered man co-parenting with two women explained that while he and his partner were sizing up the potential mothers of their child, the women were simultaneously assessing them. Although they had informally broached the subject of raising a child together for a few short weeks, when the time came to seriously consider co-parenting, the women had a heap of questions for Gus and his partner, Robin. Gus elaborated on their concerns:

We'd only known each other less than a year. They didn't know us about monogamy, about being tested for AIDS recently, how much involvement we were looking to have, if we were willing to sign off on the legal aspect of the children...things like that. So it was more of a technical interview.

Clearly, Aaron and Gus' relationship with the women who are the biological link to their children is more enduring and permanent than that of Billy, Elliot, Drew, and Nico. As is described in detail in the following chapter, these men's relationship with their co-parents is an ongoing negotiation; yet the identity work that manifests within these families begins with this process of assessing one another's physical and personal characteristics. However, Drew and

Nico and Billy and Elliot's narrative fragments highlight that even if the biological mother has very little contact with her child following the actual birth, she cannot simply be reduced to a carrier or a womb. As these men evaluate the identity of the birth mother (and vice versa) prior to their selection, they forge the beginnings of a convoluted relationship that persists throughout the course of conception, pregnancy, birth, and sometimes even through childrearing, wherein an interconnected web of familial identities and relationships emerges. In the following chapter, I address how this relationship influences the ways men narrate the presence of a "mother" and connect their child to her identity. These evaluations forge the beginnings of the challenges gay fathers face in crafting an image and identity of the mother for their children (Hertz, 2002).

Presumably, gay men who create families through adoption would value the characteristics of the birth mother and the biological father, but few mentioned the existence of the biological father. For the few men who did mention characteristics of the biological father, he was a shadowy figure at most. Regrettably, I never asked men specifically about their relationships with the biological father; nonetheless, when men did speak of the father, it was in terms of a guessing game attempting to assess his racial and ethnic background. Although, I do not know for sure, I speculate that adoptive fathers may avoid discussing the biological father to somehow legitimize the authenticity of their own father identities.

Evaluating the Motives of the Birth Mother

In the specific case of men who became fathers via surrogacy, and to a lesser extent, open adoption, there was a concern as to why the birth mother was relinquishing her child. Men evaluated the potential birth mother in terms of how likely she was to carry out the agreement of parting with her birth child. So, alongside an evaluation of the birth mother's biographical characteristics of age, race, physical attractiveness, medical history, intelligence, athleticism and artistic ability, gay men also ask themselves what motives a birth mother has in her endeavor.

They questioned, for instance, whether prospective birth mothers were entering into this agreement solely for financial purposes, or because they genuinely wanted to help people in general or gay men in particular.

Billy and Elliot reflected upon the intentions of their birth mother and spoke of why they chose to employ the assistance of their surrogate mother, “she was very gentle and you could tell that her heart was in the right place. Her motives were very true...She didn’t want a family of her own, but she wanted to help other people who wanted to have families.” As Ragone (1994) suggests, people desiring children through surrogacy must grapple with whether the birth mother is motivated purely by financial means or by an inclination to help people in need of children; gay men, having few other options in acquiring children, may be especially worried about this motivation.

Some men considered if the birth mother had been a surrogate mother prior to working with them because this would confirm that she was “stable,” and that she had the ability to relinquish another child. Marc, a single gay father who became a dad through the assistance of a surrogate mother discusses why he decided to choose this particular woman as the birth mother of his future child:

She was in college, actually, and she herself was a lesbian. What I liked about her most of all was that she was in college, so I figured you know obviously she’s smart enough to be in college... and the reason she was doing this was not financial, because she actually was quite wealthy herself, but she wanted to help a gay man have a child.

Marc’s narrative illuminates the various considerations men go through when selecting the woman who will carry their baby to term and ultimately be a biological connection to their child. Like Marc’s story, some men spoke of how their birth mothers actually sought out gay men who wanted to become fathers because they specifically wanted to work with same-gender couples or individuals. Brian, an adoptive father explained that the birth mother he worked with chose he

and his partner out of a photo book because she “wanted her child to have a strong male influence because she didn’t have it when she was growing up.” Drew and Nico discussed that their surrogate mother also preferred to work with a gay couple because in her previous surrogacy arrangement, “she had met a lot of other surrogates who were working with gay couples, and they were saying how great it was.” When I asked them what was so great about working with a gay couple, Nico replied, “Because there is no baggage...[it was not] we couldn’t get pregnant and this is our last ditch, which is really what it is for a lot of heterosexual couples. They bring kind of a little bit of sadness along with them.” Interestingly, despite reported instances of homophobic prejudice and discrimination surfacing in adoption and surrogacy agencies (Lev, 2006), men reported individual women as willing and eager to work with prospective gay fathers. Thus, when gay men evaluate the birth mother, her physical characteristics, biographical background, and personality are important. Yet, her motive for relinquishing her child and her ideas about who to give up her child to played a critical role in their decision as to whether she was to become a member of the tangled web of their future family.

The Conception

Even for very fertile heterosexuals, planned pregnancies sometimes take a while to actually come into fruition. The conception stories of the men I spoke with took various forms; some took advantage of modern reproductive technology, while others were more old-fashioned and employed an at-home approach to getting pregnant. Regardless of the pathway used to create their child, the process of conception was one filled with apprehension, excitement, and anxiety for both the men and the birth mother. Drew and Nico used artificial insemination and a surrogate mother to get pregnant. When I asked them if they could speak to me about the pregnancy, Drew jumped in with:

She actually got pregnant, in retrospect, pretty quickly. It felt like forever. The first cycle didn't work. She didn't produce a viable egg, but we had flown out anyway, because she thought she did and it turned out to be a cyst...So a few weeks later, we flew back out...it was actually 5 or 6 days on a roller coaster...It was awful. And we're out there, neither of us have jobs, spending all this time and money to fly out there. She's bummed out, she wants to get pregnant...you know, she's also invested in it, and she's upset her body's not working the right way.

After waiting barely a week, Drew and Nico's surrogate mother found out that she was pregnant. Only two weeks after learning she was pregnant, she went to get her first ultrasound and discovered that she was indeed pregnant with twins. Drew delightedly expressed, "We jumped up and down, oh my God, no one could believe it. I kind of had a vision of having twins." Although Drew and Nico's conception process was rather quick, for them it felt like an eternity...a very pricy eternity at that. Drew divulged that one of the reasons he was hesitant to go through with surrogacy was the fear of having an only child and as a self-proclaimed cheapskate who would not employ the services of a surrogate mother a second time, he was thrilled to literally get two babies for the price of one.

Other men attempted to use assisted reproductive technology but were not as fortunate to get pregnant as quickly and easily as Drew and Nico's surrogate mother. Raquel, the woman Aaron conceived and raises his daughter with did not have as easy of a time with the insemination process. First, the clinic who was facilitating the conception warned Raquel about using Aaron's sperm because they were a clinic that primarily assisted infertile heterosexual married couples or were impregnating lesbian women, but only with anonymous donors. "But to bring a known donor like me into it with my unknowns, my unknown health history, long-term health history, stability things, and generally just a huge dose of homophobia." However, they were a persistent team and insisted that the health clinic permit them to go through with the insemination process. They tried for months in the setting of the clinic and after many failures and financial setbacks they decided to undertake the task at the comfort of Raquel's home.

Raquel and her partner, Abby would monitor her ovulation cycle, Aaron would come over “and do my business and then they would do their insemination in the bedroom.” When I inquired further as to how the insemination actually took place, Aaron, rather half-jokingly responded, with “a crazy straw and an empty baby food jar.” Not thinking I had heard him correctly, I asked him to repeat himself and he laughed, “Well, they used something like that. They actually took a small syringe and they you know crazy glued a straw, a straw like with a curly cue to it, that they attached that to the end of it to you know to draw in the liquid, and then they would use that.” Aaron, Raquel, and Abby relied on this home insemination remedy for the better part of two years, until finally, Raquel did indeed get pregnant.

Aaron was not the only father who got pregnant at home. Recall Leonard’s story from the previous chapter. When he, his partner Ariel, and two women embarked on a co-parenting agreement together, the first step in the process was a known-donor insemination process at the neighborhood sperm bank. Leonard remembered that he was escorted into a small room and given a Playboy magazine as a visual aid to assist him in the masturbation process. He laughed at the heteronormativity of the entire process and managed to find his own way of filling the plastic cup. However, after completing this process, he was requested to fill out a form about his personal, family, and sexual history. On the very last page, was a question that read, ‘have you ever had sex with a man?’ And ‘might you ever have been exposed to a person with AIDS?’ He was honest on the application and the very next day his application was denied. What previously had been regarded as a simple heteronormative gesture now became blatant homophobia and discrimination. Leonard had tested negative for HIV multiple times. So, the foursome took matters into their own hands and employed homegrown insemination. Pregnancy occurred on only the second try.

A final example of an at-home insemination is when rather romantically, Gus and Robin actually conceived their child on Valentine's Day on their very first attempt. Recall that Gus and Robin lived across the yard from Arlene and Shelley, the co-parents of their children. If an onlooker were to observe that yard that particular February night, they would see none other than Robin running across the snowy backyard with a jar of Gus' semen under his arm. Gus remembers that night clearly:

We thought it was a joke because we thought, first of all, how long can semen live running it across the yard February under your armpit? And we thought, this isn't going to work, this is stupid. Ten days later she did the old pink test and there it was. And then right at that moment when she called us over and announced, I'm pregnant, it was like, oh my god, we really did pull this off!

Even though gay men who choose fatherhood do not have the ability to have all the spontaneity of an unplanned pregnancy, some still have the advantage and comfort associated with home conceptions. It is rather fascinating that even with every medical advance associated with reproductive assistance; the comfort of an at-home insemination for some men and women is still the preferred way to get pregnant. Most importantly, regardless if men used the clinical setting or an at-home setting, the conception process was much more than an asexual encounter. Instead it was a night, a series of weeks, or even years filled with the intimacy of creating a family.

The Pregnancy

Although some of the gay men who were interviewed were never privy to the pregnancy experiences of birth mothers, those who had access to the birth mothers of their children discussed living vicariously through their pregnancies. Drew and Nico, fathers of two year old twins, Samantha and Oliver, became fathers through the assistance of a surrogate mother. During the pregnancy they decided to document their experience and gave their surrogate mother a video camera that was kept on often. Similarly, some participants made creative booklets and

scrapbooks as evidence of their journey, while others took advantage of modern technology to stay in touch continuously with their birth mothers who lived out of the state. Some men used e-mail to keep up-to-date with the most recent ultrasound pictures. Billy and Elliot spoke of scheduling web-cam dates with their birth mother, “so that we could see her belly grow. She would sit at her desk chair with her top rolled up so that we could see her belly get bigger.” For the most part, men explained how they were intimately involved in the lives of the birth mothers. For example, Drew described his involvement in the nine months of pregnancy: “If anything happened we got a call. If she got a cramp and she went to the doctor, we knew about it.”

For men who co-parented with a lesbian woman or women, the experience of pregnancy was one they were intimately a part. When I asked Gus about his experiences with his co-mother’s pregnancy, he explained that she was “open about sharing with me any changes and sonograms [asking] do you want to go to this with me? So I was very much a part of it.” I then explained that some men I spoke with who had hired surrogate mothers or used open adoption talked about living vicariously through the pregnancy. He laughed and expressed that he lived so vicariously through the pregnancy that he actually had significant weight gain. He replied, “I definitely had weight gain and I actually had to kind of keep in check because I could kind of tell I was gaining weight. I was eating a lot more, I don’t know. She was eating everything in sight. She gained 75 lbs. She was enormous, enormous.” Gus’ experience during his co-mother’s pregnancy is synonymous with what anthropologists have referred to as the couvade syndrome. The couvade “represent the involuntary and unconscious bodily symptoms some men report experiencing in conjunction with their partner’s pregnancy” (Marsiglio, 1998, p. 113). According to Brown, (1988), when a couple becomes pregnant, both partners often gain weight, feel nauseas and experience other gastric problems. Like Gus, men also experience increased

appetites and gain weight during pregnancy. Estimates based on research in the U.S. and the U.K range from 11-79%, depending on the inclusion criteria and methodology (Marsiglio, 1998). While men experiencing the couvade are well documented (Klein, 1991), this syndrome has yet to be reported in the context of gay men who are experiencing pregnancy with a lesbian woman who reside in completely separate households.

Following the act of conception, conventional Westernized medical models of pregnancy and birth often downplay men's role in procreation. For this reason, Reed (2005) urges us to view couvade as a social, constructive and interactive experience. Conceptualizing couvade as a social ritual, rather than an anomalous behavior of an individual elucidates how the experience of pregnancy for men is also a time when they come to terms with transformations in their identities. In the absence of social bonding rituals that bond men to pregnancy, the couvade might serve to define men's role as a father to society and secure his relationship to the child, functioning as a ritualistic experience to facilitate men's inner changes in becoming a father. Further, gay men's somewhat creative negotiations during pregnancy can serve as personal and social rites of passage for these unlikely candidates to bridge their former gay childless selves with their new identity of father.

Participants' stories illuminate how a conscious recognition of the uniqueness of their family arrangements becomes heightened during the crucial nine months of pregnancy. The biological connection is hardly evident for heterosexual men, let alone for gay men. While Reed argues that dimensions of the couvade serve as social bonding rituals for heterosexual men, gay men must be a bit more creative in their ritualistic attempts to legitimize their social ties to their child. As they experience weight gain or engage in other emotional, bodily, and even

technological processes, they are to an extent “expressing changes in the fabric of their social ties with their family, their community, and their nation” (Reed, 2005, p. 57).

Clearly pregnancy is a critical stage of forming familial identities regardless of the type of familial arrangements that exist prior to pregnancy. Still, the uniqueness of gay family formations can be seen at the time of pregnancy through the ways in which they attempt to manage the schism between dominant understandings of pregnancy and their experiences of it. Gay men had to place themselves in an experience that would not traditionally include either partner. Hence, in their everyday experiences with pregnancy, gay men are navigating the dual realities of normative ideologies surrounding pregnancy (e.g. loving a child before birth) and challenging the assumed framework of the family (e.g. creating a model of two male parents).

The Birth

Many men were in the birthing room and were able to witness their child being brought into this world. Tommy, a professor in Manhattan who adopted his son using open adoption, said when he and his partner witnessed the birth of his son, “the doctor held him and when I got to cut the umbilical cord it was like that defining moment [of my life] had finally arrived.” Being in the birthing room and cutting the umbilical cord for Tommy were symbolic turning points that consummated his emergent father identity. Art and Rick, adoptive fathers of a 3-year old boy remember that their birth mother was due to give birth on May 2nd. So, they flew in to Seattle from New York and were told that their birth mother still had a few days to go. Rick recalled, “we sent her home to have sex with her boyfriend to try and make the baby come out.” Finally on May 9th after various false alarms and some superficial bonding over meals and doctors visits, it was time for her to give birth. Art reflected on the birthing experience, “We were there when her water broke over breakfast at Denny’s and we were in the birthing room and we cut the cord.

She started screaming, ‘get the baby out of here!’ And they moved us all...she never saw him, never held him.”

Yet, many fathers were not permitted in birthing rooms for reasons ranging from lengthy travel distances, or from requests of the birth mother. Gus explained that for the birth of both of his children, he and Robin drove the two women to the hospital and stayed in the birthing room for some of the labor. However, when it came time for the actual birth, there was an understanding that it was to be a private affair with only the women present in the room. He reflects on this experience and maintained that he did not mind one bit that he was not able to witness the actual moment of childbirth. For the first birth, he remembers that Emily, the woman giving birth to their daughter, was:

A beast that day and not that much fun to be around. She was in labor since morning and now it was dinner-time. It was a horror story, 24 hours of pushing and nothing happening. They finally did a C-Section on her. I really would not have wanted to be around her honestly. I met my daughter when she was 20 minutes old.

Gus in fact considered himself quite fortunate that he was permitted to be excused from the majority of Emily’s lengthy childbirth. Gus’ absence from the childbirth experience and his respective reaction serves to foreshadow the multiplicity of ways that the women and men involved in co-parenting arrangements facilitate their respective involvement with each other and with their children.

Brian and his partner were also not in the birthing room, but remembers that “we gave the first bottle, changed the first diaper, we wanted to have that experience and the birth mother was pretty cool with that.” Thus, simply because fathers were not permitted in the birthing room did not necessarily negate them from forming bonds with their children immediately following the birth. The stories of many of these men underscore the importance of forming bonds with their future children through the physical experiences of conception, pregnancy, and birth. For many

gay fathers who had contact with a birth mother, she became much more than simply a carrier of their future child. She became an integral part of their lives, and her identity was woven into their elaborate web of procreative, father, and family identities.

Presence and Absence:

Whereas some men knew or eventually met the birth mothers of their children, other men never got to meet, see, or even speak with the biological mothers of their children. In these cases gay fathers struggled with the paradox of the birth mother being both real and imaginary at the same time. Ethan, an adoptive father of a thirteen year-old girl, opted for a closed adoption where he and his partner, and the birth mother had no contact with one another and their relationship was completely mediated by the agency. He remembers that during her pregnancy, he thought about requesting a photo of the birth mother. When the agency refused, he was forced to reconsider and explains now that, “it was [just] as well that we didn’t exchange photos...because, now I never have to feel if I see a woman walking down the street, oh she looks like the picture, maybe that’s the birth mother...it was better that way.” Ethan’s struggle with the identity of the birth mother illustrates the need to see her as real (in the request for a photograph of her) and the need to keep her imaginary (in his eventual admission that it would be better to not know what she looks like). For him, as long as the identity of the birth mother was imagined and not real, the intrusion on his daily life was minimal. Without having to really know what the birth mother of his child looks like, he does not have to imagine happening upon her in the street and engaging in conversation with a woman who some would see as more closely linked to his child than he or his partner is because of her biological connection to her.

