Why Parenthood, and Why Now?: Gay Men's Motivations for Pursuing Parenthood

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Abstract

The current qualitative study of 35 pre-adoptive gay male couples (70 men) examined gay men's motivations to parent and their reasons for pursuing parenthood at the current time. Similar to heterosexual couples, gay men described a range of psychologically-oriented reasons as shaping their decision to become parents. Some of these (e.g., desire to teach a child tolerance) may have been uniquely shaped by their sexual minority status, and others (e.g., desire to give a child a good home) in part reflect their adoptive status. Men named age, finances, and relationship factors, as well as unique contextual factors such as the need to find and move to gay-friendly neighborhoods, as influencing their readiness to pursue parenthood at the current time. Gay men's motivations to parent echo normative life course decision-making processes, but also reflect concerns that are uniquely informed by their sexual minority status.

Keywords

gay men; life course; motivations; parenthood; social constructionist; qualitative

Gay men have long been stereotyped as uninterested in children and parenting (see Mallon, 2004) and yet empirical research does not support these stereotypes. Using national survey data, Gates, Badgett, Macomber, and Chambers (2007) estimated that over half of gay men (52%) reported that they hoped to become parents in the future. A study of urban sexual minority youth found that 86% of young gay men expected to raise children in the future (D'Augelli, Rendina, & Sinclair, 2008). In addition, estimates based on national survey data found that one in five male same-sex couples were raising children in 2000, up from one in 20 in 1990 (Gates & Ost, 2004; Gates et al., 2007). Thus, an increasing number of gay men view fathering as an expected part of their life course trajectories (Rabun & Oswald, 2009). Such changes are in part a function of broad-scale socio-historical changes, such as increasing family diversity, advancements in reproductive technologies, and a growing liberalism towards the rights of sexual minorities (Goldberg, 2010). Of course, this is not to say that gay parenthood is universally accepted: A 2003 Gallup poll found that 49% of Americans said that same-sex couples should have the legal right to adopt, whereas 48% said they should not (Robison, 2003).

Despite gay men's increased interest in and enactment of parenthood (Goldberg, 2010), particularly through adoption (Gates et al., 2007), no research has explicitly examined gay men's motivations to parent. Such research is important given the unique context of gay male parenthood. Gay men who choose to become parents do so outside of the traditional model of family development, where a man and woman have a biological child. Further, gay men who seek to adopt pursue parenthood within a unique relational context whereby neither parent is genetically related to the child. Additionally, gay men who seek to become parents do so amidst institutions and discourses that privilege heteronormativity and thus present challenges to their parenting pursuits. Given the unique social and relational context in which gay men consider and pursue parenthood, of interest is how gay men construct their parenting desires and motivations. Given the highly intentional and time-consuming nature of becoming parents for gay men (Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, & Goldberg, 2009), also of interest are the factors that influence the timing of parenthood for gay men. Thus, the current qualitative study of 70 gay men (from 35 couples) examined gay men's motivations for parenthood, and their explanations for why they were pursuing parenthood currently. We aim to extend prior research by focusing specifically on motivations to parent among gay men who were in the process of adopting their first child.

We first discuss the general research on motivations for parenthood. This literature has largely focused on heterosexual couples who were becoming or had become parents via biological means (as opposed to adoption); there is also a small literature on lesbians' motivations for parenthood. In reviewing these literatures, we do not mean to suggest that gay men will necessarily construct their parental desires in parallel fashion. Rather, we assert that the desire to parent is human, not heterosexual, warranting our examination of prior research on the subject. At the same time, we believe that subjective constructions of parental motivations are shaped by one's social location, relational configuration, and majority/minority status. Reflecting this perspective, we then discuss the research on gay male adoptive parenthood specifically. Then, we discuss factors that may influence the timing of parenthood. Finally, we define our theoretical framework.

Heterosexual Couples' Motivations for Pursuing Parenthood

Being a parent is often described as a key developmental milestone in the adult life course, and research suggests that the decision to become a parent is driven by a variety of motivational factors (Fawcett, 1988). In the research on heterosexual couples' motivations to parent, men and women often highlight perceived psychological or personal rewards of children, such as the emotional benefits of the parent-child bond, enjoyment of children, and personal fulfillment (Dion, 1995; Langdridge, Connolly, & Sheeran, 2000; Langdridge, Sheeran, & Connolly, 2005). For instance, in their sample of 34 heterosexual couples, Langdridge et al. (2000) found that the desire to give love and to receive love were described as the most salient motivators by both men and women. The idea that parenthood was "the most worthwhile thing in life" was also salient.

