Parental aspirations among young gay men

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PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS AMONG YOUNG GAY MEN

by

Daniel Farr

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University of Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
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Doctor of Philosophy

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Parental Aspirations Among Young Gay Men

by

Daniel Farr

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Abstract

Today’s young gay men are experiencing life choice options in manners greater than any prior generation of gay men, particularly when considering family building. These men are coming out at earlier ages and facing a socio-political world of increased legal rights and opportunities, among which is the opportunity to parent outside of a heterosexual past. Informed by interviews with 51 gay men, aged 18-35, this research explores the personal views of today’s young gay men about parenting. While past research has primarily focused upon the views of gay men who were already parenting, thus recalling past aspirations, this project focuses on the current views of gay men who have yet to pursue parenthood. Central discussions have explored the views of gay men who desire or are yet undecided about wanting children, as well as those men who actively speak to a preference to remain childfree. Among these three groups, how they are personally constructing their parental desires, what they perceive the pros and cons of parenting to be, and the manner in which their aspiration influences intimate and family relationships are examined. These views are additionally contextualized to the men’s cultural observations of media and political climate. Despite social and historic assumptions that a gay identity implies a childfree path, these men particularly speak to the emergent and active consideration of parenthood by many. One may no longer presume a gay identity is incompatible with a fathering identity—it is a choice to be made at the individual level.
Chapter One: Introduction

“Fathers are a biological necessity, but a social accident.”
~Margaret Mead, 1949

“…there is a world of difference between beginning to imagine the possibilities of non-heterosexual parenting and being able to negotiate the economic, political, and biological realities involved in realizing those opportunities.” (Donovan and Wilson 2005, p.133)

“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.” (Drew, a 35-year-old recent father from Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007, p.377)

Children have always played a role in the family lives of gay men. These men are the siblings, the uncles, the family friends, and the fathers of innumerable children. Yet the role of gay men in the lives of children is often regarded with suspicion. Men who wish to parent outside of a heterosexual relationship may be particularly suspect—why would a gay man possibly want children? Notwithstanding the negative stereotypes and beliefs about gay men and children, gay men are increasingly visible as parents (Sullivan and Basques 1999) and are finding tremendous joy and fulfillment in their roles as fathers (Strah with Margolis 2003).

Despite the number of gay men who have positive beliefs about and experiences as parents, many still find the idea of a *gay father* to be oxymoronic (Bozett 1987). The suggested incompatibility of a gay ‘sexual identity’ and a ‘parenting identity’ is enforced by various social forces. In past decades, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, involvement in a gay community may have been integral to one’s construction of a gay identity. Among many of the gay communities of this era there were few visible gay and lesbian families with children, with those becoming parents simultaneous to a gay or lesbian identity being especially rare. For many, a gay social life was situated around partying and casual sex, with less emphasis on long
term monogamous relationships and parenting. Additionally, for those gay men who may have parented in prior heterosexual relationships, it may have been necessary to actively hide a gay identity to maintain paternal rights and access to their children. This led to many gay fathers leading dual, lives segregating their gay social lives from their lives as fathers.

Men seeking entrance into the gay community found limited models for lifestyle options. Many report that part of coming out meant they had to mourn the life options, such as parenting, that they perceived as unavailable or lost (Mallon 2006). These men were entering a social world absent of children. Given the social rewards allocated to those adhering to cultural expectations, many men may have chosen to hide their parental aspirations for fear of rejection. When one has no examples of parenting and one is raised in a social world with negative beliefs about gay men and children (Barret and Robinson 1990), how can one even imagine parenting as an option? Ultimately, it is the lack of visible gay fathers that may lead younger gay men to conclude that it is not an option fostering a cycle of gay men choosing not to parent.

Despite the social obstacles involved in the process of choosing to parent, more gay men are now parenting, many outside of a heterosexual past. As socio-cultural transformations and medical technology have expanded the opportunities to parent (Weston 1991), research has not sufficiently sought to address the beliefs held by gay men prior to achieving parenthood (Marsiglio and Hutchinson 2002). The emphasis of research examining gay and lesbian family life has been upon the outcomes of children born to or raised by gay and lesbian parents, family development and transformation, and the impact of parenting on one’s life. While the family life of lesbian mothers was emphasized among earlier research, the families of gay men have recently gained more attention.
This project sought to expand the research related to gay men’s parenting. In particular, this work addresses the social forces that inform the perspectives of young gay men as they consider the possibility of fatherhood. While there are many gay men who may be open to the idea of parenting, perhaps even indicating a strong desire to parent (Sbordone 1993, Stacey 2006), there are a number of men who are secure in their desire to remain childfree (Stacey 2006). It is important for us to gain a better understanding of the social forces influencing the perspectives of these men as they enter young adulthood.

Research addressing parental aspirations itself is limited and has particularly addressed the experiences and beliefs of heterosexuals. Among heterosexuals, chief factors considered include biological reproductive ability, control and access to contraception, the chance of accidental pregnancy, and the desire for children (Friedman et al. 1994). Additional factors such as age, racial-ethnic identity, socio-economic status, gender, religion, and number of children are also influential in parenting desires (Thomson et al. 1990). Ultimately, a combination of these factors, along with career aspirations, financial resources, and social resources interact to influence one’s desire to parent or remain childfree (Schoen et al. 1997). Despite an emphasis on heterosexuals in most research, many of these factors undoubtedly also influence gay men and lesbians.

To extend understandings of parental aspiration among gay men it is important to understand social forces that influence heterosexuals and the greater culture, but one need also recognize distinct forces that may also be at play for gay men. For example, among homosexuals the ability to overcome biological and social obstacles in the pursuit of children may be significantly integral to one’s aspiration to parent. Certainly some heterosexuals may also face similar obstacles, particularly if experiencing issues of infertility. However, they
experience this process in a social terrain that encourages and rewards heterosexual parenting. So, while it is important to keep in mind social factors influencing everyone, it is important to draw out and examine the factors at play as gay men consider their parenting choices.

In seeking to understand parental desire among gay men I was informed by three primary research questions: (1) What are today’s young gay men considering as they think about the idea of parenting? (2) How are these men engaging with their parental aspirations as they consider their familial and intimate relationships? and (3) How do these men describe lesbigay parenting within their own community and society at large? Informed by interviews with 51 young gay men in the Albany, NY area, this project addresses gay men’s parental aspirations in several ways. First, this research only included gay men who are currently non-parents. Thus far few research projects have specifically addressed the beliefs of non-parenting gay men or included them as a primary sample group (for example Beers 1996, Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007, and Sbordone 1993). This work gives voice to these men. Further, literature on gay men’s perspectives on parenting often is informed by an analysis of retrospective beliefs (for example Gianino 2005, Mallon 2004, Wells 2005) which may be problematic given recall bias (Schoen et al. 1997). It is my belief that the experience of parenting itself is likely to influence the reported beliefs and thoughts about one’s past as they are interpreted through one’s current life circumstances. This research focuses upon the perspectives of young men, ages 18 to 35, a population that has been under analyzed with most research focusing on men ranging in age from mid-30s through 50s. As today’s young gay men are less likely to enter a heterosexual relationship prior to identifying as homosexual, having experienced a world where closeted gay life is in decline (Seidman 2003), they have a myriad of life options believed unavailable by
many in the past. Thus, it is important to question how parental aspirations are integrated into a gay man’s identity during young adulthood.

The following chapters provide an overview of this entire dissertation research project, from general inception and data collection through discussions of findings. Firstly, Chapter 2 provides an overview of existing literature that informed the initiation of this research and framing of interview questions. In Chapter 3, an overview of the research methods employed and brief sample description is presented. From here the following chapters focus upon the findings from the interviews. Chapter 4 focuses on the social and cultural experiences of the subjects to lend context to the men’s discussions and social awareness on issues and media topics linked to gay and lesbian parenting. This is followed by focused discussions about the views of men who desire to parent or are yet undecided, in Chapter 5. Thereafter, in Chapter 6, the views of men who do not want to parent are explored. Additionally, the manner in which men of all orientations is discussed in relation to how their views are expressed or discussed with their families of origin. Finally, Chapter 7, serves to summarize and contextualize the overall findings of this research and provide suggestions for further research.
Chapter Two: Literature

Overview

The role of children in a gay man’s life today can, perhaps more then ever before, be self-determined. The families of gay men can be self-created, inclusive of diverse biologically and non-biologically related members, and relationships unbound by legal ties—families of choice (Benkov 1994). A significant aspect of these families are those men pursuing and experiencing fatherhood absent of prior heterosexual unions. Yet, research addressing their experience and the outcomes of their children cannot be complete without first examining the beliefs gay men hold prior to pursuing fatherhood. Without this, we are missing an important chapter in the story of gay family life in the twenty-first century.

This chapter begins by addressing gay and lesbian visibility within mainstream culture. Building upon an examination of the historic context of this community will be a general discussion about gay and lesbian parenting, with particular attention paid to the experience of gay fathers. Herein, the experiences of past generations of gay fathers, the diverse paths taken to become parents, and the outcomes of children raised by lesbian and gay parents will be explored. This will be followed with a discussion about parental aspiration among heterosexuals and then among gay men, more specifically. Finally, I will review the literature on gay men who have pursued parenthood outside of heterosexuality and discuss the trajectory and implications of this research project.

It should be noted that the research presented within this chapter focuses upon what was available within the literature at the initiation of this dissertation research. This chapter’s review of the literature was particularly informative to the interview guide relevant to this research and
to the interactions during interviews. In recent years, additional publications have been produced that explore topics relevant to this project. More recent literature will be incorporated into the conclusions chapter for comparative purposes and to contextualize this research with current knowledge relevant to gay men’s fathering aspirations.

Gay and Lesbian Identities and Visibility in a Historic Context

Gay and lesbian visibility in America is occurring at an unprecedented level. Over the course of the last century a gay and lesbian community has emerged and continues to evolve. While early visibility particularly occurred in port cities and urban centers such as New York City, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, New Orleans, and St. Louis (Chauncey 1994, Faderman 1992, Kennedy and Davis 1993), gay men and lesbians are today visible in nearly all communities and regions. Yet, particularly among partnered gay men, there is a tendency towards urban locales (Black et al. 2000).

To some, the growing visibility of homosexuality is regarded as a threat to traditional social values and norms. Given today’s sexual ideologies, one may assume that a perceived threat to the norm of heterosexuality is the primary concern. However, perhaps the central fear is the threat of ‘inappropriate’ gender behavior, particularly the threat to ‘appropriate’ masculinity by gay men (Chauncey 1994). Indeed, by the mid-1900s efforts to encourage appropriate heterosexuality and gendered behavior manifest through dating and intimacy rituals (D’Emilio and Freedman 1998). This era forced many gay men and lesbians into a lifestyle of sexual concealment and identity management – a “closeted” lifestyle.

The closeted lives led by many gay men and lesbians of the 1950s and 1960s were encouraged and enforced by social stigmatization, discrimination, and police enforcement
(Chauncey 1994, Katz 1983, Seidman 2002). The late 1960s and early 1970s particularly marked an era of increased political activism by gay men and lesbians (Adam 1995). Initial efforts of the gay and lesbian movement were to transform a sexual identity into a political identity, seeking visibility, socio-legal rights, and acceptance. During the 1980s and early 1990s efforts of this movement persisted, but also evolved to respond to the emergence and threat of HIV/AIDS and the need for medical access, partner rights, and reducing discrimination. The 1990s and 2000s have brought a new approach to sexual identity and community. While many gay men and lesbians continue to be socially and politically active, many are also constructing their social lives as less political. Today, more gay men and lesbians are regarding their sexual orientation as a normal, private matter (Stein 1997) in a world no longer defined by the “closet” (Seidman 2003).

This transitioning from a politicized sexual identity to a normalized identity is the result of media infiltration, transformations of social understandings, and greater acceptance of diversity throughout society. While the norm of heterosexuality persists, today’s youth are growing up in an era with visible homosexuality. This visibility may be at times problematic, but is tempered with diverse depictions of sexuality and gender that may foster greater acceptance of those who depart from traditional norms.

A central means of access to gay and lesbian identities and culture for many Americans is the media (O’Neil 1984). This access had led to unprecedented levels of acceptance, or at least tolerance, of homosexuality (Mazur and Emmers-Sommers 2002, Newman 1989, Riggle, Ellis, and Crawford 1996). The media, in particular television, allows the mainstream public to observe and gain some understanding about the lives of gay men and lesbian. However these images are often problematic, serving to convey both normalized and stereotypical, stigmatizing,
depictions (Shugart 2003). However, even positive depictions of non-heterosexuals in the media may have only a modest impact with women reporting positive perceptions of homosexuality and men being unaffected (Mazur and Emmers-Sommers 2002, Newman 1989). Further, these ‘positive’ images then become the measure of appropriate homosexuality, serving to constrain the behavior of gay men and lesbians who wish to be regarded as ‘normal’ (Seidman 2003).

Many of today’s youth, gay, lesbian, or heterosexual, may be unaware of the relatively recent advent of gay visibility in the media. Today, gay men and lesbians have become a mainstay of reality television program (Pullen 2007) and series have been created that center upon gay and lesbian issues, characters, and communities, such as Will & Grace, Queer as Folk, and The L-word. This presence may even be taken for granted by today’s youth as they have seen gay and lesbian characters on mainstream television for much, if not all, of their lives.

Prior generations of gay men and lesbians likely experienced their sexuality as a central, if not primary, aspect of their identities (Gonsiorek 1995). Today, young gay men and lesbians are confronting their sexual identities at ever younger ages, and may be able to integrate their sexual identity into a social identity such that it is never held as a primary social identifier (Seidman 2003). Their sexual identity is but one aspect of their being—much as it may be for heterosexuals. As more young gay men and lesbians experience their sexuality in a normalized context, life options once believed the realm of heterosexuals, such as marriage and parenting, may become regarded as feasible options.

As more gay men and lesbians pursue life options once believed the realm of heterosexuals, their sexual identities can become essentially invisible, particularly if they parent. Parenting, more than any other major life activity is accompanied by the assumption of heterosexuality (Patterson 1995). Informed by social beliefs about family, sexuality and gender,
the image of two same-gendered, similarly aged, adults accompanied by a child may be read with the same heterosexist perspective as a differing-gendered couple. As pointed out by Allen and Demo (1995) “lesbians and gay men are thought of as individuals, but not as family members” (112). Our social understanding of children is so strongly entrenched in heterosexist assumptions that the possibility of non-heterosexual parenting may not even enter one’s mind. Such assumptions of heterosexuality may require gay and lesbian parents to repeatedly “out” themselves socially (Symons and Sablosky 2002)—an experience perhaps foreign if they have been out for much of their adult lives. While an individual may be out, and may comfortably possess a non-heterosexual identity, an identity inclusive of non-heterosexuality and parental status (ie. gay father or lesbian mother) can seem problematic, particularly for gay men (Barret and Robinson 1990 & 2000, Mallon 2004).

**Gay and Lesbian Parenting – by the Numbers**

Over the past decades, the number of gay and lesbian identified parents has grown (Barret and Robinson 1990 & 2000, Mallon 2004, Patterson 1992, Pennington 1987, Weston 1991). However, it is difficult to obtain a clear count of their number and the numbers of children they are raising, particular given the fluidity among which they may become parents—during a heterosexual relationship without a homosexual identity, in a heterosexual relationship with a homosexual identity, or outside of a heterosexual relationship entirely. Additionally, given the fluid nature of some gay and lesbian families, especially from a legal standpoint, it may be difficult to identify them via traditional survey and measurement methods. Despite obstacles of measurement, various authors (Black, et al. 2000, Beers 1996, Bozett 1987, Falk 1989, Gottman 1990, Miller 1979, Patterson 1992) estimate that between 2 and 8 million gay and
lesbian individuals in the U.S. are parenting between 4 and 14 million children. Others (Bell and Weinberg 1978, Bryant and Demian 1994, Saghir and Robins 1973) suggest 10 percent or 1 to 2 million, are parenting 2 to 4 million children. Regardless of this vague demographic picture, the growing presence, visibility, and importance of these families suggests the need for further examination.

What is clear is that there have always been individuals parenting whom we might today regard as gay and lesbian. Historically, the majority of this parenting occurred within heterosexual contexts (Bozett 1980, Wyers 1987) without a homosexual identification. It is impossible to determine the number of children raised by gay or lesbian parents who parented in such relationships, be they married or not, because the acts of procreation and/or parenting do not preclude the possibility of a homosexual identification prior to, concurrent, or post relationship. Beyond the problem of identification, this research is further complicated by the invisibility of gay and lesbian parents, as discussed earlier. Further, some may seek to actively hide their sexual identities in order to become or remain parents. This may be particularly true, for example, after the dissolution of a heterosexual relationship as child custody may be a concern (Green 1982, Knight 1983, Wyers 1987).

While the majority of current lesbian and gay parents likely became parents via prior heterosexual relationships, there are increasing numbers pursuing parenting outside this context (Barret and Robinson 1990, 2000, Benkov 1994, Edwards 1991, Mallon 2004, Martin 1989, 1993, Patterson 1995, Pollack and Vaughn 1987, Ricketts and Achtenberg 1987, Schulenberg 1985, Weston 1991). This emerging group of gay men and lesbians are pursuing parenthood by various methods such as alternative insemination, adoption, foster parenting, surrogacy, and co-parenting (be it with a domestic partner or another household entirely).
To say that gay and lesbian parenting is increasing is imprecise. Some suggest that the number of gay men fathering may, in fact, be in decline (for example, Stacey and Biblarz 2001). As fewer gay men enter heterosexual relationships and marriages culminating in parenthood prior to coming out, the cumulative impact is fewer gay fathers. Thus, while some ‘types’ of gay fathers are on the rise; others are in decline, resulting perhaps in a net decline in gay fathers, in particular. What this means for the future of gay and lesbian parenting is demographically unclear, but the presence of these families will continue to influence our social experience and understandings of contemporary family life.

**Gay Men and Children**

In the past, economic and social factors may have limited the abilities of individuals to pursue lives departing from traditional family paths. Over the course of the twentieth century, as our nation established a middle-class culture, more individuals were economically and socially empowered to follow alternate life courses, perhaps pursuing long-term single lives, serial relationships without marriage, cohabitation, choosing childfree lives, or constructing homosexual identities and social lives. The trajectory of these ‘alternate’ life paths and family life is yet unknown, but perhaps one aspect will be an increasing likelihood of childrearing among today’s gay and lesbian youth as they age.

**Gay men, divorce, and parenthood**

The majority of gay fathers enter parenthood within the context of a heterosexual relationship. Many of these men were married and subsequently came out and divorced, but today we are also seeing increasing numbers of gay men entering fatherhood from alternate paths. It is only
recently that such fathers have begun to be studied (Beers 1996, Mallon 2004, Martin 1993, Sbordone 1993). They are gaining access to fatherhood via the foster care system, adoption, surrogacy, and various co-parenting situations (Gianino 2005, Mallon 2004, Martin 1993, Sbordone 1993, Wells 2005).

Much of the literature of the late 1970s and early 1980s examining gay and lesbian parenting was aimed at debunking myths about homosexuals and their interactions with children. More recent research has sought to examine the lived experiences of gay and lesbian families and their children (Weston 1991). Having sought to break down negative stereotypes about homosexuality and having achieved some success, the gay and lesbian community has witnessed a transformation of family. The majority of early efforts toward homosexual parenting and visibility was forged by lesbian mothers during a period often noted as the “lesbian baby boom” (Martin 1989b, Patterson 1994). During this era few gay men were pursuing parenthood, other than from prior heterosexual relationships (Barret and Robinson 1990, 2000), though at least some men were beginning to engage in such efforts (Mallon 2004).

Central to early literature was the examination of gay and lesbian parenting post-divorce. Women, whether lesbian or heterosexual, are more likely to have custody of children post divorce (Bozett 1987). Consequently, many gay men had limited social opportunity to parent after a divorce. Early examinations of gay fathering addressing children born to a heterosexual marriage found that many men struggled with their identities as gay fathers (Miller 1978, Bozett 1980). This struggle was enforced by social beliefs that suggested these identities were incompatible. Many reported having married for love, though other suggestions include the desire to ‘make’ one’s self heterosexual, societal and familial pressures, and the desire to parent (Bozett 1980, Wyers 1987). These men experienced significant stress as they sought to resolve
their internal struggles about sexuality and coming out. This struggle may also have been tied to guilt affiliated with marriage dissolution, concerns over losing one’s children, and feeling a sense of blame for not being able to be heterosexual. Many of the men initially experienced difficulty integrating their gay and parental identities (Bozett 1981), maintaining compartmentalized lives separating their “gay” and “straight” parenting lives. Ultimately, many are able to integrate these two worlds (Bozett 1987, 1989).

Historically gay men have constructed their social lives and aspects of their own identities through participation in a gay community (Bronski 1992). During the early stages of coming out they seek to understand what it means to be gay. For many young gay men this may mean significant participation in venues of gay culture and socialization, such as social organizations, clubs, and bars. Many also seek an understanding of their own desires and identities through sexual exploration. In a world that discriminated against gay men it was not uncommon for the gay community to become ‘family’ (Bronski 1992, Weston 1992), particularly if one was disowned or rejected by their biological/legal family. While exposure to gay culture can create a limited understanding of how to enact a gay identity, it seems to serve merely as a starting point. Increased exposure to diverse populations of gay men fosters greater understanding of the diverse manners in which one can be gay (Bozett 1981). Men may over time come to recognize the existence of innumerable life options. Learning that gay fathers do exist and that this seemingly disjointed identity can indeed be synthesized into a single positive idea may foster further consideration of parenthood. They may also learn that there are infinite manners of enacting such an identity (Barret and Robinson 2000)—there is no singular manner of being a gay father.
Today, we are seeing more gay men coming out at younger ages, and a declining number of men who are marrying heterosexually and later coming out. This suggests a social world with greater acceptance and tolerance of homosexuality. With increasing acceptance comes declining numbers of men entering the closet prior to identifying as homosexual. We are, arguably, living in what Seidman (2003) refers to as a post closet society. While this is a positive transformation in that internal conflict and familial stresses affiliated with a spouse coming out and divorcing are reduced, this also may result in declining numbers of gay fathers. Alternately however, numbers of gay men are pursuing parenthood today via alternate paths that are increasingly available and acceptable (Beers 1996, Brodzinsky and Petterson 2002, James 2002).

*Paths to parenthood*

While adoption is often a choice among heterosexuals due to infertility (Daly 1992, Daniluk and Hurtig-Mitchel 2003), it is the favored path to parenthood for gay men (Gianino 2005, McGarry 2003, Wells 2005). In response to the increasing number of gay men and lesbian would-be parents considering adoption, more adoptive agencies are willing to work with non-heterosexual parents (Johnson and O’Connor 2002). Today, about 60% of all adoption agencies report the acceptance of applications from gay men and lesbians (Brodzinsky and staff 2003). However, this does not indicate the number of placements made with these parents. The mere acceptance of applications does not guarantee the placement of children. Indeed, many social workers report favorable perspectives about gay and lesbian adoption, yet many are particularly wary of gay and lesbian adoption of children under the age of 5 (Ryan et al. 2004). We can even
see this bias emerge in legal policy in Florida, the only state to explicitly forbid gay and lesbian adoption (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2007a).

While sexual orientation is a factor considered when placing children, gender is also important. Lesbians encounter less resistance in their pursuit of adoptive parenthood (Johnson and O’Connor 2002). This is likely a result of the social preference for women over men as parents. The existence of a cohabiting partner, if any, would be known to the adoption organization through the requisite home observations prior to child placement. Yet many of these adoptions occur as “single parent” adoptions. In such circumstances one person becomes the legal adoptive parent to the child, while a cohabiting partner would have no legal connection. Today, approximately 25% of all adoptions are single parent adoptions (Cooper 2004). It is likely that a significant proportion of these adoptive parents are gay and lesbian.

Further complicating the numbers of gay and lesbian adoptions, are second-parent adoptions. A second-parent adoption establishes a legal bond between a parent and child, without the first parent losing their legal bond. Second-parent adoptions are primarily sought by gay men and lesbians who seek to gain legal rights to a child who has been adopted by their partner via a single parent adoption or a child who is biologically connected to their partner via surrogacy or alternate insemination. Currently, eight states (California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont) and the District of Columbia allow for second-parent adoption statewide (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2007b, Sember 2006) and eighteen other states have had at least some examples of its occurrence. However, second-parent adoptions are underutilized due to cost and family arrangements, leaving the legal rights of many gay and lesbian parents in a precarious position.
Ultimately, socio-economic status, particularly for gay men, is an important factor when pursuing parenthood outside of heterosexuality. Central to this equation is the biological inability of men to bear a child, while a lesbian would-be mother may pursue alternate insemination (Agigian 2004, Sember 2006). Adoptions are costly, though variable depending on locale, foster-care status, or domestic versus international. However, the cost of surrogacy is even more expensive, limiting the number of men who might access this path to fatherhood. Today, gay men pursuing fatherhood outside of heterosexuality are most likely to pursue adoption (perhaps preceded by foster parenting), and are less likely to pursue surrogacy (McGarry 2003). Alternate paths to parenthood including foster parenting and co-parenting persist, although co-parenting appears to be losing favor. This decline in co-parenting may be the result of increasing access, socially and economically, to parenthood via alternate paths and changing social ideologies. Today, more gay men may feel that a ‘mother’ is unnecessary, perhaps reducing the appeal of the co-parenting path.

**Parenting and child outcomes**

A significant aspect of research relevant to the families of gay men and lesbians examines outcomes for their children. The vast majority of literature on these children has taken a supportive, rarely critical, approach (Stacey and Biblarz 2001) and found limited variation when compared to heterosexually parented children. They demonstrate similar parenting styles, children’s emotional adjustments, and children’s sexual orientation (Allen and Burrell 1996, Stacey and Biblarz 2001). While this research is useful in contrasting heterosexual and homosexual parents and their children, it often minimizes the subtle variations (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). An additional limitation is that many of the psychological examinations of “gay
and lesbian” parenting have been based on lesbian households with assumptions that gay men’s families would be similar.

Allen and Burrell’s (1996) meta-analysis of 18 studies examining the parental impact of homosexual parents found no difference when contrasting with heterosexual families. However, Stacey and Biblarz’s (2001) meta-analysis of 21 studies (11 of which were also found in Allen and Burrell 1996), found subtle distinctions. They particularly note variations in the gender expressions and sexual behavior (not identity) of children raised by lesbian and gay (lesbigay) parents.

Broadly speaking, children raised by lesbigay parents do identify ‘appropriately’ with a gender identity correlating with their biological sex. Yet, children raised by lesbigay parents demonstrate greater fluidity, still within a range of ‘appropriate’ gender (Green et al. 1996). This fluidity, however, is mitigated by a child’s gender. Girls demonstrate higher aspiration levels for “masculine” jobs such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers. While boys raised by lesbians exhibit lower aggression levels in play and prefer less traditional masculine roles. This said, the boy children of lesbian parents demonstrate higher levels of gender conformity than girl children. Ultimately, these minor gender variations are argued to be the result of parental gender and gender expression, rather than parental sexual orientation.

While most research notes that children raised by lesbigay parents demonstrate outcomes for sexual identity similar to those raised by heterosexuals, this tends to address sexuality from a binary identity construct and often does not engage with behavior or consideration of same-sex relations (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Children raised by lesbian parents seem to have a greater likelihood of considering the possibility of or to have been involved in a homoerotic relationship than those raised by heterosexual women (Tasker and Golombok 1997). However, these
children are not statistically more likely to identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This disparity of behavior and identity may be a manifestation of more fluid sexual and gender identities, or perhaps the limited identity options employed within the research. Again, it is suggested that this variation is not likely the outcome of parental sexual orientation per se, but of mitigating factors of parental gender and gender expression, social-economic status, and perhaps the experience of a social sphere tolerant of diversity (Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

Some research examining children’s experiences has noted that children raised by lesbigay parents can experience disproportionate levels of prejudice and teasing from their peers (Riddle and Arguelles 1981). Yet, Harris and Turner (1986) found that these children were not experiencing significant differences in being teased, dating, and ability to make friends. While there is disagreement in respect to the peer-based social experience, lesbigay parented children do seem to navigate childhood without psychological harm stemming from parental sexual orientation. Some have argued that these children may in fact be better off, with more developed coping skills to manage the potential stresses and stigma that can be affiliated with having a homosexual parent (Patterson 1994).

Particularly understudied are outcomes for the children of homosexual men. This lack of literature is perhaps the manifestation of social ideologies affiliating women with children and assertions of the incompatibility of gay masculinity and fatherhood. The majority of what is known about “lesbigay” families is actually what we know about lesbian parents. The limited information available regarding gay men’s families and children tends to focus on the social and parental issues the man may experience, rather than the child’s identity and outcomes.