When people adopt use closed-adoption, their child appears to come from an orphanage rather than from a mother, thus contributing to what Rothman has referred to as the “erasure of the birth mother” (2005). While this phenomenon typically occurs with transnational adoption, it

clearly can occur within closed adoption as well. Rothman asserts that for some individuals who construct their families through closed-adoption, “rather than thinking of the child as a person in a web of relationships, with families by birth and by adoption, we make the child into an isolated object, a property that belongs to someone” (2005, p. 47). Yet, as is evident from the men’s stories that used surrogacy and open-adoption, the birth mother became an intricate part of their tangled familial web. Thus, it might be safe to say that open forms of adoption, while they require complex negotiations, may be more beneficial to the building of families than are closed-adoptions.

The experiences of gay fathers show the contradictory status of the birth mother’s relationship to the family as a simultaneously present and absent figure. For some families, the birth mother is *present* in the recognition of the important contribution of her genetic material, her physical body, and her contribution to their family. But she can be *absent* in terms of a conventional social relationship to their kin; a phenomenon especially relevant in families that use closed-adoption. Although the paradoxical notion of presence and absence can be expected in any family arrangement that relies on assisted reproduction or adoption, it is especially evident in gay headed families because of the constant societal reminder that this third party of a different gender was a necessity in creating their families. In the following chapter, I turn to how fathers ultimately decided to portray this woman to their children.

Becoming a Father Through Multiple Pathways

The procreative consciousness and fathering identities of the men I interviewed was constructed and negotiated within a societal context whereby a transformation of familial arrangements was taking place. Currently we are witnessing a reconfiguration of what we have always termed “the family.” The traditional nuclear family form has emerged as the minority with most people’s family life departing in some way from this model (Gubrium & Holstein,

1990). Yet, the very idea of lesbian and gay planned parenting is a recent invention and has involved major struggles over the meaning of kinship and sexuality.

Many of the older men I spoke with discussed how their fatherhood fantasies were constrained by homophobic beliefs. In the language of the current study, this denotes that their procreative consciousness was constructed within a heteronormative context that assumed a singular type of family. Consequently it was not uncommon for these men to conceal their same-sex attractions in order to create their ideal families. At forty-eight, Art was one of the older gay fathers I spoke with. As we discussed distinct periods in his life when he thought about fatherhood, he admitted that at one time he was contemplating “going through heterosexual channels to have kid.” Art was even engaged to a woman, explaining that this was his fundamental strategy to father children. He explained that, “this was God’s plan for me to have kids...I’ll have kids and then I’ll get divorced and at least I’ll have a kid. But it came time to write the invitations and I just broke it off.” Ultimately, Art could not go through with concealing his homosexual identity long enough to wed a woman and father children with her. Similarly, Elliot, a recent father of twins divulged that:

I was actually bisexual for, actually, I was straight, then I was bisexual, then I became the way I am now. It was a really huge issue for me...I felt really strongly that I should be a father. I felt that that was a part of who I was going to be. So when I was in therapy, I had a huge problem coming to terms with my sexuality because I really wanted to have a family, and something that therapy helped with was to communicate that as a possibility. The therapist said, ‘I think that you or anyone should feel blessed to have the options and the finances, you know, the research is available.’ This made my transition, you know, made me respect my sexuality easier, and made me realize if I really do want a family, then I can have one.

The lives of the gay men I spoke with were contingent upon choices involving identity and kinship (Nelson, 2006). Both of these men could have easily lived a different life than the life they are currently living. Yet, each made a conscious decision to resist the dominant assumption that being an openly gay man was synonymous with being eternally childless. With time,

financial resources, and emerging opportunities associated with changing legalities in adoption and revolutions in reproductive technology, both Art and Elliot were able to create their desired families in the context of gay-identified relationships. Thus, the choices and options that were eventually made available to them were made possible through societal and historical changes associated with meanings and definitions of family.

As the novel familial opportunities discussed above emerged for the gay men I spoke with, so did their consciousness and identities with respect to fatherhood. Thus, it was not unusual for the fathers I spoke with to become parents through two different scenarios. Drew's experience highlights how the emergence and negotiation of gay men's procreative consciousness and imagined pathways to fatherhood are conditional upon a sociohistorical context. Recall that Drew is a thirty-five year old gay man who has four children, two through a co-parenting arrangement with a lesbian couple and two twins with his current partner, Nico. Drew not only had two very different stories to tell me, but he spoke of these two experiences in terms of two very different standpoints; the first as a known donor who saw his children periodically and second as a father intimately involved in the day to day tasks of raising a set of twins. Similarly, in chapter 3, I touched on Spencer's experiences as a father in two separate contexts. First, in the 1990s he became a known donor to a lesbian woman who resided in the same neighborhood as him. Recently, he adopted a mentally challenged eight-year -old boy through his involvement in Big Brother organization.

Finally, Robin, a man co-parenting with his partner Gus, and two lesbian women is not only the father of his two children in this family arrangement, but is also the father of a twenty-one year old daughter conceived in a heterosexual relationship that led to a short-lived marriage ending in divorce. When his girlfriend at the time found out she was pregnant and was

contemplating abortion, Robin was adamant about keeping this child. When I asked him why he thought he was so adamant, he expressed, “I guess deep in my heart I always wanted to have a kid. But with all the complications, I just ruled it out...I was just thinking I want to be a father and I wasn’t thinking about being a husband, a family.” Robin admitted that he had experienced same-gender intimacies prior to this relationship and had even joked with his then girlfriend that he thought he was gay. However, when the unexpected pregnancy occurred, this event triggered his procreative consciousness and fatherhood desires, leading him to persuade his girlfriend to keep the child. Not long after their daughter was born, Robin and his wife divorced and Robin proceeded to live his life as an openly-identified gay man. More than ten years after the birth of his first daughter, Robin became the father of two children that he co-parents with Gus, Arlene and Shelley.

The stories of how men became fathers and construct their emergent fathering identities deconstructs how fatherhood is constructed in Western culture. One’s father identity is not simply mediated by biological ties. Rather, fatherhood is a fluid and interactive process. A deeper appreciation of how men infuse their emerging father identities with their identities as gay men must be understood in the process of how men do fathering. Hence, I now turn to an in-depth analysis of how men negotiate their dual identities of gay fathers in the context of the everyday activities in their families and in their communities.

CHAPTER 6 DOING FATHERING

Understanding gay men's experiences of doing fathering advances theoretical knowledge on the social matrix of men's intimate relationships with children. The act of doing fathering for gay men causes a break in their consciousness wherein the stereotypical gay lens into the future shifts from an imagined life of childlessness to a life with new possibilities. In this chapter, I detail how when gay men engage in fathering and family, they do so in a socially constructed society that assumes a dominant type of family. Through individualized homophobia and institutionalized heterosexism, I explore how gay men navigate fathering and family in a heteronormative world. I move to an analysis of how fathering and family are social constructions that are actively created, maintained, and modified in specific situations. Here, I detail how fathers cope with the paradoxical task of making their families appear ordinary and making it known that they are unique. However, all gay families do not fit the same mold, and while each father negotiates family in a socially constructed world plagued by heterosexist and gender norms, their specific and everyday negotiations are contingent upon the type of familial arrangement they are situated.

I move to a discussion of gay fathers' experience of changing social networks, attending to the complex reconfiguration of gay identities within the domain of kinship and friendship networks. I then explore the socialization practices, experience, and discourses of fathers, specifically detailing how they negotiate racial and gender socialization. Embedded in my analysis of gender socialization is a discussion of the inclusion of female role models to negotiate accountability. Finally, I discuss how planned gay fatherhood can sometimes open spaces for innovative and creative parenting. However, much of the time, innovations are

significantly limited by the institutionalization of patriarchy, heterosexism, and the ideological code of the Standard North American Family (hereafter referred to as SNAF) (Smith, 1993).

How Does Life Change?

Having children, regardless of one's gender or sexuality can be a life-altering experience. Researchers exploring transitions to fatherhood have accentuated how fathers experience a shift in their relations with others and perceptions, often substantially altering their life course and development (Marsiglio, 1995; Palkovitz, 2002). As men adjust to fatherhood, negotiating their identities along the way, they reorganize their sense of self (Marsiglio, 1995). The emergence of a father identity is the result of changes in men's multifaceted selves in response to shifting demands (Palkovitz, 2002). All of my participants who were fathers agreed that their lives were busier, more structured, and in many cases, more "complete."

Life course transitions involve the adoption of novel statuses and roles, like father and (for some), the elimination of others, such as gay man. Yet, for gay men embracing fatherhood, the transition from childless man to parent is more complex than a simple life-course transformation that "accelerates their transition out of adolescence" (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002, p. 115). Recall that Stacey (2006) maintained that as openly gay men increasingly traverse pathways to fatherhood they are deconstructing what it has traditionally meant to be a gay man. When I asked the fathers in the interview to describe their current daily experiences, the answers I received were "we are pretty boring," "we've settled down," "we are done with the club scene" and "we are just like you know, normal dads." However, in the context of my interviews I did see more than a simple and abstract deconstruction of traditional gay male stereotypes. Rather, when men became fathers they consciously renegotiated their past, present and future experiences of what it meant to be a gay man in contemporary American society.

For example, when I asked Lawrence how his life as a gay man has changed since becoming a father, he maintained that “a gay person without children is like the greatest uncle in the world, you know because they have all this time and money and now that’s changed!” He continued by detailing how his once imagined future and his present reality are now contradictory experiences, “I imagined spending time with my nieces and nephews, but as soon as I had kids, you know, they are secondary to me...Traditionally that was the role of gay people, you would take care of other family members, you know. So, and I’m not that kind of uncle now.” Like many of the other fathers, Lawrence’s present reality as a father was conflicting with his prior imagined future as the stereotypical gay man enacting the kindly uncle role.

Similarly, when I asked Andrew how he pictured his future before he became a father, he explained that:

I see growing old much more traditionally now, whereas I used to see it as, I guess more through the gay lens, like you grow old and you’ll have, maybe some nephews and nieces, never kids, but mostly just probably have friends around you that might help take care of you if you need help at all and you’ll help your friends who are older, too. I see it much more family oriented now.

Spencer echoes Lawrence and Andrew’s sentiments when he forlornly expresses that “it was a sad thing to think about if I didn’t have a partner who was younger than me, who would be sitting by my bed when I was dying. It was a source of some sadness. I’m not sure if back then I said to myself all I need to do is have children, it was just sort of a sadness.” Lawrence, Andrew, and Spencer each spoke about a future that could have been quite different had they not had children. This imagined future of being close with nieces and nephews, a tight-knit group of friends and dying alone is consistent with how the life of a gay man was stereotypically constructed until very recently.

Recall how the narratives of the younger childless men illustrate how as novel opportunities surface for gay men to construct families and father children, fatherhood and

childlessness become voluntary constructs rather than compulsory ways of life. Furthermore, the so-called gay lens into the future has shifted from an imagined life of childlessness to a life with new potentialities that include many familial possibilities, some of which involve becoming a parent and some of which do not. Clearly, as more men come out of the closet, they create more choice about how to be a gay man (Seidman, 2004).

Whereas the closet as a strategy of accommodating to heterosexual domination is becoming less salient, this does not necessarily denote that heterosexual domination is a remnant of the past. The experiences of my participants who are fathers demonstrate that gay men do fathering in the context of a socially constructed society that assumes and privileges heterosexuality. Although many individuals today can choose to live beyond the closet, they must still exist in a world where most institutions uphold heterosexual domination. My conversations with gay men about their fathering experiences further illuminate how heterosexual dominance is deeply rooted in the institutions and culture of American society (Seidman, 2004).

Gay Parenting in a Straight World

Hereafter I advance understanding on how when gay men engage in fathering and family, they do so in a heteronormative society. Consequently, they cope with individual homophobia and institutionalized heterosexism that manifest from heteronormative assumptions. The earlier discussion in chapter four detailed how childless gay men imagined their futures as gay fathers plagued with everyday hardships and discrimination. Rather than the fathers' days being filled with the discrimination and hardship that many anticipated, their lives were predominantly filled with the mundane tasks of childrearing. Yet, discrimination did occur, and fathers were always prepared to encounter discriminatory instances, or at least were prepared to answer prying questions about their families and had rehearsed explanations readily available. Spencer explains

that while he has never encountered overt prejudice, he “was actually hoping that someone would say something so that I could practice what I have been saying in my head.” Similarly, Marc, who has a three-year-old daughter, has been anticipating having to answer questions about the absence of a wife or other female caregiver:

When I go to birthday parties with my daughter, I meet all her friends’ parents....I’m amazed that they don’t seem to ask too many questions. Every time I go I keep expecting them to say where’s your wife....but nothing has happened, maybe they just know...but everyone has been wonderful.

Although neither Marc nor Spencer encountered overt discrimination, inappropriate questions, or obtrusive stares, other fathers who I spoke with did share these stories with me.

Individual Homophobia

Lawrence explains that he and his former partner were forced to relocate from their old neighborhood to a new one in Queens because “there were bigoted neighbors down below us, they said, ‘we don’t know how they got this child and we’re going to investigate.’” While no investigation actually ensued, the discomfort of having distrustful and scrutinizing neighbors was enough to initiate Lawrence and his family to move to another neighborhood. Similarly, Art and Rick remember instances of discrimination in their son’s daycare center where the facilitator did not approve of them or their family and was taking out her homophobic beliefs on their son in subtle ways, like not changing his diaper in a timely matter. However, stories of overt instances of homophobia by individual persons were few and far between among my participants. The most common experience of discrimination was not directed to fathers and their children by homophobic individuals, but rather was manifested through more subtle forms of social control.

Some fathers noted that these actions were actually carried out by their own families of origin. Although all the fathers for the most part felt supported by their ascribed families, in some cases when there was an absence of biological ties, fathers had reservations about how

their own parents treated their children (for a similar discussion on heterosexual stepfathers see Marsiglio, 2004, 2005). Spencer, the father of two boys, one via biological ties (through sperm donation) and the other through adoption explains that his mother, the children's grandmother, always sends cards to his biological son that read, "To my grandson, love Grandma." However, to his adopted son who lives with him full time, she sends cards that are addressed simply to his name from her name. A similar situation surfaced in my conversation with Gus and Robin when Gus gave the example of how whenever it was time for a family photo, Gus's mother would line them up so that the biological parents (man and woman) were placed directly behind their biological offspring. He says, "They'll put us in a traditional sense. They'll arrange us and we're very aware of it that they're doing it."

Although I cannot say with certainty whether these are real or imagined acts of discrimination, these narrative fragments do illustrate how meanings associated with gay men's fathering experiences surface from a social and interpretive process. A hierarchical relationship exists in that biogenetic ties constitute a gold standard by which all other kinship formations are compared and deemed less desirable and less valid, a process similar to comparing heterosexual and gay families. As they construct their father identities in nontraditional scenarios, gay men assign meanings to situations, events, others, and themselves. With these family hierarchies salient in their minds, gay men may perceive actions that might not be intentionally discriminatory as subtle forms of enforcing dominant family values.

Institutionalized Heterosexism

As Seidman maintains, "gay life today is defined by a contradiction: many individuals can choose to live beyond the closet but they must still live in a world where most institutions maintain heterosexual domination" (2004, p. 7). Not surprisingly, and consistent with Seidman's assertion, numerous participants had stories of how following hospitalization of their children

due to a fall or minor accident, those men who were not biologically related to their children or had no legal ties due to state-mandated discriminatory laws prohibiting same-sex second parent adoption were not permitted to enter hospital rooms. Lawrence, one of the pioneering fathers in my sample recalls a time when his oldest son cut his head open after a fall. He remembers his son holding on to him in the emergency room and being taken out of his arms by a nurse and escorted through the swinging double doors. His former partner, and legal father to the child was the only person who could accompany the boy past the waiting room. He recalls that he wasn't even permitted to check on his son in the x-ray room. Even after overcoming the various obstacles discussed at length in earlier chapters that make it challenging for gay men to fulfill their fathering fantasies, Lawrence's experience illuminates how following "childbirth" these same institutionalized barriers shape how participants experience their everyday social realities as gay fathers.

Lawrence's story highlights how gay fathers can be forced to navigate institutionalized arenas that fail to recognize the validity of their families. Although the fathers in my sample certainly define their families as real and valid, others, in particular those who are in power, do not. Further, the scenarios for gay father's identity construction and fathering experiences include physical, spatial, and social dimensions. When gay fathers are in their own home or in another safe space, they are free to express themselves in fatherly ways and construct their identities as legitimate parents. The physical space of the hospital and the legalities associated with emergency room settings clearly privilege biological fathers. As gay fathers move between public and private spaces they find themselves in settings where others question their relationships with their children and their legitimate claim as fathers (for a similar discussion on heterosexual stepfathers see Marsiglio, 2004, 2005). Like those of heterosexual stepfathers, gay

men's fatherly identities are being challenged continuously by institutional norms privileging blood ties. Yet, as gay fathers who are neither biologically nor legally tied to their children construct their symbolic and interpersonal worlds, they face an added layer of complexity than do heterosexual stepfathers.