In addition to psychological reasons, the role-related benefits of children (e.g., children ensure that the family line will continue; children ensure that the parent will not be alone) have also been described as motivators for parenthood (Dion, 1995; Langdridge et al., 2005). Research suggests that relationship factors may also drive the desire to parent (Langdridge et al., 2005; Miller, 1994). For example, heterosexual men and women, but particularly men, frequently describe their motivation to parent as driven, at least in part, by their partner's desire to parent (Miller, 1994). Some heterosexual men and women explain their desire to parent in terms of their perception that having children will "complete" the marriage (Newton, Hearn, Yuzpe, & Houle, 1992). Thus, the literature on heterosexual

couples suggests that a myriad of psychological, role-related, and relational factors may shape motivations to parent.

Much of the research in this area has focused on women's motivations for parenthood because they are viewed as the driving force in becoming parents compared to their husbands (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). Studies that do include both men and women have described differences in how heterosexual men and women view the prospect of parenthood (Gerson, 1986; Langdridge et al., 2005). Langdridge et al.'s (2005) study of 897 heterosexual couples found that women were more likely to cite a "biological drive" as motivating them to parent as compared to men. The tendency for women to describe their desire to parent as an innate yearning may perhaps be influenced by the societal belief that motherhood enables women to actualize an "essential" aspect of womanhood (Siegenthaler & Bigner, 2000). Men in Langdridge's study were more likely than women to identify "continuing the family name" as a motivator for parenthood. Continuing the family lineage through biological parenthood may be especially important to men in part because masculinity norms emphasize children as a status symbol for men (Hammer & McFerran, 1988).

Lesbian Couples' Motivations for Pursuing Parenthood

Perhaps reflecting their shared socialization as women, and the salience of motherhood to female identity development, lesbian and heterosexual women tend to evoke many of the same reasons for wanting to parent. Lewin's (1993) study of 73 lesbian mothers and 62 heterosexual mothers found that both groups articulated psychologically-oriented reasons, such as the belief that parenthood is an important part of personal development, and gender-related reasons, such as the belief that motherhood enables one to achieve the status of a complete woman, in explaining their desire to parent. Likewise, Siegenthaler and Bigner (2000)'s study of 25 lesbian mothers and 25 heterosexual mothers found that both groups emphasized happiness and affection and role-related reasons as motives for parenthood.

And yet, lesbians' motivations for parenthood do appear to be less tied to heteronormative notions regarding motherhood as a necessary aspect of female identity development. Siegenthaler and Bigner (2000), for example, found that lesbian women were less focused on "generativity" (i.e., the continuation of one's genetic line through childbearing) and "the passing on of family tradition" as compared to heterosexual women. It is possible that the lesser salience of generativity for lesbian women reflects their positioning as sexual minorities. That is, they already exist outside of the heteronormative nuclear family ideal in that they are typically pursuing parenthood alone, or with another woman, and often via non-biological means (Goldberg, 2010). In turn, it seems likely that gay men's status as sexual minorities, as well as their adoptive status, may ultimately shape how they make sense of their parental desires and motivations (e.g., their valuing of generativity).

The Unique Context of Gay Male Adoptive Parenthood

Although family diversity is increasing in the U.S. (Smock & Greenland, 2010) and gay parenthood is not the anomaly it once was (Goldberg, 2010), gay men do not necessarily receive encouragement or support for their parental desires – in contrast to heterosexual men and women, for whom parenthood is often expected, if not compulsory. Insomuch as the life course of individuals is shaped by the historical times and places they experience across their life course (Elder, 1998), it follows that many gay men -- such as the men in the sample, who were, on average, in their late 30's, and had entered young adulthood and begun to "come out" during the 1980s -- are exposed to prevailing discourses that equate heterosexuality with parenthood and homosexuality with childlessness (Mallon, 2004). In the 1980s, "assuming a gay identity seemed to automatically entail losing [one's]

prospective parent identity" (deBoehr, 2009, p. 329). Thus, in order to become parents, men who are exposed to this master narrative must ultimately reject it and begin to envision an alternative reality for themselves, a task that may be facilitated or constrained by the people that they meet and other social influences (Elder, 1998).

Indeed, gay men who wish to become parents may encounter resistance from both within and outside of the gay community. For example, they may face rejection from some gay men, who view them as assimilating to heterosexuality or as simply "crazy" for giving up their freedom (Mallon, 2004). Likewise, gay men who seek to parent will likely encounter some degree of resistance from the larger society. Gay men who seek to adopt, specifically, far from being applauded – as heterosexual couples often are – are vulnerable to suspicion regarding their motives (Hicks, 2006). Furthermore, the households of gay men who seek to adopt are often presumed deficient by virtue of the fact that they typically lack a female parental figure (Mallon, 2004).