Regardless of the path taken to parenthood, the experience of gay men as fathers is increasingly investigated. Frequently, gay men’s parenting is contrasted to that of heterosexual

Some research has also contrasted gay men’s parenting with lesbian parenting (Anderssen et al. 2002, Turner et al. 1986). Overall, this research demonstrates few significant differences found between children raised by gay fathers and lesbian mothers. Some variation has been found in the style of gay men’s parenting, particularly when compared to heterosexual men. Gay fathers seem to be stricter with their children, but less authoritarian in style. Additionally, gay fathers, much like lesbian mothers, seem to parent in a manner that allows greater fluidity in their children’s gender constructions (Bigner 1999). However, these children do not differ dramatically from children raised by heterosexuals.

The vast majority of research examining lebigay families and childhood has concluded that they are more similar to heterosexual families than they are different. However, some researchers have argued, often informed by heterosexist assumptions, that children raised by homosexual parents may experience negative outcomes (Cameron and Cameron 1996). While many psychologists and sociologists discount these reports (Stacey and Biblarz 2001), popular beliefs about the “harm” done to children by lebigay parents, and in particular gay fathers, persist (Barret and Robinson 1990). Fortunately, as social awareness of diversity and research examining adults raised by homosexual parents have become increasingly available, these heterosexist and homophobic ideologies have become less influential.

Parental Aspirations (among Heterosexuals) and Theory

Having reviewed the literature addressing the family lives and cultural contexts of gay and lesbian families I now address parental aspiration. While the desire to parent among gay
men is the central aspect of my research, an understanding of parental desire in general must first be understood. Historically, literature addressing parental aspiration has centered on heterosexuals, as does the research reported on in this section. Additionally, a significant proportion of this research has addressed the aspirations and experiences of women (Deollos and Kapinus 2002), while limited research has sought to explicitly address men’s beliefs (Houseknecht 1987). It is only recently that men have become the subject of increased investigation, regardless of female partner/wife (Lunneborg 1999).

Research addressing parental desire is, at its core, problematic. “Retrospective questions about childbearing intentions are inherently contaminated by recall biases, and prospective questions have predicted fertility poorly” (Schoen et al. 1997, p339). Certainly to inquire about parental desires after a person has had children is embedded in a social life transformed by the experience of parenting. One seldom can recall the past without memories being shadowed and interpreted from a current situation. Yet, it is also impossible to foretell one’s future. One may desire to parent, or wish to remain childfree, but social experiences and relationships may reshape one’s life path. This said, it is still important to understand the implications of a social life as it shapes one’s current desires and beliefs regarding the possibility of parenthood, particularly as one’s future fertility intentions are strong predictors for behavior (Bumpass 1987, Rindfuss, Morgan, & Swicegood 1988, Schoen et al. 1999, Thomson 1997), at least among heterosexuals.

Historically, children were a necessity of family life, serving as an economic resource. This perspective on the role of parenting and childbearing is indicative of an instrumental value of children. One sought to partner heterosexually to secure the ability to bear children. These children provided labor to secure the survival of the family, but also served as a resource in later
life as elderly individuals might require the care and support of their children. This instrumental role of children has declined over time, in part due to economic transformations, increased involvement of women in paid labor, and changing social support available for the elderly. Today, children are an economic investment, which has resulted in lower fertility rates (Schoen et al. 1997). In addition to cost as a reported factor in declining fertility, the impact of children on the ability of a woman to participate in the workforce is often reported (Schoen et al. 1997).

This changing role of children in family life has influenced changing ideals and values about childbearing. Today, research suggests that the value of children has shifted from instrumental to intrinsic (Hoffman and Manis 1979). Men and women of various racial-ethnic and educational backgrounds seem to agree that the value of children is intrinsic—including the value of love, family ties, stimulation, and fun. Simultaneously, however, children may still have some instrumental purposes socially, such as affirming adulthood—to be a parent is to be an adult (Hogan and Astone 1986).

While overall, men and women may agree upon the value of children, gendered variations exist in the perceived costs and benefits of parenting. Seccombe (1991), informed by exchange theory, sought to address the beliefs of married childfree men and women. This work investigates the perceived costs and benefits associated with parenthood, suggesting that one’s decision whether or not to parent may be based on the culmination of various factors such as gender and gender role beliefs, education, occupation, religion, and economic status. As suggested by prior research (Campbell 1985), the decision to be childfree is not a single decision, but likely the culmination of various smaller decisions.

Seccombe’s (1991) research suggested that childfree men were more pronatalistic than their women peers—with men demonstrating more interest in children and rating the importance
of parenting higher than women. Within this, however, class variation did influence the perspectives of men—men in higher prestige occupations placed greater value on children and were less likely to report cost as an important deterrent for parenting. Perhaps due to social and economic rewards affiliated with fatherhood within their occupations, men of higher socio-economic status were less likely to remain childfree long term. Among men in general, concern about how children might impact their ability to pursue major purchases did emerge (Lunneborg 1999).

While economic status and financial pressures play a significant role in the beliefs of men, this was less true for women (Seccombe 1991). Women place greater emphasis upon age than men, perhaps in part due to biological imperatives. Women also have more concern about the respect from and stress of having children. These concerns are a reflection of both gendered beliefs about parenting, but also the impact and role of women’s education and employment within the equation of family decision-making.

Ultimately, the reasons couples choose to remain childfree vary. Early research suggested seven primary reasons couples remained childless: 1) self-centeredness, 2) women’s concern over impact upon career, 3) inability to afford children, 4) women’s health concerns, 5) dislike of children, 6) lack of sexual activity, and 7) concern over marital stability (Silverman and Silverman 1971). More recent research report similarly that the three most common reasons people may choose to live childfree are 1) freedom and independence, 2) dislike of childrearing responsibilities, and 3) career/career aspirations (Somers 1993). The shift from approaching this issue from a ‘childless’ to a ‘childfree’ perspective is indicative of growing acceptance and validation of living an adult life without parenting. Paramount in such a decision are the demands of one’s career and work aspirations. Similarly, the desire to live an adult life
unconstrained by children seems to be the modern interpretation of what was in the past regarded as self-centeredness or selfishness. The times may be changing, but the reasons for remaining childfree seem to be fairly consistent.

While much of the work examining the value of children and the beliefs informing childfree adulthood are informed by exchange theory, rational-choice theory has also been incorporated into the interpretation of fertility choice. Becker (1960) suggests that children are analogous to consumer durables. Thus, people have children for a nonspecific immanent good. Despite the significant time and fiscal resources invested in children, an intrinsic value must manifest. Blake (1966) argues in response that Becker’s framework is unsuccessful as he fails to consider other social factors relating to reproduction—children cannot be understood as consumer durables. Rational-choice theory may not fully explain the reasons people pursue parenthood, but it can be particularly useful when examining the number of children one may have, given the increasing costs affiliated with parenthood in the developed world.

Friedman et al. (1994) proposed uncertainty reduction theory as an explanation for parenting. Arguing that uncertainty reduction is a universal immanent good, the choice to parent is a logical ‘good.’ To become a parent is indicative of maturity, stability, security, marital solidarity, and the knowledge that one is not likely to be alone or unloved. The authors suggest that the need to parent, informed by uncertainty reduction is greatest for those with limited alternatives or life opportunities, such as the impoverished and/or racial-ethnic minorities (Friedman et al. 1994). This approach was found among young women of lower-economic status who chose premarital early fertility (Edin and Kefalas 2005) and was also reported among the reasons some gay men report for desiring to parent (Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007).
Research affiliated with fertility aspiration would be incomplete without addressing the question of number of children desired. As gender roles, costs, and social expectations have changed this has affected the number of reported children a person may desire. While research demonstrates the connection between religion and ideal number of children (Adsera 2006), it seems that family of origin at large may be a better predictor (Axinn, Clarkberg, Thorton 1994). One factor particularly affiliated with reported fertility desire is one’s number of siblings—the larger the sibling group, the higher one’s fertility preferences may be (Duncan at al. 1965). This may be constructed as an interpretation of parental fertility behavior influencing a child’s fertility preferences. However, the role of siblings is further addressed by Axinn, Clarkberg, and Thornton (1994), wherein it is suggested that elder siblings’ fertility behaviors are influential upon one’s own desires. The more nieces and nephews one has, the higher the reported ideal number of children. Yet, it is also suggested that one’s desires also change over the course of one’s lifetime (Stolzenberg and Waite 1977), in response to social circumstances.

Gay Men’s Parental Aspirations, Desires, and the Pursuit of Fatherhood

The investigation of parental aspiration among gay men has only recently begun. This emerging body of work has drawn heavily from psychological research (Sbordone 1993, Beers 1996 for example), with some employing a more social perspective (Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007, Mallon 2004 for example). However, even within the social research a significant portion of the work has been based on the recollection of aspirations after one is already parenting (Mallon 2004 for example). It is important to move research beyond psychological investigation and recollections to a critical investigation of the current beliefs held by gay men who have yet to pursue parenthood. While some have sought to address parental aspiration, or procreative
consciousness, among heterosexual men (Lunneborg 1999, Marsiglio and Hutchinson 2002 for example), research must further address gay men.

Currently, few works have sought to thoroughly investigate the aspirations of non-fathering gay men unto themselves. Berkowitz and Marsiglio’s *Gay Men: Negotiating Procreative, Father, and Family Identities* (2007) is the only sociologically based work to incorporate a significant sample of non-fathering gay men. Building upon Marsiglio and Hutchinson’s (2002) study, this research seeks to give voice to the procreative consciousness (Marsiglio 1998) of gay men. Berkowitz and Marsiglio argue that gay men experience their desires and beliefs about parenting and fertility differently from heterosexual men, particularly as they will not accidentally impregnate their sexual partner. Additionally, these men do not face the same social pressures and expectations that may be experienced by heterosexual men in long term relationships (Lunneborg 1999).

Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) interviewed 19 childless gay men and 20 gay men who became fathers as gay identified men. The men ranged in age from 19 to 53 for the non-fathers (with a mean age of 31, median of 30), and 33 to 55 for the fathers. The sample of non-fathers incorporated 6 non-white respondents with low to middle-class incomes. The fathers, similar to other research on gay fathers (Johnson and O’Connor 2002, Mallon 2004), were white and primarily of the upper middle class. Among the older respondents many recalled understanding a gay identity as incompatible with fatherhood, but over time recognized the opportunities and options for parenting. The authors suggest several common turning points in this realization found among gay fathers. Many men reported that their desire to parent was influenced by caring for or being involved with children such as nieces and nephews, cousins, or even by caring for an elderly or ailing family member. On the other hand, at least one non-father

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suggested it was his involvement with children as an adult that confirmed his desire to not parent. Similar to Johnson and O’Connor (2002), many of the partnered fathers discussed the possibility of parenting early in their relationships, suggesting that the desire to parent may be a factor taken into consideration as these men established their relationships.

Among younger gay men who were not fathers, various perspectives and beliefs about parenting emerge (Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007). These men were unlikely to regard a parenting identity as incompatible with a gay identity, suggesting a cultural shift from prior generations of gay men. Many of these men felt that the pursuit of fatherhood was a realistic choice or option. These men were also aware of the legal and social obstacles they might face if they were to pursue fatherhood. They particularly noted concern with the obstacles their potential children would face with peers, lacking a mother, and discrimination. Many of the childless men reported that were they to have children, a biological tie would be preferable and adoption would be their secondary choice. However, despite this ideological preference, the social reality of the prohibitive costs of surrogacy will likely limit the number of gay men who can be biologically related to their children if pursuing fatherhood outside of heterosexuality.

For many, particularly heterosexuals, there is a strong social expectation of long-term monogamous relationships, marriage, and child rearing. To become a parent, is to become a legitimized adult (Hogan and Astone 1986). However, for gay men this expectation does not exist. For many, from the moment they come out, their parents may mourn for the loss of their son’s imagined ‘happy future’—destined to be childless and alone (Ben-Ari 1995, Savin-Williams and Dubé 1998). Parenting is so inextricably entwined with heterosexuality that the idea of gay parenting may seem abnormal and impossible (Lewin 2006, Mallon 2004). This perceived impossibility impacts both a gay man’s parents and his own imagination of life.
expectations. Gay men who wish to parent must struggle to overcome these socialized beliefs, internally and socially.

Gay men who wish to parent must overcome multiple social obstacles to achieve fatherhood. These men must not only challenge social ideals of gender that associate children and child-rearing with women, but must also challenge issues of homophobia. Indeed, when contrasting (78) gay fathers with (83) gay non-fathers, Sbordone (1993) found gay fathers had lower levels of internalized homophobia and high levels of self-esteem. However, within his sample many gay fathers felt that these socio-psychological conditions were the result of fatherhood, not a precursor. The act of raising children, of fathering outside the sphere of heterosexuality, may foster personal growth as one is forced to frequently acknowledge a gay identity socially.

In seeking to understand the desire to father among gay men, Sbordone (1993), employing a psychological approach, examined gay men who chose to father after identifying as gay and contrasted them with gay men who were not fathers. In particular, Sbordone addressed parental relationships and recollections of childhood. The fathers did not differ significantly from the non-fathers other than having lower levels of internalized homophobia. In reflecting upon their own childhoods, the fathers and the non-fathers recalled their parental relationships in similar fashions. An important off-shoot of this research was the variation found among the non-fathers, with half (53%) suggesting the desire to parent. The men who responded positively to the question “Would you like to raise a child(ren)?” recalled their parental relationships differently than the men who did not wish to raise children. These gay non-fathers who aspired to parent recalled their mothers as more loving and their fathers as more demanding. Sbordone
suggests that this recollection is markedly similar to the nuclear family constructs idealized in television during the mid-1900s.

The fathers in Sbordone’s (1993) work were significantly older than the non-fathers, though this did not appear to impact variations in recollections and parental desire. The age variance can be explained in various manners—the cost affiliated with pursuing parenthood outside of a heterosexual context, advanced education, and career pursuits, ultimately enabling the accumulation of fiscal resources. Indeed, Sbordone found that the gay fathers had higher levels of educational attainment. Additionally, there may be a delay in the pursuit of fatherhood as gay men may undertake a second “adolescence” as they seek to resolve their gay identity and explore relationships during their late teens and 20s, having to unlearn social beliefs about homosexuals (Herdt & Bozer 1993, Rhoads 1994), pushing the parenting stage of life to later years.

Beers (1996), working in the same city as Sbordone, also employing a psychological approach but a differing sample technique, examined the desires and beliefs of 88 gay men who were not fathers. Approximately half (51%) of the surveyed reported that they wished to parent at some point. Contrasting the men who wished to parent with the men who did not wish to parent, Beers found little variance in the recollection of parental relations. Beers found that men who wished to father had greater levels of identity development and resolution, which may have in turn impacted their consideration of fathering. Men who did not wish to parent expressed concern about how their careers, social lives, and relationships would be impacted if they were to parent and felt that relationship status (being in a couple) was important to the pursuit of parenthood. HIV status and overall health were found to influence the decisions made by men who wished to parent, but did not impact the decision making process among men who did not
wish to parent. Of the men who wished to parent, many recalled this desire going back to childhood. These men were found to be more involved with children as well, via families and social spheres, which may have informed their desire to father or may merely be the manifestation of an inclination or enjoyment of spending time with children.

Significant to the research to be undertaken, Beers (1996) found that men who wished to parent were younger than the men who did not wish to parent. On average this difference was 5 years which given the rapidly changing social climate of recent decades can have a profound impact. Beers suggests that this variation is likely of particular importance during the formative teen years as these gay men begin to recognize their sexual identities and take note of political and media portrayals of gay men and their families. Additionally, this age variation may be reflective of the changing beliefs manifest over the course of a lifetime. Perhaps some of the older gay men reporting no desire to parent had decided that they had become too old to parent or were too set in their ways, making the option of parenting less viable.

Other research addressing the parental desires of gay men has sought to address these desires after these men are already fathering or are in the process of pursuing fatherhood (Gianino 2005, Mallon 2004, Wells 2005). While this work is informative, it is limited, both because of sample size and the lack of interviewees not wishing to father. Without the inclusion of men who do not wish to father the findings are left without context or comparison. Certainly, understanding the factors that may be at play in encouraging gay men to parent is important, but it is also important to question how such factors play out in the lives of men who do not want children. Additionally, these projects are of limited relevance for the current project as several are using a primarily psychological perspective. However, these works are especially useful to inform potential avenues of investigation for the current project.
Mallon (2004) surveyed twenty gay men, aged 40 to 62, who became fathers during the 1980s as self-identified gay men. These men became fathers primarily through adoption and foster-parenting and none were biologically related to their children. While prior research on gay fathering has rarely addressed non-white fathers, Mallon sought to be inclusive of racial diversity in his sample, with 25% (five) of his sample identifying as African American or Latino. This work primarily addresses the experiences of these men as they became parents and their experiences as gay fathers. When asked to address the roots of their yearning to parent, most men found it difficult to articulate a response. This difficulty may in part be the result of the years spent parenting making it difficult to recall beliefs and feelings prior.

While many of the respondents in Mallon’s work had difficulty expressing their beliefs prior to becoming parents, some were able to address the cultural contexts that informed their beliefs of the time. For many of these men, coming out during the 1970s and 1980s, there was the assumption that as a gay man one would not be able to parent. As one respondent pointedly stated, “it was something [to parent] that I had always wanted, actually. It was probably the only problem I had with being gay…that I couldn’t be a parent” (Mallon 2004, 30). These men not only had to serve as pioneers in adoption and foster parenting procedures, but had to actively challenge their own conceptions of family opportunities and constructs.

Further examining the transition into parenthood, Gianino (2005) surveyed eight gay couples transitioning through the adoption process and their post-adoptive family life. The men surveyed were aged 32 to 50, had been coupled for 4 to 21 years (with a mean of 12 years and 9 months), were middle to upper-middle class, and all identified as Caucasian. Central to this work was the construct of their relationship, with these men suggesting that being “older” or more mature was integral to their establishment of a strong relationship. Among many of the
couples a discussion about the desire to parent had occurred early in their dating process and was believed integral to strengthening their bond as a couple.

It seems that many of the men in Gianino’s (2005) study had dismissed parenting as a viable option when younger. They reported three primary perceived barriers informing this dismissal: legal and logistical barriers, a lack of role models, and the belief that being gay was inherently incompatible with being a parent. It seems that many men “shelved” the possibility of parenting, feeling that it might be an option for later in life, and went through several periods of time contemplating the possibility of parenting. Men who become parents come to understand parenthood not as a mere possibility, but as an inevitability. Several factors encouraging this conclusion were an awareness of aging, a belief that children would enrich and fulfill their lives, and the belief that children were the next logical step in their life/relationship.

Similar to Gianino’s work, Wells (2005) also addresses the experience of gay adoptive couples. Wells surveyed ten gay couples, aged 31 to 50, a majority of whom were of upper-middle class (annual incomes at or above $100,000). Unlike Gianino, Wells did have some racial diversity, with 20% (4 men) of his sample identifying as Filipino, Latino, or Black. Many of these men recalled initial concern that being gay and being a father were incongruent identities, but also had long-term desires to father. While racial diversity was incorporated into this sample, it was not particularly addressed in the findings, beyond the difficulties that multi-racial families may face. Wells’ findings are consistent with other research addressing gay adoptive parenting. He suggests that today, the issue of integrating a gay identity and a fathering identity are of less importance, having become increasingly viable and visible. The task at hand for many gay fathers is the pursuit of recognition and legitimating social and legal family bonds, and changing the definitions of fatherhood.
Gaps in Existing Literature

The research investigating the paths and desires of gay men to parent has begun, but significant work remains. Gianino’s and Wells’ work with couples, while informative, is also limited. It is difficult to determine the applicability of their results as the process of coupling may itself influence one’s aspiration to establish legitimacy and longevity through the process of fathering.

The sample size and diversity of respondents in some of the above discussed research also has limited application. Among the research discussed, sample sizes varied from as few as 16 to over 100, with a majority of the research emphasizing the experience and perspectives of white gay fathers.

Beers (1996), Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007), and Sbordone (1993) are the only researchers to particularly address the experiences and beliefs of gay men who were not already fathers. Within their research the experiences and perspectives of younger men have not been especially well addressed. Certainly, Gianino (2005), Mallon (2004), and Wells (2005) have added to our understanding about gay men and parenting beliefs, but examining the beliefs of these men after the fact has limitations.

This work serves to fill several gaps within the literature and will expand upon other’s findings. A particular area of inquiry this research offers is an understanding of today’s young gay men who are, arguably, coming of age in an post-closeted era. The young adults of today have been raised in a world where the idea of gay parenting may be less foreign than has been reported by older gay men. This work also examines the role of parental aspiration in romantic relationships among young gay men. Gianino (2005) and Wells (2005) both report that parental desire can be a significant factor in pair-bonding, but they were also examining this feature
among established couples who were in the process of or already parenting. While there was hope to include more men who were in couples among the subjects, ultimately there were few couples where both men were interviewed. This said, the manners in which these men engage their aspiration orientation in their dating processes is discussed. Finally, this research is one of the first sociologically based analyses of non-fathering gay men and their social experiences and beliefs relevant to their consideration of fatherhood.

Chapter Conclusion and Research Questions

The experiences of gay men as they consider their procreative potential and familial aspirations have not been sufficiently examined. Historically, researchers examining the lesbigay family have emphasized the family lives and children of lesbian parents, with limited attention to gay men’s families. Within the examinations of gay men and their families, identity issues have been centralized, sacrificing an understanding of parental aspiration prior to its enactment. Today, we must seek to better understand the parental beliefs and desires of young gay men as they embark upon adult lives of tremendous opportunity.

The research undertaken here explores the factors that inform the desires of these men. I particularly address three primary research questions: (1) What are today’s young gay men considering as they think about the idea of parenting? (2) How are these men engaging with their parental aspirations as they consider their intimate relationships? and (3) How do these men describe lesbigay parenting within their own community and society at large?

This research serves to answer the inquiry suggested by Berkowitz and Marsiglio, that “attention should be devoted to understanding how facets of gay men’s race/ethnicity, social
class, and family/friendship networks affect their perceptions and strategies for incorporating fathering visions into their personal and relationship trajectories” (2007, 379).
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Qualitative research methods are particularly appropriate for this project. To understand the beliefs and experiences influencing gay men’s parental aspirations it is necessary to engage them in meaningful dialogue. This approach allows a researcher to expand and clarify ideas and themes that emerge during conversation, creating a comprehensive understanding of statements and phrasing that might be misinterpreted were they responses in a survey.

Sampling design and research techniques will be discussed in this chapter. This will be preceded by a brief discussion of qualitative methodology and grounded theory. Next, the role of the researcher, procedural information, and the interview guide will be addressed. Finally, a description of the participants will conclude this section.

Qualitative Research and Grounded Theory

Qualitative methodologies are useful when one seeks to address subcultural groups, particularly during exploratory stages of early research (Lofland and Lofland 1994). Integral to this approach is the role of the researcher. The researcher plays an active role in data collection and analysis. The deep involvement of the researcher allows for substantial levels of analysis and understanding, but this involvement must be tempered by a researcher’s constraint and self-reflection. The researcher must be cognizant of his/her own perspective so as not to influence or impart personal beliefs upon or make assumptions about the subject. This engagement with the subject can allow the researcher to clarify terminology and to question meaning in a significant manner.

Quantitative research is an important approach to understanding social phenomena, but is frequently based upon hypotheses established prior to the research.
When investigating new phenomena one may be limited in the ability to hypothesize causal paths prior to research. In such cases, qualitative methods allow the researcher to develop detailed and comprehensive understandings of phenomena, and consequently build hypotheses. During this process, theory may develop hand-in-hand with data collection and analysis.

Gay fathering outside of heterosexuality, as a recent phenomenon, has had limited research attention and theoretical framing. The motivational factors influencing one’s desire to parent have had even less attention. With so little known about this phenomenon, qualitative research is clearly the preferable approach (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Using qualitative interviews, this research will enable the development of theory as themes are established and examined.

This research is informed by grounded theory. As defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), grounded theory is:

One that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. This is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis pertaining to that phenomenon…One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. (p.23)

From the interviews, common themes will likely emerge among earlier interviews. These emerging themes will foster further inquiry and clarification during later interviews, cultivating theory development.

Role of the Researcher

In this investigation I conducted interviews that were recorded, transcribed, analyzed and interpreted. This research is fully qualitative in nature. Given the intimate relation of the
researcher to the subject matter of this project it is important to posit my perspectives relevant to this research.

Researcher objectivity is often regarded as a foundation of quantitative research, thus removing the individual perspective from the research equation. Grounded theory, however, recognizes the presence of the researcher through “theoretical sensitivity” (Strauss and Corbin 1990), insomuch as the researcher must be able to effectively analyze and interpret data informed by personal knowledge. In this case, as a gay identified, relatively young man I had insight into the cultural references and social experiences that emerged during the interviews. As a consumer of gay and lesbian magazines and television programming, I was able to interpret and understand the context of their cultural references. Additionally, as all interviews occurred in the Albany, NY area, I was also familiar with references to local gay and lesbian venues, such as bars, events, and the community center. While I had general familiarity with the various local venues, I was an infrequent participant or consumer of these businesses and services—as such, the vast majority of subjects interviewed were unknown prior to interviewing. The few known subjects were culled from local friends, co-workers, and acquaintances. Despite knowing a few subjects (approximately six of the fifty one), I was particularly conscious to remove any prior knowledge or beliefs I may have personally had relevant to a subject’s dialogue. The value of the subjects voice was paramount for the interviewing process and it was particularly affirming known subjects expressed beliefs and thoughts that I had not known from them previously.

To reduce the influence of my own perspective and values within this research, I will address my own relevant beliefs entering into this project. I believed that the desire to parent is socialized based on norms of gender, age, relationship status, or sexual orientation and is not an innate “drive.” I did not believe that one must parent to lead a fulfilling life. The choice to
remain childfree is a valid decision that can be accompanied by various rewards. Certainly, I recognized the existence of strong socialization forces that may direct people towards parenting, but I questioned how these are experienced by gay men as they ponder their sexual identity, life expectations, and ideas about parenting.

Recruitment Procedures

This research was conducted within the Albany, NY/Capital District area. The majority of research subjects resided in this area full-time; however, those who are local only during part of the year, such as college students, were also included as subjects. Initial interview subjects were obtained through local advertisements, with further subjects obtained via snowballing.

Initial recruitment efforts occurred via signs (Appendix B) placed at various local venues (with business/location permission) with gay patronage, such as coffee shops, health-food co-ops, community centers, and gyms. Additional recruitment also occurred via emails (Appendix C) distributed to local listservs that were likely to include local gay men—such as local GLBT community organizations and GLBT organizations at local college campuses. As these recruitment methods resulted in limited subject numbers, efforts for individual recruitment were also pursued using MySpace.com and Facebook. MySpace proved to be particularly efficient for helping locate potential subjects. At the time of subject recruitment MySpace allowed users to search their local area for those who identified as gay and of the appropriate age range. Using those search parameters, individual emails (Appendix C) were sent to men in the region, resulting in more efficient and responsive engagement with potential subjects.

Once recruited for interview, subjects were also asked to encourage other men they knew to participate. Small contact information sheets were provided to subjects to share as they saw
fit. While an occasional subject indicated they had been referred to me by a prior subject, snowball interviewees were ultimately uncommon across the entire sample pool.

Regardless of how recruited, all subjects were interviewed in person at a location of their choosing. Interview settings ranged from coffee shops and restaurants, subject’s workplace, public settings such as college/university campuses or local parks, the local LGBT community center, and some occurred at subject’s homes. Only one interview occurred at my own home, with a subject I had known for several years. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to approximately two hours, with most interviews running approximately an hour and 15 minutes to an hour and 30 minutes. Interviews were tape recorded and some minor notes were taken in process. The recordings were transcribed, with the transcriptions proofed by myself while re-listening to the interview recordings. After transcriptions were completed the tapes were destroyed. No name identified information was incorporated into the transcriptions with all subjects, referenced family, friends, and significant others’ names being replaced in the transcripts by pseudonyms. Every reasonable effort was made to assure the protection of subject identities in this research. Additionally, the psychological well-being of subjects was taken into consideration during interviews. Prior to the start of interviews subjects were informed of potential risks and contact information for local resources, particularly counseling resources at the University of Albany were provided and subjects were asked to affirm their agreement to participate by signing a consent form, with knowledge that they could withdraw from the interview and overall project at any time. During the interviews no subject expressed psychological distress or chose to withdraw and no subject reached out after being interviewed to withdraw.
Sampling Design & Participants

This research employed a convenience and snowball sampling. Given the exploratory nature of this research and the limitations of reaching a population via traditional sampling methods, these approaches produced a sample appropriate for analysis (Hendricks, Blanken and Adriaans, 1992). This sampling sought to incorporate diversity of age, racial-ethnic background, and men who do and do not wish to parent.

My final sample pool consisted of fifty young men who self-identified as gay (or homosexual). While gay men are coming out at younger ages today than in the past (Grovv, et al. 2006), the age at which an individual socially identifies as gay can vary significantly. For this research it was important that participants identify as gay, though they may not have been “out” in any or all social arenas.