This example underscores how a more comprehensive analysis of gay families must move beyond individual-based theoretical frameworks in order to advance understanding of how institutions shape and define familial processes and arrangements. As American society moves "beyond the closet," gay men begin to possess some of the accompaniments of full equality. However, these stories illuminate how they are still denied all of its benefits (Seidman, 2004). Whether it is through individual homophobic practices, interpersonal negotiations, or institutional regulations, gay fathers and their families experience their everyday worlds in a society infused with heterosexual domination.

Doing and Negotiating Family

While the solid wall separating gay and straight worlds gradually begins to crumble, assumptions about the place of gay men, the place of family, and the relationship between the two continue to govern conventional thought. Dominant familial discourse and practices still mirror the traditional two-parent heterosexual family. When a family looks like a family should look, no steps need to be taken to ensure that others recognize and treat them like a family. However, when a family does not resemble the typical SNAF (Smith, 1993), tactics must be undertaken to ensure that outsiders accord them the validation of a family. As alluded to in chapter one, similar to how individuals do gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987), individuals do fathering and family. As Rothman asserts in her analysis of her mixed race adoptive family, "we're just doing what normal people do, but we *know* we're doing it (Rothman, 2005, p. 4). If you are an ordinary family (i.e., heterosexual two-parent biologically related family), you do not

have to think about presenting yourself. You do not think about how you “construct the family, weave the relationships between the various parts, and present the seemingly solid fabric of your lives to the world” (Rothman, 2005, p. 5). Yet, for gay fathers and their children, it is not obvious and these families are called upon to account for themselves. If you differ from the SNAF you have the paradoxical task of demonstrating you are indeed an ordinary family, and making it known that your family is different. Fathering and family become an accomplishment that entail a heightened awareness of what other “ordinary” families take for granted. This accomplishment does not represent an objective material reality. Rather, like gender, fathering and family are social constructions that are actively being created, maintained, and amended in specific situations.

Regardless of how gay men construct their families of choice they are not perceived as an “ordinary” family. The fathers I spoke with learned various little tricks, so to speak, to make others perceive them as a family. First, they became skilled at negotiating public spaces in such a way as to clarify that they are a queer family. They vied with outsiders asking them to explain their family arrangement and became well versed in ways to navigate the inquiries regarding the absence of a mother. Furthermore men were in constant negotiation of how to traverse the revolving door of the closet. Such considerations included dealing with coming out to their children and their children’s friends and coping with inevitable instances of homophobia. Finally fathers spoke about how they were held accountable for their gender just as much as their sexuality.

Making it Clear That We Are a Queer Family

We live in a complex world where things are not always as they seem. Thus, we make sense of multifaceted input by using schemas, or cognitive structures that we develop through interactional processes. Used as templates, schemas help us organize and process information,

enabling us to discern patterns (Plante, 2006). While schemas are useful, they can prevent us from integrating new information that does not fit within our previously constructed template. Because people generally have broad socially constructed schemas that capture what families look like, when gay men and women who are in a co-parenting relationship navigate public space, people automatically assume that they are a standard heterosexual nuclear family. Consequently, as gay fathers traverse public spaces, they negotiate how to make the vague obvious, and the ambiguous, unambiguous. Specifically, they contend with how to make it clear that their families are queer.

Participants explain that the experience of having children and doing family conceals their identities as gay men and presents a heterosexual front. For example, Aaron explains that when he and one of the women he is co-parenting with are walking down the street with their children they look like a typical heterosexual two-parent family. However, as one of the more politically active families I spoke with, they devised tactics to make others aware that they are a queer family. For example, they would make a point “to speak very loudly to people, and making it really clear that we’re not married and you know there’s another person in the relationship.”

Even for fathers in an intimate partnership who are not co-parenting with a woman or women, the accomplishment of appearing as a queer family can be difficult. Craig explains that when he and his partner are together, especially when they are traveling with their mixed-race family outside of New York, outsiders automatically assume that the two men are friends. Because their children are dark-skinned and therefore resemble Craig’s partner much more than him, onlookers presume that Craig is a friend of the family. During one of their vacations, they were at an airport ready to board a flight when their daughter’s diaper required a quick change. Craig offered to change her and overheard remarks like, “oh you’re such, you’re a good friend.”

Craig quickly announced that he responded with “what I am not a friend, I’m like her mommy, you know!” While some men try to normalize their family arrangements as much as possible by not responding to outsiders’ comments or stares, others, like Aaron and Craig wanted to make it visibly clear that their family is queer.

Negotiating family for gay fathers may be a paradoxical experience. Some men, like those described above, spoke of how children made them appear like a heterosexual family, whereas others like Drew and Nico spoke of how “nothing outs you like having a child.” Drew and Nico resided in a large cooperative building in lower Manhattan that had the amenities of a spacious playground and grassy area for children to play. When they accompanied their two-year-old twins to this space, they were the only coupled men with children. Every setting, no matter how informal has a negotiated normative order associated with it defined by the presence and status of those individuals who frequent it. As the only coupled men, Drew and Nico may have felt that their gay identities became obvious or known to bystanders and as such, they negotiated their parenting practices to account for the presence of others. This notion that “nothing outs you like having kids” highlights how concerns about the legitimacy of gay fathering identities might affect the extent that Drew and Nico pay attention to others’ perceptions of them while they are on the playground or the large patches of grass that line their brick building (Marsiglio, 2004; Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). This consciousness of being a different family than the others on the playground has meaningful consequences for how gay fathers construct their fathering identities in public and private spaces.

Regardless of whether fathers were called upon to accomplish family in such a way as to clarify that their families were queer or if they asserted that “nothing outs you like a having a child” these men’s individual presentations were always held accountable through their

interactions with others. Even though it is individuals who do family, the process of rendering a family accountable is interpersonal and ultimately institutional.

The Absence of a Woman

In chapter four, I elaborated on how childless participants worried if in their future experiences as fathers they would have to cope with the continuous question of where the mother of their child was. Because the SNAF of a mother, a father, and children has emerged as a schematic ideological code (Smith, 1993), this was an issue that fathers had to cope with quite frequently. Simon and Theo express that while Los Angeles is somewhat of a haven for gay men and has even been referred to as “Gay el-lay” (Stacey, 2006), the moment they step out of this comfort zone, they begin to feel the omnipresent heterosexual gaze. Simon and Theo elaborate on experiences at the airport as relatively uncomfortable spaces for their families.

Simon explains:

We'd be in the airport ready for a flight and you could just watch the people who are sitting all around us trying to figure it out...are you two brothers, or that's nice two dads came down with their kids and left the wives at home....or you must be the father and you the grandfather because you are older.

Theo chimes in that most people, after “finally figuring it out” actually respond with praise. However, even when outsiders respond with acclaim it is still “a double edge sword,” because while an observer might maintain that they approve of their familial arrangement, “its like, I am glad they think that, but I don't need your approval really because I don't even know you.”

It is somewhat captivating that so many of men's experiences having to account for their families occurred either in airports or on airplanes. The very day that Art and Rick were flying home with their newborn baby, they had their first of what would be many encounters with curious onlookers. Rick explains how a woman who kept staring at them throughout the entirety

of the flight walked past them to use the restroom, stopped and inquired “where is the mommy?”

The rest of the encounter ensued as follows:

We said ‘there is no mommy, there are two dads.’ She goes ‘well, what do you mean there is no mommy. Two dads, I don’t understand.’ She ran back to her seat and sat there for like a half an hour and finally she got up and said ‘I am sorry for my reaction, I was absolutely flabbergasted. I think it is absolutely wonderful what you two are doing. I congratulate both of you.’

Unlike Simon and Theo who were offended and annoyed by the gawks of onlookers, Art and Rick were smiling when they shared their experience with me and explained that they enjoyed it when strangers would praise them and their family. Regardless of whether fathers wanted to normalize their families or become de-facto rainbow family activists, all participants spoke about others’ excessive curiosity regarding the absence of a woman.

These inquiries concerning the lack of a visible mother not only came from outsiders, but also surfaced in interactions within their children’s social networks. Randy remembers this happening often when his sons were younger. He recalls a time in the context of a playgroup when a child pointed and asked, “How did you get him when there is no mommy?” Robin has a similar story. He shared that a little girl in his neighborhood once asked, “Why do the two moms live in one house and the two dads live in the other house?” Where men were well prepared to address these questions, and even expected them, they also claimed that such inquiries created awkward atmospheres when in a group situation. Randy remembers how following the little girl’s remark, all the parents in the room stared at him with curiosity as to how he was going to handle the situation. These examples highlight how gay fathers’ negotiations of accountability emerge through everyday interactions wherein the absence of a woman or mother is called into question.

Negotiating Coming Out to Children and Their Friends

Because of the frequency of such inquiries, fathers taught their children at very early ages that their families were special and slightly divergent from the SNAF. Some men spoke about exposing their children to other diverse families as a strategy to foster their children's understanding of family diversity. Others mentioned the importance of telling their children the story of their birth as an important socializing technique that prepared them to manage questions. All families narrate stories to their children about where they came from and these early stories fashion significant memories that children incorporate into their self accounts (Hertz, 2002). Gay fathers who have an absent mother must construct stories about who these women are and to help the children create self-images that enable them to "pin down the self" (Strauss, 1959, p. 33-34, as cited in Hertz, 2002, p. 6). The child's sense of self develops and is negotiated through these carefully crafted narratives.

For example, Andrew kept a scrapbook of all the newspaper clippings covering the story of how his partner found a child on the subway. He read these to his son often as a bedtime story. Consequently, he was well suited to answer questions about his family when he was asked at the school lunch table. Simon and Theo employed an agency that facilitated an open adoption so that their children would have intentional meaningful contact with their birth mothers throughout their lives. A teacher once told them how she overheard a conversation between their daughter and her friends that ensued, "'Where's your mom?' 'I don't have one; I have two dads'...'well your grandma must be your mom.' 'No she's not, my mom lives in Pittsburgh.'" Suffice it to say that the teacher was highly impressed. Hertz asserts that such customs illuminate how the "paper mother" may enter the social and interpersonal worlds of the father(s) and child (Hertz, 2002, p. 675).

The above stories point to how gay fathers negotiate family when their children are young. Yet, children grow up, as all children do and with age ensues increased exposure to homophobia and other prejudices. However, not all adolescents adhere to homophobic ideologies and practices. Lawrence, one of only two men in my sample with teenage sons, spoke at length about coming out to his son's friends:

It's funny, you assume they know because they come here all the time, they know Gene and I are together, and I think they know we sleep in the same room, but you get these funny reactions...we took one of his [son] friends on vacation last year, and the kid was talking to Gene about being gay and the kid said to Gene, "you need a boyfriend, or something" and Gene said, I have a boyfriend. And the kid said, "Who?" and he said Lawrence. And he said, "Lawrence is gay?"

Although the young boys were completely "okay with it," this situation sheds light on how for gay men who choose fatherhood the closet becomes somewhat of a revolving door. The process of coming out is a continuous negotiation regardless of whether one has children or not. However, the experience of parenting for gay men fosters complex negotiations involving the coming out of the closet as a processual phenomenon that involves multiple situations and multiple persons.

Negotiating Children's Exposure to Homophobia

In chapter four, I highlighted how another concern of childless participants was how to manage the inevitable bullying and teasing of their future children. According to Stacey and Biblarz (2001), there is some "credible evidence that children with gay and lesbian parents, especially adolescent children face homophobic teasing and ridicule" (p. 171-2). Other researchers maintain that children in lesbian and gay families are "no more likely to experience bullying and teasing than are children from heterosexual single parent or stepfamily backgrounds" (Tasker & Golombok, 1997, pp. 89-90). Regardless of which of these assertions is true is of little concern here and did not surface as an experiential theme of the fathers. Rather,

what fathers did mention was not explicit teasing and bullying, but their children's exposure to what Pascoe terms as "fag talk" (2005). Fathers, especially those with boys touched on the issue of "fag talk" frequently.

Pascoe (2005) argues that "fag talk and fag imitations serve as a discourse with which boys discipline themselves and each other through joking relationships" (p. 330). The specific masculine nature of fag discourse has as much to do with failing at hegemonic masculinity than with actually being gay, insinuating that to be homosexual is to be un-masculine. Such discourse is consistent with Kimmel's masculinity as homophobia (1994), or the notion that anything remotely equated with femininity be renounced. Robin explains that "the word faggot or gay is heard 25 times a day, and my kids hear it every single day." Note that the disciplinary effect of fag talk does not necessarily have to do with homosexuality, rather it is more closely tied to creating Foucaultian 'docile bodies' inscribed with hegemonic masculine norms. If hegemonic masculinity links gender and sexuality, and asserts that what is masculine is distinctly heterosexual, how might this discourse affect adolescent boys with gay fathers?

Randy's boys are active in sports and it is well known that the arena of athletics is one wherein homophobic discourses and practices regularly surface (MacKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000). He recalls one of many incidents when his son was on the field when "fag talk" surfaced

It's summer, and he's having a hard time breathing because it's hot, and some kid goes, 'oh don't be such a faggot, get back on the field.' I wanted to kill that kid. My son is like having a hard time breathing, and he looks up at me, and you know I caught his eye, I didn't say anything, he didn't say anything.

Although Randy "wanted to kill that kid" gay fathers must navigate when and where to pick their battles with homophobia. After telling me this story, Randy comments that he does speak up when encountering homophobia, but it "depends on the circumstances...when kids are

in my house, and they say ‘don’t be so gay.’ I say, ‘we don’t use that in this household’. And my kids know that. I’m not going to have it in my own house.”

Randy’s story illustrates how physical and spatial issues shape family and fathering (Marsiglio, 2007; Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). The public/private divide highlights how fathering can occur differently in different environments. The processes and practices of doing fathering illuminates how some spaces can be more heterosexist and homophobic than others. Gay fathers are especially marginalized in such sites as sporting events where there are blatant homophobic displays. The “public behavior and creation of private meaning” in response to such homophobic remarks are at the hub of how gay men construct their fathering practices and identities (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005, p. 12). The hyper-masculine atmosphere of a sporting event is not a safe environment for Randy to risk him and his sons’ welfare. The safety of his home, however, provides Randy the physical and social space to project his fathering identity while simultaneously wearing his gay identity proudly.

But, You’re a Man

Where fathers in my sample experienced discrimination and homophobia because they were gay, they faced further prejudice because they were a visible anomaly; they were their child’s primary parents. Many of the events and settings that fathers frequented were gendered social spaces. Men’s perceptions of fathering sites are shaped by the ways and the degrees that they perceive these spaces as gendered (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). Quite often, gay fathers often found themselves in spaces dominated by women, specifically mothers. Drew and Nico spoke about how Nico attended an event called “The New Mom’s Stroll” where new parents got together and did an organized walking tour of various sights in Manhattan. Nico was the only father present at the event. The name of the event was altered to reflect a more inclusive representation of families and because of his presence; “The New Mom’s Stroll” was changed to

“The New Parent’s Stroll.” Similarly, Marc shared that he is usually the only father present at Gymboree when he accompanies his daughter to play there. These experiences highlight the pervasiveness of the gendered division of childcare labor. These examples are not overly surprising given what we know about gender divisions of household and childcare labor. However, what was shocking to me was the subtle institutionalization of these norms that many times go unnoticed.

As a woman who never steps foot in men’s restrooms, I wondered if men’s restrooms were equipped with the same baby-changing stations I often see in ladies’ rooms. Most men shared that many of the more upscale restaurants do have baby-changing stations in the men’s restrooms; however, most public spaces do not offer these built-in amenities for fathers. For those men who do not have the financial luxuries to frequent upscale restaurants or rely on hired female assistance to change their children’s diapers, the experience of navigating public space with infants and toddlers who were not potty-trained was made difficult by these subtle institutionalized gender norms.

Even more, countless fathers expressed that women would often stop them and offer them constructive criticism for not handling their children, especially their infants, in a proper manner. Randy says that twice, once at a market and once at his son’s nursery school, women have stopped him to tell him he was mishandling his baby’s neck. While Randy hinted that this was sometimes quite irritating, Craig, a more outspoken man, displayed far more annoyance and even resentment to such women:

They walk right up to you and tell you you’re doing something wrong...once, my daughter was just learning to walk, and she didn’t have any walking shoes on, she had sandals, but she insisted, so we’re walking down the street, and this woman literally came up to us and said, ‘I work with kids, I just need to let you know that those shoes are not good for walking’... we knew they weren’t good for walking but what, we’re going to tell our 13 month old kid. You know like she wants to walk, fuck it, whatever, it’s not going to break

her ankles... What right does this woman have, it's like me saying, 'I'm a personal trainer and your big fat ass is in my way' or 'I work with hair and your hair is a fucking mess.' Like she felt totally justified, like I work with children so it's okay that I'm telling you this. And I was looking at her like, it's really not okay that you're telling me this. She kept saying, 'It has nothing to do with you.' But it was clear that she saw two guys and you know, and she thought we were incapable.

The theme of women approaching gay fathers in public spaces is one voiced by many participants. Because women are socialized to be primary caregiver, nurturers, and the like, they may feel it is their responsibility to volunteer their "innate" abilities to men who are simply not "naturally" able to undertake the task of caring for children. If we juxtapose these individual and interactional experiences against the subtle institutionalization of gender norms (i.e., no baby-changing stations in men's restrooms), it highlights how gay fathers are held accountable for their gender just as much as their sexuality in the context of parenting.