Such heteronormative biases create a challenging climate for gay male couples who wish to become adoptive parents, and contribute to the barriers that gay men encounter in the adoption process. These barriers are well-documented in the research literature; much of the research on gay male adoptive parents has focused on the challenges that they encounter in their efforts to become parents (Mallon, 2004; Matthews & Cramer, 2006). Studies have examined gay men's experiences navigating institutional barriers such as discriminatory state laws and homophobic adoption workers (Hicks, 2006; Matthews & Cramer, 2006) as well as interpersonal barriers, such as discouragement from family and friends (Mallon, 2004). Thus, research has tended to focus on the barriers to parenthood (the push *away* from parenthood) as opposed to how men explain and make sense of their drive *to* parent, amidst or despite such barriers (i.e., the pull *toward* parenthood).

Indeed, despite their exposure to numerous barriers in the adoption process, many gay men do become parents, perhaps in part due to their high motivation to parent and to adopt specifically. Same-sex couples are more interested in adoption as a means of becoming a parent than heterosexual couples, most of whom pursue adoption only after experiencing infertility (Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009). Same-sex couples' greater openness to adoption, in turn, is likely facilitated by their positioning outside of traditional definitions of "the family," where they are exposed to fewer expectations about how they build their families (Goldberg et al., 2009). Further, research indicates that sexual minorities tend to value relational ties over biolegal ties in defining who they consider to be "family," perhaps in part because they are vulnerable to rejection by their own (biological) families of origin (Goldberg, 2010); this valuing of relational ties may in turn predispose them towards adoption. Thus, gay men who have chosen adoption may express unique motivations to parent which are shaped by their intersecting identities as prospective parents, generally, and as adopters, specifically. Gay men's interest in adoption is also likely facilitated by the reality that biological parenthood (i.e., via surrogacy) is inaccessible to most gay men, due to its high cost (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007); for many gay men, adoption is viewed as "the" route to parenthood (Goldberg, 2010). Finally, gay men may also be drawn to adoption because it offers the chance to make a difference in a child's life: Research on heterosexual couples has found that secondary to infertility, altruistic desires (e.g., the desire to provide a good home to a child) may influence the decision to foster or adopt (Cole, 2005; Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006). Notably, Malm and Welti (2010) found that altruistic motivations were more common in heterosexual couples who were adopting via foster care than those pursuing a private adoption.

Gay men who are seeking to adopt, then, may construct their desire for parenthood in ways that uniquely reflect their positioning as *gay men*, and as prospective *adoptive* parents. As

sexual minorities, they have been exposed to dominant messages about their unfitness as parents, which may affect how they construct their parental desires (e.g., as emerging amidst or in spite of such negative discourses). Their sexual minority status may also shape their motivations for parenthood such that, for example, parenthood may be valued as a means of shaping a more accepting society. Their positioning as gay prospective *adoptive* parents may also shape how they construct their parental desires. For example, they may describe their parental desires as motivated, in part, by altruism. In this way, men's sexual minority and adoptive statuses may intersect to lead them to value the difference they could make in the life of a child who has experienced adversity. At the same time, we expect that men's motivations may overlap with the literatures on heterosexual and lesbian couples, in that the desire for children is arguably human, not heterosexual (Lewin, 2009).

The Timing of Parenthood

Researchers increasingly recognize that the transition to parenthood cannot fully be understood without taking into consideration the timing of parenthood, which may be shaped by personal, relational, and economic considerations (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010). The literature on heterosexual couples suggests that several factors may influence parental timing. Career considerations, such as the desire to achieve a certain educational or career status, have been cited by heterosexual men and women as influencing their decision to delay parenthood (Dion, 1995; Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2003). Financial considerations, such as achieving a certain level of financial stability, have also been cited by heterosexual couples (Mackey, White, & Day, 1992; Roberts, Metcalfe, Jack, & Tough, 2011) and lesbians (Lewin, 1993). Finally, relationship factors, including finding a partner and achieving relationship stability, have been cited in research on heterosexual and lesbian mothers as shaping the timing of parenthood (Lewin, 1993).

For sexual minorities, the timing of coming out may impact the timing of parenthood: Gagnon, Riley, Toole, and Goldberg (2007) found that lesbians who were seeking to adopt often described their delayed pursuit of parenthood as related to their need to resolve coming-out issues. Societal heterosexism (e.g., the belief that gay people should not parent) and sexism (e.g., the perceived necessity of a female parent) may undermine gay men's recognition of their parental aspirations as well as delaying the timing of parenthood overall. Ultimately, certain events and experiences may push men towards realizing their parental aspirations and pursuing parenthood. In their qualitative study of 20 childless gay men and 19 gay fathers, Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) found that men often described key "turning points" as activating their parental desires. Such turning points included having experiences with children, interacting with lesbian mothers, and encountering other gay men who chose to parent. Such events often instigated men to decide to parent despite contending with larger societal contexts that stigmatized gay male parenting.