For the purposes of this research I defined “young” as those aged 18 to 35. Initially, this project was intended to focus upon men age 18-30, but upon consultation with my dissertation committee and consideration of the extended framing of young adulthood that may exist among gay men, the upper age was extended to 35. This age range was selected to bring new information to the research on gay men’s families and aspirations as prior literature had focused on men aged 30-50+ (Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007, Mallon 2004). Additionally, this group gives insight into the ideologies of younger gay men as they are socialized into a post-closet culture. Among this sample I sought to give voice to men at various ages and life stages within this range—those who were students (primarily college), young working adults, single and partnered, and those who were in more stabilized career and relationship settings. My work investigated men who have experienced adolescent, teen, and adult socialization primarily during the 1990s and 2000s—an era post-AIDS and contemporary to increased gay and lesbian
visibility both socially and within the media. Among the subjects interviewed, the ages ranged from 18 to 35. The average age was 27.4 and the median age of the sample being 28.

In my research pool I particularly sought to include both men who do and do not wish to parent, as well as those who were yet undecided. While I had hoped to have equal representation of various perspectives within the sample, this did not occur. Among the 51 men interviewed, 27 indicated a desire to parent, 12 reported being undecided, and 12 reported that they did not desire to have children. It is my assertion that the research itself and its advertising/soliciting of subjects resulted in a greater representations of men who desired children as they may have had a greater interest in discussing the matter. As recruitment continued throughout the project, efforts were particularly made to attract men who may not want to have children by reordering perspectives in emails sent to potential subjects to place those who did not want to have children in the first position. This effort did not appear to result in any notable shift in subject orientations expressed in interviews.

The US is a multiracial nation and the city of Albany is no exception, with approximately 40% of the city’s population identifying as non-white or multiracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Entering this project it was my intention to interview at least 15 non-white identified gay men, for a goal of approximately 30% of the final sample. Despite efforts to recruit a diverse sample pool, this project ultimately included 13 non-White subjects (approximately 25% of the final sample). Among these subjects five identified as African American or Black, four identified as Latino or Hispanic, three identified as multi-racial, and one as Asian American.

Other considerations of personal identification and experience were clearly relevant to this research. A subjects relationship status was queried, along with a brief past history of relationships. Among the subjects current relationship statuses, thirty-four indicated they were
single, fourteen indicated they were married or partnered, and three indicated having a boyfriend. For those who were married/partnered or had a boyfriend, invitations were extended to encourage their significant other to participate in this research with the hope of exploring and comparing perspectives and recollections of dialogues, however only one couple agreed to both being interviewed, with their interviews occurring separately. With only one couple within the sample, it limited the ability to draw any conclusions relevant to how this topic may be negotiated or discussed when linked to a long term relationship. Many men did speak to what their partner’s standpoint was, but this ultimately speaks to the interviewee’s perspective on what they believe or understand their partner’s perspective to be and may not fully reflect his beliefs and desires.

Given that educational background can influence one’s aspirations, it was queried and taken into consideration during analysis. No sampling goal was related to subjects’ educational or occupational attainment or prestige levels, but the sample did ultimately reflect men of varying educational levels ranging from high school through graduate level training. This educational attainment then also related to the perceived socio-economic status of these men. Broadly, the men interviewed were primarily of the middle, working, and lower classes. Their status in this system was problematized by a number of subjects who were students, but quasi-measures of familial background were collected with inquiries of their parents’ educational and occupational backgrounds.

Because this research sought to address the perspectives of gay men as they considered the possibility of parenting, men who were already fathers or who were in the process of becoming fathers (such as already pursuing adoption or surrogacy) were not included in this
project. Indeed, the recruitment efforts appeared to effectively convey the intentions of this research as not one gay father contacted me during the research process.

Within the findings chapters, most of the men are not fully described, but may have information such as their affiliated pseudonym, age, and racial-ethnic identity as relevant. However, a brief list of subject pseudonyms, age, racial-ethnic identity, relationship status, and parental aspiration orientation is provided in Appendix E for reader consultation.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of the transcribed interviews was facilitated by the use of the qualitative analysis program N6 (a version of NUD*IST). This program is designed to manage and analyze large volumes of data. The researcher was able to create and explore concepts, topics, and themes as they emerged within the transcribed interviews. This program is also able to perform pattern-based text searches which can expose proximity of themes and concepts within the interviews. The proximity feature, however, did not prove useful as the dialogues varied in content as dictated by the subject’s flow of thought. As themes emerged in various manners, nuances of social experience, identity, and parental aspiration perspective provided a comprehensive and rich understanding about young gay men’s aspirations and beliefs about gay fathering, facilitating the writing of these research findings.
Interview Guide and Relation to Research Questions

Interviews for this research were semi-structured to assure that particular areas of inquiry were addressed. The basic interview guide (Appendix A) was developed with two pathways to address the men who expressed a desire to parent (or undecided) and the men who wished to remain childfree. Interviews opened with basic inquiries of demographic and background information. This was followed by three primary areas of inquiry: (1) desire to parent; (2) parenting and intimate relationships; and (3) community awareness and visibility.

Demographic & background information

The majority of questions in this section of the interview resulted in relatively short answers that allowed for easier comparison of the subjects and contextualization of subject dialogue. While some questions, such as age or racial-ethnic identity resulted in typically concise, clear responses, others such as parental education and occupation at times resulted in more dialogue to explain changes in the life course or to account for divorces, step-families, and for changing work or educational histories.

Desire to parent

This section of the interview particularly sought to address my first research question: What are today’s young gay men considering as they think about the idea of parenting?

I first addressed this question in a very broad sense by asking “When you think about gay men who are parents, what crosses your mind?” I had pondered if answering a question such as this would influence subject responses when expressing their personal aspirations, but found that these subjects, while certainly influenced by their social observations and experiences, often had
distinct and clear aspirations regardless of their general thoughts or knowledge. Using this question as the primary lead question to the substantive aspects of inquiry allowed the subject to transition their own thoughts from sometimes limited background information into the topic at hand.

The phrasing of questions in this section offered particular obstacles when developing the initial interview guide, particularly with the use of the word ‘children.’ Had I used a question such as “Do you want to have children?,” it would innately suggest the idea that appropriate parenthood would include multiple children (Hagewen and Morgan 2005). For this reason I chose to place perspective upon the role of parent by asking “Do you think you will one day want to be a parent?” This issue emerges again when I inquired how many children he would like to have. Informed by Axinn, Clarkberg, and Thornton (1994) I chose to phrase this question “If you could have just the number of children you would like, what number of children would you want?” This question was followed up with further clarification to determine if they would prefer fewer or more children as a second choice.

Within this section I explored my subject’s personal perspectives and beliefs relating to issues of sexuality, choice-making, family structure, and preferences relating to gay men’s parenting at large and their own desires. Using different question paths for those wishing to parent and those wishing to remain childfree avoided redundancy—it would have made little sense to ask a man who does not wish to parent “If you were to parent, what number of children would you want?” It made more sense to rather inquire “What do you consider the ideal number of children for a family to have?”

*Parenting and intimate relationships*
This section of the interview was intended to explore the research question “How are these men engaging with their parental aspirations as they consider their intimate relationships?”

I expected the responses to this section to both further clarify the importance of one’s parental desires and engage how this influenced their hopes for, creation of, and maintenance of intimate relationships. While one may argue “intimate relationships” can be extended to include family and friends, I was particularly seeking to understand how gay men are relating their parental beliefs to their dating and long-term relationships. While prior research has sought to address this issue in established long-term couples, particularly as they pursued adoption (Gianino 2005, Wells 2005), this explored a new area of inquiry.

Community awareness and visibility

This final section of the interview addressed how these men saw the social world as it relates to gay and lesbian parenting. Herein I sought to explore their own perspective about how choosing to parent or remain childfree would influence their personal involvement in the gay community. The perspectives of these gay men on gay culture, the media, and culture at large were also taken into consideration as I attempted to explore how social awareness of lesbigay parenting interacted with their personal desires.

This section primarily addressed my final research question “How do these men describe lesbigay parenting within their own community and society at large?” I suspected that many gay men would be able to refer to lesbian parenting examples, but would struggle to present examples of gay men who were parents. I further expected that they would struggle to exemplify gay men who were parenting outside of heterosexual pasts. Indeed, both these expectations bore true in the interviews, but this will be discussed further in chapter 4.
Chpt 4: Situating Aspirations: Social and Cultural Experiences

My research question focuses on what gay men are thinking as they consider the possibility of ever becoming a father. Centering my analysis among younger gay men helps reduce the number of men who had previous long-term heterosexual relationships in general, let alone those who might have had children in such a situation, allowing for a focus upon men who are primarily experiencing young adulthood with a gay identity. The men interviewed primarily came out at younger ages, some as early as 13, with the vast majority being out in most social spheres by their early 20s. Their perceptions of life choices and aspirations were largely established while identifying as gay men. These men, even as they mature, are largely able to reflect on their life and social experiences in a manner that is consistently within a gay-identified lens, rather than through the perspective of an established heterosexual social identity that later transitioned to homosexuality.

Unlike heterosexual men and women, most gay men’s pursuits of fathering are constrained by biological factors. Indeed, gay men are arguably more constrained than lesbians in their pursuit of parenthood as well (Agigian 2004, Martin 1989b, Patterson 1994, Sember 2006). Without a womb of one’s own to support fetus growth there are substantial limitations. While many gay men recognize the options of surrogacy or adoption as potential paths to fatherhood (Gianino 2005, McGarry 2003, Wells 2005), they speak widely to concerns of cost and fiscal constraints. Despite the potential restraints of the social systems at play in the pursuit of gay fathering, nearly all men interviewed regarded the idea of parenting as a potential life choice, a decision to be considered and made. However, in addition this perspective, regardless of their personal desires, many recognized that their future lives may not align to their current aspiration. While fatherhood may be an option to consider, as young men, many realized that
they cannot predict their future relationships, occupations, and incomes\textsuperscript{1}—all factors they deemed important in the final decision to choose to pursue fatherhood.

To contextualize the cultural and social frameworks that are informing the perspectives of these men this chapter has been broadly divided into three central themes. The first section, “Preliminary Perspectives on Gay Fathering” explores what first came to mind for these men when queried about gay fathering. Herein, various perspectives ranging from respect and adulation of gay fathers to cultural stereotypes are highlighted, to reveal the preliminary thoughts these men have about gay fathering. In the second section, “Gay Men’s Interaction with Gay and Lesbian Parents,” situates the background of these men and their experiences of knowing or interacting with gay and lesbian parents. Finally, two sections address “Recollections of the Media,” wherein the recollections of queer family portrayal and LGBT media broadly are examined. The first of the media sections examines print, film, and television imagery, while the second explores the importance of gay and lesbian celebrities.

Preliminary Perspectives on Gay Fathering

While inquiry of each man’s desire and social perspectives was central to this analysis, it would have been problematic to initiate discussion of the topic by directly asking if they wanted children. While family background and demographic factors helped posit these men preliminarily, it did not give voice to their orientation on gay fathering as a larger social issue. To guide subjects into self-reflection and discussion, each was first asked “When you think of gay men who are parenting, what crosses/comes to your mind?” While I expected obtuse responses, I suspected that many would speak to both broad social ideologies, as well as personal

\textsuperscript{1} Seccombe 1991 also notes the high status of economic concerns among heterosexual men when considering paternal aspirations.
perspectives. As nearly all gay men experience much of their early cultural and familial
socialization in the context of their heterosexual families of origin within a heteronormative
society, I expected at least some men to speak of gay parenting in a critical or negative light.
While many men did indeed speak to cultural stereotypes and the social stigma or obstacles that
might be affiliated with gay and lesbian parenting, nearly all spoke of gay fathering as a positive
pursuit. Even those who were personally disinclined to pursue fatherhood were markedly
positive about men who were doing so and were supportive of the individual choices these men
had made.

My query on the perspectives of these men about “gay men who are parenting” was
intentionally constructed to be obtuse and allow for multiple interpretations by the subjects. In
particular I sought to avoid the gendered stereotypes and bias associated with the term
“fathering” and the potential heteronormative affiliation of this term with a counterpart mother.
Herein, I was intentionally trying to avoid the possibility that subjects might be predisposed to
only think of gay men who became parents in prior heterosexual relationships. Among
preliminary responses, few made a connection between gay men’s parenting and a prior
heterosexual relationship. The few respondents that made such a connection always did so in
reference to a known couple or acquaintance, a real-life example of such a situation that
informed their perspective. Particularly surprising was the frequent image of a gay couple
raising children, rather than gay parenting unto itself. This inclination may have emerged as a
result of the plural phrasing of the question (“gay men”), but may have been informed by the
hegemonic cultural family ethos of children being raised by two parents. The orientation to
thinking of parenting as a dyadic role, while certainly encouraged culturally, may also be
mitigated by personal family backgrounds. Indeed, among the men who did not speak to gay
fathering as a two-parent construct it was not uncommon to hear of having been raised by a single mother.

Ultimately, one of the most prevalent themes to emerge among initial responses to gay fathering was a comparison with heterosexual, hegemonic, family constructs and ideals. Some men, such as David, suggested that gay fathering is “a kind of a symbol, a form of a heterosexual relationship.” This implies that parenting is a heterosexual pursuit and to do so as a gay man is a replication of hetero-ideals, or perhaps the normalization of gay parenting. Many more spoke to gay fathering not as a replication of heterosexuality, but as being comparable in parenting ability and child socialization. Some went so far as to speak of gay parenting as being “no different.” Fred and Nick, respectively, stated that “the way I see it, parents are parents regardless” and “I really don’t think I make much of a distinction between gay parents and straight parents.”

Similar to the correlation of parenting with heterosexuality, some men made the clear connection of parenting with maturation. As Rick states, “Stable. They’re very stable, um the first thought that came to mind was they were a couple, there were two of them. Um, now that I think about that, that doesn’t necessarily have to be the case. Uh, older, in their 30s, not that that’s old …” While Rick speaks to gay parenting as a dyadic pursuit affiliated with stability, others suggest that such a pursuit may merely be a natural progression from the wild days of youth. As Carl states, “…It just seems like they reached a point in their lives, you know, their lives were just not about partying and vacations, and it’s still about, they still enjoy that, but it just seemed like a broader existence I think.” Both statements particularly point to the pursuit of fathering as an activity for later in a gay man’s life, likely affiliated with one’s 30s or 40s.²

Among most men interviewed, it seems that the idea of gay fathering is clearly affiliated with

² While Rick clearly suggests 30s as an appropriate age span for gay fathering, subjects themselves often spoke of parenting as a pursuit they would consider into their 40s.
life stability in the form of a committed relationship, as well as occupational, fiscal, and geographic stability.

Another comparison to heterosexual parenting emerged as men spoke to the deliberateness of gay parenting. As Randy states, “I think that the main difference between straight parents and gay parents is that in every case, not every case, but most of the time gay parents deliberately chose this and have to make a very conscious effort no matter how they achieve, achieved, it. Um, I assume that they must have a certain stability in their lives…”

While affirming the previous point about stability and maturity, he has made the clear point that gay parents are almost certainly making clear, conscious, decisions when they choose to become parents. Unlike some heterosexual parents, gay men and lesbians are unlikely to “accidentally” enter into fertility—conscious actions towards fertility or adoption (Beers 1996, Brodzinsky and Petterson 2002, James 2002), time consuming processes, are required for most to become parents. As Norman suggests, becoming a gay parent is almost certain to require extra effort and time:

I think that gay men are phenomenal parents, reason being because I think they for a gay couple to actually go through the process of adopting a child it takes so much more time, so much more energy. It’s just so much harder an obstacle to overcome as a gay couple to adopt a child, than it is for a straight couple. So, I think that you have to really want it and you have to be really committed and I think that after you have done all the work, and you now have a child you are going to be the best possible person you can be because you’ve done so much already.

Despite the progressive perspective of some gay men, quite a few also make clear reference to the cultural stereotypes and fears about gay men’s parenting and affiliation with children. A number spoke to this cultural concern in obtuse terms, as Owen suggests “… so many people that would think that was wrong.” Meanwhile, others explicitly referenced
historical stereotypes affilating gay men with pedophilia (see Barret and Robinson 1990, 2000) as did Aaron and Chris:

Um, good for them, cause it’s a lot of hard work and there’s a lot of stereotypes out there. The biggest one that comes to mind is being gay, you’re a pedophile. You’re automatically put into that stereotype and um, it’s a hard stereotype to break for a lot of people. So, that’s the first thing I think about. And the second, is, you know, it’s um, I dunno, it’s tough. Good for them. I mean, it’s not…I would like to be a father but I know it’s not going to happen. I wouldn’t want children now at my age, thirty-three, having children now would be the time and I’m not ready to have children, so I don’t think it’s going to happen. (Aaron)

Um, a lot of the stereotypes that gay men are pedophiles, that’s what I feel a lot of people think, like ‘oh why should they be parents, you know, they’re probably going to molest or something’ if it’s a boy child…. (Chris)

While these men are among the very few men interviewed to make such specific reference to child molestation, it is clear that many of the men recognize the cultural constraints and obstacles affiliated with pursuing fatherhood. Certainly, they realize the biological and legal issues they may face should they choose to seek children, but they are also consciously aware that society, despite significant progress, continues to struggle with the concept of gay fatherhood (see Barret and Robinson 1990, 2000). As Jason suggests:

It’s something that you know, society doesn’t really see or value at all and the two men, you know, strange obviously, for mainstream society to see that and so I would think that it must be kind of difficult because you aren’t going to get much social support trying to raise kids when you are, you, bring your two men so I think they must be well dedicated and really thought it through a lot and, uh, I know, know, what they want, and um yeah.

Beyond the specific societal concern regarding pedophilia, concerns about child and family outcomes also emerged among respondents:

I wonder what their expectations are of the child, if they hope the child grows up to be straight or gay. I wonder, um, I wonder what happens with custody if they split up. I wonder how that would work out legally…that could be weird. I also wonder how if it was between two men, would one of them be the biological father, how that would affect the other one because the other one wouldn’t
necessarily be related to it. Um, and whether it would be treated as an adopted child, but it wouldn’t be the same bond possibly, I’m not sure how that works, which is why I think about it. (Julio)

Herein, Julio actively speaks to the complex and layered contemplations many have as they think about gay parenting. Given the diverse paths to fathering, the complicated and often problematic legal status of two men parenting a child together, and the cultural stereotypes that gay men and lesbians raise their children to be gay, it is not surprising to find these divergent issues intertwined. Gay parenting, as a relatively recent social phenomenon, remains legally and socially complex and problematic. If anything, it is surprising that more men did not articulate these issues. Indeed, Julio was the only man to specifically refer to the social concern that a gay-raised child may him/herself “become” gay. The rarity of this reference among the interviews, suggests that this stereotype is likely in decline. His particular perspective may also be influenced by his Latino heritage and impoverished childhood, although other Latino men made no such reference.

As a final significant aspect of these men’s preliminary thoughts, the political component of gay fathering emerges. While he may temper the suggestion that gay parenting is a feminist political act, Paul certainly speaks to the act of queer parenting as a socially progressive occurrence:

Like, when I see that I’m like, I’m like, can I do that, kind of thing. But I admire it, because it’s like, umm, I don’t know. I think it’s very, not to sound like, like, a feminist, but I mean, I feel like its [a] very empowering kind of thing. You know, it’s like, you know, like as gay, lesbian, transgendered, bisexual, you know, something, someone always has something that they, you know, about you, and that you can have a parent, er, you can have a child and you know, share that with your lover, or somethings. I think that’s a sign of the times and I wouldn’t change it.

Both Allen and Burrell (1996) and Stacey and Biblarz (2001) demonstrated the illegitimacy of this claim in their research on children raised by gay and lesbian parents. In the years since, this data, along with media influence, has likely eroded this belief.
Herein, Paul is cognizant of gay parenting as a piece of the holistic issue of LGBT socio-legal politics and movement towards social equity. Similarly, Chet asserts “I think that it is a step towards an open society and it’s really good to see they have that ability and that right to be able to take care of kids and have a life that is comparable to a heterosexual life.” While Chet is arguably reaffirming heteronormativity with his comparison to a “heterosexual life,” which is clearly the social norm, he has prefaced this concept with the idea of an “open society.” Similar to earlier mentioned allusions to gay parenting being the same as heterosexual parenting, he has articulated gay parenting as a transitional step towards an emergent socio-political conception of parenting at large.

Among all responses, often found among the previously incorporated quotes as well, the most prevalent ideology that emerges is that of admiration and respect. The vast majority of respondents spoke positively and supportively about the idea of gay parenting, with statements such as “Good for them” or “I completely respect and admire anyone who does it,” and often use terms such as admire, envy, and lucky. While some mention that parenting may be an undesirable personal choice, they frequently temper this potentially stigmatizing view with positive reinforcement of others. Regardless of their personal aspirations, it seems that gay men are embracing a positive view of gay parenting and believe that parenthood is a choice to be made—a human right, regardless of sexual orientation.

**Gay Men’s Interaction with Gay and Lesbian Parents**

A striking characteristic of many of the subjects was the limited personal interaction with gay or lesbian parents. Among those surveyed, only half reported knowing or being acquainted with any gay or lesbian parents. These men primarily reported knowing only a single gay or
lesbian parent or couple. The greatest number of referrals to emerge among the subjects was three. This limited engagement was found across all aspiration levels and does not appear to have a particular affiliation with one’s desire to parent or remain childfree. Significant to the limited observation or acquaintance with this parenting may be the stage of life and level of involvement in the GLBT community. As younger gay men, they may have fewer social ties or opportunities for interaction with gay and lesbian parents for several reasons. Central to this limited interaction may be age cohort social segregation, with young gay men likely socializing with peers, rather than those 10 to 20 years older. As such, younger gay men may only be socializing with those of similar life experience. Particularly among gay men, parenting is likely a situation most likely seen among those in their later 30s and older. 4 Whether these men become parents in prior heterosexual relationships or sought parenthood as gay men, this would likely be situated among an older cohort who had established a homosexual identity later in life or among those who had accomplished a stable enough career and income to pursue parenting. Given the differing stage of life and stability levels, these different demographics of gay men may be socializing in differing arenas in general, but even in shared spaces may not be interacting significantly. This said, the limited social engagement may be a consequence of fatherhood itself. Once one has become a parent, he may be less able to engage in significant social interactions in cultural environments where young gay men are likely to socialize, such as gay bars and events. Further, even if one is a gay father, this information may not be widely shared when casually interacting in social venues. While young gay men may report not knowing many, if any, gay and lesbian parents, it may ultimately be a matter of not being aware that they know any.

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4 Research on gay fathers, such as Mallon 2004, Strah with Margolis 2003, and Symons 2002, primarily engage with stories and interviews of men in their mid-40s and older, for example.
Among gay men who reported knowing or interacting with gay or lesbian parents, a variety of social relationships were observed. A few men spoke to familial connections to gay or lesbian parents, though this was fairly unusual. More common among those who knew such parents was the referral to gay men they believe became fathers in prior heterosexual relationships and then came out as gay later in life. Similarly, some spoke to being aware of this parenting via peer acquaintances who had gay or lesbian parents, but none of these men spoke to particularly knowing or seeing the parents or their interactions with their children. Among those who directly knew men who were parents or were pursuing children, via adoption for example, there was often an affiliation of class status and privilege connected to their exemplifications. Two men reported having previously dated men who had children from prior heterosexual relationships. Common across the examples was the observation of gay and lesbian parenting as clearly separate occurrences, without reference to gay men and lesbians co-parenting together, except for one reference to a lesbian couple whose child was fathered by a gay man.5

Familial connections to gay and lesbian parents were limited among the sample. None of the men reported having a gay or lesbian parent themselves. While several reported having a gay or lesbian sibling, cousin, aunt, or uncle, few of these relatives were parents. One man had a sibling who was in the pre-parenting stage, as a lesbian who was in the process of foster-parent training with her partner. Another example of lesbian parenting experienced within a family context was reported by Dennis:

The closest I’ve come to, again, is my aunt Debbie. She’s a lesbian. And her, the girlfriend she’s had now for 10 years, umm, the girlfriend came into the relationship with 3 children, umm, from a previous divorce. Umm, so, they have been raising the children for 10 years, since they were 2 or 3. So, that is the only

5 Unclear in this case, however, was the role of the gay man in the childrearing. It seems he was likely a sperm donor with a limited role in the child’s life, rather than a co-parent. This discussion, with Ivan, will be quoted in several pages.
example of gay parenting that I have personally witnessed. And, and it’s, they’re just parents. You know, they ground the kids, and take them on vacations, and, I mean, they just do what any other parent would do. I don’t see a difference in any way, except with, umm, in getting the kids involved with sports or whatever, and the coach would call the house. It was really awkward for the kids to try to explain that they had 2 mothers. So, my aunt Debbie would tell them “just tell them I’m the babysitter,” or “just tell them I’m the roommate.” They did that just to make it easier for the kids to explain to the other grownups in their lives.

In his example he demonstrates an ethos common among many of the men interviewed—the simultaneous normalization and acceptance of gay and lesbian parenting, tempered with an awareness of social stigma it may garner. He asserts the normative parenting process of his aunt and her partner, but also notes the social compromises they engage to limit social stigma and facilitate easier peer and school interactions for their children.

The most common interaction or knowledge of gay and lesbian parents by these men occurred via casual social acquaintances or even through a “friend of a friend” social network. Ned particularly demonstrates both of these dynamics, as he states “I have a friend who I have only known him a short time and he has two kids from his marriage. He is bisexual and then um, my friend’s aunt has a 17 year old daughter.” He had met a bisexual man who had previously had children, although did not appear to have met the children or observed their interactions. He also knew that one of his friends had an aunt who was a lesbian mother, but again did not appear to have met her. Statements such as these indicate limited social interaction with this type of parenting, but awareness that it occurred within their abstract social networks.

Similarly, Eric had also experienced limited social connections to gay and lesbian parenting, but regarded these examples of those he “knew”:

Actually, now that I think about it, but I think it was like heterosexual but the parents split up and one of them became gay. I am not really sure but there was this kid. I just remember because there was this career fair in middle school and this kid’s dad was an art guy, I don’t really know-like the head of department for art so I think he was gay and he was raising his son who was now in high school
so I don’t know if he has a partner or anything. There was this girl who goes here [to the same college], her mom, I don’t know the situation but her mom has a female partner after their parents divorced but that is not really like, it is still parenting but not a crucial age when children look up to you, well they still look up to you but not a much because they are forming their own ideas when they get older but when they are younger they kind of form their personality from you. They are like the only two gay parenting situations I know of.

Manish also spoke to knowing lesbian parents where one had born a child in a prior heterosexual relationship, but also demonstrates the older age of children involved given his reference to grandchildren:

It’s mostly lesbians I’ve seen have children, but I have, uh, we do have two friends of ours, they’re an older couple, but, um, only one of them has children, biological children, but they’re from a prior marriage, and they’re older couple bred both, um, partners...are active in the child rearing, and also very involved with their grandchildren as well, and I think that’s just very, very sweet and endearing.

Striking in these examples is the observation of these children being older, at least in their teenage years. While this may merely be happenstance, it also indicates the cultural terrain in which the positioning of “real” gay and lesbian parenting is occurring. Certainly some associate gay and lesbian parenting with children across an age spectrum, yet it does appear that examples tended to reference older children. This may be speaking to the larger context in which gay and lesbian parenting is observed, but may merely be the result of gay and lesbian parents coming out later in life. If one were to parent in the context of a prior heterosexual relationship it may have indeed been a number of years before they were able to come out as gay or lesbian, during which time their children would have grown and entered their teen years.

Few knew gay men who had become parents or were pursuing parenthood as gay men, although two men spoke to such examples. Common to these examples was a clear association with upper-middle class occupations and fiscal statuses. As Jim reported:
You know, of the ones that I have met, um, (inaudible)… Doctors, lawyers that had the money to adopt, you know, foreign or domestic adoptions. Um, have the money to have that partner at home or help at home. So, definitely they are doing it and it’s not taking a huge bite out of their financial situation. They have the means to do it right.

Similarly, Mark, throughout his interview made brief references to an ex-boyfriend who was in the process of pursuing adoption with a current partner. Through his discussion he made reference to his ex’s partner’s occupation as a lawyer and their fiscal comfort. While exceptionally few men could reference others who had or were becoming fathers as gay men, these examples simultaneously demonstrate the viability of gay fatherhood and the social distance many may feel from the socio-economic status these men demonstrate. Examples such as these may encourage men about the opportunity to father, but also discourage their belief of its viability if they do not lead such privileged social (economic) lives. Perhaps some gay men will see this fathering, but will regard it as only an option for the well-to-do, not for those of average income. As will be discussed later, the issue of money is indeed among the most reported concern or issue gay men believe will facilitate or limit their ability to pursue fatherhood.