Different Families: Different Negotiations

The familial negotiations that men experienced were contingent upon the way by which they constructed their family. The negotiations of families formed through adoption and surrogacy were unique from those formed through co-parenting due to the (in)visibility of a birth mother. Furthermore, the management of men's sexual and familial identities as single fathers was distinct from those in coupled arrangements. The primary way the negotiations differed between those families that were formed through adoption and surrogacy and those through co-parenting was in the management of the identity of the birth mother. The diverse negotiations in these families speak to the unique situations and contexts for familial identity development. Note that the specific negotiation of gay coupled parenting, or co-fathering, is detailed in a separate section at the end of this chapter.

Birth Mother Negotiations

Those men who used a surrogate mother or an adoptive mother expressed very real concerns about the management of this woman in the lives of their children. These fathers were faced with the difficult challenge of crafting an image and identity of the birth mother for their children (Hertz, 2002). Ethan employed an adoption agency that facilitated closed adoptions to construct his family. He explains that he tells his thirteen-year-old daughter frequently that:

When you're grown up, when you're 18, you can... I said if you decide you want to, I'll give you all the details, and I said, you know there are people like private investigators who can find a person for you. I said nowadays with the Internet, it's probably easy to find her. I tell her that will be your decision. And I let her know, and that has nothing to do with me. I said, it doesn't mean, oh you don't love me because you want to find your birth mother.

Ethan is well aware of the social stigmatization of children born out of wedlock and the shame of their biological mothers (Wegar, 2000). By keeping his daughter informed about her history, the existence of her birth mother and by enabling her to find her birth mother, Ethan instills in his daughter ideologies that directly counteract the disparaging images of adopted children and their birth mothers.

Marc has a very different relationship with his daughter's birth mother than does Ethan. Marc knows the identity of the birth mother and further, he keeps in contact with her, communicating with her regularly. He explains that he wanted his daughter to "know who her mother is rather than just talk about her. So we stay in touch...my daughter knows her. She doesn't call her mom, but she knows that is her biological mother and this way there is no mystery."

Neither of these situations is better or worse than the other; however, I highlight these two examples to accentuate the diversity of gay fathers' familial experiences and negotiations. Hicks (2006a) urges scholars to generate theoretical understanding about the differences in gay

families, arguing that there is nothing inherent about gay planned families. A useful starting point for conceptualizing these differences lies in understanding these varying negotiations. Because gay men can choose to form their families through various conduits, the negotiations of these families are mediated by these constructions. Thus, while each family negotiates parenting in a social landscape inundated with heterosexist and gender norms, their specific and everyday negotiations differ depending on the pathway they employ.

Co-parenting Negotiations

Recall from the previous chapter that five men (Drew, Spencer, Aaron, Gus and Robin) constructed families via being known sperm donors to lesbian women. Yet, Drew and Spencer ultimately become fathers through other conduits and their most salient fathering identities emerged through these other contexts. In this section, I detail how Aaron, Gus, and Robin negotiate their fathering experiences as they co-parent with lesbian women who they are intimately but not romantically involved.

Co-parenting arrangements between lesbian women and gay men are somewhat of a living laboratory, fostering opportunities to understand changing kinship networks, the nature of relationship dynamics and social change within families. Where the possibility for inventiveness in such arrangements is clear, Aaron, Gus, and Robin expressed that although the negotiations involved were creative, they were complex, and at times highly problematic. These men spoke about their family negotiations as forays into uncharted territory where the absence of cultural and social guideposts to mark the journey engendered apprehension and exhilaration.

For Aaron, Gus, and Robin, their very first fatherly rite of passage was to legally relinquish their parental rights. Where all these men did so eagerly in order to guarantee the legal rights of the non-biological mother, this was not done without extreme sorrow and uncertainty. Gus conveys this sadness when he says, and I cried the day they adopted our son. I had to give him

up, and I literally cried...it was a horrible feeling, I felt like I was going through a divorce again.” He continued to express the uncertainty that plagues his parenting experience, “the biggest issue is control. We have absolutely nothing. No law behind us, nothing, so they [mothers] could easily walk away, just disregard us.” Similarly, Aaron expresses that his mother and many of his friends were apprehensive of him entering in this somewhat experimental parenting arrangement because of all the legal ambiguity involved. He says, “It was a huge objection on the part of a lot of my friends and family who were freaking out...you have no rights, no legal protection.” It is difficult to paint a comprehensive portrait of which states allow second-parent adoptions, since they are approved by local family court judges (Cooper & Cates, 2006). However, it is clear that as I write this, no states legally protect informal co-parenting arrangements. Such stories illuminate the exclusivity of family policy, the heterosexist assumptions underlying family law, and how ruling relations constrict gay men’s fathering identities and experiences. Simply because these men perceived themselves as fathers, legally, they were not regarded as such; once again underscoring the need for a more comprehensive theory of fathering and family that accounts for institutional regulations and power.

Following the surrendering of their rights, Aaron, Gus, and Robin embarked on a new journey as they attempted to navigate an uncharted terrain of family construction. As such, many were in constant negotiation of their status as fathers. Aaron articulates that when he entered into this agreement he understood that the women were to be the primary parents and that the day –to- day decisions of parenting were at their discretion. Yet, as time and familiarity progressed, he began to see “how incredibly controlling and overprotective they are as parents.” This has produced an awkward role for Aaron as a father because early on he agreed to allow the women to make those decisions, and now maintains, “There’s not really room for me to become

involved.” Aaron’s experience illustrates how for some gay fathers, their abilities to construct their fathering identities and experiences in co-parenting arrangements are contingent upon the final say of the co-mothers. Because social and historical representations of emphasized femininity (Connell, 1987) render women as natural caregivers, gay fathers in co-parenting arrangements are viewed as secondary, regardless of their level of involvement.

Robin and Gus echo this sentiment when Robin tells me, “We don’t really have a say in the day-to-day activities...they call us babysitters sometimes, and we say, ‘we’re not babysitters, we’re dads, you know?’ The kids know us as dads.” Robin and Gus’ role in their children’s lives was clearly tricky to negotiate given the contradictory messages they receive from the mothers, their children, and outsiders. Gay fathers co-parenting with lesbian women navigate an unexplored terrain with few normative guidelines to follow. These negotiations were unique to these three men and did not occur for any of the men in other familial arrangements. While this experience was at times difficult to negotiate, recall that many of the men who were in co-parenting arrangements (including Drew and Spencer) saw this as a perfect opportunity to “have kids without having kids.” As Robin so eloquently pointed out, co-parenting with lesbian women is a way to have the “joy of parenting without the fulltime responsibility.” As is discussed in further detail later, many men in co-parenting situations did partake in the joys of parenting without evenly sharing in the responsibility of childcare.

Negotiating Single Gay Fathering

In chapter four, I wrote about how most participants pictured their ideal families and fathering experiences as occurring with a partner. Despite their visions of a partnered future, there were five men out of the twenty-two fathers who for various reasons were fathering alone. The experience of being a single father can be an isolating experience for gay men because they are marginalized from heterosexual society, they do not quite fit with the mainstream gay

subculture, and they are without the comfort of an intimate partner to help buffer these experiences. Although there are gay parenting support groups, many of the men who attend these groups are partnered themselves. June Lapidus (2004) discusses how during Family Week in Provincetown, Massachusetts, (a week-long retreat for gay and lesbian parents and their children), amidst the hundreds of t-shirts, baby bibs, and coffee mugs that read “I love my two moms,” she could not find a single item for sale that read “I love my lesbian mom.” Marc echoes Lapidus’ experience when he talks about being one of very few single fathers in his Family Pride group in Miami. However, because of societal stereotypes of women as natural caregivers and nurturers, and gay men as irresponsible and self-involved, single gay fathers are more likely than lesbian single mothers to be seen as anomalous. Single gay fathers are at the intersection of gay men raising children, often in coupled relationships, and heterosexual single men raising children. They “attempt to straddle these two worlds but are often invisible in both” (Lapidus, 2004, p. 229).

Divorced heterosexual custodial fathers have reported that the demands of full-parenting limited their abilities to forge romantic relationships with women (Chang & Deinard, 1982; Gasser & Taylor, 1976; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002; Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). Like these men, Marc, as a single father, encounters considerable difficulties trying to find a romantic partner:

I guess any single parent, finding a mate is difficult, although it’s worse in the gay world, just because a single woman at least is looking for a man who may consider a family at some point, whereas I’m dealing with men who don’t want children...It makes it harder... but I wasn’t going to give up the chance of having a child just so that my dating life would be clear. But you know a lot of people would give that up and I understand why because you know they want a better chance of finding a partner. But I’m willing to risk having a harder time of it as long as I had my daughter with me.

However, as a middle-class gay man, his experiences are unique from those of his heterosexual counterparts, because research shows that divorced custodial fathers who are middle-class are

more likely to date, reside with intimate partners, and remarry than are custodial mothers (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). Thus, Marc's experiences as a single gay father are unlike those of heterosexual men and women raising children and unlike those of single lesbian mothers. Nonetheless, Marc's disappointment at his inability to find a romantic partner was clearly overshadowed by the joy he gets from raising his daughter. In a society that to some extent stereotypes gay men as promiscuous and incapable of commitment, Marc's experiences with his daughter complete his search for enduring intimacy.

Where Marc has a difficult time navigating the singles scene as a gay father, other men like Randy found ways to reconcile their desire for intimacy with their identity as a single gay father by escaping the confines of suburbia to the more urban landscape of noncommittal sex. For Randy escaping to Manhattan was a tactic he employed to distinguish his social world as a father from his personal world of a man with sexual desires without permitting the two to converge. By keeping these worlds separate, Randy is able to keep his family intact and not disrupt the comfort of his home.

Aaron too recognized the difficulties of integrating a man into his family. Yet, his family was more complex than Marc or Randy because he not only had a daughter, but also was parenting with two co-mothers. When his daughter was younger, he still attempted to navigate the dating world in the same way he did prior to her birth:

I was still trying to satisfy the need of companionship but not so much looking to the future...I was also still kind of letting go of my former social self and then I just kind of thought, well I don't know that I really want to bring anybody else into all this just yet.

Aaron's narrative fragment illuminates how the gay father, especially the single gay father, is the victim of a divided personal identity, torn between two worlds. As Aaron becomes more and more committed to his identity as a father, his need for romantic companionship is overshadowed by his familial responsibilities. Although heterosexual single-fathers may have

similar experiences, Aaron's gay identity adds an additional gradation of complexity to the equation. Gay single fathers struggle to reconcile their family responsibilities with their romantic and sexual desires within a cultural discourse advocating "a socially carefree, sexually experimental, brotherhood of marginalized men" (Marsiglio, 2007, p. 23).

An intriguing theme amongst the three fathers who parented by themselves without the assistance of a co-mother was the praise and utmost respect for single mothers. Marc says it best when he claims:

So I have all new respect, more respect for single mothers...especially those who are divorced... they can't rely on his income like they once did, so and they're raising children, keeping their jobs, and going home and taking care of these kids...at least I can afford for someone to come to my house and take care of her.

The experience of single fatherhood has heightened Marc's awareness of the plight of countless single mothers raising children without the help of a partner or a nanny. The life of a single gay father is isolating in terms of fitting in with other gay men and other families, but it can simultaneously heighten men's awareness of their class and gender privilege.

Changing Social Networks

Revolutions in kinship arrangements have allowed gay men to develop their fatherhood identities in a more liberated societal context than ever before. Similarly, many of the gay men I spoke with cited non-traditional family arrangements as a rationale for why their own families did not appear anomalous. Parker became a father at the turn of the new millennium. When I inquired about any experiences his family might have had with discrimination or homophobia, he retorted, "its 2005, you know and it's different now, [It is] such a different place - the world." He followed with a detailed description of the families in his neighborhood:

This neighborhood, you know they're hip to it...they know that we're gay...You know they know families with two daddies, two mommies, whatever, one daddy, one mommy, you know daddy in prison, mommy in prison, whatever. Like there's, you know there's so

many different scenarios, it's not the same thing anymore, it's not, and you know, there are so many different families.

Although it is clear that Parker lives amongst a diverse collection of families, his description of what characterizes the families in his neighborhood is still somewhat consistent with a dominant discourse of families. Interestingly, while Parker lists various family forms he does not give validation to those families that lack children. In her anthropological account of lesbians and gay men in San Francisco, Kath Weston (1991) details how by grouping friends together with lovers and children, lesbians and gay men complicated dominant views of kinship. Many of Weston's participants conveyed that these chosen families were substitutes for "blood ties lost through outright rejection or the distance introduced into relationships by remaining in the closet. (1991, p. 116). Thus, "families we choose" were tight-knit friendship networks that replaced rather than succeeded their biological families. Since my conversation with Parker was one of my first interviews with a gay father, I wondered whether Weston's "families we choose" was becoming a thing of the past and actively probed for this theme thereafter. Specifically, in an era "beyond the closet" how do gay men choosing fatherhood sustain or challenge the practices and ideologies associated with "families we choose"? An adequate explanation for such a question requires an understanding of how gay fathers' shifting identities and lives influence their social standing within their gay-identified community

Reactions from Gay Men

Recall in chapter four I spoke at length about how childless participants worried about how their relationship to the mainstream gay subculture might be transformed if and when they ultimately decided to become fathers. Suffice it to say, these concerns were not amiss, as some fathers spoke about how they experienced prejudice from their friends and acquaintances within their gay social networks. When I asked Simon about any encounters he had ever had with

discrimination, he maintained the only time he had ever encountered hostility was from gay people. Gus said “we definitely had a situation where a friend of ours called it freakish.”

Spencer expressed that he had “one gay friend who was appalled that I would give up my social life for a child and he’s not my friend anymore.”

Like all men and women making the life course transition from childfree to parent gay men experience a shift in the circles of people they socialize. While some of these shifts are intentional like those discussed above by Simon and Spencer, much of the time, these changes are simply a gradual shift resulting from increasing responsibility and decreased spare time that was once used to attend gallery openings, operas, and ski trips. Lawrence expresses this clearly when he says,

The negative attitude came from gay people...I think it was because gay people are so pushed away from children...There’s this world, this childless gay world, like you do adult things, and you go dancing, and you go to restaurants and you go to clubs and you go to museums, and there’s never a child involved, and children are demanding. They need, and they cry and they wet, and they need attention. And all of a sudden we were in this world, and you know it wasn’t about talking about fabulous restaurants and clubs...and it was about diapers, play dates and screaming children.

Transformations in the definitions of family and changes in the meanings and imagery of gay men have played a critical role in constructing how gay men see themselves as potential or active fathers. These gay men who choose to navigate the procreative realm are forging new meanings of families and deconstructing prevailing meanings of gay men. Yet, it is still common for gay fathers to experience rejection and discrimination from their gay peers who are not fathers as a result of restrictions to freedom (Bozett, 1981; Mallon 2004). Spencer articulates that “gay men have such a distinct culture and introducing parenthood into that culture is very different than introducing it into the lesbian culture.” Because of the intersection of gender and sexual mores, gay men choosing fatherhood experience a transformation in their social networks distinct from heterosexual parents and lesbian mothers.

A Reconfiguration of Families We Choose

For most men, the shift in their social networks was a gradual transition. Spencer states that his friends did not simply abandon him one day, “it’s just that I can’t keep up with them anymore so they’ve stopped inviting me...so now, I’m hanging out with parents.”

Ellen Lewin notes that fatherhood for gay men “constitutes an indicator of entitlement and full citizenship, a mark that they have been able to become members of communities not necessarily limited by being gay. As such gayness becomes reconfigured as one set of daily practices replaced by another, the new set more child-oriented and rooted in domesticity” (2006, p. 22). On one end of the spectrum, the experience of fatherhood bridges the gap between gay and straight, between men and women, wherein gay men who have children forge new relationships with other parents, regardless of their gender or sexuality. Simon and Theo express that “our closest friends are heterosexual couples...our lives become dictated by who our kids’ friends parents are.” In his study of heterosexual fathers, Palkovitz found that children often “play the role of social matchmaker” by initiating relationships with other parents whose children participate in similar activities and who go to the same school (2002, p. 208).

While the trend of gay fathers running in circles with other (mostly heterosexual) parents connects men with women, gay with straight, it simultaneously deconstructs those social support networks popularized by Weston in the late 1980s. The socially constructed opposition between families with children and those without reaffirms the straight/gay boundary. Randy expresses this border construction when he says:

Some of my gay friends bit the dust...but I’m definitely socializing in a much more straight world now...Tonight I’m going to go for a glass a wine with neighbors, tomorrow I’ll be with a bunch of straight women, because they’re parenting. They’re primary parents, and I’m socializing with primary parents, we talk about parenting, we talk about the teenage years.

While some may say that these transitions and transformations represent assimilation into heterosexual culture, I maintain that this is a more complex reconfiguration of the gay straight distinction within the kinship domain. Such experiences complicate understandings of gay community for gay men's identity. Gayness and fathering become meshed in unexpected ways; a phenomena that manifests itself through these social networks. Parenting connects these men to goals that supersede at least for the time being, those that characterize stereotypical gay identities.