In that gay men must contend with societal heterosexism, and do not accidentally become parents through procreation, their decision to parent involves a highly intentional process. The path to adoptive parenthood, in particular, is often very involved, lengthy, and expensive (Downing et al., 2009). Understanding gay men's decisions about when to have children can shed light on the factors that shape this highly intentional, often stressful, life transition.

Theoretical Perspective

The current study is informed by social constructionist (Schwandt, 2000), life course (Elder, 1994, 1998; Umberson et al., 2010), and intersectionality (Cole, 2009) theoretical frameworks. A social constructionist perspective highlights how individuals construct meanings of their experiences within specific social contexts. It also emphasizes how

meaning-making processes emerge and shift over time as individuals make sense of new experiences, desires, and intentions (Schwandt, 2000). Thus, a social constructionist perspective is useful in elucidating how gay men's personal interpretations of their parenting intentions are influenced by their immediate social context and relationships, such as their relationship with their partner, as well as by larger dominant, often heteronormative discourses regarding the meaning and salience of parenthood.

Life course theory emphasizes not only the larger social context that shapes individual lives, but also how individual development progresses and changes over time, and the influence of time in life transitions (Elder, 1994; Umberson et al., 2010). Throughout various life transitions (e.g., commitment to an intimate partner, becoming a parent), individuals re-examine and potentially restructure their societal roles, while taking into account the perspectives of loved ones (Elder, 1998). For example, a partnered gay man considers his partner's desires and goals against his own motivations for parenthood. His decision to parent, and the timing of parenthood, are thereby influenced not only by his own values and priorities but also by those of his partner. Thus, lives – and transitions – are often considered to be "linked." Further, a life course perspective highlights how each individual's path to parenthood may be shaped by a variety of personal factors (e.g., sexual minority status, financial stability); relationship factors (e.g., relationship status, relationship quality); and contextual factors (e.g., geographic location; Umberson et al., 2010).

This study also draws from intersectionality theory (Cole, 2009) in considering how men's multiple identities, such as their sexuality, gender, adoptive status, and social class, may intersect to influence their motives for and the timing of parenthood. For example, gay men's stigmatized sexual minority status may intersect with their adoptive status to shape some men's valuing of parenthood as a means of bettering the life of a child in need. This tendency may be especially heightened for men with limited resources who cannot afford a private adoption. Likewise, men may view the timing of parenthood as influenced by financial factors (i.e., the need to save money for the adoption) and issues related to their sexual minority status (i.e., a delayed coming out).

Method

Data from interviews with 70 men (in 35 gay male couples) were analyzed. All couples were actively seeking a child placement but had not yet been placed with their first child.

Participants

The average age of the men in the sample was 38.4 years ($SD = 4.5$), which is consistent with the demographic profile of adoptive parents in prior studies (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). The men had been in their current relationships for a mean of 8.3 years ($SD = 3.8$). Fifty-seven of the men (81%) were White; five (7%) were Latino; three (4.5%) were Asian; three (4.5%) were Biracial/Multiracial; and two (3%) were African American. Although somewhat racially diverse, the sample was disproportionately White compared to the national profile of gay male adoptive parents, of whom only 61% are White (Gates et al., 2007). Seven of the men (10%) had graduated high school; five (7%) had an associate's degree/some college; 28 (40%) had a bachelor's degree; 19 (27%) had a master's degree; and 11 (16%) had a Ph.D., J.D., or M.D. The men's annual median personal salary was $70,000 ($SD = \$6,702$), and their annual median family income was $122,800 ($SD = \$9,463$). This sample was more affluent than the average national household income for male couples with adopted children ($102,331; Gates et al., 2007).

Ten couples lived in California; three couples each lived in New York, Oregon, Washington DC, and Washington State; two couples each lived in Georgia, Missouri, and Texas; and one

couple each lived in Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Vermont.[1] Twenty-four couples (68%) were seeking private domestic adoptions; nine couples (26%) were pursuing public domestic adoptions (i.e., through the child welfare system); and two couples (6%) were seeking private international adoptions.

Recruitment and Procedures

Inclusion criteria were: (a) couples must be adopting their first child; and (b) both partners must be becoming parents for the first time. Census data were used to identify states with a high percentage of same-sex couples (Gates & Ost, 2004), and effort was made to contact adoption agencies in those states. Particular effort was made to contact agencies whose materials were explicitly inclusive of a variety of family forms. Agencies were asked to provide study information to clients who had not yet adopted. Over 30 agencies provided information to clients, usually via a brochure that invited them to participate in a study of the transition to adoptive parenthood. Because same-sex couples may not be "out" to their agencies, several gay organizations also assisted with recruitment. For example, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) posted a description of the study on their Family-Net listserv, which is sent to 15,000 people per month.