While a number of men reported they might be willing to date a gay man who had children, only two reported ever having been in a relationship with a gay father. One, Manish, referenced his experience off-handedly with “um, my-my ex-boyfriend, he did have a daughter” in his conclusion to his earlier referenced remark about his lesbian friends. In so doing, it demonstrated the limited implications of the experience and the casual status of their relationship. It did not appear that he had significant experience interacting with his ex’s daughter, but may have known he’d had a child with a prior girlfriend while younger. Daniel, on the other hand, had a particularly meaningful relationship with his partner’s two children when
they lived together. During our discussion it became evident that his ex was both an alcoholic and a relatively neglectful father, despite having custody of his two children. Daniel particularly spoke to having managed the majority of the childcare, but was unable to remain given the troubled relationship. When questioned about the experience dating a man with children he reported:

Daniel: I would never date anybody with children again.
Farr: Were the children something you think attracted you to the situation?
Daniel: Yes, very much so. I think the children were the only thing that attracted me to that situation. I can’t stand seeing kids being neglected and to see how badly they were neglected the first that I met them. It breaks your heart. You wanna do everything in your power to make sure that they feel loved and wanted. And their father never did that.

While Daniel experienced a particularly troubling first-hand observation with gay fathering, he did not express negative beliefs about gay fathering in general. Rather, he spoke specifically of this particular father as a bad father, his homosexuality being a secondary irrelevant issue to his drinking and other problems.

Common to the majority of gay and lesbian parenting examples was the distinction of these two types, without overlap. While in the past one might have observed the collaboration of lesbians and gay men in the pursuit of children, it seems that this may be an increasingly rare, or at the very least under recognized, occurrence. The only subject to speak to a collaborative affiliation of lesbian mothers with a gay father was Ivan:

Farr: You mentioned a lesbian couple you knew who had children. Otherwise, have you been exposed to gay or lesbian parenting, or seen it, etc.?
Ivan: No, I know only that [lesbian] couple who are. Only one couple, but as far as I know, the child has a gay father. It’s a complicated story, and the father visits the child from time to time, but I’m not sure the child knows who the father is, but again the whole thing within the gay community, not beyond it.
His observation suggests the centering of this parenting in the lesbian domain, but with the “donor” being a gay man. While the gay “father” may have limited interaction with the children, his identity as the biological father is unclear. Regardless of the specifics of their familial dynamics, this example offers a unique view of gay and lesbian parenting. This is the only example offered, among all respondents, to speak to parenting as occurring within the gay community, between gay men and lesbians. Otherwise, men broadly spoke to gay men’s parenting and lesbian parenting as two distinct familial forms—they were related but, distinctly unique in how they were observed. While co-parenting may have been a functional path pursued in past decades to bring children into gay and lesbian families (Gianino 2005, Mallon 2004, Martin 1993, Sbordone 1993, Wells 2005), cultural changes and improved access to alternate paths of parenthood have made this an exceptionally rare familial scenario today.

Recollections of the Media: Print, Film, and Television

Given the apparent limited personal access to engaging with or observing gay and lesbian parenting for most men interviewed, the media and synthesis of such images becomes an important aspect of understanding the situated perspectives of gay men as they consider their parental aspirations. Not surprisingly, nearly all men were able to make some reference to media portrayals of gay and lesbian parenting in television, film, or print. However, the number of portrayals any particular man could muster varied and tended towards five of fewer examples, with most only able to reference one or two images or examples. Among the references, a consistent clear picture of the central iconic cultural images emerged. An aspect of the cultural images that was unexpected was the frequent referencing of gay and lesbian celebrities, including those who did not publically identify as gay, who were not parents, despite a clear
query about media depictions of gay and lesbian parenting. It would seem that gay and lesbian parenting, as seen in the media, is merely a piece of a larger construct of queer imagery in the minds of many gay men.

A number of subjects referenced print media and articles during their interviews. Juan even spoke of magazines as his first media introduction to gay and lesbian parenting, which was not surprising given the gay-themed magazines observed on his coffee table during our interview in his home. Indeed, among the magazines observed was an issue with a central article relevant to gay fathering; “Disco Dads,” appeared in the June/July 2008 issue of Out magazine, contemporary to the interviews. As introduced on the magazine cover, “Disco Dads: 40, with kids—and still partying,” this article discussed the familial dynamics of a few socio-economically privileged gay men and couples who were raising children, but remained active in the gay party scene, including attendance of national events such as the White Party, an annual week-long gay party event in Miami, FL. Among the men referencing this and similar articles, it was often brought up casually or in an obtuse manner, such as “having recently read about…” gay men’s parenting in a gay magazine. When men specifically referenced the aforementioned article, they often engaged with critiques about engaging in a party lifestyle in conjunction with parenting. While mention of the article often emerged within the context of other dialogue, some, such as Jim, brought up this article early in our discussion, when questioned about their preliminary perspectives on gay fathering:

Jim: You know, honestly, there was an article I read in last month’s Out magazine about gay parents that go out to clubs and things and I thought uh, not what I would have thought that parents should do whether they are gay or straight.
Farr: Okay.
Jim: And I was reading this month’s…
Farr: While you were reading that were you feeling critical about it?
Jim: Yeah I was very critical about it. I thought you should be home doing family stuff like a normal

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Farr: Not going to the (inaudible) parties and…
Jim: And yeah, you know, and not booking your Atlantis cruise. You have kids I think you make sacrifices as a parent. And I was reading some of the letters to the editor in the issue that just came out this month and a couple other people had voiced that same opinion as mine. Like, how you’re surfing on Manhunt [an online gay men’s cruising site] while your kids waiting to do homework research and I was…it was interesting to um, to read the feedback those who had my same thoughts. That it was kind of inappropriate.

This critique of a partying lifestyle and its intersection with parenting was also referenced by Dennis, although he himself did not mention the article.

Dennis: I think it would only impact them if they are still trying to stay in the club scene, or they are trying to do the parties, or they are trying to...
Farr: There is an article on that in just the last month.
Dennis: oh is there? Ok.
Farr: Ya, “Club Dad’s”
Farr: Or something like that, ya.
Dennis: Umm, I think in terms of that, if they wanted to maintain that lifestyle and be a parent, I think at some point it would cause a conflict. But, if you’re, but if you can find the gay family venues, where they embrace families, they embrace children, then I think you’re going to be fine. Umm, I just don’t know if those are as numerous as the more mainstream club scene. I don’t know, I haven’t looked.

Despite magazines and print material being mentioned secondary to television and film, they clearly remain influential among gay men’s conceptualization of gay fathering and its influence in a couple’s or man’s life.

Within the media at large there were clear trends among the shows and films mentioned by the men. The two most commonly referenced programs were Will & Grace (mainstream television series) and Queer as Folk (premium channel television series), with each being mentioned by approximately 25 to 30 percent of respondents. Additional television references included other premium television channel series such as The L-Word and Six-Feet Under,
mainstream television series _Friends_ and _Brothers & Sisters_, and the “news.” Several films also garnered notation, most notably _The Object of my Affection_, _The Next Best Thing_, and _The Birdcage_—all being comedies or romantic-comedies. Some also made reference to “documentaries” or “foreign films,” but rarely mentioned particular titles. Within interviews, subjects primarily referenced films by name only, with limited commentary or analysis, as such discussion will center primarily upon television programs which garnered more dialogue.

As the most referenced media example, _Will & Grace_, a popular, long-running sitcom, offered a unique example of gay and lesbian parenting. Unlike other series to be discussed, this show specifically centered queer parenting in the domain of gay fathers. Over the course of the series gay men are shown parenting post-adoption (particularly a gay married couple who are friends of Will and Jack), a central character (Jack, who is gay) learns he is a father via a sperm bank donation made years prior—interestingly, his son is shown being raised by a lesbian mother played by Rosie O’Donnell, and in the season finale the lead character, Will, also a gay man, is shown raising a young son born via surrogate with his partner, Vince. Within the series, there is discussion and the preliminary efforts towards _Will and Grace_, Will’s heterosexual female best friend, entering a co-parenting situation together, via alternative insemination. While centrally a sitcom program, this series, more than any other contemporary, addressed the greatest diversity of approaches available to gay men when seeking to have children.

The frequent mentioning of this series by subjects is likely a consequence of its airing on public channels, strong ratings, and its eight season run which aired during many of the men’s

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6 In the years following these interviews other series such as _Modern Family_ (2009- ) have included gay fathering as central aspects of the show. Gay and lesbian families also continue to garner growing visibility as secondary characters in a variety of television programs.

7 When O’Donnell appeared in the 1/31/2002 episode 4(14) “Dyeing is Easy, Comedy is Hard,” her character Bonnie comes out as a lesbian. O’Donnell herself did not come out publicly until about a month later.

8 The term “surrogate” is never actually used in the episode; rather, when Will is speaking to his infant son he states: “Sometimes I see me, and sometimes I just see the sad girl who sold her eggs for rent money.” Such a statement clearly implies the child was born via a surrogate.
adolescence or young adulthood. While some mentioned the show without noting the inclusion of parenting, as did Daniel, “Then of course Will & Grace, but they weren’t parents,” most included at least one example of the diverse forms of gay and lesbian parenting in the show. Among those who did mention the gay fathering in the series, there was a tendency to center upon Jack’s connection to his biological son or to Will’s friends who had adopted an infant girl. No one mentioned the number of episodes where Will and Grace were pursuing fertility together, and few mentioned Will’s parenting. The most likely reason for the limited notation of Will’s son is the fact that he only appears in the series finale. However at least one man, Rick, did make the particular observation of this parenting at the very end: “you notice in Will & Grace they finally at the very, very, very end there was parenting,” although he dismissed all prior examples of gay or lesbian parenting in the series. However, in his view of the series he may have been primarily centered upon Will as one of the title protagonists. Will & Grace was clearly a ground-breaking series as far as introducing gay men’s culture and identities to America and has left a lasting impact upon many of today’s young gay men as they consider their own parental aspirations.

When discussing media references, some subjects interjected their interpretation of greater culture’s perspective about programs with central gay themes and plot lines. When asked if he had ever observed gay or lesbian parenting in the media, Ben responded:

Ben: I don’t think I have. I’m trying to think of examples of- and I can’t really think of any positives or negatives. I don’t remember really any movies or tv shows with gay or lesbian parents. I mean except for like fairly recently, you know, like Six Feet Under. Toward the end of the show, two guys like adopt a baby. Does anyone in The L Word have a kid? Yeah they do.

Farr: Bette and Tina.

Ben: But those are sort of shows for gay people.

Farr: If they were [only] gay people, they wouldn’t have enough audience to watch The L Word.

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9 Full context of this quote will be presented shortly.
**Ben:** I think there’s an assumption that if you’re watching *The L Word*, *Queer As Folk*, or *Six Feet Under* or some show that has that has level of gay content, then you’re at least gonna be pretty gay friendly going into that.

**Farr:** Well, *Six Feet Under* is not a particularly “gay” show in my opinion, but *L Word* or *Queer as Folk* or....

**Ben:** No, but I think it would be hard for a really homophobic person to watch *Six Feet Under* comfortably I would think...

As he points out, the audiences of these programs, regardless of sexuality, are likely to be “pretty gay friendly.” Given the success of the programs referenced, each airing for five or six seasons, it would seem likely that they each garnered significant audience attention. The success of these programs speaks not only to greater visibility of gay and lesbian identities and culture, which may include parenting to varying degrees, but also the influence these programs have upon social perspectives about LGBT persons, their social lives, and their families. This said, among these three series in particular, gay and lesbian parenting tended to be delayed until later in a series or subjugated within story plots. For example, in *Six Feet Under*, David and Keith do not adopt their two sons until the final season; in both *Queer as Folk* and *The L-Word*, gay and lesbian parenting emerges at varying times in the storylines, though does not remain a central aspect of the story, reemerging periodically to varying degrees throughout the series.\(^{10}\) This said, while rarely central, stable aspects of a particular episode or plot arc, these shows do offer visibility of some of the diverse forms of gay and lesbian parenting including: adoption,\(^{11}\) lesbian-born mothering via alternative insemination\(^{12}\), as well as varying degrees of co-parenting between gay

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\(^{10}\) For brief analysis of the imagery affiliated with lesbian mothering in *Queer as Folk* and *The L-Word* see Farr and Degroult (2008)

\(^{11}\) Including interracial adoption by David and Keith; David is white and partnered with Keith who is African American. They adopt two sons who are also African American. Issues of HIV are also addressed in relation to adoption in *Queer as Folk* when Michael and his HIV+ partner Ben adopt Hunter, an HIV+ teenager.

\(^{12}\) In *The L-Word*, Bette who identifies as African American and Tina who is white, sought an African American sperm donor for the child birthed by Tina.
sperm donor and lesbian mothers. Further, two of these series also reflect racial ethnic diversity within gay and lesbian families, with the third series engaging with issues of HIV within the family.

Highlighting the distinction of program content on premium channels versus mainstream stations, Rick transitions from *Queer as Folk* towards *Will & Grace*, poignantly referencing the issue of gay men’s parenting specifically and questions the media’s message.

*Rick:* *Queer as Folk, Queer as Folk,* as the girls want to (inaudible) Mel and Lindsey yeah, they got Brian and Michael’s sperm, but you don’t see and then you see Ben and Michael they took in the stray and they parented. He’s a stray, the homeless kid and they brought him to a more loving environment. But those shows are not mainstream. You can’t turn on TBS at 10:00 at night right after *Sex in the City* it’s probably because there is a lot of naked stuff in *Queer as Folk* uh and a lot of bad words. 

*Farr:* It’s rather graphic in some respects.

*Rick:* Oh. But I think it was I think it is a good role model. Uh, you notice in *Will & Grace* they finally at the very, very, very end there was parenting. No talk of parenting really up until that point, um, so at the end they finally adopted and uh I don’t know, that makes me wonder a bunch of things like what is media trying to tell me? Uh, I think it is trying to tell me that you know the man has to be in a relationship to have a child. Uh, and that it’s I can’t think of a single example of a gay man having a child and full custody of the child. Uh, I can think of lesbians that have full custody of a child mainly because they had sex with a guy and got pregnant uh and then had their own child and I know of one woman, one woman whose girlfriend is my friend and she said that she had sex with men in order to get pregnant because she can and that’s the easiest way. But you know I can’t think of any role models for any single gay male parent. 

His point of limited examples, if any existed at the time, of single gay men parenting in the media may indeed indicate that gay fathering is being portrayed as a pursuit only for the coupled.

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13 This co-parenting is seen in *Queer as Folk* with Melanie and Lindsay’s two children. The first child birthed by Lindsay is the result of sperm donation by Brian, who recognizes the child as his son, but remains relatively hands-off and ultimately relinquishes legal rights to his son. Their second child is birthed by Melanie and is the result of sperm donation by Michael, who remains an active parent in his daughter’s life and ultimately gains 1/3 custody shared with Lindsay and Melanie. Despite the varying degree of co-parenting, Melanie and Lindsay remain the central caretakers and guardians to their children.

14 While Rick recalls the portrayal of Will’s parenting incorrectly resulting from adoption, rather than surrogacy, his point remains. However, he does dismiss all prior inclusion of gay or lesbian parenting in the series.
This said, one can argue the portrayal of lesbian mothers in the media engages with the ethos of coupling as prerequisite activity also. However, with close examination of media one also observes that in both *The L-Word* and *Queer as Folk*, the parenting lesbian couples each separate after having a child and demonstrate mothering as single women. Nonetheless, by the end of each series both couples have reunited, enforcing the couple ethos yet again.

Rick, perhaps more than any other man interviewed, also verbalizes a connection between media and lived experience. As he discusses media he digresses and switches to speak of his lived experience and personal knowledge of a lesbian mother. This association of media depiction and life experiences suggests the interactive cultural engagement that likely manifests for many gay men as they observe the social terrain of gay and lesbian parenting. The media can serve as a way of bridging limited social experiences, offering ideas and social options that may not be readily observed by all. Alternately, these portrayals may offer young gay men ideas about the diverse ways of achieving parenthood, beyond the limited manners they may have seen among limited peer examples. In so doing, it may plant a seed of inspiration for young gay men, encouraging them to recognize the possibility of different options. Certainly such portrayals may offer insight to inform an individual’s particular aspirational stance, but given the diverse synthesis of media imagery and limited correlation to reported aspiration among the men interviewed, a clear causal influence or association seems unlikely.

Beyond creating visible gay and lesbian parents, media can encourage the audience to question cultural beliefs about gender itself and one’s ability to parent. As discussed by Paul:

Do you know what I wish? I wish there was more men, uh, and stuff. Because, I don’t know, I see, like the lesbian ones like, I think you it on *The L-Word* too. I’ve never gotten into that, but um, you know, you see them as more, like nurturing and stuff. But men can be nurturing too. You know, they’re not all about screwing (laughs). So um, but yeah, I wish, but you never know, it will probably come up eventually, like I mean on the show *Brothers & Sisters*, they
um, just have [inaudible – likely reference to the characters of Kevin and Scotty, a gay couple] got married, sort of thing, so eventually…

Clearly, to Paul’s mind, there are few gay fathers being shown in the media and that the bias towards portrayals of lesbian mothers may serve to reinforce ideologies separating gay men and children. Ultimately, his assertion comes down to persisting gendered ideologies that women are more nurturing, better parents, than men. Jason, also building off discussion of media similarly suggests:

I think it is more natural for lesbians to have kids because you grow up and learn in culture and socialized in your brain to the to learn that women are better at having and raising kids then men aren’t. They can have them their selves biologically have kids themselves so it probably more natural and I probably picked up on that a little bit. And the entire stigma too and they probably can pass more in social situations in the mall or grocery store walking down the street. If it is two women who are passersby it is like oh you know so you whatever so you and your it cannot be it is almost seen as friends whereas two men seen with a child and you don’t see that very often.

Informed by Paul and Jason’s comments, the synergistic relationship of media, cultural, and personal ideologies is revealed. Cultural aspects of sexual behavior, relationship stability, men and women’s interactions with children, and the likely social interpretation of lesbian couples with children intermingle when gay men reflect upon media imagery. While the portrayal of lesbian mothering, which appears to be particularly noted by many gay men, offers an image of parenting outside of a heterosexual norm, it remains troubling given the lack of (female) gender diversity portrayed (Farr and Degroult 2008) and the few gay men shown.

Surprisingly, a number of men reported that they had witnessed or observed gay and lesbian parenting in the media, to varying degrees, but were unable to specifically point to any

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15 Paul turns out to be correct as later in the series Kevin and Scotty attempt surrogacy without success and then pursue fostering parenting with the intent of later adoption.

16 One may argue that Paul is speaking to the portrayal of men at large, not just gay men, based on the specific phrasings. However, with the follow-up statement of “they’re not all about screwing,” he confirms he is speaking of gay men, given the cultural stereotypes that gay men’s culture is centered upon sexual prowess and active sex lives.
examples. Some, such as Edward, spoke to their engagement with these portrayals in an obtuse fashion that suggests an assumption that he had seen such imagery, “I am sure I have but I can’t remember right now. No, I can’t think of any right now.” Edward appears to assert not only that these portrayals exist, but he must have seen them, but simply cannot recall. This perspective certainly encourages one to question the degree of influence these media portrayals may have in this man’s life. Perhaps some young gay men are merely consuming these images, if they have indeed seen them, as part of a normalized integration of gay and lesbian identities into mainstream media—something not even noteworthy. Of course, this limited ability to point to media images may also be the consequence of limited engagement with media at large, as with David who suggests, “Um, I couldn’t give you any specific examples, I don’t go to movies much, but uh I mean, uh, I’ve seen movies that have lesbian parents in them. Um yeah, I can’t remember the titles and stuff.” Indeed, among men who were unable to mention any examples it was quite common that they would offer reasons for this, including not owning or watching a television, or a preference for reading.

Despite the limited ability to speak to examples of gay and lesbian family images, at least one subject felt informed enough to suggest that these portrayals are stereotypical.

Warren: Um yeah, I’ve seen many.
Farr: Can you give me any examples perhaps?
Warren: Um, no. (laugh).
Farr: (laugh).
Warren: No specifics, but no, I know I’ve seen it and witnessed it, but no specifics. I think any ones that I’ve seen are stereotypical or um, what you could imagine a gay relationship with a child would be.

Warren may be unable to give any specific examples of media portrayals, but he is informed enough to draw a preliminary conclusion about what types of images do exist. His suggestion that these family portrayals are stereotypical and are “what you could imagine a gay relationship
with a child would be” indicates an assumption of an agreed upon cultural ideology about gay couples and parenting. Despite this obtuse comment, he offered little clarification, beyond the suggestion that he had seen both gay men and lesbian parenting in the media. He did add the caveat that he believed lesbian mothers were shown more often than gay fathers. It is clear that at least some men are able to develop a conceptual framework of this cultural imagery, without specifics, building generalized ideas about how American media is presenting gay and lesbian family.

Recollections of the Media: Celebrities

Several respondents made specific reference to celebrities, in particular, when questioned about gay and lesbian parenting in the media. One subject, Nick, was particularly articulate in speaking to references of gay and lesbian celebrities, parenting or otherwise:

_Farr_: Do any examples come to mind?
_Nick_: I mean, you know, I know a lot of, I can mention names?
_Farr_: if it’s in the media that’s public domain, yeah.
_Nick_: Um, I mean B.D. Wong, um whose on _Law and Order, SVU_ and won a couple Tony Awards, he and his partner adopted a child,\textsuperscript{17} I mean there’s the big ones, Rosie O’Donnell and Melissa Ethridge and I mean, I don’t always think that I, I having worked in that industry, celebrities are held to a higher standard anyways, um, celebrity are held to a higher standard yet, and gay celebrity parents are held to a higher standard than that, so, um, it’s very easy, its, I mean, it’s sort of, what we’re talking about, whenever a child, ya know, when Cher’s daughter.
_Farr_: Chastity.\textsuperscript{18}
_Nick_: Chastity, was going through, I just went through, treatment for alcohol abuse or something, it’s something having to do with that, I think it’s very easy for people to go oh, that’s, that’s, ah, I think, I think it’s hard to find good role models in the entertainment industry in general, so I think it’s even harder to find good gay role models cause we’re only 10\% of the population.
_Farr_: You’ve particularly mentioned celebrities or actors, etc. Do you recall, have

\textsuperscript{17} Subject is correct that Wong and his ex-partner had a child, but it was via a surrogate.
\textsuperscript{18} Chastity has since undergone gender reassignment and currently is named Chaz Bono; he has no children.
you ever observed any story lines or sitcoms, movies, with story lines of gay or lesbian parenting?

Nick: Uh, there was the, Ellen DeGeneres and Sharon Stone did a thing about, you’ve heard of it, can’t remember what it’s called, it was directed by

Farr: Oh, If These Walls Could Talk?

Nick: Yes, and they go through the talk about artificial insemination and I liked that, I thought that was a really good representation. Um, yeah I thought that was a great representation of gay parenting, um, I don’t think there’s a ton, or there aren’t a ton that come to mind.

Farr: Well when you think about, you know even if you can’t specify the examples, do you think gay men’s parenting and lesbian parenting is being equally portrayed?

Nick: No, no, cause I think that the fact that women are naturally considered more maternal, um, I think that there’s just the assumption that two women will, will um, will, first of all lesbians don’t have the association, I mean, gay male culture is thought of as very sexual culture, lesbian culture is not generally, so I think that lesbians are women before they’re lesbians whereas gay men are gays before they’re men.

As mentioned by Nick, Rosie O’Donnell (comedian/actor) is clearly a “big one,” mentioned by just under 20 percent of respondents. Indeed, O’Donnell was referenced twice as often as any other celebrity. Her visible mothering and lesbian identities, publicly occurring in distinct times, as she initially was publically visible as a “single,” presumably heterosexual, mother, later coming out as lesbian, partnered with a woman. At the time of interviews, and still today, O’Donnell had become quite active and visible in the gay rights movement, particularly in relation to gay and lesbian parenting. In 2006, she starred in a documentary film, All Aboard! Rosie’s Family Cruise, about a gay and lesbian family cruise boat. The film followed Rosie’s family and others as they experienced their family vacations on the boat and the various harbors visited, portraying the diversity, as well as normality, of gay and lesbian families. While no men mentioned this film in particular, or any titles of documentary films in general, the celebrity lent to this film likely garnered greater public visibility and notoriety. Without doubt, O’Donnell had become the public face of gay and lesbian parenting in America during the era these men were experiencing.
Other lesbian mothers were also noted by some of the men. In particular, Melissa Ethridge (musician) was referenced by several men. Having come out herself in 1993, Ethridge’s family had been a minor staple of media query from the beginning of her long-term relationship with Julie Cypher, who had divorced Lou Diamond Phillips to be with Ethridge. Cypher gave birth to two children while with Ethridge. They were not only one of the first celebrity lesbian couples, but they were also among the first to have children. While O’Donnell had adopted her children as a single, presumably heterosexual, woman, Ethridge and Cypher were the first public lesbian couple to build a family together. Another “lesbian” celebrity mentioned by one man was Jodie Foster (actor). However, she has never come out as lesbian, although she is widely speculated to be so by the media. She does indeed have two children, whom she is raising as a single mother, as far as the public is aware. Among celebrities fathers mentioned, B.D. Wong, as quoted above, was the only man referenced by any subject.

There are clearly a larger number of celebrity lesbian mothers that these men could draw upon as examples, with few gay men to reference. In the years since the interviews, a growing number of male celebrities have not only come out, but have also begun to raise families. Were young gay men interviewed today Wong might still be referenced, but additionally we have witnessed celebrity gay couples such as Neil Patrick Harris (actor) and his partner David Burtka (actor/chef) raising twins born via a surrogate, Elton John (musician) and his partner David Furnish (filmmaker) raising a son born via a surrogate, as well as celebrities, Ricky Martin (musician) raising twins born via a surrogate and Clay Aiken (musician) raising a son with a female friend, although it is unclear if they are co-parenting or if she was a surrogate. Clearly, the preference of these well-to-do celebrity men was to pursue parenting via surrogate. As will later be discussed, this ethos appears to be the preference of many men interviewed, if their
financial situation allows. While the preferences of the men interviewed could not have been influenced by these recent celebrity examples, this commonality suggests that widespread cultural preferences encouraging genetic ties to one’s child and recognition of potential constraints of adoption processes for gay men are likely influencing gay men as a group, should they choose to parent.

Surprisingly, when queried about the imagery of gay and lesbians parenting, a fair number of men made reference to gay and lesbian celebrities who were not parents and even to heterosexual celebrities. Particularly referenced gay and lesbian celebrity non-parents were Ellen DeGeneres (comedian), as well as Clay Aiken\(^{19}\) (musician) and Lance Bass (musician/actor). These examples underscore the importance of gay and lesbian visibility in general as gay men consider life choices, such as parenting. This greater public visibility may serve to normalize queer identities socially, and allow these young gay men to expand their vision of life options as they see growing diversity of examples. As Dennis notes, “I think it’s more visible gay and lesbians. I can’t think up any particular movie or series that I remember seeing gay parent, off the top of my head. So, I think with that comment, I was mainly saying that it’s just gay exposure in general.” Clearly, for at least some gay men, it is not specific programs or storylines, or even specific celebrities, but it is the growing visibility and cultural awareness of gays and lesbians that is affecting social change.

**Summing Up: Cultural Engagement, Situating Aspirations**

The lived experiences and cultural observations of these men offer significant foregrounding to the interpretation of their parental aspirations and perspectives on gay

\(^{19}\) Aiken announced his son was born shortly after the interviews were completed (August 2008) and came out in September 2008.
fatherhood. While there does not appear to be a clear correlation between personal observation of gay and lesbian parenting, or even the degree of media depiction synthesis, with one’s personal aspiration, it remains likely that these experiences offer insight into how these men perceive the world. For these men to even be able to consider parenting as a potential life option suggests that there are various features of culture and society that are marking this path as valid and attainable. Many of the men are cognizant of the limitations, obstacles, and varying degrees of stigma affiliated with gay fathering across the United States, yet are seemingly able to at least partially resolve these concerns—particularly among those who are aspiring to parent.

Given the limited personal acquaintances these men report, one might surmise that they would deem gay and lesbian parenting an uncommon act. Indeed, given the particular bias in the reported media observations towards lesbian mothering, one might suspect a particularly pessimistic view about the opportunities available for gay men to become fathers. However, even among those who knew of no examples within their social network, or even in the media, there was the recognition that gay fathering is occurring. Clearly, these men are able to see beyond heteronormative assumptions of parenting and are increasingly able to place this significant act upon a list of life options.

As suggested by several men, the choice of parenthood has become particularly legitimized as the visibility of gay and lesbian persons has increased. As these men and women have gained respectable, normalized, visibility they are perhaps allowing today’s young men to regard their own lives as comparable to their heterosexual peers. During these interviews, and still today, the gay marriage debate has continued, and was noted by several. The political movements towards protection and expansion of gay rights, particularly if one considered gay marriage as the social reproduction of a heteronormative status, is allowing these men to see their
own lives as similar to their heterosexual peers, in ways that those of the past likely could not have considered. Today, the synergistic interaction of personal experience, the media, and politic are clearly shifting gay identities into a new, increasingly heteronormative age—or perhaps it’s ultimately the heterosexuals who are becoming more queer.