Yet, as fatherhood becomes more and more of a possibility for gay men, organized opportunities for such men are becoming more common place and serve as spaces to form new and creative friendship networks based on a different kind of family. *Center kids*, *Pop luck*, and *South Florida Family Pride* are just a few of the existing support networks for gay men choosing fatherhood and are used by men to forge relationships with other fathers or other gay men choosing fatherhood. Furthermore, such stereotypical vacation spots like Fire Island are quickly becoming replaced with attractions like Family Week in P-Town (Provincetown, Rhode Island) for gay men and their families that include children. Thus, the trend of gay men choosing fatherhood offers new opportunities to form innovative networks and support systems divergent from those in Weston's "families we choose." Men relied on these kinship networks for support, encouragement, and guidance. Spencer asserts that he is in a support group for gay and lesbian adoptive parents, "not because I have problems and need help...it is about sharing things about life, parenting stories and advice." However, not all men embrace opportunities to interact with other gay fathers in the contexts of these groups. Parker contends that the support and parental networking group in his town has "picnics and stuff, but, it's a little touchy. I mean just because people are gay does not mean I have to be friends with them." Parker's excerpt underscores how

a gay identity is no more of a common bond as is a woman identity or a black identity. This is not to say that gay men are just like heterosexual men, but simply that all gay men or gay fathers for that matter do not inherently share common bonds and interests. More, gay families bring together not only issues of gender and sexuality, but also issues of race and class stratification. Andrew articulates the complexities of this when he says, “we seem to have a lot more in common with straight people with younger kids...probably because we’re going public route, and I think most gay men have enough money to go the private route. We don’t have money.” Andrew’s reflection on how the public schooling of his son places him in a network of lower socio-economically advantaged parents than most gay fathers underscores the need to address how race and class limit or make available particular kinds of interpersonal resources for gay fathers.

Because the emerging opportunities for openly identified gay men to pursue fatherhood were more salient in the development of the younger, childless men’s procreative consciousness, I wondered if emerging opportunities would serve to dismantle the kinship practice of friends as families. Yet, consistent with the growth of alternatives to the traditional family form, this was not the case. Aiden was consciously wavering between the idea of having children and remaining childless. He expressed that “there is more [to life] than just having kids, you know. Like, I could do things other than having kids and just be content with my life...I always picture myself as having a tight circle of friends, and I think that would replace a lot of that [having children].” Thus, even for younger men who have novel opportunities to become fathers, the symbolic idea of families of friends is not necessarily a forgotten practice.

When gay men form families with children, there are no roles or relational prescriptions for these family constellations. Hence, the process of developing their own “personally

constructed family of creation system” opens up a host of creative possibilities wherein friends can emerge as a support network and as a symbolic extended family (Johnson & Colucci, 1999, p. 354). As sociohistorical developments transform how gay men experience family, the postmodern practice of chosen relationships that once took place underground in gay ghettos is slowly becoming integrated with these very modern, almost suburban-style gay-headed families with children. Clearly, families of choice are being reconfigured to include families both with and without children. Yet, rather than surpassing these families of choice, children are being added into the complex web of gay family arrangements and practices.

Socializing Children

Socialization is a recurrent process of learning and doing. It is the ways we learn to perceive our world and how to know what it means to be black or white, male or female, gay or straight. Socialization does not take place in a vacuum. Social class, race, gender, and sexuality are all significant features of how cultural information and ideology are learned. Such information and ideologies are replicated through individual socialization practices. In this section, I explore the ways gay fathers socialize their children. Specifically, I attend to the ways by which fathers negotiate racial and gender identity and ideology and how these are manifested through socializing practices. I conclude this section by discussing how the inclusion of a female presence enables men to negotiate their accountability for raising children in a society that maintains children need a male and a female role model to grow up to become ‘normal’ adults.

Doing Racial Socialization

The experience of family merges sexual identity with other types of identifications, including race and class (Weston, 1991). Many fathers, specifically those who constructed their families via adoption, had children who were racially or ethnically mixed. Although the majority of fathers hinted that the black-white divide in America was simply too difficult to

traverse, three men, Craig, Simon and Theo all had children who were either black or of partial African ancestry. These men spoke at length about the ways they negotiated America's complex and insidious racial structure (Note that Lawrence, Randy, Art and Rick all had children of color who they identified as Latino or biracial but the men did not speak about race as a critical axis that shaped their familial experiences in the same ways as Craig, Simon, and Theo).

Previous research in African American families has drawn attention to how such families have developed distinct socialization strategies to offset societal pressures by exposing their children to accurate and positive representations of African American people and history as well as warning them of the dangers of being a person of color in a racist society (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002). Because the situation of white gay men raising children of color is one that has been prevalent since the mid-1980s (Mallon, 2000), workshops and seminars designed to deal with the above issues have been developed specifically for such families. Craig has attended some of these seminars and reflects on them with disappointment:

I was so mad because we did all these exercises where we have to share our experiences, and it just sounded like a bunch of defensive white people trying to make it sound like they were really open and had no problem with black people kind of thing. And it's like, that's not the issue, you know, like take it a step further, do you know what it feels like to be a black person, do you understand what it means to be a black person. Would you, if you were shown a situation where there was very subtle racism, would you identify it, would you be able to see it, would you even know institutionalized racism if it walked across your face?

Craig described in depth how he has read up on racial politics and the necessities that a white parent needs in order to socialize a child of color properly:

I've done a lot of reading about it, and you know there's a great book called, "I'm chocolate, you're vanilla," and it's about raising black kids, and you know one of the things you do is you really just sort of instill a sense of confidence around issues of color, you know ... I'm prepared for the questions when they start to come up, like why are you white and stuff like that. You know because I've taken the time to read about that.

Craig's dialogue illuminates how "race isn't just something we talk about, it's something we live" (Rothman, 2005, p. 92). By educating himself on racial discrimination, and preparing to deal with future hardships, Craig simultaneously invests in creating a connection with his dark-skinned daughter, while constructing a bond based on his understanding of white privilege. In this way, when the process of doing family and fathering is not based on sameness, especially where the relationship between a parent and child is obviously not genetically linked, the accomplishment of doing family becomes a more challenging endeavor. In these cases, more mental labor, such as familiarizing one's self with literature on racial politics must occur.

Simon and Theo deliberately employed an adoption agency that specializes in biracial adoptions. Like Craig, they were well versed in the politics of race. However, while Craig had two daughters of color, Simon and Theo had both a daughter and son of color and detailed how race and gender socialization intersect with one another. When talking about their daughter, they emphasized the need for a positive racial role model who their daughter could identify with and look up to. Unlike the other, mostly white children in their neighborhood, their daughter was described as "not bone-skinny and thick boned." As fathers trying to instill their daughter with a positive body image, both men described the importance of including other women of color into their daughter's life who would be representative of real rather than ideal (and white) female bodies. The rationale behind Simon and Theo's desire to expose their non-white daughter to other women of color resembles a discussion I had with Craig about the need to familiarize himself and eventually his daughter with the politics of black hair.

However, when it came time to discuss engaging in racial socialization with their son, a different conversation ensued. Theo expresses how "there are built in prejudices in society about black men...black boys, you know are always viewed with suspicion...and I just think he is

going to have a harder time.” Simon then interjects with a long list of examples told to him by an African American friend who has a son, summing up with, “when anything goes wrong in school, heads always turn to his son first.” When all fathers spoke of socializing their sons, there was always an underlying discourse highlighting the need to prepare young boys for the trials of life. However, with black and even dark-skinned boys, this discourse of preparation was further expanded to address socially constructed stereotypes of black men as dangerous and unruly.

A final theme that emerged in my analysis of white gay men raising children of color is how the reactions from outsiders varied depending on the space that fathering occurred. Craig details how when he walks down the street in Chelsea or the West Village in Manhattan he receives “either dismissive looks or longing looks, like oh I want to be a gay dad.” Because these areas are regarded as gay ghettos, the presence of a white man and a non-white child trigger automatic assumptions that this is a gay father with his adopted child. However, when Craig and his child(ren) walk down the street in his neighborhood in Brooklyn, he explains that:

It’s sort of this confused arrangement people try to figure out. Especially when I’m alone with Morgan (daughter), I get a lot of somewhat negative energy, mostly from people of color...like, what’s this white guy doing with this black baby. Whereas if my partner and I are walking together and I have Morgan strapped onto me, people would look at me like, what’s going on, what’s he doing, you know. And then we’d stop in a store and we’d switch and he’d take the baby. All the black women would look at him and smile, and like, oh he’s taking care of his own, and so it’s totally completely, different reactions.

Craig’s narrative fragment emphasizes the situatedness in gay fathering, illustrating how the racial and sexual composition of the neighborhood constructs experiences of doing fathering and family. Physical and social spaces critically shape the way by which gay men do fathering; a finding that is unmistakable in the specific case of Craig’s multiracial family. Further, Craig’s processes and practices of doing fathering are mediated by the cultural conditions that surround him and his family. Social and cultural constructions about black families shape how white gay men raising black children experience fatherhood. Because definitions of physical space are

infused with differing constructions of power, racial “privilege” structures the ways that Craig and his partner do fathering and the subsequent reactions they perceive. Focusing on relationships between physical space and symbolic processes generates further understanding of the complexities influencing how gay men do fathering (Marsiglio 2007; Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2007). In a socially constructed terrain that privileges not only heterosexuality, but also whiteness, gay men’s familial identities and experiences are woven into an interlocking system of privilege and oppression. Each of the white men raising children of color recognize that their parental identity could not be separated from either their gay identities or from the reality of their mixed-race family.

Doing Gender Socialization

Research has revealed that children raised in gay and lesbian families are less likely to conform to such gender ideologies that have traditionally inscribed boys and girls with the separate and unequal standards that have fostered gender inequality (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). While there is substantial research on the outcomes of children of gay and lesbian parents with regards to sexual preference, social conformity, and gendered outcomes, there is a paucity of data that specifically attends to the intentions, and experiences of the gay parents themselves. With this in mind, I now explore how gay fathers’ experiences raising children simultaneously sustain, reinforce, and challenge assumptions about gender, sexuality, and families.

Even before babies are born, they begin the gendering process, where girls are dressed in pink onesies and boys in blue. Like many parents regardless of sexuality, some of the gay fathers I spoke with conformed to these rigid markers of gender. Brian remembers when he flew to Vermont from Miami to pick up his new baby. He and his partner were originally told that they were having a boy. However, they were wrongly informed and they ended up having a baby girl. He explains “we had 70 pounds of boy clothing with us...we had to return all the

clothes to the store and switch them to pink.” Brian and his partner wanted to ensure that their newborn baby girl was dressed in the appropriate feminine garb on their flight back to Miami.

However, the ways by which gay fathers negotiate engendering their children are not always as clear-cut and simple as a pink versus blue issue. Before children are born, parents generally decide on a name for their child. Names reflect not only parental preferences, but can ultimately end up reflecting and symbolizing the characteristics of a person and even their parents. The issue of gendered names surfaced in my conversations with Gus and Robin, two men who are raising their daughter and son with two lesbian women. Gus says, “I love the name Julian for a boy. But, I think they were afraid the child would have four gay parents to begin with and that’s definitely a prissier name. So, we went with Nathan.” While the images that are conjured up by names like Julian and Nathan are certainly subjective and debatable, the symbolic meanings that these parents associated with the name Julian were simply too feminine. By calling their son Nathan, a more masculine name than Julian, these four parents maneuvered their way through a complex social landscape that is embedded with gender, heteronormative, and familial proscriptions. Whether through gendered colored clothing or something as subjective as a name, gay fathers (and these lesbian mothers) are in constant negotiation of how to traverse societal gender norms.

Sanctions against gay men for doing gender incorrectly are rampant in our heterosexist society. These sanctions are expounded in the case of gay fathers, in that they have a unique type of surveillance surrounding their own normative gendered behavior as well as their children’s gendered actions and attitudes. Because the heterosexual nuclear family has become institutionalized as an “ideological code” (Smith, 1993), gay fathers are held accountable for the gendered outcomes of their children. Thus, the panoptic gaze of the heterosexual eye serves as a

surveillance mechanism that commands these fathers to engage in self-monitoring their children's gendered actions to become to a certain extent, in Foucaultian terms (1977), "docile bodies" inscribed with normative gender standards.

This surveillance becomes evident when we explore how men spoke about how they fathered boys. Lawrence has two teenage sons, and himself never doubted his own ability to instill his teenage boys with "proper" masculine ideals. Nevertheless, he recalls a scenario when an outsider who happened to be in close proximity to he and his son scrutinized his fathering skills:

I remember once Isaac [older son] was crying, he was like 3 years old, and he hurt himself and he was crying, and there was this painter in the house, and the painter kept saying, "be a man, be a man." And my instinct is to hug him and wait until he stopped crying, and let him sit there and calm down, you know. But this man's thing was "be a man" which is I think what many people would say...So, I just took him away, and I didn't say anymore.

Gender scholars have argued that normative definitions such as 'No Sissy Stuff,' 'The Big Wheel', 'The Sturdy Oak', and 'Give'em Hell' give men an outline for how to live their lives (Brannon as cited in Connell, 1995). As an adult gay man reared with these gendered blueprints, Lawrence is acutely aware of the rigid definitions of masculinity in contemporary society. As such, he is keenly attentive to the pressures of raising a man in a socially constructed world that defines masculinity in such strict terms. In contemporary society, raising a boy to be a "proper" and "suitable" man is simultaneous with preparing him to fit into the historically and socially constructed version of hegemonic masculinity that is culturally dominant (Connell, 1995).

Later in the interview, Lawrence elaborates on another time when an outsider commented on his son's masculine development. Many years prior to the interview, Lawrence was with his two young sons at a local playground. He remembers another father approach his younger son who was recently wounded, and wailing at the pain. The man exclaimed "oh stop crying, you're acting like a girl," to the young boy. Although Lawrence was tempted to retort back "what is

wrong with being a girl?” he quickly stopped himself from succumbing to his immediate response and simply picked his boy up and walked away. Lawrence explained that he was uncomfortable with having another grown man fill his son’s head with stereotypical masculine ideals. At the same time, Lawrence clearly did not want to get in a verbal argument with this man in the middle of a public playground. Furthermore, Lawrence is in somewhat of a paradoxical dilemma: he does not want his son to have to act in accordance with hegemonic ideals of masculinity, yet he understands that in order to survive as a man in contemporary society one needs to adapt to certain normative gender standards.

Recall the discussion of child visions in chapter four when I detailed how many men displayed uncertainty with regards to how they would negotiate the challenges of fathering a menstruating, bra-shopping, sexually active teenager. Embedded in men’s child visions were rigid stereotypical constructions of gender. To some extent these rigid gender constructions surfaced in men’s narratives describing how they engaged in doing fathering and negotiating gender. Ethan, the proud father of a thirteen year-old girl explains that:

It is easier with a girl, and why I’m glad I have a daughter is sometimes she’s your typical teenager, don’t embarrass me, don’t go near me...but other times, out of the blue she is spontaneously very affectionate, will put her head on my shoulder, or give me a hug or things like that....I give her a lot of touchy and huggy and kiss, when she lets me...and so I feel there is that closeness that you would not have with teen boys.

In tune with the public scrutiny surrounding men as “predatory creatures targeting children” (Marsiglio, 2007, p. 7), and because gay men disproportionately feel these repercussions, the theme of gay men’s affective public displays is an important matter. However, Ethan is the only father who expressed aspects related to the public and private affection of his children. Thus, regrettably, I am unable to speak to the uniqueness of gay fathers’ experiences with respect to this public, affective dimension of parenting. An important consideration for future researchers in gay parenting is advancing understanding about how gay

fathers in comparison to heterosexual fathers negotiate publicly displaying affection to their children and if such displays differ according to the child's gender.

Nonetheless, Ethan's description of him and his teenage daughter's reciprocal displays of affection are framed within an essentialized framework of gender. Within this essentialist framework of gender, girls are naturally or innately nurturing, loving, and caring and teenage boys are incapable of displaying affection to their fathers.

Throughout many of my interviews with gay men I heard such essentialized connotations associated with stereotypical femininity. However, these connotations were often closely followed with a complex cultural notion of what it means to raise a girl in a socially constructed society that devalues them, endangers them, forces them into adulthood at earlier and earlier ages, and sexually objectifies them. For example, later in Ethan's interview, he goes into a detailed explanation of how he and his partner are coping with the pubescent phase of their daughter's life:

Before she was going to menstruate, we went to Barnes and Noble, there are a lot of sex education books, but they had things in it that I don't know about. I found the perfect book. There's one book called *Period*, which is all about menstruation. And we read it together, chapter by chapter, you know we read the chapter, "Pads versus Tampons" and the whole thing, and I presented menstruation to her as a very positive thing, it means your body is healthy, it means that you can be a mother someday, you know we understood it, believe me, I didn't want her head filled with nonsense.

While Ethan's previous comments point at the essentialized assumptions of femininity associated with caregiving and affection, his later comments suggest some contradictory views about the cultural construction of puberty and in particular, menstruation, which deserve further exploration. Ethan maintains that two men can easily prepare their daughter for menstruation by using proper resources such as coming-of-age books that teach young girls to deal with their monthly cycles. With the assistance of these resources, Ethan recognizes that anyone can teach a young girl to use a pad or a tampon. However, in a socially constructed society that regards such

an incredible milestone as menstruation as a female problem, it is significantly more difficult for two men (or even two women) to teach their daughter positive images of what this milestone means for their body. Thus, the issue at hand is not the physiological dimension of female puberty per se. Rather, the principal matter lies in the socially constructed nature of this pubescent phase and how it has historically evolved into a peculiar, misunderstood, and devalued stage of development.