Study procedures were approved by Clark University's Committee for the Rights of Human Participants. All participants completed a questionnaire packet and a telephone interview before they were placed with a child. Couples were mailed two packets and two consent forms and were asked to return the consent form with the packet. Participants then completed individual semi-structured interviews (1–1.5 hours), separate from their partners. Interviews were transcribed and pseudonyms were assigned to participants. The data are derived from these open-ended questions:

1. Why do you want to become a parent? (*Standard probe:* What drew you to be a parent? Did you always want to become a parent?)

2. Why do you want to become a parent *now*? (*Standard probe:* What factors did you consider in deciding to become a parent *now*?)

3. Was one of you more of the "driving force" in becoming parents? Please explain.

Data Analysis

The first author engaged in a thematic analysis, which involves carefully sorting through data to identify recurrent themes or patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Using techniques described below, she examined participants' descriptions of their motivations to parent and their reasons for pursuing parenthood currently. Because the men completed individual interviews, separate from their partners, it was possible to capture their personal motivations for parenthood and their subjective constructions of the factors that impinged upon the timing of parenthood. It was also possible to examine the extent to which the men's responses converged versus diverged from their partners', by examining their data alongside those of their partners. This process allowed us to determine which themes were particularly likely to have convergent versus divergent responses from partners. The first author approached the analysis using an integrated theoretical lens, which sensitized her to attend to social constructionist, intersectional, and life course related issues.

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[1]Of note is that California, New York, Oregon, Washington DC, and Vermont allow same sex couples to jointly petition to adopt children. Michigan and North Carolina explicitly prohibit same sex couples to jointly petition to adopt. The remaining states (i.e., Washington, Georgia, Missouri, Texas, Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania) do not explicitly prohibit (or permit) same sex couples to jointly petition to adopt. All of the participants' states either allowed or had no explicit prohibition toward a same-sex parent petitioning to adopt his or her partner's child (i.e., second parent adoption).

The first author engaged in a systematic process of data analysis (Patton, 2002), whereby she first engaged in line-by-line analysis of each participant transcript to generate initial theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006). After reading transcripts of each person's data multiple times, she initiated the coding process with open coding, which involves examining each line of narrative and defining events or actions within it. This led her to generate initial categories, which she reviewed and then often subsumed under more abstract categories. For example, persons who highlighted their large families, "family-oriented backgrounds," and close relationships with family as reasons for wanting children were assigned the general code of "valuing of family ties."

During this initial coding process, codes were expanded and collapsed where appropriate and new codes were created based on emerging theoretical constructs. Once clearly articulated codes had been developed, focused coding was applied to the data. The focused codes were created by identifying the most frequent and significant codes to sort the data across participants (Charmaz, 2006); these codes became the basis for what we refer to as the themes developed in our analysis. Relationships among key categories were also attended to at this stage (Charmaz, 2006). For example, participant adoption type and income were systematically coded and examined in relation to participant responses about their motivations for, and the timing of, parenthood.

Next, the second author independently coded a random selection of the transcripts (i.e., one-fourth of the interviews) to verify the soundness of the emerging scheme (Patton, 2002). This process of check coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) is useful in helping to clarify categories and definitions and to provide a reliability check. Intercoder agreement was calculated using Cohen's kappa. There was initially moderate agreement between raters ($K = .68$). Disagreements were discussed and led to several refinements in the scheme, and clarification of the coding definitions. The secondary coder then coded a random selection of transcripts (one-fourth of the narratives). Intercoder agreement of our final scheme was $K = .96$, providing strong evidence of the utility of the scheme for describing the data. Our findings are organized around the final scheme. Because some men cited the same motivations to parent and others did not, we report both the number of men and couples in each coding category in order to capture similar and divergent perspectives.

Results

We first discuss men's motivations for parenthood, and then their explanations for the timing of parenthood. We aim to contextualize our findings by referencing the prior literature on the topic where relevant, as well as examining the findings through our integrative theoretical lens.

Motivations for Parenthood

The 70 men in the study described a range of motivations for wanting to become parents. They often described more than one motivation, suggesting that a variety of factors influenced their motivations to parent.

Parenthood as psychologically or personally fulfilling—Many men said that they wanted to become parents because they believed it would be psychologically and personally rewarding. They discussed their valuing of family connections, their enjoyment of children, their sense that raising children is a natural part of life, their desire to give a child a good home, and their desire to teach their child tolerance, as motivations to parent.