Whether gay men seek to parent or choose to remain childfree, they today have the ability to make that choice. As cultural and media depictions of GLBT lives continue to diversify and increase in numbers, the life options offered to today’s youth continue to expand.
Chapter 5: Yes, Definitely…Maybe, I Don’t Know…

Among those interviewed, nearly all reported positive perspectives about the ideas of families with children and parenting, regardless of their own aspirations. It would seem that the cultural valuation of families broadly and those inclusive of children specifically have been strongly internalized among the men of this group. Many of the men reported a positive orientation toward the idea of becoming a father themselves. Among these men common themes emerged regarding their perspectives and framing of parenting—particularly in the manner they contextualized their aspirations. Some expressed “always” having wanted children or the “naturalness” of such desire. For many, their aspirations had evolved through their social experiences affiliated with children or parenting. Many of the same ideologies were similarly found among those who were still in the process of deciding, or were yet to decide, about their desires to parent.

This chapter will open with a focused discussion centered upon the men exhibiting a clear desire to parent. A discussion of how they framed and spoke of their desire to parent will be followed by a discussion about their aspirational questioning and considerations that led to this orientation. These subjects particularly spoke to the idea that a childfree life was selfish, which is then explored. At this point the chapter shifts to explore the voices of men who are yet undecided in their aspirations for fatherhood. Given the significant overlap that emerged in discussions among those desiring and undecided, the remaining sections of this chapter combine these two groups to explore the pros and cons of parenting, planning for the possibility of future parenting, and the approaches they would consider for achieving parenthood.
Yes, “Most Definitely:” Men Desiring Children

I love the idea of being a parent, having children. I love the relationship I have with my parents and I think I would like to continue to have that kind of relationship with somebody. —Julio

Among the majority of men who reported wanting children, initial responses were frequently reinforced by pronounced, resounding, affirmations of desire. A variety of phrasings were expressed, including: “(most) definitely,” “absolutely,” “beyond a shadow of a doubt,” “ever since I was little,” or “always.” While some men were less exuberant in their responses, for example “yeah, I think so,” for the majority herein it seems they not only hope for or desire to have children, but they are clearly excited and committed to the idea. These sorts of phrasing and responses may initially be read as mere linguistic variations of affirmation, but the definitive terminologies suggest a strong qualitative degree of affinity for this life option. These men, by-large, were less likely to speak in terms of “I think so” or “probably” throughout their interviews—these men have made a decision that they appear committed to, at least at the time of interview.

The question then emerges, what has inspired or informed this aspiration? Without doubt there is a cultural terrain that is supportive and affirming of parenting, at least for heterosexuals, but do the same mechanisms of aspiration come into play for gay men?

For many of these men, the idea of parenting was particularly linked to their social experiences and interactions with their families of origin, friendship networks, and children in their lives. While many men spoke of families of origin in terms of hegemonic constructs of marriage and biological progeny, several also spoke to family experiences of adoption, having extended kinship households and families engaging in foster parenting. Reggie, a 27-year-old

20 Such phrasing was more often used by respondents who were undecided.
African American, particularly spoke to his experience being raised in a household with additional foster and adopted children as informing his parental aspirations:

Ever since, because of the nature of my upbringing, there have always been children in the house, my parents always taking in foster kids, adopting kids, um, upbringing also the daycare [Reggie’s mother ran an at-home daycare] helped with that growing up. So children have always been a big part of my life, and helping them, and teaching them things, and all of that. So I want to become a full parent.

For Reggie, the idea of family and children is inexorably linked. The affiliation of non-biologically related children within his family household was actually so fluid that he was vague in the number of siblings he had—initially suggesting “4 or 5,” but moved toward a non-specific answer tied to the flow of foster children in and out of household, growing up. This valuation of child rearing and socialization experienced in his youth has clearly instilled a desire to parent. In fact, among all subjects, he reported a desire for one of the largest families, up to five children.

Jeff, another African American subject, expressed a life plan inclusive of children from an early age:

Absolutely, absolutely, while growing up, until I knew anything about sexuality and paying attention to my sexuality, you could ask anybody growing up if you were a kid and even in college, they would tell you that “Jeff” would be a pastor, he’s going to own a Lincoln Town Car, and he was going to have 5 children. It was just like a basic thing and that part has not changed in terms of the children, there is no doubt whatsoever. Now economically, if I was older I wouldn’t want 5; I would want 3, uh but yeah, it’s always been a part of my nature and it’s so important and me being the oldest and everything I was the nurturing one and uh I don’t know it’s just always been a part of me.

This quote reveals the role that being an oldest child may play when considering the idea of having children. Given family dynamics in a larger family, as with Jeff who was the eldest of four, the oldest child may have experienced greater levels of responsibility and may at times have fulfilled childcare roles, such as babysitting younger siblings, thus developing and reinforcing childrearing skills. His comment that his aspiration to parent is “part of my nature”
suggests an essential naturalization of parenting—an idea shared by others that will be discussed shortly.

Pedro, a 24-year-old Latino, also spoke to the importance of family when considering if he would like to have children:

Well, my family is very close. My extended family, not only, you know, my parents and my sisters. But me and my extended, my grandparents, aunts, uncles. We’re a very close kind of family. So yeah, I’ve been that all my life, and yeah, the importance of family, that support you get from your family, you know, having children. It’s also, you raise them, but also they support you. I’m not looking to like raise kids so that I can live off of them, but actually, I would like to have someone to worry about, you know, that kind of feeling. It’s necessary for me.

Pedro highlights an extended kinship ideology most often found discussed by the non-white subjects. He is not seeing family as a limited “nuclear” construct, but as a larger tapestry of social relationships and connections. In his experience the roles of parenthood and the importance of children are central to his life constructs—to be a parent is “necessary” for him. However, it should be noted that he does not actually say that it must be a child that he would “worry about,” rather, “someone.” This may just be a turn of phrase, but this may also suggest that he is not wholly invested in the idea of having children. Perhaps he is continuing to consider the way “family” is understood from his socialization experience and the importance of children in that construct. Later discussion will address the support and social capital children are believed to provide, such as Pedro’s flippant reference to “living off them.”

It may be noted that the three men discussed here thus far, Reggie, Jeff, and Pedro, are engaging with their parental aspirations not only as gay men, but also as men of racial-ethnic minority status. Their experiences of family life in America may be in part influenced by their socio-familial background. Among the men surveyed, for example, the ideal family size or numbers of children desired was highest among the African American and Latino respondents.
They also demonstrate some of the highest number of references to extended kinship networks of aunts, uncles, and cousins, of any respondents. They too were inclusive of parents, siblings, nieces/nephews, and grandparents – though these were common referrals among all subjects. Ultimately, however, the perspectives of men who self-identified as racial-ethnic minorities do not appear otherwise markedly distinct from those who identified as white; as such, specific analysis based on race/ethnicity will not be further pursued.21

When first queried about parental aspiration, a number of men spoke of their interactions with children—some in reference to their work as teachers, others in reference to their role as an uncle or older sibling, and some in less specific manners. As noted above, the experience of Reggie working with children at his mother’s daycare was affirming to his thoughts of being a parent. Some men spoke of affirmations from family, or even strangers, that were bolstering to their desire to parent. For example, Edward spoke of his experience with his nephew in a public restaurant where “some customer just turned to me and said you really should have kids…people have told me I should have kids.” What is unclear, however, is if the encouragement and validation received from interaction with children inspires aspiration or if it serves to merely affirm aspiration already in place. Indeed, if one is wanting to have children, he may be more likely to interact with children in socially desirable manners and in varied social settings, eliciting affirmation.

Tied to families of origin was the emergent idea of lineage and family legacy. How these men perceived “legacy” varied—ranging from a personal legacy into the future, the continuation of family lines or names, or even in a specific biologic manner. Interestingly, these men tended

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21 However, racial-ethnic identity will be included when relevant to the dialogue and perspective conveyed.
to only express a singular meaning of legacy, without blending the three frameworks. For some, such as Eric, having a child was a way to affirm a legacy of one’s own being:

Well, like you know, having a little, I guess “you” crawling around and they form their own opinions and ideas after you show them your point of view and then you produce a productive citizen who are hopefully going to change something in the world.

Here he is suggesting that parenting allows one to affirm a personal legacy of one’s own existence, yet recognizes that a unique individual will arise from your influence and parenting. A similar perspective was also put forth by David:

I’ve settled on the idea, it suits me, I really, I can’t imagine my life like being full without a child, like I would always feel like something was missing. Even if it weren’t my own, but someone to raise and to be proud of, um, to share my ideals with, but not necessarily force them on them, you know. Raise someone the way that you think someone should be raised. To have more like you.

Again, simultaneously suggesting the idea of raising someone “like you,” and noting that children are not carbon copies of one’s self, they can be influenced, but one can’t “force” a child to be a particular person or think in a particular fashion.

The idea of legacy was more traditionally constructed by others who sought to continue family lineage. Indeed, Carl specifically uses the term “legacy” when discussing the positive aspects of parenting, “The biggest pro to me is just like a legacy kind of thing…you and then your child and then your children’s children.” He is clearly connecting legacy not only to parenting, but to generations of progeny. Charles poignantly ties this idea of lineage, via his family name, to the intersectional aspects of his identity as a gay man:

…never really thought of it, ironically, until I came out when I was 18. Because I am the last son, of the last son, and if I don’t have a kid to pass my name to the name will die. So, when I was coming out that went through my mind quite a bit … I definitely knew I wanted to have kids to keep the family going, either biologically or adoption. I want the name to survive. I think that coupled with my own kind of internal biological clock, fuels my desire to become a parent.
Indeed, Charles’ statement is representative of that voiced by a number of gay men. Coming to terms with one’s sexuality as a gay men forces one into a position of negotiating or questioning one’s ability to parent—given the heterosexist constructs of families with children in our society, many men, especially when young and coming out, may have questioned the validity of this life option.

Biological legacy, a genetic tie to one’s own children, while not preliminarily discussed by most men, emerged as a frequent preference among many of the men, especially during dialogues about approaches to acquiring children. Harry was one of the few men to place this concept early in his dialogue about a desire to parent, stating “Not that I have anything against other children. I’d just want my own. [emphasis added]”. For the majority of these men, a preference for a biological tie did not emerge until later in conversation, within interview prompts asking how they would pursue parenthood. Indeed, for some of the men, this preference was only revealed after significant inquiry, when comparing adoption and surrogacy.

While family of origin and the experience of being part of a family as a child remain the most common sources of influence described by these men, some also spoke to the role a particular relationship/partnership may have had for their aspiration. Ben, for example described,

*Ben*: I found myself in the relationship that I am in now, and [partner’s name] wants kids. So my first thought was ‘Eh, I don’t know. It’s not really for me.’ He’s not pushy about it at all, but the more I saw how he wanted that to be a part of his life the more I gave it thought and realized, ‘You know what? I could see myself doing this. It could be pretty cool.’

*Farr*: Ok. So for you, you think it was your long-term relationship that really..?

*Ben*: Absolutely, because I didn’t really feel that way before. Or even in previous relationships, like the other long-term relationship I was in, I never really—I never saw us having kids together. I don’t think he did either. It wasn’t on the agenda. Maybe because we were younger, or maybe it was just the dynamic of the relationship… But with [partner’s name] definitely.
For Ben, his partner’s aspiration particularly encouraged his own reconsideration. He keenly notes that his partner had not pressed the topic per se, but had shared his excitement and interest in parenting. Perhaps that aspiration, that excitement, was “contagious,” fostering a more positive perception of this pursuit for Ben. Alternately, it may be the type of relationship that he is currently experiencing that frames his thoughts. The comparison to a prior relationship and the notion that he didn’t believe his ex-saw them having children together might also suggest that the relationship was not as serious or long-term oriented ultimately. Or, as he himself notes, perhaps it was a function of life stage and being younger. In total, it could be any combination of these factors, but the central aspect of this dialogue is that his current partner and their relationship have been integral to his reconsideration and orientation towards wanting children.

Like Jeff, who stated above “it’s always been a part of my nature,” a number of men described the idea of parenting as a “natural” desire or pursuit. As phrased by Zack, “I kinda see it as somewhat of human nature to want to help someone and that is basically what you are doing.” While he was more broadly speaking to ideas of helping “someone,” this was a central component of his response to whether he one day hopes to have children. He is clearly associating the idea of parenting and care for someone, especially a child, as a natural or perhaps biologically informed characteristic of humanity—regardless of gender or sexuality. Indeed, for Zack, the idea of parenting may be “natural,” but he was not tying his own biological reproduction to the equation. He immediately followed the above statement with “raising a kid and the fact that I am gay, it is not like I am going to bring a new one into the world,” implying adoption or foster parenting as likely paths, contrasting heterosexual reproduction and his likely “parenting.” It seems for him, and a number of other men who wish to parent, the idea of “parenting” is seen as very natural, but as men (or perhaps as gay men, more specifically) this
concept is not explicitly tied to biological reproduction of progeny. They are regarding the care
giving of children as a naturalistic act—regardless of biological connections.

Cumulatively, central to the ideologies posited by the majority of these men is the
underlying construct of the traditional heteronormative family. As Warren aptly suggests “I
would imagine part of it comes from traditional heterosexual upbringing that you get raised.
You have a family. You have children.” While other men were not so specific in this assertion,

nearly all were framing idea of family in hegemonic traditional fashions—two parents and
children. None of these men were themselves raised by gay or lesbian parents and few had first-
hand experience with gay or lesbian parents, so they may have limited ideological frameworks—
yet, even those raised by single parents spoke favorably and with a preference for families of two
parents. Despite the ultimate issue that these men would be pursuing parenthood as either single
men or as men in relationships with other men, they tended to downplay any distinction this
would have from a traditional structure. The hegemonic family ideal, to which these men have
been primarily socialized, is clearly informing their thoughts as they consider their own
aspirations.

**Questioning Aspiration**

While many of the men wanting children appeared comfortable and committed to the
idea of parenting, the path to this decision was not always an easy one. Given the hegemonic
heterosexual construct of family in which many of these men’s perspectives are framed, they
must actively question and challenge this if they are to one day parent. Indeed, among these men
a number spoke to questioning their ability to become parents—not from a perspective of their
individual skills, but rather if parenting was a societal or cultural option, especially as gay men.
This questioning was especially referenced by many when reflecting to when they were first coming out or when “younger.”

Similar to Charles, above, who particularly began to consider his parental aspiration as he was coming out, Manish, 26, also pondered the legitimacy of parenting as a gay man:

There were doubts now and then, but I think those doubts were really because I wasn’t so sure I’d be getting to, but then I got into more, um, I guess, aware I am of myself, I realized I do wanna have children.

As he suggests, Manish wasn’t sure he’d get to be a parent—for young gay men, especially when first coming out, there is a question whether fatherhood can remain a life option. Unique to Manish’s perspective is his Southeast Indian heritage as a first-generation American. He not only must confront social ideologies about gay men and fathering, but he must also confront cultural beliefs carried by his family from India. Indeed, despite his family’s knowledge of his long-term partner and identity as a gay man, he spoke of their continued hope that they might yet arrange his marriage to a woman, thus leading to grandchildren.

Jack, 25, also questioned the opportunity to become a parent as he came out:

There was a short amount of time where when I was starting to get know myself as a gay man, where I was like, I don’t know that [having children] would be good, but the more that, like, I thought about it, and the more that, for me, I want to do all the things right that got screwed up when I was a kid. If that makes sense? As far as like parenting and all that stuff and cause I always sort of felt that, cause I was always told through my whole childhood that I was, you know, I was special cause I was adopted [at age 5], because my parents got to make a choice. You know what I mean? So, then when I was kicked out [after coming out to parents], so you pulled out the receipt and you were like, so this is not actually what I bought and I’d like to return it. So that was sort of traumatizing when I was that young [age 14], but as I’ve gotten older I’ve thought more and more about it and really I think my want to be a parent has more to do with, you know, how crappy my childhood was, cause I want to adopt and have the kid have a better adoption experience than I had.

However, Jack, as one of the few men interviewed who no longer has contact with his family of origin and who had negative feelings about his upbringing, particularly highlights a desire to “get
it right” to offer someone a childhood better than that he experienced. Ultimately, this desire to offer a better childhood may be additionally understood as a desire to actively challenge his lineage or familial experience. Those who had positive childhood experiences seek the continuation or legacy of that family—meanwhile, those who had a less positive experience seek to actively confront that legacy and establish a better one.

The idea of offering a better childhood was not, however, solely posited on one’s family of origin, at times it emerged when observing the experiences of other children. As a teacher, Edward particularly spoke of his students when considering his aspirations, “Well, I would think, being a parent, to raise someone up to be a good person in this world, like, I feel bad when I think about the parents of my children and I think I could do so much better a job than them.”

While not all teachers surveyed aspired to become parents, those who hoped to have children and had participated in work with children or mentally impaired clients all made reference to their work as informative to their desire to parent. For these men, their interactions with children or clients affirmed their aspirations—it seems that such interactions function as a form of pseudo-experience and confirmation of ability. These experiences, for some, going so far as to suggest that not only are they capable of being a good parent, but they may even be able to do “much better” jobs of it.

The idea of being a better parent, based on personal attributes, put forth by some of the men was at times taken a step further with the argument that it isn’t the ability to be a good parent as an individual, but that being a gay parent may make one a better parent specifically. Harry suggested, “I think gay parents are better parents… I think they are just more open to ideas, ya know, if the child happens to be gay there never going to be some horrible outcome as they are coming out.” This construct did emerge within the interviews of several men, but Harry
was one of the few to particularly suggest that this idea could then translate into the potential benefits of gay parents, particularly should one’s child(ren) happen to be gay.

Like Ben, earlier discussed in this chapter, some men find they are initially ambivalent about having children or inclined towards a childfree life before coming to the desire to parent. David, when first discussing his orientation, spoke to initially being ambivalent about the idea of parenting. Upon query about what shifted his perspective to desiring he suggested “I think it was really more that I had a fear of being tied down and what that meant, but, um, I think that’s what has changed about it, I’ve become more comfortable about with the thought of settling down because I don’t really associate that with slowing down anymore.” David, who also referenced the earlier discussed news article about partying gay dads\(^{22}\), may have been influenced, to some degree, by his cultural and media observations of this “alternative” parenting style. His preliminary socialized image of parenting may have been based on the traditional heteronormative structure of a parent (likely a man) who works for pay and has little parenting responsibility, paired with a spouse (likely a woman) who stays home with the kids, handling family and household responsibilities—he now has come to recognize that not only do parents come in many forms, as with gay parents, but parenting itself also occurs in myriad manners.

**Childfree as “Selfish”**

For a number of men who want to have children, there exists this underlying idea that their current life is selfish. Carl specifically stated this as “my life is pretty selfish right now…but I think that eventually I just want my life to be about more than just myself and a boyfriend.” This portrayal was also conveyed by Ben,

\(^{22}\) See Chapter 4, Recollections of the Media: Print, Film, and Television section.
I used to – up until very recently in my life, like in the past three years probably, I had no interest really in having kids. Not it was – the idea didn’t turn me off. I mean, I knew that I [would] probably be good at it. But I just didn’t really – I don’t know, maybe I was just selfish or something. Kinda wanted live my own life instead of doing something for somebody else.

It seems that among the men conveying this sentiment there was an underlying consensus that to lead a “selfish” or self-involved life was an acceptable, perhaps even desirable, aspect of being a young adult—and particularly so for gay men. This was at times correlated with a reflection to when “first coming out” and was often constructed as a period lasting through one’s 20s. A number of these men actively articulated that they did not want to be out partying when they are in their 40s or 50s, expressing a desire for children, home, and often a partner. As Edward stated:

there’s got to be something else, there has to be something more to life than just this. Just like, going to work, coming back home, watching tv with BF, going on vacations, I can’t be doing this for the next 50 years. I need something more.

While the majority of references to selfishness among these men emerged in dialogue about childfree lives, or pre-child lives, at least one man saw having children as selfish unto itself. Harry said, “the more I got older the more I see how people act in life and I want to have a kid for obviously selfish reasons because it’s a beautiful thing to have a kid.” When asked why he felt this was selfish he responded “because I think there’s enough people on this planet and I think that we’re extremely overpopulated and umm the selfish reason being that I probably wouldn’t adopt, I’d want my own.” In this Harry is initially understood to be thinking of being a parent as selfish for wanting the various personal benefits of the relationship. However, it becomes apparent that his perspective is particularly informed by traditional ideologies of parenthood being affiliated with a genetic tie and the selfish desire of biological progeny in a world of high population. Indeed, a number of men, across orientations, spoke to the concerns of global population and environmental strain when discussing the idea of having children—
though those desire children, only Harry spoke to the idea of having children as specifically selfish.

“I’m not exactly sure;” Undecided Men and Their Beliefs

While the prior men discussed in this chapter had rather definitive perspectives on their parental aspirations, a number of men interviewed were undecided about their aspirations. These men, labeled “undecided” within the “Information on Participants” section, demonstrate nuanced descriptions of their aspirations that are often more complex than those conveyed by those “desiring” children. Overall, many of the perspectives are similar to those voiced by the men desiring children, but these men appear to be more actively considering, debating, or ambivalent about the pursuit of fatherhood.

Notably, the language used by these men when first asked about whether they wish to have children or remain childfree is often non-committal. Examples of terms and phrases used to affirm their undecided status include: “not sure,” “torn on it,” and especially “I don’t know.” While many of the men utilized such phrasing immediately within their responses, other men were less specific initially, leading with a seemingly affirmative response that was shortly followed by a recognition that it may not happen and they are comfortable with that. For example, Adam stated:

I think I would like to have children at some point, but I have also sort of figured out that if I can’t have children... I’ve come to have peace with the fact that I may never have children. So, I’m going to be the best, damn, gay uncle that he could have.

Despite the initial response suggesting a desire to parent, throughout the rest of the interview he made numerous references to his and his partner’s lack of interest in pursuing parenthood in lieu

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23 See Appendix E
of other activities, such as serving a strong uncle role, participation in the Bear community, and pursuit of gay marriage legalization. It might be possible to classify Adam to another category, such a preferring childfree, but his linguistic ambivalence lacked a clear statement of childfree preference, commonly found among those subjects, led to his characterization as undecided.

Those who were undecided noted a variety of reasons for their non-conclusive position. The reasons reported depart in a number of ways from those informing the decisions conveyed by those desiring children, yet also suggest a significant overlap in perspective. Among the youngest men who desired children (aged 18-24) many spoke to affirmative perspectives with an orientation for the future pursuit of fatherhood, particularly after pursuing “youthful” activities, such as higher education and partying. For the youngest undecided men there was the restructuring of this pathway with the articulation of a need to get through the youthful activities, before making such a decision. As stated by Fred,

Ya know, being 22, I currently have the perspective of ‘I don’t even want to think about it.’ But, ya know, there’s, there’s some sort of curiosity in the back of my mind that might sway me later when it’s a bit more feasible.

Fred, in particular, conveyed that completing his education was of the utmost priority for the moment and that the consideration of parenthood must be deferred. He also spoke to the issue of fiscal stability as a requisite to decision making as well.

For Randy, 28, who is slightly further along in his life journey, the experience of a long-term relationship was another life step affiliated with transitioning towards decision making.

I might. I don’t know, right now, I’m [in] the first real relationship I’ve ever had. I, when I was single, and that was a long, long time, I didn’t really date. I didn’t go out. And, I’m not ready. Um, I’m enjoying this and I, I would like to be ready, um, and I’m hopeful that someday I will be, relatively soon. Um, but, I don’t know. I hope so, but I don’t know. And there, there, there’s the pressure that I’m 28 and if I don’t want to be 55 when he’s in college, there’s a certain time element and time measure to that as well. So yeah…
The awareness of the passage of time and movement through young adulthood stages was further articulated by Mark, 34:

If you asked me that question 10 years ago, I probably, I would have said probably yeah. Now as I look into it and just see that the way the world is today and that the way society can be I would probably have to think twice. I would probably have to say there is more of a 60% chance not, and a 40% chance yes.

Not only is Mark articulating his mid-level commitment to the pursuit of parenthood, 60/40, but he is highlighting the evolution that can occur among subjects as they transverse young adulthood. He demonstrates a current undecided orientation, but suggests that at 24 he would likely have indicated a desire to parent. Undoubtedly, the individual social situations of education, occupation, relationship, fiscal, and health remain influential factors framing one’s orientation as they mature, which may lead to changing aspirations. However, the larger social terrain remains an omnipresent issue for some men, such as Mark (i.e. “the way the world is today”), influencing the evolution of their parental aspirations. The context of larger social issues was also articulated by Adam, above, when he discussed the issue of gay marriage as a priority over the issue of gay parenting.

Similar to Mark, another subject, Lou, also conveyed his aspiration in a quantified fashion, stating “I’d like to be, but I’m torn on it 50/50.” Among the undecided subjects, these were the only two men to convey their aspiration in a quantified fashion—weighing their options in a quite literal fashion. Alternately, many of the undecided offered a qualitative conveyance of “weight” via the number and types of pros and cons attributed to parenting. These will be discussed later in this chapter.

While the men who desired to parent tended to frame their aspirations in highly personalized, decisive manners, those who were undecided tended to lead their responses not with an aspirational orientation per say, but rather with social contexts of consideration. As
previously noted by Randy, Sam also notes the importance of a relationship to his decision-making process:

I don’t know. I couldn’t, I know I couldn’t do it alone and there would have to be a committed relationship there, something steady. It would be great to have a family, but on the flip side of that I don’t know, I am back and forth on it, there are probably some great rewards in there are people that they really want it, but at the same time it kind of ties you down and it’s not that I don’t want to be tied down, but I want to go out and you have to wonder what you are going to do with the kid and on top of that let me think, oh the other part of that because maybe I do because some day when you get old and what’s going to happen to me when I what am I going to pass on what will I leave to the world, ‘who is going to take care of me when I’m old?’ that’s really the bigger question. I mean, what if my parents are dead and my brother and sister only want to take care of themselves? So who really, if I have to go to a home, who is going to take me who is going to take if something happens to me? So, it’s back and forth, that may be a selfish reason for wanting a child I think, but that’s probably not the best reason to bring it into the world. Deciding to raise somebody I mean, I don’t know; the answer is: I don’t know. I really don’t know, if I would want children before I can even consider it I would have to meet somebody and, and, [being] 30 years old, time is running out so, and there’s no way in hell that I’m gonna get to 40 and say I want to have a child. I would be 60 by the time they graduated and goes to college.

Similar to several of the men discussed here, the passage of time and the future is clearly a concern for many men as they consider whether they want to have children. Interestingly, Sam, herein also brings to light the issue of “selfishness,” as discussed in the prior section. He however is noting the concern of self-security as he ages—who will help care for him when he is elderly?

One of the most prevalent themes that emerged among the undecided men as informative to their aspirational considerations is the specific referencing to ideologies of the heteronormative family and culture. This issue, also prevalent among those desiring children, clearly speaks to the socio-cultural influence at play for these men as they consider the possibility of parenting. Tom poignantly responded to questioning of his aspirations with:

I guess I had that, like, picket fence idea of, uh, like, getting married, having a wife, maybe one or two kids, just because, I don’t know, it seems like what
everybody is doing. …a lot of things have changed, like, the wife part of that situation…

It appears, for Tom, the influence of the traditional family ideology that “everybody is doing” has been firmly affixed to his perspective, yet he also notes his departure from this construct as a gay man, as the “wife part” has changed.

This heteronormative ideology was especially expressed by Chet, who discussed the idea of parenting as inextricably entwined with a heterosexual sex act:

Chet: I’m not exactly sure. Um, I would like to have a child of my own, but at the same time I don’t know how I can justify wanting a child from a woman I am not sexually attracted to or don’t want to be with at all in any kind of sexual way? It would be strictly platonic and I don’t think that type of relationship can work if it is strictly platonic. There has to be sex involved. It is part of who we are as human beings. Sex comes into play in a loving relationship with two people come together to bring a child into this world or if they want to adopt a child. I want to have my own kid, but at the same time adopting doesn’t sound bad either. There are so many kids out there that are without parents and they need guidance and they need someone to take care of them and I don’t know, it’s too soon to tell at this point.

Farr: So you haven’t really made a decision at this point?

Chet: I want to see what the future brings. I want to see how society will react as time goes by. I think that people are becoming more and more open, but there are certain types in this country that are still very religious and strict about this sort of thing.

Here Chet leads with dialogue informed by heterosexist ideology of reproduction, yet is simultaneously denoting the alternative option of adoption. For gay men, the cultural socialization to heterosexual reproduction and familial constructs may make it difficult to step beyond this idea when initially considering parental aspiration. One must overcome this preliminary reaction to parenting to be entertain the idea of pursuing fatherhood.

For Chet, as for many of the undecided men, it seems that the cultural terrain is a central concern as they are debating their personal aspirations. One may argue that these men are more actively engaged with, or cognizant of, the socio-legal obstacles at play for gay men in general,
and specifically in the pursuit of fatherhood, based upon these statements. However, over the course of their interviews there does not appear to be further expression of these concerns. Some of the men do note specific cultural issues in their discussion, but they are not largely distinct from those suggested by those desiring to parent.