This theme further surfaced in my conversation with Simon and Theo. Earlier I mentioned how they expressed that their daughter was not “bone-thin” and did not closely resemble the other rail-like girls in her neighborhood or the emaciated women depicted in the media. Both men were concerned that she might not develop a healthy and positive body image. Simon reflects on a recent event when “in school she drew her self-portrait and they were supposed to write something about their body, and she wrote I like every part of my body.” Theo interjects that “I want to put it upon the wall and say just look at this everyday when you get older and remember how you felt.” Simon and Theo were well aware of the culture of thinness surrounding young girls today and made conscious efforts to instill a positive sense of self into their young daughter. Like Ethan, Simon and Theo fashioned tactics to negotiate carefully raising a young girl in a socially constructed society that devalues and objectifies women and girls.

Although the gender preferences discussed in chapter four would suggest otherwise, the gay fathers that I conversed with rarely imposed stereotypical gendered expectations on their children. They were uniquely aware of the heterosexist and gendered assumptions surrounding their chosen families, their parenting, and the questionable outcomes of their children. Yet, they made conscious efforts to allow their children to explore their gendered identity as they

themselves chose to do. I speculate that permitting their children to play outside the 'gender box' may be a result of their own childhood experiences and their compulsory conformity to stereotypical standards of masculinity.

Parker explains how his young son has an affinity for what would be termed girly-toys. He elaborates, "All he wants to do is play with Barbie's dress up computer game, and I'm like, well, let him play...give him a break." Parker continues to explain that his son enjoys playing dress-up, a childhood game that would be considered a stereotypical feminine activity. He discusses, somewhat surprised that the other children "don't mind and are not put off or scared by it." Parker's son is still a child and sanctions against young children are certainly not as harsh as for older ones. It is not clear how others' will react to these atypical gender processes as he ages or if Parker and his partner will be held accountable for this non-normative gender play. However, as is discussed in the following section, Parker and other fathers devised a strategy to negotiate their accountability as same-gender parents; the inclusion of a female role-model.

Negotiating accountability through the presence of a woman

The inclusion of women in children's lives is a theme that emerged in my interviews with all fathers. Many gay fathers that were interviewed discussed in detail the efforts they went through to include a female presence in their children's lives, regardless of whether the child was a girl or a boy. However, the necessity of this inclusion was augmented substantially if the father(s) were raising a female child. This finding is similar to Hamer and Marchioro's (2002) finding wherein low income African-American custodial dads explained that they found it necessary that their children have an accessible adult woman with whom they could share their problems and communicate. For many gay fathers, grandmothers became active participants in the rearing of their grandchildren. Likewise, female friends of the family were invited over frequently to partake in the joys of playing with, reading to, and just plain hanging out with the

kids. Yet, the most common form of female interaction with children of gay fathers emanated from contact with hired help.

Many participants were of upper-middle class status and had incomes well over six-figure salaries. Because of this disposable income, many fathers were able to hire outside assistance to help care for their children. In every case, this outside helper was a female, a finding not at all inconsistent with the gendered characteristics of domestic labor (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002). Nonetheless, even in some of the cases of coupled fathers where one man stayed home and cared for the child(ren), they still opted to hire outside female assistance.

Parker explains that he ensures that there are “plenty of female influences” in his children’s lives. Their nanny, Vivian, is with the children five days a week and his mother, the child’s grandmother, actively participates in rearing his children. Similarly, Simon and Theo, explain how their nanny (although they maintained that they despise calling her that) is a principle figure in their seven year-old daughter and three year-old son’s lives. The inclusion of a female domestic worker who participates in the rearing and care of children emerged as a primary theme in the interviews with gay men so much that I simply began to expect it. Yet, as with all generalizations, there are exceptions and it was only after one couple maintained their refusal to hire a nanny that I paused to ask myself the underlying meaning as to why so many other fathers found it necessary to seek outside female assistance with the rearing of their children.

Simon expresses that he “felt very strongly that she [daughter] needed female role models.” Where Art and Rick maintain “we definitely needed female contact, which is just how we felt.” Why were these men so adamant about including a female presence in their children’s lives? I maintain that it is a manifestation of their accountability to mainstream heterosexual society. Because these families are held so uniquely accountable, in that they are expected to

produce children who are “different” and to some extent “not normal” the inclusion of a female role model might be a strategy they employ to negotiate this accountability. Whether they believe they can appropriately raise children, is not the issue. The point here is simply that others, in particular, others in positions of power do not. Thus, the inclusion of a female presence for children, and the specific inclusion of a gender role model for their girl children is a tactic fathers use to manage heterosexual domination.

The Mr. Mommy wars: The place of nannies

Fathers hired nannies to enable them to continue their career path, avoid the second-shift, and have spare time to spend with their families. A built-in bonus of employing domestics was the opportunity to include a female presence in their children’s lives. Even some men who were short-term stay at home dads relied on domestics to clean their home and fulfill the mundane tasks of childrearing. While some men were eager to hire outside help, capitalizing off the incorporated luxury of a female role-model, other men in my sample were highly critical of this choice. In fact, this argument occurred so often in the Pop Luck organization’s website chat room that Judith Stacey referred to it as the Mr. Mommy Wars (2006).

Men who were critical of employing nannies pointed to the effort, time and money that were necessary to create their family and questioned why other gay fathers would want to miss a single moment of childrearing. Brian explains, “We wanted a child, so she should be raised by us, not the nanny.” Likewise, Ethan maintains, “we decided we weren’t going to have a child and to hire strangers to raise our child.” Such comments highlight the disapproval that many of my participants voiced at having another person (woman) raise their child.

An additional critique raised by men was that fathers who relied on nannies were self-proclaimed “super-dads” who were undeserving of such a title. It is no wonder that such exchanges were termed “Mr. Mommy Wars” as they are reminiscent of heated discourses

publicized by the verbal attacks of (white middle-class) stay-at-home mothers to their employed counterparts. Andrew's assessment of gay men employing domestic and childrearing illustrates this clearly:

We know lots of guys, who the nanny's go on vacations with them, and it's like well, who's raising your child, your nanny or you. I mean yes, I won't begrudge anybody their ability to have that. But I think sometimes they rely way too heavily on that, and then they act like they are super dads of the world.

Recall that Andrew's family was the only one in my sample that was unplanned and he and his partner did not have the financial resources that so many other men in my sample did. A critical analysis of domestic labor reveals a complex web of race, class, nationality, and of course, gender relations. However, an overlooked and relatively new dimension of the globalization of childcare is the role of sexuality. While these men are marginalized for their sexual identities, their race, and more clearly, their class privilege, offers them similar opportunities to other middle-class fathers -- the ability to avoid childcare and domestic duties. Where heterosexual fathers can rely on their wives to complete the dirty work of keeping house and caring for children, gay fathers who have the financial resources can extend this gender exploitation beyond the confines of their family and employ migrant women, women of color, or poor women to perform the traditional duties of the wife.

Doing Parenting

Recall my earlier discussion of how the specific negotiations that occur in gay planned families are contingent upon the type of family pathway they pursue. Because the majority of my participants were involved in coupled relationships, I devote substantial time to discuss their specific negotiations. Hereafter I detail how coupled men, or men in co-fathering arrangements manage their household labor and childrearing responsibilities.

One of the central tasks that couples face in parenting is the division of household labor. Studies of time use have consistently revealed differences between working husbands and wives in the total number of hours worked when paid labor, child-care, and domestic duties are combined (Coltrane, 2004). Arlie Russell Hochschild's now historical study, *The Second Shift* uncovered that employed husbands worked between ten to twenty fewer hours per week than their employed wives (1989). More recent research has shown a different picture, with men and women spending approximately equal amounts of time on housework and paid labor, but that specific domestic tasks continue to be overwhelmingly done by women. Furthermore, men's contribution to housework is still viewed by both, husbands and wives as 'helping.' Although many men and women profess an egalitarian gender ideology, the behavioral reality is that only 2.5% of men in the labor force are the primary caregivers of a child under age fourteen (Townsend, 2002). This stands in comparison to the 60% of women with children under 6 years and 77% of women with children between the ages of 6 and 17 years that are in the workforce and define themselves as primary parents (Heymann, Penrose, & Earle, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

LaRossa argues that there is a culture of fatherhood, or a set of "shared norms, values and beliefs surrounding men's parenting" (1988, p. 451). Consistent with Pleck and Pleck's (1997) overview of historical ideals on fatherhood, the culture of fatherhood explores how the role of men in families has shifted from the stern patriarch of colonial times to the distant breadwinner from 1830 to 1900 to the genial dad and sex-role model of much of the 1900's to the current ideal of the co-parent who shares equally with his wife in the care of their children. The current culture of fatherhood encompasses ideologies of the androgynous father (Rotundo, 1985), or the modern, new nurturant, involved father that shares equally in housework and childrearing. The

expectations of men as parents has changed dramatically over time and is modified to reflect and adjust to prevailing social, economic, and cultural contexts. While transformations in the culture of fatherhood are more than obvious in contemporary Western society, LaRossa argues that there are little changes in the conduct of fatherhood (1988). Furthermore, Lupton and Barclay (1997) assert that while fathers today no longer resemble the image of the stern patriarch, they have not developed a new identity either. In both LaRossa and LaRossa's research (1981) and Lamb's (1987) work, father's levels of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility were only a very small proportion of mothers.' Thus, although we would like to believe that heterosexual men are participating significantly more in domestic and child rearing tasks, the stark reality is that changes are gradual and minimal at best.

More recent research, however, has shown a slightly more positive picture. Using time diaries from a national representative sample, Sandberg and Hofferth (2001) concluded that for all fathers in heterosexual two-parent families with a child under 13, both engagement and accessibility time increased between 1981 and 1997. Similarly, Bianchi (2000) compared data on married heterosexual father's reports of their time with children in 1998 to data from 1965-1966 American's Use of Time study and found significant increases in fathers' engagement and accessibility. Another analysis based on national time-diary data collected in 1997 reported that the relative time fathers in intact families were engaged with children was 67% that of mothers during the week and 87% that of mother's on weekends (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, Hofferth, 2001). Yet, this same study highlighted that despite this increase in time spent with children, fathers still made relatively minimal contributions to household tasks, caring for infants, and reading and studying with children.

Research with men who extensively engage in childcare suggests that men are just as capable as women of assuming the nurturing role and do so in ways consistent with the archetypal maternal role (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). In her book about changing fatherhood, Kathleen Gerson (1993) reports that heterosexual men can become “mothers” when they do not have wives to do it for them. Moreover, she found that when men’s capacity for nurturing is activated when the child is an infant, men continue to feel competent to be involved in their children’s lives. Similarly, Grbich’s (1995) study of Australian men who had who had taken on the primary care-giving role of their young children while their female partners worked full-time found that men’s interactions with their children were openly caring and sensitive to their children’s needs, in ways that typically are expected of mothers. DeMaris and Greif (1992) assert that men are equally as capable of providing for their children’s social and emotional well-being as women. Furthermore, when assessing some of the stereotypical roles and practices associated with “mothering,” such as housekeeping and childrearing, Greif (1985) found that divorced heterosexual custodial fathers are able to accommodate fruitfully their families and households. Clearly it is not nature, or biology that holds men back from assuming the status of primary parent, but rather, “the grip of centuries old economic and social arrangements acting on our emotions” (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005, p. 256). An exploration of gay fathers generates further understanding of men’s engagement in primary parental processes. Such research can deconstruct presuppositions that men are not natural caregivers.

The majority of gay and lesbian headed families subscribe to egalitarian ideals and desire an equal balance of power (Patterson, 2000). Although all gay and lesbian families do not achieve such equality, there is convincing evidence that such families exhibit higher levels of equality than their heterosexual counterparts. As early as 1978, Bell and Weinberg reported that

most lesbians and gay men in their sample shared domestic tasks equally. More recently, studies have described similar findings on gay and lesbian couples both with and without children (for a comprehensive review see Patterson, 2000). Similarly, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) maintain that the research on lesbian headed households consistently shows more egalitarian divisions of child care than in heterosexual couples and assert that gender and sexuality interact to create new kinds of family processes.

Dunne's research on lesbian mothers revealed that that these women engaged in a joint responsibility of housework since they were less subject to the tyranny of the traditional gendered division of household labor that is presupposed in the ideological code of the family (2000). Interestingly, Dunne also reported that it was not uncommon for the woman who was the higher wage earner to reduce time at work, thus undermining the prevailing assumption that caregiving and domestic work is inferior to paid labor (2000).

Research on gay fathers is significantly slimmer than that of lesbian mothers. Mallon's (2004) research reveals that the men in his sample used paid labor as a means to support their families and engaged in family and caregiving tasks equally. My own conversations with gay couples raising children expose paradoxical findings. Like the women in Dunne's research, some men in my study who were the higher earners left their jobs to become stay at home dads. Further, many men I spoke with simply claimed that they divided child-care duties and household tasks depending on what each one was skilled. For example, if one man was better at cooking, he prepared meals and if one man was more of a disciplinarian, he undertook the responsibility of disciplining and punishing their children. Ethan expresses that the primary way his parenting arrangement differs from traditional heterosexual arrangements is simply that:

We didn't have any prescribed role models of who does what, and we kind of did what we do best... We've been able to divide household chores and parenting chores based on what works best as opposed to any gender defined kind of role.

Rather than viewing their families as imitations or derivatives of their ascribed families, many men alluded to the excitement of constructing families in contrast to these models. In describing his family, Andrew maintains that:

Neither of us is the mother and neither of us is the father. We're both his parents... we assume all the duties and responsibilities that a typical mother would assume and the ones that the father would have taken on... I see with my parents, the gender roles, gender norms and it's actually very liberating to not have to deal with any of that. We have no strict template to follow or to live up to. Sort of, it's really freeing in that way. Almost better parents than what my parents were because we're free to, we're not confined to any roles.

Where it may be liberating not to have confined gender scripts to play in such families, this creativity in parenting does not necessarily come easy. Lawrence articulates how making your own rules and "not being on automatic pilot" can be strenuous. He elaborates, "there's more arguing, more working out... but in the end I'd much rather have freedom." This lack of rigidity is not only liberating for parents, but according to these men, it can be a way to impart nontraditional gender socialization on their children that paves the way for a new generation of families not succumbing to rigid gender divisions of labor.

Because of the dominant schema of the SNAF and the pervasiveness of gender scripts, certain norms are expected of women and of men in the context of families. Hence, outsiders frequently inquire as to who the mother is and who the father is in same-gender families. Consider a remark by Mark Grover, a columnist for the Boston Ledger: "It may be my ignorance, but I can't help but wonder what a child would do whose parents are two males; are they both referred to as Daddy? Or does the child learn to refer to one of them as Mom?" (Weston, 1991, p. 173). As irritating as this question is for gay men raising children (and even those simply in intimate partnerships) it speaks volumes about a Western binary categorization of

gender and sexuality. In his uneasiness with gay fathering, Grover points to the inevitable consequence of a system of mutually exclusive gender categories, one man would have to be the father, leaving the mother as the only status vacant for the remaining partner to fill (Weston, 1991). Such statements and inquiries often force gay men to conceptualize and describe their familial roles within the constraints of such language. Simon and Theo express that “we have a strong sense that you have to be both parents to the kid...you are just more aware of your maternal instincts and the things you traditionally think of as a mother’s role.” While these men reject the rigidity of traditional gender divisions of household labor, they still fall into the trap of relying on dominant gender discourse (i.e., maternal instincts). Furthermore, when I asked the men who had more of the disciplinarian role, they responded that Theo is the disciplinarian and Simon is “definitely more of the mom figure. He’s the one they come to if they fall down, they run to him.” Simply because Simon is the parent who cares for scraped knees and wounded elbows, the men automatically equate him with the role of the mother. In a society that holds firmly to gender divisions of childcare and household labor, the ability to move past these roles can be an arduous task.

Simon, Theo, and other men “invoked cultural associations that linked parenting and procreation to gendered difference, and not just any sort of gender difference, but one constituted through a heterosexual relationship” (Weston, 1991, p. 174). While some of these fathers actively tried to bypass normative family/gender constrictions, they were limited in their ability to express this because of ideological and linguistic constraints. Thus, despite Simon and Theo’s desire to achieve a more flexible parenting environment, there is little way to communicate their experiences without relying on dominant language.

In a socially-constructed society that offers little possibility for gender maneuvering, the ability to bypass rigid norms and roles is difficult. Surprisingly, Craig, one of the more critical fathers in my sample regarding racism, classism, and heterosexism was quite traditional in how he described he and his partner's familial roles:

[I'm] in charge of the childcare, I'm the mom basically. I have definitely taken on the role of the mother at home...in some ways we kind of entered into the situation with that understanding...he even said before we had kids like, well you have to be the mommy kind of thing like, he didn't want to be, he wanted me to be the nurturer.

Where others attempted to evade stereotypical gender norms associated with heterosexual families, Craig and his partner consciously planned to act in accordance with such traditional roles. Craig and his partner were not the only men who conformed to such gender scripts. Where co-parenting arrangements surfaced as a setting to create novel family and gender behaviors, they simultaneously fostered more rigid divisions of household and childcare labor. For example, Aaron divulges that he never even changed a diaper when his daughter was young. Aaron's comment makes me wonder if in the case where there is more than one man or woman parenting with one another, how do traditional gender scripts construct and constrict gendered parenting? While this question is beyond the scope of my research and cannot be discerned by the relatively small number of men I spoke with in such relationships, such explorations can shed light on the situations that facilitate creative, non-gendered parenting. Furthermore, while these men clearly regard themselves as fathers, it is unclear how their lesbian co-parents might view them; are they fathers to these women, or are they uncles, friends, or baby-sitters?