<u>Valuing of family ties:</u> One-third of the men (22 men: five couples, plus 12 individuals) described themselves as having grown up in close-knit, often large families, and they longed

to recreate these experiences in their own families. Their strong connections with family members and their "family-oriented background[s]" had led them to value the importance of establishing strong family ties in their own adult lives. Dashaun, a 36 year-old African American mental health technician, explained, "I've wanted a child since I was a kid. I came from an extremely large family. My whole life I spent with kids and family. I can't wait to have my own family." When asked why he wanted to be a parent, Frank, a 39 year-old White physician, asserted:

> I think a variety of reasons, but one is that I had a fun childhood. I was very close with my brothers and my parents and the whole sort of family atmosphere was so enjoyable and fun and neat. I want to try and recreate something like that, because I think that nothing can really replace the bond you have in a family scenario and there's just so much love and fun and adventure that happens. In a way it's kind of like another extension of being in a relationship; you're just adding more people to your life that you love and care [about].

In contrast to stereotypes of gay men as the product of unhappy family environments and as disconnected from their families (see Miller, Mucklow, Jacobsen, & Bigner, 1980), many men recalled their childhoods with fondness, and described an appreciation of the importance of family ties. Some men were motivated not only by the desire to recreate a sense of family for themselves, but wanted to provide a child with the love that they had been lucky enough to receive as a child: "I felt loved and so I want to provide [someone with] a great childhood." Thus, they emphasized the desire to give love, rather than the desire to receive love, perhaps in part reflecting their positioning as prospective *adoptive* parents, which fostered their tendency to consider how they could contribute to the well-being of their future child.

These men's narratives suggest that they were strongly influenced by the families in which they were raised, such that they strongly desired families of their own. Aware that their own family structure would differ from their families of origin, they focused on the closeness among family members as the dimension of family that they sought to replicate. These men emphasized family *process* (dynamics among family members) rather than family *structure* (heterosexual two-parent versus gay two-parent) in constructing the meaning and importance of family. Thus, although they drew from their own family of origin experiences in making sense of their desire to parent, they reconfigured their notion of "family" to match their current social context (Schwandt, 2000).

Enjoyment of children: One-third of the men (23 men: six couples, plus 11 individuals) exclaimed that their primary reason for wanting to parent was, quite simply, their love of children. As Daniel, a 38 year-old White graduate student exclaimed, "I've always wanted to have children. I love being around children, I love teaching them things, I love learning from them. I love playing like a child." These men described themselves as people who had "always liked being around kids" and who had "always been great with kids." The men's emphasis on their love of children as a reason for seeking parenthood is both unremarkable, in that it represents a fairly conventional (i.e., well-documented among heterosexuals) reason for seeking parenthood; and notable in that it contrasts with stereotypes of gay men as selfish and anti-children (see Mallon, 2004).

Raising children is a part of life: Congruent with the notion that parenthood is often perceived as a key developmental milestone (Fawcett, 1988), and a common if not "normative" adult role (Elder, 1994), 14 men (one couple and 12 individuals) explained their desire to become a parent in terms of the "natural human desire for family." They described raising children as an integral part of the human life cycle, "a part of life and growing up and all that kind of thing," and an experience that they could not imagine *not* having. Nolan, a 36

year-old White teacher, said, "I just see [kids] as fitting in with the cycle of life. Having kids and raising them, and watching them grow up and watching them have their own kids…it's a really important part of the way I see my life playing out." Nolan's understanding of family and parenthood draws from the dominant belief that becoming a parent is a necessary step to progress through life on a trajectory comparable to most adults, but it also reflects his rejection of heteronormative discourses that define families as biologically related with heterosexual parents (Schwandt, 2000). Indeed, these men constructed parenthood as innate, universal, and inherently human – in contrast to popular depictions of parenthood as exclusively desired by heterosexual men and women (see Mallon, 2004).

Desire to use own resources to better a child's life: Perhaps reflecting their marginalized sexuality and their status as prospective *adoptive* parents, 14 men (one couple and 12 individual men) cited their emotional and financial resources in explaining their desire to adopt a child. They felt they could "better a child's upbringing with [their] experiences and emotional support and financial support." Cooper, a 39 year-old biracial physician assistant, asserted, "We've got a really nice house and we've both got good jobs. It is something that we both desperately want…We wouldn't want to spoil them a lot, but we can just financially and emotionally provide for a child."

Several men – all of whom were seeking to adopt through the foster care system – explicitly noted their desire to benefit the lives of children in need. They felt a responsibility to adopt and raise a child who, given his or her personal history (e.g., a history of trauma or neglect) would particularly benefit from the emotional and financial resources they could provide as parents. Timothy, a 41 year-old White sales manager, exclaimed:

> We see so many kids that…haven't gotten a break. And you read the stories that are horrible, and we think, Wow, you know, we've been so fortunate. If, you know, we could make a difference in just one kid's life, you know, wouldn't it be sad if we didn't?