**Parenting: Pros and Cons**

For both men who desired children and those who were yet undecided there was a ready articulation of various pros and cons to the pursuit of parenting. These groups of men demonstrated significant overlap in the issues addressed; both will be explored in this section. While the issues mentioned were largely consistent, the manners and number of issues mentioned varied to some degree between the groups and will be explored at the end of this section.

The most prevalent issue mentioned by nearly all men was the concern of finance and fiscal strain. Constructed as a “con” or negative aspect by nearly all, a common assertion was the expected high cost of raising children. Often this concern was indirectly referenced in manners such as “kids cost a lot” or “financial strain.” Some made reference to the costs of specific aspects such “diapers cost a lot” or the cost of “clothing,” but this was relatively uncommon. Surprisingly few respondents in either group noted the fiscal cost affiliated with the pursuit of adoption or surrogacy during initial inquiry—focusing rather on the costs of actually raising children. However, the high costs of both tactics of becoming parents were noted by a number of subjects when queried about how they thought they would pursue fatherhood.

Carl, who desires children, spoke not only to the issue of finance, but included a representative sample of the myriad issues mentioned by many subjects:
[Kids impact your life] in almost every way possible. I mean, obviously your sex life wouldn’t be what it was because of your time constraints and being tired and stuff like that. Financially you would both be more strained. You wouldn’t be able to go on as many vacations. Or you would have to more think about, like I said, college funds and clothing and food and all the other stuff. Um, in good ways too though, it should bring people closer together really, but sometimes it has the opposite effect I think.

Herein, Carl was unique in that he was the only subject to list “sex life” as first within his response. Indeed, few men specifically referenced sex as an issue of consideration, although many did make reference to less “time with partner” or “lack of privacy,” wherein sexual intimacy might be implied. The issue of less “free time” or “freedom,” which might tie to the intersection of financial and time for vacations, was also noted by many men as a potential negative aspect of parenting. As exemplified by Jason, who desires children “you do have less time, you know, for your own self, for your career, and then for your partner. You have less time to travel, you have less time to go out.” For many of the men interviewed it was difficult to separate the issues of education, career, and finance—these issues, however, are clearly interconnected. It seems that many of these men did not readily distinguish these social institutions and the influence of parenting therein.

Jason’s above response is particularly interesting as he led his statement with “Well I guess the pros are, well let me start with the cons cause I can think of those more.” During interviews subjects were asked about what they believed the “pros and cons” of parenting were, which led to many providing answers in such an order. Jason was one of few men desiring children that offered a response that was framed by cons prior to pros. Perhaps it was simply easier for him to specifically articulate the perceived negative aspects of parenthood, or perhaps it suggests an orientation leaning more heavily towards a desire to remain childfree than he was able to recognize.
Among both groups, the articulation of “pros” tended to be less specific and concrete than the cons referenced. Cumulatively, the ideologies of personal-fulfillment or enrichment, love and emotional fulfillment, care for another, and lifetime commitment were the most common themes emergent among the positive attributes affiliated with parenting. Given the complex nature of some of these concepts—love and emotional fulfillment in particular—it was not uncommon for men to list fewer pros than cons. Despite the distinct number of concepts affiliated with either side, among those desiring children especially, there was often a clear articulation that the “the pro option outweighs the con” (Charles, desiring). Without doubt, the majority of men desiring children are placing an exceptionally high value upon the emotional connection and personal fulfillment they believe is associated with being a parent.

The vast majority of men who desire children indicated this outweighing of positive aspects, despite difficult articulation of specifics. Indeed, while many were able to offer both pros and cons, the men least likely to offer cons or to offer the fewest cons were those desiring children—some explicitly stating they saw “no cons” to being a parent. One subject, Brad, went so far as to describe the idea of caring for a sick (vomiting) child as a positive experience, wherein he could bond and spend time with his child. While few parents are likely to describe such a scenario in such optimistic terms, this idealized construct of parenting may be a reflection of inexperience with caring for ill children and its associated stress, fatigue, and anxiety. However, given Brad’s occupation working with mentally impaired adults, one may readily argue his familiarity with issues of bodily function and disease—perhaps his idealized image of bonding with an ill child is ultimately legitimate. This said, no other subject of any orientation described children’s illnesses or bodily functions (diaper/potty training) in a positive light—
some going as far as to indicate a preference for adopting children at ages where they would have already been potty trained.

A notable distinction emerges when contrasting the men who desire children with those who are yet undecided on their articulations of the pros and cons of parenting. The undecided subjects tended to offer the most examples of both pros and cons of parenting, often with an equal balance of number. While the types of pros and cons referenced were consistent with those presented by those desiring children, these men tended to offer more in-depth dialogue with longer statements and multiple ideas at once. Among the undecided, there were no unique examples of pros and cons that had not also been mentioned by those desiring children. It appears these men, perhaps as a function of being undecided, were better able to articulate and see both sides of the equation of parenthood. While many of the men desiring children might downplay negative aspects, or outright deny their existence, these men tended to offer the most comprehensive holistic imagery of what parenting may bring.

When contrasting the desiring and undecided and their referenced number of pros and cons to parenting, what remains unclear is to what extent a social process has informed this difference. Both groups of men appear to have had relatively similar levels of experience engaging with children directly or indirectly via friends and family, so likely have cognizance of the benefits and deficits of parenting for one’s social life. The primary distinguisher affecting the numbers of reported pros and cons appears to be one’s parental desire orientation, not one’s direct experiences. It may be that those who are undecided are more actively debating their future aspirations and life path and thus may be more consciously considering how having a child would change their life. For those who desire children, it may be that the affirmation of this orientation serves to trump considerations of potentially negative aspects parenting may have
on one’s social life. If one is centering their engagement of thought upon a single perspective, desiring, the potential outcomes that may be deemed negative simply fade from thought or are reconstructed to have positive or beneficial connotations, as with Brad and caring for a sick child.

Planning for Possible Parenting?

Among nearly all of the men who actively desired to parent, as well as most undecided men, there was reference to life choices they perceived as linked to or leading to parenting-friendly scenarios. The major themes that emerged in these dialogues linked to geographic locality and/or distance to their kinship networks, family-friendly oriented occupations, and most commonly, partner selection. As previously referenced, and intersecting with occupations, was also the matter of income level and perceptions of money needs. Broadly however, many of the men, regardless of age, constructed the possible pursuit of children as a future activity (no subject was in the active process of pursuing children)—an abstract idea to be considered as time unfolded.

The least common aspect referenced was geography of family and kinship networks. While many men in the research implied the desire to have connectivity between their families of origin and their potential children, few explicitly regarded this as a requirement or necessity. However, at least one man mentioned a desire to be sure he was located in a job close to his parents, after college graduation, so that they may enjoy their roles as grandparents and he would have their support. Most men spoke to this issue in more abstract manners, typically linked to the earlier discussed ideas of kinship and family heritage.
Occupation or job type was often referenced as an aspect that would be significant to their approach and consideration to parenting. Some men spoke to already being in a specific career/job and how that would interact with their being parents, while others spoke to future occupations for which they were in training or pursuing higher education. Given that these men varied in age from 18 to 35, the range of perspective and dialogue was likely explained by their educational status as college students, being in early stages of their career, or by the socio-economic status of their current job (or even, current unemployed status). Those who were still in school or were in lower-level jobs, with accompanying lower-level incomes, particularly emphasized the need to delay pursuing children until they were more financially stable or potentially paired with another person so there was a stronger household income overall.

Beyond the income component, other aspects such as a “job being somewhat flexible to allow for childcare needs” (Javier, desiring), was commonly linked to one’s occupation. This concept was mentioned by several men, particular among those desiring children. This sort of dialogue suggests that these men are unconsciously recognizing the gendered challenges they may face as fathers, without a female significant other, in a system that traditionally assigned childcare to women. While many are likely aware that parents, regardless of gender, may have need for flexible work scheduled to facilitate childcare and caregiving roles, as gay men in a culture that continued to reinforce gendered family roles, they may be aware of the greater resistance they may face when pursuing such accommodations or occupations.

An area that elicited significant dialogue regarding potential planning or strategic life choices was that of partner selection. This unfolded in two particular manners across these categories of men—those looking to only date men who also want children and those who were open to dating men who were undecided or did not want children. Men who were desiring to
parent often spoke of wanting to only date men who also wanted to have children. As Julio indicated:

I’ve actually refused to date people that don’t want children in the future because I don’t, I don’t like having pointless relationships and I know that it’s something I want… how I approached relationships has changed because of it and I know it’s a little long-term committal for some people, but I don’t want to have to break it off later just because of that and I’ve also thought of where I should move if certain states are more friendly to it. If I should try moving or if I should fight for it in New York, or something, uh, I don’t know.

Here we see not only the clear preference as to the types of men Julio wishes to date, trying to avoid what he regards as “pointless relationships,” but also a reference to geographic aspects of the equation as dictated at the time by the legal status differences state to state in regards to LGBT rights. This sort of perspective was common among all men who desired to have children, with all indicating at the very least they would not want to get into a “serious” relationship with someone who did not want children. Yet, many indicated they would be willing to date men who were undecided as they believed they could “win them over”—implying a belief that if the relationship was serious enough and if the undecided man really loved and wanted to be with them long-term that he would get on board for having children. Among the men who wanted to have children, they all indicated they would not be interested in pairing with someone who did not want to have children. Given the age variation of the subjects, one may interpret this partner selection process as part of planning for the future—if I am to have children, I need to pair with someone who is also motivated to do so.

Those who were undecided were the most likely subjects to indicate a willingness to date men of any desiring orientation (desiring, undecided, or not desiring children). Some of the men in the undecided group not only spoke to being open to dating anyone who was a good fit personally, but a number spoke to having had past relationships with men of varying
perspectives on children. At times, it seemed that some who were ultimately classified as undecided could better be described as ambivalent or ambivalent with a positive view of children and parenting. Among these undecided men, the emphasis in discussions about whom they would consider dating was not at all linked to considerations of parenting, but emphasizing partnership and fulfillment as a couple. The prioritization of partnership clearly trumped childrearing thoughts and demonstrated a willingness to acquiesce to the perspectives of a potential partner.

**How to Become Parents**

Across nearly all men interviewed there was an awareness of the difficulties a gay man may likely face when trying to have children. As this project interviewed only gay-identified men, all subjects were constructing their life course and ideas about possible child rearing in terms of same-sex relationships. Few subjects made reference to the idea of having children via traditional heterosexual sex acts with women—although one subject referenced his parents’ desire to arrange a heterosexual marriage for him (as mentioned earlier) and another subject spoke to having had sex with a lesbian some years prior in the hopes of impregnating her and pursuing a co-parenting scenario.

Centrally, men spoke of two primary paths to parenting: surrogacy and foster-parenting/adooption. The concept of co-parenting with a lesbian/lesbian couple, which had more visibility in past decades (Gianino 2005, Mallon 2004, Martin 1993, Sbordone 1993, Wells 2005) was mentioned by only one subject. The awareness of these options speaks particularly to greater cultural visibility and awareness of alternative options, as discussed in Chapter 4.

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24 Not a single subject spoke to relationships in terms that might be inclusive of open or polyamorous relationships.
Despite awareness of possible approaches to parenthood, very few among those interviewed actually knew gay men who were parenting, other than men often in their 50s and older who became parents at young ages in prior heterosexual relationships and came out later in life. As young gay men in an era with greater acceptance of such an identity, few of these men made reference to any serious heterosexual relationships in their histories. The few who spoke to prior heterosexual relationships often noted that they occurred at young ages, such as in high school, and were not serious or intended to be long term in nature—relationship and life stage periods where the pursuit of parenthood was seen as undesirable for various social reasons.

Among those desiring to parent there appeared to be a mix of surrogacy and foster/adoption preference, with a number indicating the possibility of a combination of these approaches across several children. Jeff, for example, spoke to

It would be, as of lately, I would like to have one biological, um, perhaps. I’ve been thinking about that, but um definitely the majority, if there were three, the majority of the kids I would want to be from the Foster Care system.

Yet he also went on to express concern about the possible obstacles he may face between biological and foster children:

Um, the foster are thing I am still very nervous about, the children wanting to be connected, okay so their biological family, uh because you know… a child eventually becomes their own person and what if the kid isn’t happy with the family situation, what if they like don’t like having two dads, I want a mom and a dad, um, that is a fear of mine. Cause you know they will eventually get to make up their own mind…and you just hope that they are happy with your life, um so that’s a big con with the foster care. Biological they have no choice, um and then the moms [friends as surrogates] that I have been thinking of have been very understanding and excited about being a part of something like that, so I would I would honestly feel much better about that than the foster care thing.

Jeff offers a particularly useful statement that brings together varying issues that were often implied or explicitly stated by other men—the intersectional concerns of biological connection, fear of homophobic response from foster (or adoptive) children, and discordant or muddled
thoughts on how to have children. Further, concerns about the potential problems that may emerge with foster children, at times described by subjects as likely “damaged,” was not an uncommon theme among those who spoke of raising children from foster care (or foster care to adoption) as well.

While all men could speak of approaches to becoming a parent and many were willing to articulate a preference (most commonly surrogacy), the vast majority of men expressed an open-mindedness to approaches. When gestating a fetus/child is an impossibility for either person, as in gay couples, it creates a complex dilemma about how to proceed. Perhaps inspired by the pros and cons used when discussing children, these men often framed their discussions of differing means of achieving parenthood in similar terms. The varying cultural messages and stereotypes of the types of children that end up in foster care, the beliefs about how accessible adoption may be (primarily contextualized to New York state), and the accessibility or pragmatism of surrogacy were clearly in the minds of these men. When one has no functional womb and one lives in a heteronormative culture, the pursuits of parenting become vastly more complex and difficult to negotiate. For every approach to parenting discussed, men spoke of both opportunities and limitations, as well as apprehension in general about how to go about initiating processes, how they would be received as gay applicants, and how long such a process might last.

The most notable aspect of the dialogues about how to have children was related to surrogacy. Herein, there was a slight variation in how men who desired children and men who were yet undecided spoke of this issue. While there was overlap in the general theme of preferring biological progeny, as well as the perceived high fiscal cost, there were several men desiring children who seemed to have an idealistic image of the accessibility of this pursuit.
These men at times spoke of surrogacy, although expensive, as the best approach and they would “find a way” to make it happen. Interestingly, among the men who indicated they would somehow find a way to arrange for surrogacy (often noting friends or female family members as possible surrogates), there was significant variation in the likely income levels—ranging from those with seemingly middle to upper-middle class earnings down to working class, based on varying educational backgrounds or employment in occupations of variable income levels. Thus, it seems among those desiring children, much as with the pros and cons of parenting, there was an idealized, perhaps unrealistic viewpoint of the pursuit of surrogacy. Again, similar to earlier discussions, the men who were yet to decide typically offered a balanced discussion of the aspects of surrogacy—if you will, weighing the perceived benefits and the costs/difficulties.

Given the biological limitations of reproduction, that fetuses must be gestated by a female and that most men do not have a uterus25, these men were acutely aware of the complexity of pursuing biological reproduction. When discussing how they might pursue surrogacy, many men focused upon the idea of using a surrogate that was known to them—particularly a friend or a sister. It may be that these men were considering the cost of a paid surrogate and regarding the presumably volunteer services of women they knew as a more realistic option. However, this was not actively noted in the discussions. Rather, it seems most of these men were considering this matter from a pragmatic and affinity perspective—the idea that these women were known entities and would thus likely produce “good” children. Some men also focused upon the idea of a sister’s surrogacy as a manner to link biologically if they were to use the sperm of their partner and their sibling’s egg. Given that both men couldn’t be biologically related to the child, having a sibling’s genetics was the next-best thing. Despite the discussions of biological connection,

25 Transgender men might still have a uterus and be capable of gestating a fetus, but no men in this research spoke of transmen. Indeed, transgender issues or reproduction were not mentioned by any men in this sample.
there was little discussion about donor eggs and more nuanced approached to surrogacy. In general, these men did not appear to have detailed understandings of the legal and medical regulations that might be at play in this pursuit. This lack of awareness is likely a consequence of their life stage and their viewpoint status in advance of any active pursuits. If interviews were occurring with men who were more engaged with surrogacy and having children, they would likely have far greater knowledge of the intricacies involved.

Adoption, or foster parenting-to-adoption, was spoken of widely by all men across this research as a particularly viable option for pursuing parenthood. Herein, these men’s dialogues demonstrated two major themes—that as men, they could not birth children, so adoption was a key pathway and also that adoption was seen as a socially good act, given the number of children without homes or parents. The issues of biology, gestation, and birth were particularly demonstrated with the use of phrases such as “obviously I can’t have a baby,” “I can’t carry a baby,” or “I can’t get my boyfriend/husband pregnant.” Discussions of adoption, while numerous, were quite similar in content. As suggested by Pedro, “I like adoption better, just because, you know, why would you want to have a child, when there are so many children in the world that need parents. I think that’s an ethical point.” Javier similarly indicated “there’s a lot of really bright, lovable children sitting in various orphanages around this country and on the planet…ones that are already here that have no families.” While not explicitly stated by Javier, others also spoke to general global population issues and there being no need to add more children to the equation. Ultimately, the majority of men particularly spoke to adoption in altruistic terms and, in many respects, mutually beneficial for children and for desiring parents.

Javier was one of the only men to convey the idea that adoption was preferable due to concerns with surrogacy. While many men expressed concerns about surrogacy in relation to
cost, his view was distinct in that he was concerned about the bonding of a surrogate with the fetus:

I don’t think I would have the patience to actually deal with the surrogate person, and then of course there’s always the bonding issue ...I’ve actually heard of it in a few instances where, you know, surrogacy issues been brought up...once they feel the child being born or see the child, there’s that natural maternal bond and it’s way too complicated for me to even consider that option.

While other men did refer to potential concerns that surrogate affinity and connection could be a complication, only Javier framed this as a logistic reason to prefer adoption.

In regards to fostering and adoption the issue of fiscal resources and cost were noted by a number of subjects. There was the perception that adoption, while less expensive than surrogacy, was still a costly pursuit. Foster parenting was largely constructed as a pursuit that would be more accessible for those with less economic privilege. For example, Daniel, who worked in retail indicated, “I think at this point the only way I could get [a child] would be foster parenting.” While in his interview he never explicitly stated the reason being cost, one can surmise that his work in retail and high school education would indicate less socio-economic privilege and opportunity for career advancement. As such, one’s income and socioeconomic status may undoubtedly be linked to their perceptions of possible parenting pathways. However, this assertion may be further negotiated within the context of one’s age, with men in their early 20s envisioning opportunities and earnings growth in the future, while men in their 30s may have a different perspective on future opportunities and fiscal constraints.

Discussions of foster parenting particularly elicited complex ideas and beliefs from the subjects. Carl said “I obviously don’t think I could afford to do a private adoption or something, or even like a foreign adoption, that would be kind of insane financially.” He later expanded
with more thoughts, after sharing a story about the difficulties his sister experienced as a foster parent,

the whole idea of foster parenting scares me a little bit because I’m not really sure I could handle somebody that had a lot of emotional needs… If I did, say, do foster parenting, I would prefer it be as young as possible. Which, yes, I’m trying to think of the politically correct thing to say, but I would really want it to be as young as possible.

Carl’s commentary highlights a concern that emerged among men when discussing foster parenting—the psychological well-being of the child they may be placed with and the challenges that may bring. Given the nature of the foster care system, many of the men seemed to believe that foster children were almost certainly coming from troubled homes and were likely “damaged.” Some spoke of fostering in quite altruistic manners, being willing to foster children of varied ages, while others such as Carl had a more focused desire for as young as possible to hopefully avoid the long term impact of potential damage. What is additionally intriguing about the above commentary is the awareness that to verbalize such a thing is likely seen as offensive or politically incorrect. It seems that the aim of altruistic care for a child who needs a home was deemed socially appropriate; however, there remained a pragmatic sense about the level of challenges they may be able or willing to work through when taking a child into their home.

Additionally, a number of men expressed concern about the difficulties they believed would be affiliated with adoption (or surrogacy to adoption). As Rick said:

If I’m going to adopt it’d going to be really tough to adopt, which, you know, it kind of bothers me a to a certain extent because I don’t that I should be stopped from loving a child because of my sexuality.

Regardless of a desiring or undecided orientation it appears that many men were anxious about and ultimately uncertain about the potential ramifications their sexuality may have in pursuing adoption. This demonstrates an awareness of a heteronormative culture and the implications this
may have in organizations such as adoption agencies. Additionally, such concerns clearly demonstrate that few of these men had yet to investigate the validity of these concerns. Indeed, exceptionally few men made any reference to exploring adoption or foster care websites or resources to learn more. While these men may be articulating a desire to parent, this is not necessarily linked to an intention to parent (Patterson and Riskind 2010).

Among the subjects, all spoke of various paths towards parenthood and could articulate pros and cons for these various approaches. However, nearly all men indicated a preference. Herein, all but one subject were actively constructing the approaches to having children as distinct with unique potential complications and social meaning. Reggie, who we may recall was a subject raised in a home with nuanced family ties, suggested that adoption, fostering, and surrogacy were:

> pretty much almost one in the same. You’re going to be a parent. You’re providing shelter. You’re providing love and support and unconditional, um, and helping socialize...because my house [house raised in] is of mixed biological, foster, and adopted children, so we’re all one, so, I don’t really, I don’t see the big difference or problem.

His view on family was, in many ways, one of the most progressive and liberal of any subject, framing kinship in broad inclusive manners. This said, he also simultaneously spoke to a desire to father at least one child biologically to “carry on the bloodline.” While these assertions may initially seem conflicting, he tempers his preference with “if I don’t have a biological child I won’t feel like my life [won’t be] complete.” Ultimately, Reggie actually dually demonstrates that some men are open to pursuing parenthood in obtuse manners that are equally valuing varying paths to fatherhood, yet can simultaneously have a preference, even while recognizing it may not occur.
Summing Up: Positive and Undecided Orientations

The views of the men in this section highlight the perspectives of those who desire children and those who are yet undecided. Across both categories of men we can observe significant overlap in various topics linked to parenthood, particularly ideologies about the pros and cons of parenting, as well as how one may choose to pursue parenthood. Yet, subtle distinctions emerge when more closely examining the language used and dialogic approaches employed by these men when discussing their aspirational beliefs.

Among men who offered a clear desire to parent there was often pronounced language about the importance of children and parenting, with men asserting an essentialist view of such a desire being “natural” or innate. More than any other group of men, they were likely to further this idea with an assertion that to remain childfree was a “selfish” state of being. Parenting is in some manners being portrayed as altruistic, yet simultaneously they made strong assertions about qualitative ideas of love and self-fulfillment or enrichment. Among these men, when exploring the pros and cons of parenting, there was more often than not a bias towards positive ideas and a downplay of negative aspects.

The perspectives of the men who were yet undecided were often more nuanced and complex than those desiring children. These men often articulated thematic overlap with the beliefs and views conveyed by those desiring children, yet were typically inclusive of more descriptions, more balanced ideas and examples of pros and cons, and a narrative that indicated aspiration decisions were a future task. While men who desire children framed their views of childrearing pros and cons with a bias towards positive components, those who were undecided offered near-balanced numbers of pros and cons. A notable distinction separating the undecided was their perspective on partner selection, with many being open-minded towards dating men of
any parental aspiration orientation, while those who desired children were primarily focused upon only dating men of the same orientation.

Despite the overlap in the views of these two groups of men a clear component that distinguishes their aspirational orientations is their contextualization of parental desire in their life course. Those who desire children appear to not only have made a clear decision on their orientation, but are indicating life choices and plans that can support the transition to such a life course, at least after they are out of their “care-free, youthful” stage of life. Among men who are yet undecided there does not appear to be the same process in play. These men frame their decision making within a clear “future” oriented framework—the decision whether to parent or not is posited to an abstract indeterminate later time. They are not currently prepared to decide what they want, but will figure it out at some later time. However, one is left to ponder if this decision is ever one to really be made or if this simply allows one to slide into childlessness without ever having to make an explicit decision—as gay men, one is unlikely to accidently or unexpectedly become a parent.
Chapter 6: It’s Not For Me... But Let’s All Talk About It

The connection of the traditional nuclear family with the ideas of parenting and children were apparent themes among nearly all interviewed subjects. This is not to say that these men did not see couples who were childfree as “non-families,” but rather their mental construct was undoubtedly influenced by cultural ideals of “family” as inclusive of children. Despite the social pressures that may influence many people in their consideration of parental aspiration, a number of men interviewed spoke to a desire or preference to remain childfree. For these men, and all men interviewed, their aspirations were ultimately expressed from a personal perspective, yet simultaneously situated within a social terrain. Their views are embedded in personal and social institutions that result in not only self-reflection, but also interactions and discussions in which their aspirations may be shared with their families of origin.

This chapter will be divided into two major thematic sections. Firstly, the perspectives of men who do not wish to have children will be explored. Herein, the varied meanings and nuances of childfree intentions and their social perspectives will be explored. From the voices of men who wish to remain childfree, we will then turn to a more holistic discussion of how gay men of all aspirations speak to or share their aspirations with others, particularly family members.

“Probably Not:” Tempering the ‘No’

Unlike the men of the prior chapter, among whom many spoke with exuberance about children and the possibility of pursuing parenthood, many of the men who preferred to remain childfree engaged phrasing and perspectives that were at times apologetic and tempering in
regards to their desires. Indeed, few of these men, when asked if they would like to be a parent, were explicit or direct with a response of “no.” Rather, one of the most common responses was “probably not.” Other initial responses including references to time or life course constructs, such as “not right now” or linked to the idea that their belief was merely contextual to the time of interview, for example, “as of right now, no”. Another similar approach to tempering that was employed expanded the contextual approach with the explicit possibility that their perspective could one day shift, for example, Alan said, “Not right now. I wouldn’t say never, but not for the foreseeable future, no.” Of the twelve men interviewed indicating they would prefer to remain childfree, only one engaged a clear and definitive initial reply of “never.”

Among these men, many incorporated qualitatively implied ideas that their perspective might change at various points in their interviews, as with Alan, above. It would seem that for many it was somehow problematic to establish a firm, definitive orientation of preferring to remain childfree. In some ways it is surprising how similar initial responses were to many of the men who were undecided in their orientation. One may argue that these men are simply recognizing that life is a journey and that as young men, especially if still single, that their perspectives might change down the road depending on life circumstances and relationships. Alternatively, we may interpret this reticence of establishing a firm orientation to remain childfree as an effort to resist aspiration negativity. Given our cultural terrain, to explicitly say one doesn’t want children may be stigmatizing. As will be discussed later, many of these men actually included dialogue in which they explicitly affirm their positive views on children abstractly and that children could bring positive experiences to many, but that they were not personally interested in raising children, unless circumstances required them to do so.
Counter to the typical qualitative constructs most men articulated when expressing their desire to remain childfree, at least one man offered a quantified framing. Seth, when asked if he would one day like to be a parent responded, “probably not….I’m not totally against it, just 95% against it.” Despite an explicitly strong desire to remain childfree, even Seth is tempering his orientation to meet cultural norms. Later in his interview he expressed that the only way he would be likely to change orientation would be if he were to end up with a partner who was adamant about wanting children and who would have to “convince” him. Interestingly, among the entire subject pool, Seth was one of the few men who personally knew gay men who were parenting. His experience, having neighbors who were a gay couple that adopted a child, may in some manner interact with his orientation to allow for the small possibility of a later perspective shift. Alternately, they may have enforced his childfree orientation. Unfortunately, his interview did not include much reference to this couple beyond the fact that he knew of a couple raising children personally, so his level of interaction and knowledge about their path to fatherhood is unclear.

While the majority of men wishing to remain childfree were willing to engage phrasing that readily categories their orientation, at least one subject explicitly resisted such wording. When asked if he would one day like to be a parent, John stated: “I don’t know, I think I’d be too strict. I don’t have the patience for… whether I was straight or gay, I don’t have the patience for kids basically just being pains for absolutely no reason other than to get attention.” Upon further query of “OK, so you’re kind of in the undecided?,” John responded, “I’m am not undecided, I just think I would be too tough or strict if I was a parent.” Unpacking John’s responses demonstrates multiple ideas about parenting and children broadly and the incorporation of justification. Throughout John’s interview it was clear that he was not interested in having or
raising children, but he was highly resistant to actually saying so in a specific manner. One may argue his resistance is a response to the cultural pressures and assumptions that people are generally expected to like children and to want to raise children. Given this social terrain, to explicitly say ‘I don’t want children’ may be stigmatizing. Not only might it be difficult for some to articulate this orientation, but there may be a sense that one must then justify this perspective. In this case, John has implied that were he to parent it would be bad for the children. As such, his choice to not parent is being portrayed as a positive direction or favor for hypothetical children, so they could avoid a negative childhood experience.