Gay kinship ideologies can be seen as "transformations rather than derivatives of other sorts of kinship relations" (Weston, 1991, p. 106). These emergent ideologies represent variants modeled on a more generalized American kinship to the extent that they draw upon dominant symbols, discourses, and practices. However, there is clearly symbolic and very real innovation

occurring within these families. Gay headed families do not passively reflect or imitate the dominant heterosexual two-parent family. An analysis of these gay families reveals that beyond the confines of the heteronormative assumptions that pervade the ideological code of SNAF there are unique spaces for constructing parenting arrangements with more equitable divisions of household labor and childcare.

However, the social and historical construction of the ideological code of SNAF is so inflexible that it renders other assumptions and discourses invisible. Where there certainly are new spaces for creativity and new possibilities for parenting, the same old patterns sometimes surface and to be blunt, old habits of middle-class men die hard. The ordinary activities of gay fathers as they navigate their way through the familial sphere can pose significant challenges to the heteronormative status quo through their prioritization on egalitarianism (Dunne, 2000). Yet, while gay fathers might be termed postmodern pioneers (Stacey, 2006), many yield to very modern gendered divisions of household labor within their partnerships and some even depend on hired women to complete the traditional female tasks. To be clear, I do not fault those individual fathers who succumb to dominant family and gender norms, rather, I maintain that the spaces for gay parents to forge new possibilities are simply not large enough as a direct result of the institutionalization of patriarchy, heterosexism, and the ideological code of SNAF.

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION

Relying on theoretical perspectives accentuating the meaning-making aspects of social life, and extending a conceptual framework of procreative identity designed for heterosexuals (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002), I stress how the gay men in my study construct and act on their self-awareness of being both gay and capable of creating and/or fathering human life. My qualitative analysis, based on a combined purposive sample of childless gay men and gay fathers who became fathers through nonheterosexual means, explores timely issues related to the ways gay men develop and orient toward their procreative consciousness. Moreover, it reveals how a select group of relatively privileged men navigate the complicated procreative realm to become fathers either through adoption, surrogacy, or sperm donation to a lesbian couple and experience fathering. Despite standing outside the traditional family building path, gay men appear to develop a procreative consciousness somewhat similar to their heterosexual counterparts. But because gay men cannot biologically reproduce with one another, they construct, negotiate, and express their procreative consciousness and father identities in unique ways.

Given the realities of reproductive physiology, gay men, unlike their heterosexual male counterparts, are not confronted with the immediate prospects of paternity during their romantic and sexual relationships. Thus, gay men's procreative consciousness is not activated as often or in as many ways. I therefore decided to recruit both childless gay men and gay fathers to capture as fully as possible the wide spectrum of gay men's experiences over the life course. Including younger and childless men enabled me to interview those more apt to recall their early experiences with coming out as gay and how their procreative consciousness was expressed during this period. Interestingly, although the childless subsample was relatively less economically privileged, none of them spoke of how financial considerations or concealing their

gay identity from friends and family might ultimately shape their future experiences in the procreative sphere.

I maintain that a comprehensive analysis of gay men's procreative consciousness and fathering experiences must be situated within a sociohistorical framework that addresses larger social and cultural changes. In the beginning of chapter four, I employed participants' excerpts to illustrate micro-level examples of how each individual experience was shaped by distinct opportunities, proposing that this denotes large scale or macro-level social change. I suggest that a mutual and reciprocal relationship exists between gay men's procreative consciousness and broader sociohistorical transformations. While gay men's thoughts about fatherhood and family are constructed in a context affected by distinct social and cultural changes, gay men themselves are at the forefront of instigating these changes. Transformations in the definitions of family and what it means to be a gay man are occurring as gay men increasingly traverse pathways to fatherhood. These very changes simultaneously shape how gay men are developing, negotiating, and experiencing their procreative consciousness.

Although familial transformations are occurring all around us, American culture still largely assumes that gays are not supposed to be in or have families. However, as gay men demand recognition of their own families, the private sphere of the home and family surfaces as a public issue (Mills, 1959). Gay men exert agency by negotiating, ignoring, and modifying socializing influences. The emerging phenomenon of gay fathering by choice is one demonstration of agency in the development of novel family arrangements and practices. Gay men's procreative consciousness, fathering, and family identities arise out of many contextual influences: psychological, social, historical, and institutional. As demographic and social institutions change over time, individuals adapt to such transformations and resulting identities

and experiences are shaped by these changes. Thus, while gay men are clearly agentic in transforming the social landscape, most social institutions operate as if the traditional married heterosexual two-parent family is the only family form. As such, this is the norm to which others are compared. Such normative constructions place the burdens and stigma on other family forms, such as gay headed families, resulting in these families being viewed as deficient and not simply different. Hence, the subsequent discourses, identities, and experiences that surface should be viewed as responsive to such claims.

In chapter four I detail how similar to their heterosexual counterparts, gay men experience turning points in their identities that activate their possible selves as men who are capable of and/or desire to father and care for children. However, throughout the course of these social psychological processes, many participants became aware that their procreative and fathering fantasies were constricted and constrained by structural and institutional barriers. Homophobic stereotypes about gay men's gender and sexual identity and institutional and financial barriers intersect to construct obstacles for how these men think about fatherhood. Participants' discussion of fatherhood readiness, visions of an ideal fathering experience, and child visions are laced with hetero-patriarchal discourses.

In chapter five I discuss how gay men's procreative and father identities are cultivated and negotiated throughout distinct stages and processes of becoming a father. All but three of my participants' families were meticulously planned. Embedded in my analysis of planned gay parenting is a nuanced analysis of how procreative, father, and family identities are constructed within the various family arrangements gay men pursue. I discuss how and why the presence of blood ties surfaces as critical for some men and not for others. Regardless of which family pathway is chosen, father and family identities become entangled with the identity of the birth

mother. I also explore the reasons behind some of my participants becoming fathers through multiple pathways and how one's father identity is conditional upon sociohistorical changes.

Chapter six illustrates how when gay men do fathering and family, they do so in a socially constructed society wrought with hetero-patriarchal ideologies that manifest through individualized homophobia and institutionalized heterosexism. I show how fathering and family are situated, dynamic practices that are actively created and tailored in specific situations. Because all gay families are unique, their particular and mundane negotiations are mediated by their specific familial arrangement. When gay men become fathers, they experience changing social networks. Consequently, their identities as gay men and as fathers are reconfigured within these contexts. Gay men were faced with the tasks of socializing their children in a racist, sexist, and heterosexist society. Men drew upon various strategies, practices, and discourses to negotiate the process of gender and racial socialization. A critical component that emerged was how men 'employed' female role models to negotiate the accountability of raising children with appropriate gender norms. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how gay fathers can sometimes open spaces to creative parenting that do not rely on gendered restrictions. Nonetheless, these spaces for creativity are quite narrow because of hetero-patriarchal dominance and the ideological code of SNAF (Smith, 1993). Although these men are redefining practices associated with families, they ultimately end up reaffirming dominant notions of kinship instead of challenging them. Clearly these men are active agents in their own lives. However, they lack significant power to transform the SNAF by themselves (Hertz, 2002).

Toward a Theory of Gay Men's Procreative Consciousness and Fathering Experiences

Having advanced a more nuanced understanding of how gay men become aware of their procreative options and how they traverse pathways to parenthood, I can move to a more critical analysis of queer parenting as our academic colleagues abroad have (Clarke, 2006; Hicks, 2006a;

Nelson, 2006). Aside from a deeper understanding of how class and race privilege interact to form certain types of familial arrangements and discourses, there is a need to grapple with the question of why queer families sometimes draw upon and use traditional ideas about gender, biogenetics, respectability, sexuality, and kinship (Hicks, 2006a). Moreover a critical analysis of gay family formation needs to move beyond the social and structural constraints in attaining fatherhood to distinguish what type of father identities and families are produced in these distinct settings. There is a need to advance theoretical understanding on how gay men discursively construct their procreative consciousness and fathering experiences. I maintain that attention to such discourse opens doors to new understandings of how societal surveillance fueled by heterosexism, homophobia, and constricting gender norms shapes gay men's fathering thoughts and experiences.

Consistent with these ideas, I now propose a theory of gay men's procreative consciousness and fathering experiences that is grounded in my conversations with 41 gay men. This theory expands and integrates the procreative identity framework (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002) with Mills' sociological imagination (1959) and Smith's feminist sociology of knowledge. By doing so, I anchor gay men's personal thoughts and experiences about fatherhood within social institutions and processes. However, because participants described how they negotiate gender, sexuality, and real or imagined families within explicit gendered and heterosexist social boundaries, these theoretical perspectives do not adequately explain why gay men ultimately reified certain conventional discourses, rather than subverting or at least transgressing them. I argue that because these men and their families are under extreme surveillance and public scrutiny, they are forced to draw upon the very discourses that many family scholars (myself

included) expect them to reject. Note that such discourses do not merely reflect gay men's identities and experiences, but simultaneously influence these identities and experiences as well.

Like West and Zimmerman (1987), I stress that while individuals are the ones who do gender, or fathering, or family, the process of rendering something accountable is both interactional and institutional. Accountability is of primary importance in the specific context of gay and lesbian headed families. The cultural apparatus of homophobia and heterosexism spark fear and misconceptions with respect to gay men in general and gay fathers in particular. Gay fathers are consistently viewed with suspicion because of myths surrounding issues of pedophilia, a desire to "replicate their lifestyle," and a perceived inability to socialize children properly and inscribe them with stereotypical gendered norms. Underlying these views is the assumption that gay male performance of masculinity is different from heterosexual men's and that gay male sexuality is represented as "masculinity out of control" (Clarke, 2006, p. 22). Because of these assumptions, gay men who are fathers or thinking about fatherhood are more than simply held accountable; rather, they are positioned under the panoptic watchful eye of heteronormative surveillance. A theory of gay men's procreative consciousness, father and family identities grounded in the data must account for heterosexual power, surveillance, and sanctions. Thus, I advance the procreative identity framework by including dimensions borrowed from Foucault's discipline/punish framework (1975).

In his seminal work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault expands upon Jeremy Bentham's panoptic prison. The key dimension of the Panopticon was that it was specifically designed so that the prisoner could never be sure whether she was being observed or not. This uncertainty of surveillance caused the internalization of established norms and the docile bodies necessary to maintain a prison. A prisoner or anybody for that matter is

much less likely to break the rules if he believes he is being watched, even if he is not. Foucault argues that discipline in (post) modernity creates "docile bodies," bodies which function to produce those results optimal for capitalism, democracy, and the military industrial complex. Discipline through surveillance constructs docile bodies that conform to rigid categorizations of gender, heterosexist norms, and those bodies that lend themselves to the reproduction of the traditional nuclear family. According to Foucault, discipline in contemporary society operates without excessive force through this careful observation, or surveillance and the subsequent molding of bodies into the established form through this observation.

When Foucault's framework is applied to the current research it illuminates why gay men sometimes reify dominant gender norms, "family values," and hetero-patriarchy. "Coming out" and the decreasing salience of the closet does not release gay men from the effects of power; they simply step into a new web of power relations. Tangentially, the fact that some gay men can now form families with children does not necessarily spare them from the clutches of heterosexual domination. Because gay headed families are so closely scrutinized, the actions of a few, or even only one can get "over-generalized to represent the character and soul of the many" (Plante, 2006, p. 233). The social control of gay families operates via the pervasive notion of the accountability: 'you are going to ruin it for the rest of us if you screw up in even the smallest way.'

Steven Hicks (2006) maintains that there are a series of "empty spaces" that gays and lesbians must go about filling in their own ways, wherein they can create new relational possibilities and opportunities. While lesbian and gay families clearly push the boundaries of the Standard North American Family it is pertinent to keep in mind that gay and lesbian familial identities and experiences do not occur in isolation. Gay headed families are resisting dominant

constructions of family by their very existence. However, the larger social processes that surround us, independent of our own individual will construct our knowledge and how we view the world. The political structure, capitalism, the binary categorization of gender, heteronormativity, and the Standard North American Family compose these larger processes. The complex ways that these sociocultural institutions maintain society, persist and are perpetuated independently of specific individuals or processes are critical in shaping gay men's procreative consciousness, reproductive decision-making, and fathering experiences. Gay fathers or even gay men who contemplate fatherhood come to understand their desires and experiences through the filters of social and institutional definitions and conceptualizations of the Standard North American Family, dominant gender norms, and heterosexual dominance. Even more, they are compelled to explain and confess these experiences through the only discourses readily available (Foucault, 1978). Thus, gay families have little room to resist the dominant sociocultural order.

As evidenced by my interview data, creativity does take place within gay men's families, yet these experiences and identities are regulated by a heteronormative field defining gayness as perverse, dangerous, and a threat to children and family (Hicks, 2006). Hence, it is quite common to come across claims that gay and lesbian families are inherently radical and also contrasting claims that these families are assimilationist. My data illustrates how gay men draw upon conformity claims about family and gender as much as they do rebellion ones. Themes of traditionalist ideas about family surfaced in many of my conversations, demonstrating how gay men's narratives can draw upon and reinforce conventional views of kinship, gender, responsibility, and even heteronormativity (Hicks, 2005a, 2006). Gay families are not inherently subversive nor do they enact direct challenges to hetero-patriarchy (Riggs, 2005).

I do not want to ignore or overshadow the fact that in these familial arrangements we do indeed see fluidity, creativity, contempt for being limited and typecast by labels, and an interest in self-determination. Yet, we also see a desire to normalize familial experience and to fit in with a familiar mold. However, these normality claims must be viewed in light of a larger heteronormative context that is suspicious of gay men and skeptical of their ability to construct successful families. As such, Hicks (2005b) argues that we need to consider narrative claims about family as having a set of contexts, purposes, or motivations that need to be analyzed and that such claims by gay men are attempts to achieve meaning rather than as simplistic statements of fact. For example, Victoria Clarke is a lesbian woman who researches the experiences of lesbian mothers. The interviews she conducted highlight the extent to which her participants felt compelled to defend their parenting and their family (2006). Given what we know about the surveillance and public scrutiny surrounding gay headed families I can only imagine the complex discursive negotiations that may have occurred within the context of my conversations. Even though my appearance is anything but threatening, I am still a researcher and the power structure of the interview setting is such that my status as a researcher gives me a certain degree of power. Furthermore, when asked, I came out as heterosexual and I hail from the state of Florida, the single state in the nation that prohibits gay and lesbian adoption. Thus, if we juxtapose Foucault's discipline/punish framework with a more nuanced understanding of the sociocultural context in which gay families are surfacing, we can come to a more complete understanding of how such normality claims made by my participants might function to counter any suggestion that their current or future children will suffer sexual abuse, gender damage, and stigma (Hicks, 2005a).

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The process of becoming a gay father through nonheterosexual means is often economically costly. These financial costs coupled with my recruitment strategies resulted in the fathers who participated in my study to be primarily of the professional class, and white. Regrettably, I am unable to speak to how minority men and gay men of more limited financial means may experience the process of becoming fathers. While a sociohistorical framework and a nuanced understanding of heterosexual domination foster deeper understandings of how gay men develop and negotiate their procreative consciousness, attention also needs to be given to how other axes of oppression shape how these men form their procreative consciousness, father desires, and family identities. A critical analysis of gay family formation needs to consider seriously the type of father identities and families that are produced in the context of practices that privilege a certain type of gay man, notably, the White, upper-middle class gay man. The exclusionary policies in adoption, foster care, and assisted reproductive technologies construct very class-privileged families. Further research is needed to explore how gay men's procreative consciousness develops and evolves absent the necessary financial resources to navigate these agencies. Attention should be devoted to incorporating an intersectionality lens to gay men's procreative consciousness that explores how the matrix of race, class, gender, and sexuality shapes how gay men perceive and construct their procreative, father, and family identities. A major limitation of this study is the lack of racial and ethnic minorities that are able to speak to the influences of such factors in shaping gay men's fathering experiences. Regardless of one's sexual preference, to be a man of color in this society is to be continuously scrutinized for signs of sexual immorality. There is more intense surveillance of black and Latino male sexualities, compared to white men. Thus, it might be that gay men of color engage in more behavioral self-

surveillance, monitoring their desires, experiences, and discourses with respect to fatherhood accordingly.

Pursuing a few more obvious avenues of research with gays (and lesbians) will help broaden and deepen the literature on how individuals express themselves in the procreative realm and construct parental and family identities. First, comparisons are needed exploring how gay men and lesbians construct their procreative identities and the gendered ways they negotiate parenting desires as part of the larger sociohistorical context. Second, analyses are needed directly comparing similarly aged gay and heterosexual men from similar communities/states to better deconstruct how larger social and historical changes intersect with heteronormativity. Attention should be devoted to understanding how facets of gay men's family/friendship networks affect their perceptions and strategies for incorporating fathering visions into their personal and relationship trajectories. Also, every man in my sample resided in an urban or suburban environment where they had the comforts and luxuries of city-life such as support groups, gay pride parades, and gay parenting networks. Future studies investigating the procreative, father, and family identities of gay men should expand this analysis to men who reside in a rural context. We know very little about the physical and spatial contexts of fathering in general (Marsiglio, 2007; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000) and nearly nothing about how such considerations shape the fathering experiences of gay men. Attention to gay fathers and gay men who are thinking about fatherhood in rural environments will illuminate how physical, spatial, and organizational aspects influence emerging identities, discourses, and experiences. Focusing on the relationship between such spatial considerations and social processes and practices will advance theoretical and empirical knowledge on the "fluid, negotiated aspects of men's behavior and identity work as fathers" (Marsiglio, 2007, p. 6).