The theme of altruism appears to reflect, in part, men's status as adoptive parents. They do not simply wish to benefit *a* child, but, specifically, a child who otherwise might not live a particularly privileged life (Malm & Welti, 2010). Their status as stigmatized sexual minorities, and their relative financial privilege, may also intersect with their adoptive status to shape their reasoning, insomuch as experiences of being discriminated against coupled with financial privilege may lead them to value the difference they could make in a young child's life (Cole, 2009).

Desire to shape and teach a child (tolerance): Eight men (one couple and six individuals) described their desire to play a key role in shaping a child's moral development. As a parent, they would be responsible for "the values that [a child] will learn, and that's kind of important to us." Parenting represented a way to pass on their values, which included compassion, respect, and, most frequently, tolerance. This finding parallels research suggesting that heterosexual couples choose to have children in part as a means of shaping the future generation (Cassidy & Sintrovani, 2008), yet the men's emphasis on tolerance stands out as unique. Their focus on the importance of teaching tolerance may reflect their status as stigmatized minorities, where they share the desire and sense of responsibility to reduce prejudice toward sexual minorities through the upbringing of their children, and more generally to raise a child who would not discriminate against others.

In some cases, the opportunity to teach a child tolerance was valued not only for personal fulfillment, but also because it represented a way of contributing to social change. Gregory, a 40 year-old White graduate student, mused, "The reason I want to be a parent is, I think

it's my opportunity to give something back…To raise a tolerant person, a person who is respectful of other people. No better ways to change than…to start with your children."

Partner wants to be a parent—Nine individual men noted that a primary motivation for parenthood was their partner's strong desire to be a parent. Parenthood was not something that they would have pursued on their own, but was something they were doing because their partners wanted to. In this way, men invoked the significance of the parental transition for their partners as a motivator for why they were seeking parenthood (Elder, 1994). Nathan, a 38 year-old White museum director, revealed, "I am doing it because I love Ray more than I love life itself. It was so important to him, and so I thought, 'I want to do this and I want to be a part of it with him.'" These men's narratives must be viewed in the context of cultural assumptions that presume that women are typically the ones more invested in parenthood (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). In the context of two men, such assumptions are upended. As Nathan points out, his partner, Ray, strongly desired parenthood, and Nathan – out of love for Ray – decided to pursue parenthood with him.

Interestingly, five of these nine men observed that it was not until meeting their partners that they had seriously considered becoming a parent – largely because they had internalized the notion that, as a gay man, parenthood would be impossible to achieve. Meeting their current partner, who strongly desired parenthood, "flipped a switch" in them, such that they "caught [their partners'] enthusiasm" and began to imagine parenthood as a possibility for themselves. Darren, a 35 year-old Chinese American sales manager, explained: "I definitely didn't think it was ever going to be an option for me to be a parent, because of all the obstacles. So it was not something I was really focused on, until, you know, Michael always wanted to have kids. He always thought that it would be a possibility so…I came to see it as an option, something I want to do." This theme underscores the interconnectedness of gay men's parental trajectories: If these men had not met their (more confident) partners, some of them may never have pursued parenthood.

Role-related benefits of children: Enhancing personal security—Although role-related benefits of having children are often cited as motivators to parent for heterosexual couples (Dion, 1995; Langdridge et al., 2005), only a few men described these. Four men discussed not wanting to be alone in old age. They were drawn to the idea that children provide their aging parents with various sources of security (emotional, financial, and practical). Aware that at some point they might be unable to care for themselves, they looked forward to the prospect that a grown child would assume this responsibility. Devon, a 47 year-old White secretary, shared: "Part of it is maybe a little bit of selfishness. . . .It would be nice to have an offspring, if you will, somebody that, if something happened to Thomas, I wouldn't be just alone." Thus, for these men, the dominant assumption that children eventually take care of their parents played a role in their construction of parenthood (Langdridge et al., 2000).

Why Now? Men's Reasons for the Timing of Parenthood

For gay men, parenthood is highly intentional. The planned nature of parenthood by adoption in particular meant that the men were quite deliberate in considering parental timing.

Age—Almost one-quarter of the men (18 men: two couples and 14 individuals) identified their advancing age as a factor in why they were pursuing parenthood at the present time. Many of them had been considering parenthood for years, but had not taken steps towards achieving it until they were struck by sudden or growing awareness of their own aging. For some men, it was an impending birthday, such as "the big 4-0", that prompted them to "get

moving." For others, it was simply a growing realization that they were "middle-aged" and that waiting made little sense. Richard, a 37 year-old White urban planner, explained, "I'm in my mid-30s, so if we are going to do this, we really better start. You think about putting off buying a new car…I don't want to be 60 years old and thinking about it. We decided if we are going to do this we better get going."