Given the social processes that encourage parenting and the valuation of children, it may be hypothesized that these men are largely reticent to engage definitive phrasing when interviewed as there may be a perception that to do so would be stigmatizing. One is left to wonder however if the framing of this research also led men to perceive an implied favorable perception on gay parenting within the project or by the researcher. Efforts were made to actively recruit men who did not want children, particularly when recruiting online and able to observe their publicly noted preference to remain childfree on their profiles. When approaching these subjects minor adjustments were even made to the recruitment email to place childfree in a privileged position (i.e. “do they want to remain childfree or do they want to have children?”), in an effort to reduce such a perception. Regardless, given the overall nature of this project and recruitment methods, a number of men who wished to remain childfree may have simply chosen not to participate.
Established Orientations and Those that Shifted to ‘No’:

Among these men there was a varied framing of the desire to remain childfree—some implied never having wanted children, while others spoke to their choice to be childfree in terms of maturation and identity shifts. Given that the desire to remain childfree was found most often among subjects who were in their mid/late 20s to early 30s, one may surmise this perspective emerges for many during their 20s. However, a number of men contextualized their shift from aspiring to parent to remaining childfree as occurring in high school, perhaps even before identifying as gay. For example, Dennis, 29:

_Dennis_: As of right now, no. When I was in high school, for some weird reason, I really wanted to be a parent. I dreamed of having kids, and I went through that whole phase. Umm, but then after high school it went away and hasn’t really returned. But I haven’t really been stable, I’ve been going to school, I’ve been moving. Maybe, you know, if I eventually find a job in one spot and meet, you know, one guy that I really like, then maybe that will return, but as of right now, it’s just not there.

_Farr_: Well you said it kind of went away, if you will. Do you think there were any particular events or situations that helped codify that or did it just kind of fade?

_Dennis_: I think it just kind of faded. Like I remember in high school I actually would dream about being a father and raising children, but it kinda just gradually went away. I don’t think there was a particular event that caused it. It just was there for a while and it just kind of stopped.

While it initially appeared that Dennis’s orientation shift occurred after high school, when asked if his gay identity had influenced his parental aspirations, he stated: “No, because that ended way before my sophomore year. I think it actually stopped before I graduated high school. So, it probably [was that way] for a year or two during high school.” Herein, Dennis reveals one of the difficulties in this type of research—one’s recollections may not always be linear and may vary. He initially suggested his perspective shift occurred after high school, but then later indicated it happened mid-high school. This transformative dialogue may be the result of new recollections
that emerged or were clarified during our continued dialogue, but may also be indicative of an obtuse and nuanced process in aspiration decision making that occurs over time.

For some coming to a resolute perspective on their desire to parent may be concrete and definable, but for most it appears to be the culmination of myriad influence, such as time, social interactions, knowledge of social diversity, etc. One may surmise that such a decision to remain childfree was preceded by a gay identification, but, Nick indicated “I prepared myself many years before I came out and probably many years before I knew I was gay that I did not want to have children.” Nick, like Dennis, had established a desire to remain childfree as a teen. Despite a concise articulation that this decision preceded his gay identification, he demonstrates that it took time to come to his decision. Living in a heteronormative culture, particularly as youth who likely interact predominately with other families that are inclusive of children, necessitates a challenging of this norm. While Nick did not articulate explicit observations that informed his choice, it is evident that he was able to accept a childfree life path as valid.

As discussed in a prior chapter, exposure to and knowledge of gay and lesbian couples raising children may be altering gays men’s perspective on parenting, allowing for more young men to increasing consider and be open to the idea of raising children. Similarly, exposure to childfree families can function as an example for those who may not have interest in parenting. Given the heteronormative structures that dominate the social experience of children, some may come to believe that everyone becomes a parent. In such a scenario, the possibility of remaining childfree may not even seem a possibility to some when young. For example, Ned stated:

Not always, when I was a child I thought about when I grow up and have kids and, you know, things like that and I think that was just everybody, when I was little everybody was going to grow up and have kids and um I think the first time I thought about not was when I was I wasn’t really close to my aunt and uncle when I was growing up and um when I was younger and mostly when my parents separated and the final time when I started to meet them and I saw they didn’t
have kids and they were the first childfree couple that I had ever known. I realized that not everybody has kids.

Here he explicitly illustrates the socialization that many experience that creates this idea that “everybody was going to grow up and have kids.” This ideology that adulthood and maturity is centered on parenting can certainly influence how many consider parental aspirations. However, Ned is simultaneously demonstrating that exposure to diverse families, as with his childfree aunt and uncle, expanded his worldview and allowed for a reconfiguration of aspiration.

**Explaining a Childfree Orientation**

During interviews with the men who were not interested in parenting, a significant number sought to provide reasons for not wanting children. It seemed as though they felt it necessary to explain and defend their perspective. This was an interesting counterpoint to the voices of men desiring children or whom were undecided who, despite awareness of potential stigma, largely felt little necessity to justify their aspirations.

A common theme expressed among these men was a general discomfort with or difficulty interacting with children. As Seth indicated, “I’m not really thrilled with the idea of children…I’m not really comfortable around children.” Most men who spoke to this idea did not expand their dialogue to demonstrate situations or examples to explain why they were uncomfortable, but simply stated it as fact. Indeed, this indication of discomfort did not appear to be explained by one’s level of interaction with children—this perspective was articulated both by men who made little or no mention of having children in their family and social networks (such as nieces, nephews, and godchildren) and by men who did speak to having children in their social lives. This general idea of being uncomfortable around children, while typically obtuse, was sometimes framed within interactive contexts, as with Dennis, who said “As I’ve gotten
older I’ve realized I don’t really know how to communicate with children.” This perceived difficulty of communicating with children may be a result of limited interaction or may be the result of intrinsic interactional difficulties, this cannot be known. Regardless, Dennis voices what may be a pervasive yet under-articulated component of this orientation, generalized discomfort may be the result of communication and interaction difficulties. It should be noted however, that Dennis, like many of this group, tempered his dialogue immediately after this comment with “I can babysit. I can take care of a child, but the thought of actually raising a child freaks me out.” While he purports communication difficulties with children, he simultaneously is noting his ability to care for a child, but with the caveat that the thought of raising a child is frightening.

Few men were willing to explicitly state they didn’t like children. It would seem that cultural idealization of children and families with children may have been internalized, discouraging these men to state such a thing. Bob offers an interesting example,

I don’t really like kids. … Well, I mean, I shouldn’t say I don’t like kids. I wouldn’t want to raise kids…I have no interest in raising kids. You know, I think kids can be delightful and fun, but I’m not a very patient person and I wouldn’t want to deal with all that stress and making your life about that. So I don’t think there’s been any particular thing, I think I’ve pretty much always felt that way. I’ve never had the desire.

He leads with the fact that he doesn’t like children, but almost immediately indicates that he “shouldn’t say I don’t like kids.” Bob’s initial response is one of the most candid and direct indications of one’s viewpoint on children found among those choosing to remain childfree. Yet, his full response also serves to temper his views. He is actually recognizing that it is largely unacceptable, culturally, to dislike children and works to highlight some of the positive attributes of children as “delightful and fun.” He then transforms his dialogue to a self-reflective justification for his dislike and difficulties with children being the result of his not being a patient
person. Apparently, a dislike of children is insufficient when choosing to remain childfree—one must justify this orientation.

A self-reflective justification for not wanting children was also asserted by Peter, who framed his dialogue for not wanting children in terms of a self-centered life orientation:

I’m right now I’m too selfish to have kids. I enjoy doing what I wanna do and you mean it’s a pain to go away right now and find somewhere for the dogs, let alone to go away and have to bring a kid or I mean I enjoy my life, our life, too much to put a kid into the mix. And I don’t feel that I would give that kid what he needs, he or she needs, to grow up properly.

Like a number of men who desired children or were yet to decide on their aspirational orientation, Peter has constructed a childfree life as selfish. Yet, he contextualizes this selfishness as more than self-based, but as also an issue of concern for a potential child. He is demonstrating that his personal lifestyle and aspirations would be insufficient for the rearing of a child. He has taken the self-reflective idea of selfishness and partially transformed this view to be altruistic—by choosing to remain childfree he is sparing a child negative repercussions.

Obviously however, as a gay man, this justification is perhaps superficial in that he is unlikely to become a parent by chance (which may happen with a sexually active heterosexual man). He does not need to actively choose to remain childfree, he is able to simply choose not to pursue fatherhood options.

While most framed their discomfort with children in a manner that may suggest that as adults they find it difficult to relate to children, at least one subject demonstrated a lifelong uneasiness with children, even when he was a child himself, Nick recalled:

I never had the patience for children. [When] I was growing up, I always felt like an old soul, as I said, I was very close to my grandparents, I was close to my great-aunt, and so my role models and a lot of the people I spent time with were not kids my own age, but were adults or even elder people. Um, so, I never felt like a kid and I sort of looked at kids my age almost with my nose down, with kids my age, because of the way that they behaved, not that I was always the
model of maturity, but um, in terms of kids I just didn’t ever want; it was just never anything that ever appealed to me.

Nick’s perspective of not relating to children is dually couched between a self-perception of being particularly mature and within the connection he felt with elder adults from an early age.

It should be noted that Nick’s connection to his grandparents and elder relatives was not precipitated by their raising him; he was raised by two heterosexual parents. At the age of twenty-nine, Nick had already earned a Ph.D., which may be indicative of high academic drive or abilities, characteristics that may have led to his perception of being more mature than his peers and readily relating to adults.

Pros and Cons of Parenting

Initial queries among men who were uninterested in parenting at times led to shorter responses from subjects, but the discussions of perceived pros and cons of parenting illustrated greater depth and perspectives about parenting as a whole. While each of these men could note both positive and negative aspects of parenting, not surprisingly the entire scope of their responses tended to be more brief than those who wanted to have children or were yet undecided. Themes found within this section of the interviews tended to re-emerge at other points in interviews as well, resulting in overlap and affirmation of orientation.

Alan’s response particularly notes common themes that appeared across a number of the respondents:

Yeah. I have just always been aware of what a responsibility it is to be a parent and how much a child would depend on you as their parent and how all-encompassing and important that role is and I’m just not ready…. [Among pros] You have no responsibility to anyone. You don’t have to worry about screwing [up] someone’s life. I would just say the lack of responsibility for another human being. And I think you would be able to concentrate on other things: helping other people….
[Among cons] I think the biggest con and the biggest fear for most people, I don’t know if I thought it so much, but the fear of being alone, with no one to take care of you as you get older. The vanity thing of not having someone to carry on your name if you’re the only family member left.

The issue of responsibility was noted by many subjects and typically contextualized towards a desire to not have responsibility for the care and raising of a child. While some men’s backgrounds and dialogues suggested that they may have had problemed childhoods, this did not appear to be a factor for the majority of respondents. As Alan poignantly indicates, he does not want to “worry about screwing [up] someone’s life.” This intersectional concern with responsibility did emerge for a number of men in this section. Here we see a shift from how men who desire children (or were undecided) constructed this idea. This idea was not as prevalent among the desiring/undecided men, but was referenced as a possible con of parenting.

Meanwhile, among those who do not want to have children it is constructed positively in that they can avoid that possibility. He does highlight topics of not carrying on family lineage and fear of being alone as one ages—both were also concerns mentioned among those desiring or undecided about having children if they were not to parent.

Themes of responsibility were also noted by other men as pros of remaining childfree. For example, Bob stated “I think its freedom that [caring for children]. I don’t want those responsibilities.” and John, 22, indicated “There is a lot less responsibility you have. I mean [you’d] be so much more independent and do what you want with your time.” Building from this idea, other men also spoke of independence and concepts of freedom to do as one wished without the restraints of children. Ted, when speaking of pros of being childfree suggested, “Freedom. I can do what I want if I have to go somewhere I can like travel. I like to travel and it’s hard to travel with children.” Peter spoke of the freedom in terms of specific activities that he regarded as more viable if childfree: “things I enjoy like working a second job, or being involved
in a theater group, or going away on vacation.” These commentaries denote not just concepts of freedom, but the prevalence and importance of travel to many gay men who were interviewed.

Peter also spoke of more pragmatic issues linked to the freedom of being childfree. Specifically, he spoke of not needing to worry about savings or having a bigger home to support a family. His comments highlight multiple aspects of the overall pool of men in this project holistically—the central construct of a middle-class ethos and ideals when considering the idea of raising children. While it seems likely that the majority of subjects interviewed for this entire project were coming from middle class backgrounds, based upon their parents’ educational and occupational statuses, there were also a number of men who were clearly raised working or lower class. Yet, all men were demonstrating in their dialogues that parenting and childrearing was “best” occurring in a middle class context—with access to a particular type of housing, childhood activities, quality schools, safe locations, and the like. Given the perceived cost of not only having children, but raising them, many of the men desiring to remain childfree particularly highlighted the fiscal freedom and the opportunities that they might then afford with the discretionary funds.

Despite social ideologies that gay men are sex-focused, only one man among those wishing to remain childfree made particular reference to this aspect of their social lives, were they to parent. Bob said “My assumption is that it [raising children] probably has negative impacts on others, like sex and social relationships. I imagine that it takes up almost all your time and energy.” Undoubtedly, raising children is a major commitment of both time and energy, but this does not preclude opportunities for social lives and relationships or an active sex life. It would seem likely that those social and sexual opportunities may vary with life stage and child’s
age for any couple raising children, but we can also recognize that these vary across an adult’s life regardless of parenting or childfree.

While nearly all of these men spoke of pros and cons of being childfree or parenting in abstract manners around the concept of children, at least one man framed them in a manner specific to a child’s developmental stage. Seth explained:

They may become fun once they actually start talking and walking and all that, you can actually have a conversation with them, but, the whole idea of diapers and waking up in the middle of the night to screaming...[are negative in nature]

While it may be recalled that developmental stages of children were noted among men who desired or were undecided when discussing the pros and cons of parenting, these men were rarely focused on such ideas. It would seem that for these men, children and parenting may become largely generalizable concepts, rather than linear changing constructs affiliated with child and youth development. Further, at least with Seth, there appears to be an assumption that were he to become a parent, his child would apparently be an infant—despite the significant dialogues across all groups indicating that adoption was the most realistic likely option.

Temporary Child Interactions as Parental Replacement

While a number of men who desired children or were undecided spoke of a life without being a parent as lacking in some manner, constructing such a life as ‘childless’ rather than childfree, a number of men preferring a childfree life particularly spoke to the varied opportunities they had to interact with children. As a non-parent the quantity and quality of time one may have to interact with children is likely, on average, to be lower than those with children. Yet, this level of interaction may be sufficient to fulfill any personal interests and desires some of these men may have. They expressed varied levels of affinity for children in general, ranging
from one who explicitly stated a dislike of children to those who tempered their disinterest in parenting in term of discomfort and alternative personal goals and life paths. However, near all indicated that there were at least some favorable attributes of children.

It was not uncommon, among these interviews to hear about what may be appealing about children. Several subjects particularly highlighted the “cuteness” or endearing qualities of children. Nick, for example, spoke of his goddaughter as an infant, “Oh, she’s so cute. I mean, what I discovered was that she was adorable, but I like being able to give her back. I love being around them. I love more being able to give [her] back.” Or as Bob previously mentioned, “kids can be delightful and fun.” Undoubtedly, these men recognize that there can be positive attributed to interacting with children, but as with a variety of life opportunities, they can observe positive attributes, but may not feel a need to personally embrace those components fully—especially in light of varied perspectives of the perceived pros and cons or life impacts. They may fulfill their child interaction quota through limited interactions with the children of family members, as Ted said “I have siblings that have children,” implying in our discussion that his interactions at family events and holidays were sufficient for any level of fulfillment he might desire.

While most men focused upon interactions with children in their familial and social spheres, one subject particularly focused upon their professional role as a teacher as interactive in their perspective on parenting. Jim, who teaches children of third through fifth grade, expressed that:

No, um, no I think being in the education system for eight years I see a difference in teachers that have kids and don’t. The ones who have kids, typically are the ones who come in later, have to leave right away, take more sick days, and I think it takes away from their professional part with the kids. Um, I put in more time, because I don’t have to run home to kids. Um, I put the extra effort in and I don’t want it to take away from something that I work hard at. I think my students
deserve one hundred percent out of me and I think if I was to have kids I would fall into that category like some of the other professionals that I work with. And I don’t want that.

While not explicit to this statement, one may surmise that he regards his interactions with his students as fulfilling not only professionally, but on a personal level. It would seem unlikely that a person, particular a man entering the female-dominated field of elementary education, would pursue such a career path if they disliked or felt uncomfortable with children. Rather, this career pursuit may be interpreted as a form of quassi-parenting. Undoubtedly, teachers are not engaging the same roles and functions of parents, but there is overlap in the heavy interactions, the intimacy that can emerge, and the significant child socialization that occurs in such a profession. Herein, Jim is particularly prioritizing the importance of this role and in some manners questioning the abilities or commitment of teachers who also parent, while also reinforcing the importance of educational professionalism and prioritization of student success.

Why Might One’s Perspective Change?

By in large, most of these men expressed perspectives they did not foresee changing. Unlike the men who desired children, who spoke of the possibility that they may later decide not to pursue children, particularly as they aged, none of these men expressed any likelihood that they may later choose to pursue fatherhood. It would seem that for men who do not want children it is a stable and likely persistent orientation. Not surprisingly, like men who desire children preferring to date men who also want children, a number of these men, if single, indicated they either preferred to date men who also did not want children or were not even considering the orientation of someone they might date. A lack of consideration for the perspective of potential love interests may be a function of being young and not actively
Recognizing this as a matter of concern at this life stage. Additionally, many of these men, as well as many who were yet undecided, recognize that gay men are less likely to be parents on the whole and thus may not be a concern in the dating process.

Only two central scenarios were discussed among these subjects in terms of possible life course situations that may lead to them agreeing or choosing to parent: (1) if a partner had an extremely strong desire to parent or was already a parent or (2) if a sibling or close friend were to pass, leaving children in need of a home. Many did not elaborate on the likelihood of dating or entering a long term relationship with a man who desired or had children. However, Dennis, despite a well-established disinterest in parenting, suggested “If I got involved with someone who already had children, then yes, I would take that on.” While some may conceptually prefer to enter relationship with men who were also childfree and intending to remain so, at least some of these men do remain open to the possibility that they could be in a relationship with a man who was already a father. What remains unresolved in their discussions is how they may later regard their role in that family or if they would even then consider themselves fathers in those scenarios.

The matter of potential-parenting, particular as the result of family member death was noted by a number of subjects across all aspiration orientations. Some framed such a situation in terms of their being willing to step-up to parent only if needed, as with Ted: “If something happened to a sibling of mine and I was put in that situation [of having to raise nieces or nephews], of course I would.” Another subject, Aaron, who had been with his now husband for nine years, actually spoke to the possibility of becoming custodial parents as a justification for remaining childfree:
Right, we could very well wind up with a lot of children at once. So I think that kind of halted us is the fact that we do have a lot of nieces and nephews that we will be responsible for if anything happens to any one of our siblings.

While he additionally spoke to other reasons to remain childfree, such as finances, it is interesting that he specifically speaks to an abstract, and statistically unlikely, possibility of suddenly becoming a parent to a number of children at once as informative to a childfree orientation.

Despite potential limitations of this work, particularly the limited number of men who reported a desire to remain childfree, it should be noted that aspirations, regardless of category, are not indicative of actual intentions. One may aspire to many things, but this does not precipitate the life choices and pursuits that may occur. However, a central issue that must be resolved when considering gay men’s aspirations is the social context in which they are sharing and interacting with others about their perspectives. We shall now transition to discuss the manners in which men, of all aspirational orientations, are talking about this issue, particularly with their family of origin.

**Summing Up: Childfree Orientation:**

Among those who report a desire to remain childfree there appears to be a shifting perspective and framing of dialogues from what may initially be expected. One may have once surmised that gay men, when coming out, would then presume parenting was a life option that would be lost—indeed, this was an ideology put forth by a number of the desiring and undecided men. Despite the cultural beliefs that may exist about this likely dismissed life option, these men who prefer to not have children are articulating a unique view that certainly tempers any such assumption. Nearly all of these men used language that softened or lessened the severity of their
desire to remain childfree, perhaps to adhere to heteronormative socialization processes which foster and support parenting as a normative process of adulthood and maturation. While they were reticent to explicitly state “no, I don’t want children”, they were simultaneously expressive about their discomfort with or dislike of children. In many ways, rather than assuming that as gay men they would simply not be parents, they felt a need to justify their preference to remain childfree. For many, there appeared a central concern, beyond their perceived difficulties interacting with children, about the high levels of responsibility childrearing would bring as well as a loss of freedom. Some even went so far as to indicate it is better for children that they remain childfree, as they would likely be a poor parent. This framing then serves to transform what some may see as a “selfish” life into an altruistic construct. While it may have been expected that these men may have highlighted the cons of parenting, they largely offered similar levels and examples of pros and cons in relative balance, although they tended to be more concise in such discussions than prior discussed orientations.

The largest takeaway that emerges from their discussions is that the childfree life path of gay men is no longer being constructed as a mere presumption, but is increasingly a choice to be made. Certainly, the choice to remain childfree is likely less stigmatizing that what a heterosexual may experience and one can readily avoid accidental fertility, but this transformation denotes a cultural shift that is allowing for gay men of all orientations to more actively assess their parental aspirations and make choices based upon their individual desires.

*Let’s All Talk About It: Talking About Aspiration with Family*

While the influence of family of origin upon one’s life is impossible to fully comprehend, these men did offer insight into how these relationships inform and continue to influence how
they think about their own parental aspirations. Many men especially spoke of the interactional aspects of coming out to their families and the connection made to the cultural norms of heteronormativity and fertility, especially via the frequent reference to the disappointment these men’s parents experienced as their child came out and the belief that they would not have grandchildren. Here the commentary about discussions of aspiration with family and friends will be explored. Certainly the manner in which these men are framing and discussing this topic with a researcher is informative, but the manner they are engaging with this life aspiration in their dialogues and familial interactions further demonstrates the role of aspiration in their lives.

As Rick (desiring children) conveyed about speaking with his mother:
We were talking about relationships and well one of the first things she said when I came out was “great, I’ll never have grandchildren.” Not in a mean way, but you know afterwards she expressed a disappointment uh, it was kind of just like an, oh well, kind of thing, uh, and I said I can still adopt, I could still go get some chick pregnant, uh, my stuff still work.

Herein, Rick, who aspires to parent, notes the “disappointment” his mother expressed for the life option she believed lost by his identification as a gay man. He simultaneously speaks to his effort to rectify this misconception for her. While he may on some level understand her perspective, he explains that heterosexual fertility is not the only manner to have children—as with adoption. However, the path of traditional reproduction is not entirely precluded either, given an affirmation of his own biological fertility potential—he may be a gay man, but that does not mean that he would be unable to biologically father a child. Ironically, Rick’s mother’s assertion that she will “never have grandchildren” disregards the fact that Rick has a sibling. Rick’s brother may very well have children one day; indeed, as a straight man it may be a readily achievable goal should he wish. Ultimately, this idea of “lost grandchildren” may not be so much about the literally lost opportunity of being a grandparent, but the perception that gay men lose the opportunity to the (positive) experience of being a parent. Perhaps, this expression of
self-loss, is really an articulation of sorrow for the perception of this loss and the recognition or concern for challenges he may face as he confronts the heteronormative status quo.

The connection of parenting to biological or genetic connections, especially within a heteronormative construct, was further referenced by a number of men when speaking to how this topic was understood in relation to their families of origin. As Sam, who is yet to decide whether he wants children, stated:

> The only thing really, my mother did say once, I don’t know if she meant anything by it, but regarding my sister and I. My sister has said she doesn’t want children, um, but she said my brother and his girlfriend are the only hope she ever has to have grandchildren. It was really more in passing, it wasn’t like she ever really meant it though. Other than that it hasn’t come up.

For Sam’s mother, the idea of grandchildren was clearly predicated on biological reproduction. To her mind, having one daughter who has already expressed a desire to remain childfree, along with a gay son, means that the last opportunity for grandchildren lies with her remaining heterosexual child. Like Rick’s mother, she is expressing heterosexist ideologies of fertility and parenthood—to be gay means one will not have children. Yet Sam’s mother, at least by his own description, seems to take this a step further by suggesting that she believes his heterosexual brother and his girlfriend are her “only hope.” These two perspectives both speak to the underlying heteronormative beliefs informing ideas of grandparenting, but diverge in their recognition that opportunity to grandparent lies with each child.

This heteronormative assumption of childbearing by one’s own parents was explicitly conveyed by Charles, who desires children, when speaking of his mother:

> she has this one idea of what being gay is, having kids is a separate thing that only straight people do. And so I, you know I don’t push the subject. God willing if it happened, you know I can show up and say look, I have a grandchild. Grandchild for you.
In his case Charles’ family particularly highlights the intersections of cultural background and occupational/educational status and how they frame understandings of fertility and family. Charles’ parents met during the Vietnam War, where his white father met his Filipino mother; Charles was born in the United States. While he suggests his mother “can be very old country,” he also notes that through her training and experience as a nurse she simultaneously realizes his biological and social potential for fathering. Deeply held traditional ideologies of “family” can be difficult to overcome, even after several decades in a more progressive cultural setting.

The explicit heteronormative traditions of American culture were highlighted for some men as they saw heterosexual siblings marry, as with Adam, who is yet to decide whether he wants children:

I think my parents would like to see me with a child eventually, umm, because they are very family oriented and they’re, they really, like, when my brother and sister got married, the drum beat started for them to have children. And it got louder and louder, and as with most married couples, the drum beat is just, you know, when are you going to have children? We want to buy diapers. When are you going to have children? We want to babysit. So, I think anything that uh, adds to my parent’s ability to babysit and spoil their grandchildren is something they would like to see.

In this case, not only is Adam actively aware of the social pressure felt by heterosexuals after marrying, but he makes the implicit assumption that his parents may also expect similar of him. This belief may be in part fostered by his status as partnered for three years—being in a long-term committed relationship may be, to their minds, equivalent to marriage, and thusly affiliated with pressure or an expectation that he should parent. However, in this case Adam is assuming his parents’ beliefs without their explicit articulation of such an expectation.

Related to the preference for biological ties between parent and child was the issue of lineage and carrying on of family names. While most interviewees particularly highlighted
conversations that occurred with their mothers, at least one man spoke of his interactions with his father. When Brad, who desires children, came out to his father:

he [his father] expressed some disappointment that the family name would end. because I am the last male of my family, completely. …[our name will come] to an end and I said no, no, I’m still having kids. I made it very clear to my parents that I still want to have children and they are very supportive.

Julio, who also wants children, experienced similar when he came out to his father and discussed if he would want children:

Uh, we’ve discussed it. They want me to have them. My father wants me to have [Julio] III because I’m Junior; so, I have children is something that has come up for a long time.

Despite Julio’s being out to his father, he also notes the disconnect experienced by his Hispanic father when seeking to mitigate his son’s gay identity and parental potential:

My family knows [that I’m gay], but [his father] still asks me about girls. Uh, I think it’s a cultural issue with the concept of Hispanic view of men relationships rather and how I do and that’s probably why there is a conflict in the conversation. But I have stated that I have had boyfriends and all that.

Julio is experiencing the complexities that some minority and immigrant families confront as they seek to accept a gay son and challenge concepts of heteronormative family tradition.

Similarly, Charles and Manish who were both in long-term relationships, both experienced familiar pressure and expectations that they would marry women, despite gay identities. Clearly, the perspectives of one’s family of origin and the influence it has on one’s own aspirations is not only couched within heteronormative social beliefs, but also cultural tradition.

The pressure felt to carry on a family name is at times enforced by family, as with Brad or Julio, but this influence may be simultaneously understood as a cultural expectation. For some, such as Norman, who desires children, the importance of lineage becomes internalized:

I have discussed this with them and carrying on my blood line is a big issue with me, even though I have [half-] brothers that will. I am my father’s only child, my
father was an only child … but again my father is her only child and I’m his only child so I want to make sure that my bloodline carries on, it can’t end with me.

Although during his interview Norman references his half-brothers and their likelihood of having children and the general effort to defer fertility by his immediate family (including mother, aunts, and uncle – seemingly tied to his young age and perhaps assumptions of heterosexual sex), he clearly has a sense of familial obligation. This obligation tied not only to his deceased father, but to his grandmother, both of whom had only a single child.

While the theme of familial regrets or assumptions that gay men will not, or cannot, have children was relatively common, clearly a number of men were able to regard parenthood as an opportunity regardless of family and cultural messages. While less common, some men were more actively encouraged or regarded as potential fathers by their families. Jason, a young man who desires children, articulately spoke to the positive reinforcement he received from his family:

Well, my mom was always like, and when you will have kids you will understand this, and she knows I am gay. So it’s kind of nice that she still thinks that I might want kids or can have kids even though I am gay. So I’m actually glad she says stuff like that and she doesn’t say stuff like, oh well, you shouldn’t raise kids. She is kind of assuming that I am going to have kids and she always says that when you have kids you will understand.

Similarly, Jim, who wishes to remain childfree, also received positive encouragement towards the possibility of his parenting from his mother:

She’s like, “Well you’re so good with your nephew I think you would be a great dad, you’re good with your kids. She came to volunteer in my classroom [Jim is an elementary teacher] a couple times. Um, but she saw my perspective too, which is just not something that I feel like it’s what I want. And who’s to say you can’t change your mind down the road... 