Furthermore, another limitation of my study is that it relies solely on interview data. I have no way of triangulating whether the discourses that surfaced in my interviews are representative of gay men's experiences. While I recognize that discourses emerge as contextually based meaning-making strategies, it would still enhance my study if I had ethnographic data to supplement with my interview narratives. With this limitation in mind, the next logical step for my research agenda is to detail how institutions shape the construction of gay planned families and the subsequent narratives that emerge. Conducting an institutional ethnography involving the stakeholders shaping gay men's procreative consciousness, such as surrogacy agencies, adoption agencies, lawyers, and policy makers will help to disentangle the meanings of the emerging discourses in my participants' narratives. Similarly, future ethnographic work should explore the cultural narratives of community and parenting support groups and how such discourses shape gay men's approaches to fatherhood and negotiations of procreative, father, and family identities.

Future research needs to ask how and why homophobic discourses produce the idea that gay and lesbian parents are essentially different, and how this notion of difference is used to maintain sexuality and parenting hierarchies (Hicks, 2005a, p. 89). To build on Hicks' (2005a, 2005b, 2006) suggestions, we need to ask how family discourses work, how we assert or achieve the idea of family, and to whom this refers? Moreover, a discursive analysis of gay men's procreative and fathering experiences should be applied to more fully understand how gay men construct their identities as fathers through their narratives. What do these discourses try to achieve? What part does morality, subjectivity, or power play? Furthermore, we need to challenge current dominant discourses and constructions of gender, sexuality, family, and parenting, because in the existing framework, gay fathers will only be inauthentic, deficient, or

lacking in some way. Once these become sufficiently deconstructed, we can move to a more critical analysis of what types of gay fathers are produced in different settings (Hicks, 2000, 2006). This expanded research agenda will illuminate how all gay and lesbian families are not inherently anything, and in agreement with Hicks, I think we need to pay more attention to the “contradictions and complexities within queer families rather than suggesting all are challenging the gender or sexual order” (2006, p. 95).

Implications

Today the choice of having a child is available to those gay men who are able to financially and interpersonally navigate the bureaucratic apparatus of surrogacy, adoption and fostering agencies, or who choose to traverse co-parenting arrangements with a lesbian woman or women. This research demonstrates how some of these men negotiate this choice. Gay men can make the choice to father alone or with a partner, but their choices and their respective identities and experiences are facilitated to a large extent by social institutions. In a socially constructed world “dominated by powerful institutions that continue to speak of a traditional family consisting of a married man and a woman with a male as dominant breadwinner” it is useful to give voice to and integrate into our understanding of contemporary family life the stories of gay men who are consciously constructing their own novel family arrangements (Mannis, 1999, p. 126). While the experiences and stories of the 41 men I interviewed form a collective story of a narrow social group, this is a category of men who are often marginalized, ignored, and even silenced with respect to their familial experiences.

The emergence of planned gay fatherhood (and lesbian motherhood) is part of a broader process of social change that involves myriad forms of inventive family constellations (Nelson, 2006). Currently, increasing numbers of individuals, regardless of their sexual preference, are questioning and rejecting conventional forms of family life. Thus, examining nonheterosexual

experiences provides an important opportunity “to consider alternative models of parenting, gender, and relations across and within gender categories” (Dunne, 1999, p. 4). Although gay men and lesbians may never be viewed as part of the procreative and parenting mainstream, the paths they pursue will likely represent reflexive and innovative models for the diversity of family arrangements and practices in America and abroad.

My findings should be viewed against the dynamic backdrop of GLBT identity politics and the cultural, social, and legal dimensions of family building in the United States. As time passes more gay men and lesbians are likely to blaze the trail to parenting outside a heterosexual relationship, and assisted reproductive technologies may become more commonplace and accessible to a wider range of individuals, including a broader mix of gays and lesbians. At this writing, it is plausible that a more conservative U.S. Supreme Court might overturn *Roe V. Wade* (1973) leading to more babies being placed for adoption while future state and federal legislation might institutionalize legal civil unions for gays and lesbians. As American culture slowly embraces gays and lesbians—including their rights to form families, young gay men, both rich and poor, are likely to develop their gay identities with a clearer expectation that they, like their heterosexual counterparts, can someday incorporate parenting into their family life course.

Implications for Fatherhood and Masculinities Scholarship

Researchers have increasingly recognized the demographic diversity of fatherhood and the varying dimensions of fathering (Hofferth, Pleck, Stueve, Bianchi, & Sayer, 2002; Marsiglio, 2007; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005). Attention to the procreative desires and father identities of gay men extends understanding of how gender and sexuality intersect to construct subjective experiences involving thoughts about fathering, the process of becoming a father, and the practices of doing fathering. Understanding fatherhood in contemporary society requires awareness of the historical, social, and cultural web in which it is embedded. Since the beginning

to mid 1900's, there has been a call for men to be more involved as parents (Pleck and Pleck, 1997). Yet, despite these changing ideals of fatherhood, the primary responsibility of fathers is still that of the family's provider and fathers for the most part are often a "shadowy figure at best, difficult to understand and typically unavailable" (Daly, 1995, p. 21).

Also, although more people are moving toward the idea that fathers should be more involved with children; demographic, economic, and societal changes have resulted in fathers being less involved with their children than at any time in U.S. history (Arendall, 2000). Despite images of the new nurturant father who is emotionally attuned to his children, survey research using large representative samples reveals that increases in average time fathers spend with their children are actually quite small (Coltrane, 1995). The ideal of the father as co-parent and the modern nurturing father are in fact quite mythological. Fathers are spending more time with their children, but such time usually entails 'fun' activities and fathers' share of responsibility for their children is still substantially lower than that of mothers (Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Townsend, 2002). Furthermore, Furstenberg (1988) distinguishes between "good dads" and "bad dads." Good dads refers to the image of new nurturant father, while bad dads are those who are "physically, emotionally, and financially absent from their families" (Coltrane, 1995, p. 257). According to Coltrane (1995), fathers in America today are simultaneously present and absent, because there are almost as many "deadbeat dads" as there are "new" fathers. When subcultural groups are singled out for attention with regards to the debate on fatherhood, they are frequently positioned as negative comparisons to the new nurturant father, as absent or bad fathers.

Fatherhood is "a continuously changing ontological state, a site of competing discourses and desires that can never be fully and neatly shaped into a single identity and that involves oscillation back and forth between various modes of subject positions" (Lupton & Barclay, 1997,

p. 16). Turning the spotlight on gay fathers and young gay men who are fantasizing fatherhood can help to deconstruct the prevailing and contradictory images of fatherhood in contemporary America in myriad ways. Gay men who choose to create families challenge societal notions about fatherhood even more so than lesbian mothers because the desire to father is not seen as biologically intrinsic to men. Furthermore, traditional heterosexual masculinity, or hegemonic masculinity is conceptualized as anti-feminine and non-nurturing (Lewin, 2006). Where gay men may never quite attain hegemonic masculine status (Connell, 1987), their experiences in the procreative and fathering realms elucidate how dominant constructions of masculinity enable and constrict their subjective experiences and the social and public perceptions of these subjectivities. Gay men may strive to achieve statuses that they believe to be consistent with hegemonic constructions of masculinity, such as securing a biological attachment to their children or relying on nannies or co-mothers to do stereotypical women's work. As is elucidated by my research, gay fathers embody a series of contradictions with respect to gender and family norms. However, masculinities evolve and categories of men can adapt their individual experiences to approximate the hegemonic mold. So too, hegemonic masculinity is a dynamic and fluid construction, it sometimes shifts to embrace alternative masculinities, forging what Demetriou (2001) has termed "hybrid masculinities."

Attention to gay fathers fosters awareness of the public/private duality of fathering (Marsiglio, 2007). Much of fathering takes place in the space of a home; however, a large and often overlooked amount of fathering occurs outside the home and is experienced on the streets, in playgrounds, and in schools. Whether it is in public or in private, all men, to some extent are viewed with suspicion when it comes to their intimate interactions with children. However, as is evinced by my research, such imagery and consequences are exacerbated in the specific case of

gay men. Yet, I can't help but wonder if as more and more gay men choose fatherhood, will their "normality" challenge such disproportionate scrutiny? Will imagery of those gay men who are legitimate fathers overshadow images of gay men as sexual predators and pedophiles? Further understanding of this interplay of gender, sexuality, and familial processes will help draw attention to and explicate the fluidity of both masculinity and fathering.

A Note on Difference

Finally, a critical implication of any research on queer families is the underlying idea of difference. Underscoring political and social discourses about queer parenting suggests gay and lesbian families are somehow different from normative heterosexual families. Why is it that the question of difference has become so central in debates about gay fatherhood? Underlying this debate are three critical assumptions: gay men are different from heterosexual men, these differences are passed on to their children, and children exhibit gender and sexuality outcomes differently from those who live with heterosexual parents (Hicks, 2005a). However, the idea of difference needs to be evaluated. According to Hicks, in order for this debate to occur at all, "sexuality and gender have to be seen as obvious entities that can be isolated and tested, rather than very complex and socially constructed sets of ideas" (2005a, p. 160). Difference is the effect of a range of discourses that locate, define, and maintain the very idea of the gay man and his family as different, subordinate, and even subversive. Difference is not a set of essential characteristics, since behind these assertions of difference rests standards against which these are determined: heteronormative assumptions that construct lesbians and gay men as the other. I am not maintaining that there is no such a thing as difference; however, this difference is socially constructed as a result of the surveillance of dominated groups by dominant ones. Society organizes sexual discourse to construct hierarchies in which traditional and heteronormative family forms are dominant; a construction that is reinforced by textual, legal, and social practices

(Clarke, 2002; Hicks, 2005a). The result is that this very idea of difference shapes our knowledge, discourse, assumptions, and practices associated with reality. Deconstructing these socially constructed ideologies of sameness and difference in queer families should reveal nuanced understandings of how power and social control operate to shape family, gender, and sexualities scholarship and subjectivities.

APPENDIX A
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

What year were you born? _____

Where were you born? _____

What is your religion? _____

What would you describe your ethnicity as? (Check all that apply)

White Non-Hispanic

African-American

Latino

--If Latino, Please Check Below:

Cuban

Puerto Rican

Mexican

Colombian

Argentine

Venezuelan

Other

Asian

--If Asian Please Check Below

Chinese

Japanese

Korean

Vietnamese

Thai

Other

American Indian

Other (please specify)

How many years of formal education have you completed?

Did not complete high school

Completed high school

Some college

College degree

Masters' degree or equivalent

Ph.D., M.D., or J.D.

What is your primary occupation or main source of income? _____

What is your personal annual income? (please check one)

- under 15,000
- 15,000-29,999
- 30,000-44,999
- 45,000-59,999
- 60,000-74,999
- 75,000 or more

Please check your **heterosexual relationship history** in one or more of the categories below:

- Never Married
- Divorced
- Separated
- Married

Please check your **current relationship history** in one or more of the categories below:

- Single
- In an intimate/partnered relationship

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE NON-FATHERS

As a gay man, tell me about your life and how you see your future.

I want to talk a little about your sexuality.

- To what extent are you open about your sexuality?
- To what extent are you open about your sexuality to your family? Friends? Work colleagues?

I want to discuss your experiences with your own parents...

- What was your experience like with your parents?
- What was your relationship like with your father?

Now, I want to discuss some of your experiences with children...

To what extent do you have any close friends, family members or work colleagues who have children?

- How much time would you say you spend with children?
- In what type of context(s)?
- Can you tell me about some of your experiences with children?

Do you have any gay friends or acquaintances that have children?

- Can you tell me about some of their experiences?
- How has the rest of the gay community reacted to them?
- Do they have children from former heterosexual relationships or from relations with gay partners?
- If they have children from gay partnerships, how did they obtain these children?
- What do you think about their experiences?

Now, I am going to ask you some questions about yourself...

- Can you talk to me about how you learned about your ability to procreate?
- Can you talk to me about what this ability meant to you?

- How often do you think about this ability?

Can you talk to me about any thoughts you have had about becoming a father?

- What sorts of things influence these thoughts?
- Can you talk to me about a time when you first thought about fatherhood?
- Can you tell me about some of these thoughts?
- To what extent have these thoughts changed with your sexuality once you discovered or declared your sexual orientation?

Are you involved in a romantic relationship at the present time?

- To what extent do you think about fatherhood in the context of this relationship?
- To what extent do you discuss fatherhood with your romantic partner?
- How was this conversation initiated?
- How did this make you feel?
- What kind of issues come up?
- To what extent have conversations about fatherhood come up in any other relationships? Gay relationships? Heterosexual relationships?

If you do want a child, how would you go about obtaining him or her?

- What are your thoughts on being a biological father?
- What are your thoughts on adoption?
- What are your thoughts on modern techniques such as surrogacy, sperm donation, in vitro fertilization and others that allow individuals to have children without having sex?
- To what extent have you ever contemplated either of these?

How do you think your experience as a father might be different from a heterosexual couple or a single parent?

To what extent can you picture growing old without a child or children?

I am going to ask you a bit more about children.

- How do you picture your child? Boy or girl?

- What do they look like?

How comfortable in general did you feel discussing these issues with me?

- Would you feel more comfortable talking to another interviewer with different characteristics (age, sexuality, race, and gender)? Why?
- There is not a lot of research in this area and what I am doing is very exploratory. I am hoping I am asking the right questions, but since I am not a gay man, you should know better than I know. So I want to ask you, what other kinds of things should I be asking?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE FATHERS

As a gay man, tell me about your life and how you see your future.

I want to talk a little about your sexuality.

- To what extent are you open about your sexuality?
- To what extent are you open about your sexuality to your family? Friends? Work colleagues?

I want to discuss your experiences with your own parents...

- What was your experience like with your parents?
- What was your relationship like with your father?

Now, I want to discuss some of your experiences with children before you became a father.

- To what extent do you have any close friends, family members or work colleagues who have children?
- How much time would you say you spent with children prior to becoming a father?
- In what type of context(s)?
- Can you tell me about some of these experiences with children?

Do you have any gay friends or acquaintances that have children?

- Can you tell me about some of their experiences?
- How has the rest of the gay community reacted to them?
- Do they have children from former heterosexual relationships or from relations with gay partners?
- If they have children from gay partnerships, how did they obtain these children?
- What do you think about their experiences?

Now, I am going to ask you some questions about yourself...

- Can you talk to me about how you learned about your ability to procreate?
- Can you talk to me about what this ability meant to you?
- How often do you think about this ability?

Before you became a father, to what extent could you picture growing old without a child or children?

I am going to ask you a bit more about children.

- Before you became a father, how did you picture your child? Boy or girl?
- What did they look like?
- To what extent have your visions or ideas changed with fatherhood?

Can you talk to me about any thoughts you had about becoming a father prior to your parenting experiences?

- What sorts of things influenced these thoughts?
- Can you talk to me about a time when you first thought about fatherhood?
- Can you tell me about some of these thoughts?
- To what extent did these thoughts changed with your sexuality once you discovered or declared your sexual orientation?

Are you involved in a romantic relationship at the present time?

- Is this the relationship you were in when you decided to father?
- What role does fatherhood currently play in the context of this relationship?
- To what extent did you or do you discuss fatherhood with your romantic partner?
- How was this conversation initiated?
- How did this make you feel?

- What kind of issues come up?
- To what extent have conversations about fatherhood come up in any other relationships?
Gay relationships? Heterosexual relationships?

Can you talk to me about your experiences that led you to becoming a father?

- What are or were your thoughts on being a biological father?
- What are or were your thoughts on adoption?
- What are or were your thoughts on modern techniques such as surrogacy, sperm donation, in vitro fertilization and others that allow individuals to have children without having sex?
- To what extent have you ever contemplated either of these?
- To what extent did you use any of these means to become a father?
- If you do want another child, how would you go about obtaining him or her?

To what extent do you think your experience as a father is different from the experience of a heterosexual couple or a single-parent raising a child?

As a gay father, can you talk to me about some of the reactions you have received from others?

- Parents?
- Other family members?
- Gay friends?
- Non-gay friends?
- Work colleagues?

How do these reactions make you feel?

How comfortable in general did you feel discussing these issues with me?

- Would you feel more comfortable talking to another interviewer with different characteristics (age, sexuality, race, and gender)? Why?
- There is not a lot of research in this area and what I am doing is very exploratory. I am hoping I am asking the right questions, but since I am not a gay man, you should know better than I know. So I want to ask you, what other kinds of things should I be asking?

APPENDIX D
FLYER FOR RECRUITMENT

*******Interviews*******

**Wanted For University of Florida Study
Gay Men and Their Parenting Motivations**

Who Is Eligible?

Non-Fathers

- Gay men between the ages of 18-50
- Either single or in a committed relationship
- Do not need to be thinking about fatherhood!

Fathers

- Gay men who have fathered through adoption or some other means than heterosexual intercourse

What is the Study About?

Gay men will be asked questions about their reproductive decision-making and fatherhood motivations in a face-to-face interview

How to Arrange an Interview?

If you are eligible and would like to participate, please call or e-mail the study director to discuss the possibility of scheduling an interview. Please leave your name, phone number(s), e-mail address, and the best time to call you:

Dana Berkowitz, M.A., Sociology Department, University of Florida

Personal Mobile Phone: 352-246-1108

Office phone: 352-392-1065 ext. 241

E-Mail: dberk@ufl.edu

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