Indeed, a number of men of all aspiration orientations spoke of the children in their families, especially nieces and nephews (either biological or social), as opportunities wherein family and
friends recognized and responded verbally to how these men interacted with children. For many of the men interviewed their interactions with children informed their expectations of how family and friends perceived their aspirations and simultaneously informed their personal perspectives on whether they desired children.

Oftentimes, how the individual man behaved around or spoke about children informed how he believed his aspirations were understood by his family, especially his parents. When discussing whether his parents and family knew of his desire to remain childfree Ned, who wishes to remain childfree, indicated:

_Ned:_ I think they know I don’t want kids, yeah.
_Farr:_ Why do you say that?
_Ned:_ I’ve probably said it a million times in front of them. Whenever I’m around a baby, it’s obvious that I’m not… a crying baby at least.

While Ned was a bit flip, suggesting he had said he didn’t want kids a “million” times, it is unclear if such commentary was seen as sarcasm/humor, or if it was interpreted as a serious statement of preference. To his mind, being around a baby, especially a crying one, in articulating his disdain he was de facto informing his parents that he had no interest in having children. While nearly all men with family ties to children spoke affectionately and expressed positive feelings to interacting with them, at least in small doses, those most likely to actively articulate a discomfort or dislike of children were those who did not aspire to have children. Yet, by in large, men were reticent to speak negatively of children or parenting—rather, highlighting alternative approaches to parent-like relationships, such as with pets or as uncles.

Pets appear to particularly serve as “child substitutes” for those men who wish to remain childfree, while simultaneously implying a childfree preference to one’s family. Peter, for example suggested his family knows he doesn’t want children “because… I send them pictures of the dogs, I say here are the pictures of your grandkids.” While Peter had never had any explicit
discussions about his desire to remain childfree with his parents, he believed that the sharing of photographs of pets with the symbolic title of grandkids conveyed his intentions. While such comparisons of pets as children often seem to emerge through the dialogue of these men, some indicated that their parents also deployed this allusion. As Jim suggests, “I had a cat, uh have a cat, she [his mothers] called her granddaughter. I said, ‘that’s all your gonna get, Mom.’”

Herein, the pet was viewed as the symbolic grandchild, but this comparison offered the opportunity for her son to explicitly convey that she needed to understand he had no intentions of having children.

The majority of men interviewed particularly spoke of parental aspiration and family interaction in terms of off-hand comments and limited conversational references, with few having significant or explicit in-depth dialogue with a parent, let alone other family members, about the topic. Ned, who wants children, for example, stated “It has come up from time to time, but I have never had a real serious conversation…” Ben, who wants children, off-handedly commented to his mother during a long car trip “So, by the way, I bought a ring and I'm gonna propose [to his boyfriend] and we may have kids someday. That was pretty much how it came up.” Others, such as Edward, who wants children, do not even recall ever discussing the topic with his family: “I can’t remember ever saying anything about it or anything.” This topic avoidance or neglect particularly seems to occur in families where the son’s gay identity or personal life are not discussed. But even within highly involved, supportive family structures, discussing the possibility that one may want to have children, or remain childfree, seems to receive little attention.

The implicit understanding of family expectations and gay men’s aspirations seems to occur across all types of men. It is unclear whether familial conversations are particularly
informative, encouraging, or discouraging of the desires to parent found among these men. The vast majority of men interviewed reported positive thoughts about their relationships with their parents, siblings, and extended kinship. Those who spoke of their families, in particular their parents, in negative manners (i.e. neglect, absenteeism, and criminality) did not appear to prefer the idea of parenting or remaining childfree, per se. Some of these men spoke to wanting to be “better parents,” while some spoke to wanting to avoid the stress of parenting (especially at younger ages or financially). Ultimately, the role families play when informing gay men’s parental aspirations appears varied and unclear. Some men indicate a continued expectation that they will parent, others purport a clear assumption that they will never parent—much as we see variation in how these men engage their individual aspirations, families too exhibit variation in their interactions.
Chapter 7: Discussion

Becoming a gay father in America, outside of heterosexuality, continues to be a challenging pursuit, wrought with cultural and social obstacles that influence the process long before one begins to seek having children. These men are raised in a culture that, despite evolving social and media imagery, largely creates a stereotyped image that gay men are expected to pursue lives of limited commitment, non-monogamy, with ample leisure opportunities such as travel and partying (Bozett 1981, Mallon 2006). Linked to this, many, particularly when young or when first coming out, receive a message that there was no expectation of fatherhood and that the idea of that pursuit is seen as largely incompatible with a gay identity (Brinamen and Mitchell 2008). Yet, as more men begin to challenge these presumptions and pursue fatherhood and media constructs continue to evolve to offer more diverse family images, young gay men are increasingly allowed to challenge and question these long standing social assumptions.

This research offers insight into the perspectives of today’s young gay men as they are allowed to more actively consider the aspirations, life choices, and opportunities that lie ahead as they consider their perspectives on the possibility of pursuing fatherhood. Some recent works, published after or during data collection for this project, have sought to explore parental aspirations of gay men, for example, Patterson and Riskind (2010) who use the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth to quantitatively explore gay men’s parental desires and parental intentions. Others have qualitatively examined parental aspirations among coupled gay men specifically (Goldberg, Downing, and Moyer 2012). Particularly comparable to this work is Dana Berkowitz’s (2007) qualitative doctoral research, *Gay men: Negotiating procreative,*
family, and father identities, which led to subsequent published research inclusive of gay men’s procreative consciousness (Berkowitz 2007, Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007).

Centrally, this chapter will highlight and synthesize specific findings of prior chapters into an overview of young gay men’s parental aspirations and the central factors that may be influencing their perspectives—recalling the first research question informing this project: What are today’s young gay men considering as they think about the idea of parenting? Through an exploration of the common themes across all subjects and specific variations within subgroups a more comprehensive understanding of gay men’s perspectives may be constructed. Herein, we reflect upon the research question about how these men are engaging their aspirations in their familial and intimate relationships. These perspectives will be further contextualized to the specific cultural terrain, particularly their social interactions with gay and lesbian families and the media—reflecting and offering insight to the possible interactions that can occur to inform these men’s orientations towards parenthood, relating to the final research question of this project. Thereafter, these findings will be contextualized to recent literature, followed by a discussion of future research avenues to more fully understand this issue.

**Considering Parental Aspiration: What are Gay Men Thinking?**

Given the lack of cultural expectation for and limited visibility of gay men parenting, many may presume that these young men need not consider their personal aspirations on this matter. However, in speaking with these men, it is evident that young gay men themselves are actively constructing the potentiality of one day parenting as a legitimate life option. Regardless of individual perspective, there is changing social terrain that is facilitating the legitimization of gay fatherhood as a viable life option that can be at least considered. This research explores
what these men are considering as they proceed through their young adult lives and lends insight not only into what is impacting and informing their beliefs, but how larger social institutions might engage or approach these men to support aspiration fulfillment. As discussed in previous findings chapters, the men interviewed for this project represent a variety of viewpoints in regards to parental aspiration—namely, those who report an explicit desire to parent, those who are intending to remain childfree, and those who are still considering the opportunities and implications of each orientation and remain yet undecided.

Across all categories of men particular themes emerged that highlight the generalized beliefs of gay men, at least young gay men, as they think about gay and lesbian parenting broadly and gay men’s parenting specifically. Centrally, all men surveyed conveyed a positive view of gay and lesbian parenting and saw limited distinctions of these families with those of the traditional heteronormative family. This positive viewpoint may be the result of varied factors including general support for myriad gay and lesbian issues and efforts towards social parity, but may also speak to an emergent cultural view that is increasingly accepting of gay and lesbian parenting. Many of these men particularly highlighted examples of media imagery that reinforced their views on lesbigay families and simultaneously indicated that potential reciprocal influence these media images may have in our culture. As society becomes increasingly accepting of gay and lesbian culture broadly, inclusive of their families, the media imagery may reflect this shift with more visible positive portrayals—simultaneously, these images may create positive social viewpoints as more Americans are exposed to family diversity. Additionally, many incorporated personal views to suggest that they did not see significant distinctions in how lesbigay families were being portrayed, when contrasted to heterosexual family portrayals. This view was further deployed in their articulated thoughts about gay and lesbian families, with
many indicating that these families are like all families—that gay and lesbian families are merely part of the diverse tapestry of the American family.

Informed by the voices of these men, one’s personal engagement with gay and lesbian parenting, either in person or in cultural imagery, appears to have little personal influence in one’s aspirational orientation. While nearly all men were able to speak to an increasing visibility of gay and lesbians broadly and lesbigay families specifically, albeit at a lower level, they by and large did not incorporate this social discourse into discussions of their personal views. Their connection and awareness of this visibility was largely contextualized to dialogue that occurred after discussing their personal orientations, in response to specific interview query. It would seem that one’s interactions with gay and lesbian families and cultural images of their families may not be having a profound impact on a specific basis. Indeed, across the men’s orientations, there appeared to be little correlation between the numbers and types of interactions and observations they could reference and their personal aspiration. Undoubtedly however, the ability of all men to note and reference increasing and positive LGBT visibility in the media speaks to a changing cultural terrain that may be enabling gay men to increasingly regard their lives as largely similar to their heterosexual peers, thus legitimizing and enforcing a parallel view of life course opportunities, such as parenting.

While historically, many gay men may have been socialized to view fatherhood as a dismissed option when embracing a gay identity (Brinamen and Mitchell 2008), all men interviewed were framing their perspectives to indicate they saw the issue of potential parenting as a legitimate and very real question to be considered. Like many life choices and opportunities, such as higher education, occupational pursuits, partnering and marriage, where one chooses to settle, and the like, whether or not one wants to have children is an increasingly
integrated aspect of social negotiation for gay men. Regardless of the likely outcome that many of these men are unlikely to actually pursue fathering (Patterson and Riskind 2010), the mere discussion and deliberation of parental aspiration is now, perhaps more than ever before, part of the deliberations one confronts as one transitions into adulthood and the life course.

Given the prevalence and social support for monogamous relationships, it is not surprising that the issue of partnering or marriage was a persistent theme that emerged across the majority of subjects. While a few men did reference an expectation of likely long term singlehood and a few noted a willingness to pursue fatherhood as single men, the vast majority were contextualizing both their life course views and aspirations within a presumed construct of a long term romantic relationship. This is reflective of D’Augelli et al.’s (2006/2007) finding that among young gay men, only 10% rated relationships as unimportant. Certainly these views varied from abstract ideals among many single men to more significant discourse among those who were partnered. The inclusion of both single and partnered men within this work serves to compliment the overall importance of partnering/marriage and the interactions it may have for parental aspirations. Significantly, the viewpoints of potential or current partners was especially significant among men who were established in a desire to remain childfree—they primarily sought relationships with men who shared this view, or whom demonstrated little interest in pursuing parenthood. Among those who desired children, a shared view was noted as desirable in a significant other, but not necessarily a requirement. Herein, several spoke of the belief that if parenting was centrally important to them, any potential partner would acquiesce if they wanted to establish or remain in a long term relationship. Among those who were yet undecided, the majority spoke to current or envisioned futures inclusive of a long term pairing, but remained open-minded in regards to the aspirational orientation of a prospective partner.
Negotiating parental aspiration is not limited solely to romantic relationships, but is also tied to the social connections one has with family. Many men interviewed introduced dialogue that explored the importance and meaning of children in their family lives—particularly within the context of potential grandparenting for their parents and the continuation of family lineage. Implicit ideas of shared perspective appear to be prevalent for all three groups of men. These men are oftentimes relying upon off-hand comments and demonstrated interactions with youth to suggest their broad orientation of like or dislike of children, presuming this allows family members to gauge their parental aspiration views. Some men may have had explicit conversations with family, especially parents or siblings, to express an orientation—but this was typically found among those with definitive aspiration to parent or remain childfree. The lack of discourse, and typical lack of pressure from their parents for grandchildren, demonstrates that much of society may still presume gay identification innately implies childless lives.

Regardless of subject age, parental aspiration and particularly paternal pursuit was largely constructed as an abstract matter for greater consideration and active engagement for a later life stage. Certainly, for men who wished to remain childfree this was not of particularly concern—one can readily remain childfree and avoid accidental fertility if engaging in same-sex sexual practices. Among men who desired or were undecided about their aspirations, all were framing their views to a future point and had engaged little-to-no effort into investigation of parenting options. This construction of future intention was certainly understandable among the youngest men of this project, but was more surprising among men in their 30s. As a gender, men are largely afforded greater fluidity in regards to age when parenting, but socio-cultural ideals, reinforced by the articulations of these men, encourage the initiation of parental pursuits by one’s late 30s or early 40s at latest. This construction of parental negotiation and achievement as a
later issue may reflect the nature of this project, but may also reflect a large viewpoint on family building and achievement among gay men. Living a largely heteronormative society, where heterosexual fertility surrounds many of our individual lives through family and friends, there may be a disconnect between having children and the difficulties and lengths of time that will likely be affiliated with gay men seeking to have children. While men of all orientations could readily speak to different approaches to having children, particularly surrogacy, adoption, and foster parenting, few exhibited in-depth knowledge of affiliated legal issues, their individual eligibility, let alone costs and time investments. Indeed, many demonstrated highly unrealistic idealized images of pursuing parenthood—that they could just have a sister or friend serve as a surrogate, pop over to a foreign country to adopt, or somehow just get a kid. This naivety appeared particularly strong among those aspiring to parent, but was also evident among many who were yet undecided.

Paths to paternity discussed were largely consistent across all groups of men, demonstrating a basic awareness of key approaches to having children. Among those desiring or undecided, the order of preference was chiefly biological children (via surrogacy) and adoption, foster parenting, and least common was the raising the children of a partner. While co-parenting, particularly with a lesbian or female friend was a construct among earlier groups of gay men, it was mentioned by very few men herein. The preferred approaches to having children presented among these men affirm what others have found (D’Augelli, et al. 2006/2007, Dempsey 2010, 2013). It would seem that biological reproduction remains the primary preference for gay men as they consider, as well as possibly pursue, fatherhood, but that adoption remains a highly valued and legitimatized approach as well. Foster parenting and the children of a partner remain less
readily recognized opportunities, perhaps due the limited cultural visibility and imagery of these family forms in general and in the lives of gay men.

**Limitations, Recent Literature, and Areas for Future Research**

This research did not intend to offer representative data of gay men holistically, given the convenience sampling that occurred. The distribution of subject orientation is however similar to that found in the work of others (Patterson and Riskind 2010), which may suggest the possibility that this may be representative. However, more comprehensive research would be required to garner a statistically reliable sample.

An important point that Patterson and Riskind (2010) bring to this topic that had not been considered when developing the interview guides for this project is the distinction of parental desires and parental intentions. Had their work been available prior to this investigation more nuanced and indepth understandings of aspiration, couched with intentions, would have particularly complimented their largely quantitative work. Undoubtedly, more qualitatively investigation on these intersectional issues is warranted.

While this research sought to be inclusive of racial-ethnic and class diversity, the overall findings demonstrate a bias towards a middle-class white viewpoint. With 13 of the 51 subjects self-identifying as racial-ethnic minorities, this project is inclusive of greater diversity than much available literature (an exception being Berkowitz 2007, among childless gay men). It seems feasible to engage the voices of diverse men when considering aspiration, but given the fiscal and social obstacles linked to actually achieving fatherhood it would may more challenging to observe the realities of minority men as they transition into fatherhood or even the consideration of such a pursuit. Future research is needed to more fully explore the diversity of gay men who
are becoming parents, their perspectives on such a pursuit, and the manners in which they achieve it. Additionally, research upon aspiration itself needs to be expanded to include greater representation of both racial-ethnic diversity and socio-economic class. While unclear from this research, one may hypothesize that different processes may be at play among these different groups not only for aspiration, but within the intersectionalities of aspiration, coming out, and cultural expectations of early-life paternity.

This project is particularly noteworthy for the depth and number of men surveyed. Other than quantitative projects (for example D’Augelli et al.’s 2006/7), this research explores the largest number of gay men discussing parental aspirations pre-parenthood. The breadth and depth of these interviews has led to a rich data set that lends a more comprehensive perspective about today’s young gay men and their thoughts on parenting.

The geographic scope of this project, centering interviews in the Albany, NY metro area, offers a limited lens in regards to the holistic view of gay men in America. This said, others (Berkowitz 2007a, 2007b, and Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007) have found similar perspectives among gay men in Florida and New York City, which may suggest some level of generalizability. While legislation is changing in America, as with nationalized same-sex marriage, local and state level responses, often linked with varied levels of regional religiosity or activism, have varied. As these political shifts occur, we must work to more actively investigate the aspirations of gay men across varied localities. This research needs to expand not only to examine national trends and variation, but to also build greater understandings of how men are experiencing their aspirations across personal localities, as most research has solicited response

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26 Berkowitz (2007a, 2007b) and Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) explore Berkowitz’s dissertation work, which was inclusive of 20 gay fathers and 19 childless gay men.
from urban and suburban dwellers, with little exploration of gay men coming of age in rural environments.

Given the likelihood that many gay men who ultimately choose to pursue parenthood outside of heterosexuality are most likely to do so in their late 30s and early 40s,\textsuperscript{27} given the fiscal resources required of many approaches (particularly surrogacy), it is important to further explore age-related aspects of gay men’s perspectives. This perspective of timing was reinforced by the indication among this project’s subjects that the most preferred time to become a parent would be in one’s 30s, or perhaps one’s 40s. Given the exploratory nature of this research it is impossible to draw specific conclusions about the perspectives of gay men at different age cohorts. Research inclusive of greater stratification sampling, based on age cohorts, may offer more insight into the evolution of gay men’s parental aspirations considerations. This may be particularly useful today, given the rapid transformation that has occurred with LGBT visibility and legal rights in the last 20 years—today, a person at age 30 or 35 experienced a very different social experience of coming of age and coming out as compared to someone in their late teens.

Given the questions that remain unresolved in regards to aspiration and the actual pursuit of parenting, further work is needed to engage in longitudinal investigation to see if aspiration is at all predictive for one’s likelihood to parent. Given the continued obstacles that exist for gay men desiring to parent, it is important to more fully explore not only the causal paths that may exist, but also the views of these men in process. Research thus far has largely focused upon gay men who are already fathering, with increasing work upon gay men’s parental aspiration, while little-to-no work has sought to explore the views of men who are initiating their pursuit of parenthood.

\textsuperscript{27}As demonstrated in Wells’ (2011) work, the median age of the fathers adopting was 39; Tornello and Patterson (2015) reported the average of fathers in their project as 48, although they do not elaborate on the age at which men became fathers, the range of ages was from 25 to 84.
children or in the process of becoming fathers. Undoubtedly, the process of becoming a father through either surrogacy or adoption is complicated and deserves greater exploration about how these men experience and overcome whatever obstacles they face institutionally and socially.

**Summing Up**

Despite socio-historic stereotypes that gay men are uninterested in parenting, many are interested in becoming parents (Badgett 2001). This study has sought to bring light to the voices of these men and those who are still considering parenting, as well as the men who have already come to a more resolved desire to remain childfree. While many purport the importance of contemplating the possibility of parenting and theoretically regard its pursuit as a valid option, from a pragmatic stance it appears that many are not actively incorporating their aspiration into their social relationships, particular with dating and relationship building. Many are not actively engaging their personal aspirations in their intimate life choices, yet simultaneously enforce the idea that children would best be raised with two parents and for many they might only consider the pursuit if partnered. However, if one is reticent to discuss aspiration in dating and relationship, it can lead to continued delays or full out avoidance of the possibility of parenting.

With the socio-political terrain of America recently and increasingly evolving in regards to LGBT rights and social statuses, today’s gay men and future generations will undoubtedly continue to question and see their families in new and evolving manners. Undoubtedly, families of origin and created kin will continue to play important roles in our lives, but larger cultural shifts also influence gay men’s views about viable life options. As more gay men are shown in the media parenting, more gay celebrities become fathers, and legislation offers more protection to gay couples and their families, our community will likely follow suit with greater inclusion,
valuation, and acceptance of gay men’s parenting and allow tomorrow’s youth to actively and increasingly question their aspirations.
APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

[When the guide is divided into two columns, the left column is for those who indicate a desire to or are undecided about parenting while the right column is for those who indicate a desire to remain childfree. Text that is not in columns is indicated for all research subjects. Italicized text indicates standardized statements. Non-italicized text suggested the general outline of question/inquiry, but this will be subject to some flexibility based on subject responses.]

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Throughout this interview we will be discussing your personal perspectives, beliefs, feelings, and experiences relating to parenting. I would like to remind you that everything we discuss today will be kept confidential. Your identity will be anonymous in all papers, presentations, or publications that come from this research. Should you feel uncomfortable with any question, or at any point, you are under no obligation to answer that question or continue with the interview.

Do you mind if I tape record this interview? By recording our discussion I will be freed from heavy note taking and will be able to fully focus on our conversation. However, I may take some notes as we speak to remind myself of any questions or areas of our discussion I may need to clarify with you.

1. Demographic & background information

First, let’s start with some shorter background questions, after these we will delve into more comprehensive questions.

How old are you?
Racial-ethnic identity?
Relationship status? (single, dating, long term relationship, cohabitating, etc.)
Educational attainment/status? (clarify how much advanced education, if any)
Occupation?
Family of origin?
- information on parent relationship status (single, married, divorced, etc.)
- siblings (number, ranking in sibling structure, sibling relationship status)
- do siblings have children? clarify number/importance
- additional family relationships of importance (perhaps non-“relative” family)
Parental education?
Parental occupation?
- if two parents, did both parents work during childhood? (clarify if needed)
Religious affiliation?
- how often do you attend religious services?
How old were you when you came out? How out are you (family, friends, work, etc)?
How involved are you in gay and lesbian community?

2. Desire to parent
Now that we have addressed some basic background information, let’s talk about your thoughts about parenting. Please take your time to answer these questions as fully as possible.

When you think about gay men who are parenting, what crosses your mind?

Do you think you will one day want to be a parent?

Have you always felt this way? How early do you recall feeling this way? Has your perspective changed? If so, what do you feel influenced this change? (Probe): Any particular incident or event?

Do you feel your sexuality has influenced your decision? How so?

What things have gone through your mind as you’ve considered the idea of becoming a parent?

(Probe): What do you feel are the pros and cons of parenting? (Probe): What do you feel are the pros and cons of being childfree?

Are there any circumstance under which you would choose not to parent? (relationship status, age, stage of career, health, etc.)

Are there any circumstances under which you would choose to parent?

Are your parents aware that you (might) want to parent?

Are your parents aware that you do not want to parent?

Probes: Have you ever explicitly discussed this issue with them? If so, what was their reaction? Other family members? (If so, their reactions?) Friends? (If so, their reactions?)

Do you think that parenting impacts a person’s relationships? How so?

(Probes): Dating/intimacy? Family? Work/colleagues? Friends (both straight and gay)?

If you could have just the number of children you would like, what number of children would you want?

What do you consider the ideal number of children for a family to have?

If you did not have (#) children, would your next choice be (one number lower) or (one number higher)?

In general, among gay men what do you think is the preferred method for having children? (adoption, surrogacy, other?)

Were you to parent, how do you think you would pursue having children? (adoption, surrogacy, other?)
What are the pros and cons you perceive these different approaches having?

(Probe): Is it important to you that your children be biologically related to you?

Do you feel it is important for children to be biologically related to their parents?

(Probe): Were you to adopt, does the age of the child matter to you?

Do you have a preference for boy or girl children? Why?

What are your thoughts about multiracial families?

What are your thoughts about multiracial families?

(Probe): Would you consider parenting a child of another race?

Were you to parent, under what circumstances would you prefer it to occur? (relationship status, age, stage of career, etc.)

3. Parenting and intimate relationships

Do you think wanting to parent influences your romantic relationships? In what ways?

Do you think your romantic relationships are influenced by your not wanting to parent? In what ways?

Have you ever discussed how you feel about parenting with a boyfriend or partner? If so, at what point in the relationship did this topic come up?

Would you date someone who did not want to have children?

Would you date someone who did want to have children?

How do you think having children would impact a relationship? (Probe): Pros and cons?

How do you think being childfree would impact a relationship? (Probe): Pros and cons?

How important is it for you to find a romantic partner who feels the same about having children? (Probe): Is this only important for long-term “serious” partners?

Do you think you would pursue parenting, even if you were single? (Probe): If not, why wouldn’t you?

Were you to begin dating someone and discover he was a father, how would this impact your relationship?
4. Community awareness and visibility

Earlier I briefly inquired about your involvement in the gay and lesbian community. I’d like to talk about this a bit further.

Do you think having children would impact your involvement in gay and lesbian culture? How so?

Do you think remaining childfree would impact your involvement in gay and lesbian culture? How so?

How do you think gay and lesbian parenting is regarded in American culture?
Do you feel the gay and lesbian community feels the same?

Have you ever been exposed to or seen gay and lesbian parenting?
If so, what do you recall? (on television, movies, in the real world? Etc.)

When do you first recall seeing or being aware of gay and lesbian parenting?

Do you recall any particular reactions or thoughts you had at that time? Has your perspective changed since? How so?

(If only mention lesbian parenting families) Have you ever seen any gay men parenting?

Do you feel differently about lesbian parenting and gay men parenting? How so?

5. Conclusion

Is there anything you would like to add or clarify? Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time and participation in this interview.
Are you a GAY MAN?
Aged 18-35?

Would you be interested in discussing your thoughts about parenting?

As part of my doctoral research in sociology at the University at Albany, SUNY I am investigating the beliefs of gay men about parenting. I will be interviewing gay men, aged 18-35, to explore their desires, perspectives, and beliefs about parenting. Central to this research is an inquiry about how gay men feel about the idea of becoming a parent – do they want to have children or do they want to remain childfree? Additionally, respondents will be asked about how they feel being a parent would affect the intimate relationships in their lives. Finally, respondents will be asked about the cultural presence of gay and lesbian parenting.

If you would be interested in volunteering to be interviewed for this project please contact Daniel Farr at 518-505-3277 or DFarr@nycap.rr.com. Anonymity of all research participants is assured.

Daniel Farr
DFarr@nycap.rr.com
518-505-3277
APPENDIX C: Recruitment Email 1

This email is for listserv distribution.

Hello-

While this inquiry may not pertain to you personally, please feel free to forward this email to appropriate persons.

As part of my doctoral research in sociology at the University at Albany, SUNY I am investigating the beliefs of gay men about parenting. I will be interviewing gay men, aged 18-35 who live in the Albany, NY area, to explore their desires, perspectives, and beliefs about parenting. Central to this research is an inquiry about how gay men feel about the idea of becoming a parent – do they want to have children or do they want to remain childfree? Additionally, respondents will be asked about how they feel being a parent would affect the intimate relationships in their lives. Finally, respondents will be asked about the cultural presence of gay and lesbian parenting.

If you would be interested in volunteering to be interviewed for this project you may contact me directly at 518-505-3277 or DFarr@nycap.rr.com.

Anonymity of all research participants is assured. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely:
Daniel Farr, M.A.
Dept. of Sociology
University at Albany, SUNY
APPENDIX D: Recruitment Email 2

This email is for online recruitment via community websites such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com

Hello-

I notice by your profile that you are a gay man in the Albany, NY area. As part of my doctoral research in sociology at the University at Albany, SUNY I am investigating the beliefs of gay men about parenting. I will be interviewing gay men, aged 18-30, to explore their desires, perspectives, and beliefs about this topic. Central to this research is an inquiry about how gay men feel about the idea of becoming a parent – do they want to have children or do they want to remain childfree? Additionally, respondents will be asked about how they feel being a parent would affect the intimate relationships in their lives. Finally, respondents will be asked about the cultural presence of gay and lesbian parenting.

If you would be interested in volunteering to be interviewed for this project you may contact me directly at 518-505-3277 or DFarr@nycap.rr.com. Alternately, you may email through the MySpace email system and I will reply accordingly.

Anonymity of all research participants is assured. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely:
Daniel Farr, M.A.
Dept. of Sociology
University at Albany, SUNY
### APPENDIX E: Information on Participants

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1. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of interview participants.
2. To speak to the terminology listed: Married is listed if this was the term self-described in the interview. Partnered is listed to describe those who used various terms to describe long-term or cohabitating relationships. Boyfriend is used to described a dating, non-cohabitating relationship. Single for those who are not in a relationship. The length of time affiliated with a relationship indicates the total time in the relationship.
3. These men are partnered together.
4. This was the only subject to self-identify as being HIV+.

Of married/partnered couples the average length of relationship: 4.2 years; median length of relationship: 3.5 years.

Of boyfriend couples the average and median length of relationship: 1 year.
Bibliography


----- 2000. *Gay fathers: encouraging the hearts of gay dads and their families*. San Francisco,


body: Using *Queer as Folks* and the *L*-word to address the construction of the lesbian body.” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 12(4): 423-434.


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Symons, Johnny (Director and Producer) and Lindsay Sablosky (Co-Producer). 2002. *Daddy & papa* [Motion Picture]. (Available from New Day Films, 190 Route 17M, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926).