Several men referred to their ticking "biological clocks" in explaining their sudden urgency to start the adoption process. Rather than describing a gradual awareness of their advancing age, these men reported a sudden shift whereby they felt compelled to "get this thing started!" In a sense, they were suddenly aware of their own life course trajectories and their readiness for the "next" big life transition (Elder, 1994). Their framing of their parental urges as biological is notable given that in no case were these men considering surrogacy, and thus their fertility status was not a factor in their sense of urgency. Men's desire to "get started" would seem to be less related to concerns over their reproductive capacities and more reflective of their emerging awareness of their own mortality and the desire to be young while their children were young.

Relationship-related reasons—Men cited a range of relationship-related reasons for why they were pursuing parenthood at the present time (Umberson et al., 2010). Finding a partner who also wanted to parent, ensuring that both partners were equally committed to adoption, and establishing stability in their relationships were all viewed as prerequisites to pursuing parenthood.

Met someone who wants to be a parent: Fifteen men (three couples, nine individuals) said that they were pursuing parenthood currently because they had finally met someone who wanted to become a parent as much as they did. Frank, 39, explained, "We both came into the relationship hoping that one day we would have a family." Many of the men had ended prior relationships because their partners did not wish to become parents. Their desire to parent led them to actively seek a partner who also dreamed of becoming a dad. In turn, disclosing their parental aspirations became a "first date sort of thing." Dennis, a 40 year-old White small business owner, recalled:

> It was always, "Ok, well I want to have a partner. I don't want to do that alone." But then none of my previous relationships lasted long enough or got to that serious level. It was something I would discuss with my boyfriends: "This is something that I want in my future" and "if that's not what you want, then that finishes our relationship."

These men found that their interest in parenthood served to "weed out" many partners: "It became important in terms of the kinds of people I had relationships with. I only wanted to date people who wanted to be parents, and actually, in the gay community, that took out a lot of people pretty quickly." Some of these men distinguished between "the kind of gay man that doesn't want to have kids, and the kind that does," whereby the former were described as relatively self-centered and "into the [party] 'scene'" and the latter were painted as home- and family-oriented. These men depicted themselves – and their partners – as falling into the latter category. Such descriptions notably signify and uphold certain binaries within the gay community, such that one "type" of gay man is presumed to be more "(hetero)normative" than the other (Seidman, 2002).

One partner was not ready previously: For 15 men (four couples, seven individuals), the timing of parenthood was determined by one partner's lack of readiness to parent. They discussed delaying the process of pursuing parenthood until both partners felt similarly ready to embark on this next stage in their life. Sometimes, one partner's lack of readiness was related to fears about parenthood that, over time, began to dissolve. In other cases, men

simply lacked the emotional readiness to parent until recently. Will, a 37 year-old White marketing manager, recounted:

> When I met Charlie seven years ago…obviously I didn't start saying "Let's adopt a kid" but after we had been together for a while, I sort of started toying with the idea. He is four years younger and had come out later than I had. I think he was less excited about the idea at first. So we would just sort of talk about it, and it was clear to me that it was just not something he really wanted to think about at that point. A couple years later we talked about it a little bit more and you know, he started to feel like, "Yeah, it is something I would like to do." He said, "Just not yet, maybe down the road." So it was a little over a year ago he started bringing it up himself. I think it just took a while for him to feel ready.

Will and Charlie differed sharply in their interest in parenthood when they first became a couple, such that Charlie, being younger and having come out later, needed several years to contemplate parenthood before he was able to commit himself to it (Gianino, 2008). Indeed, in several cases, one partner had come out later, which delayed the timing of parenthood (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). Roger, a 36 year-old White small business owner, revealed:

> There was a time earlier on when I wasn't convinced that I wanted to be a parent, and I'd say I felt that way until about maybe five years ago. I feel like I had a very delayed – not delayed adolescence, but I just didn't do all the things I wanted to do at a young age in my life. I didn't really come of age until about 30, so I was just – I went around being a young person for a long time and didn't see myself being tied down. But being in our relationship made me settle down and made me refocus my priorities in terms of what mattered to me.

For Roger, his relationship served as a catalyst for him to rearrange his goals and desires, ultimately provoking him to feel more ready to become a parent. He re-examined his societal role (as a future parent) after reflecting upon his relationship as well as his partner's individual perspective on parenthood (Elder, 1998). This theme highlights the interconnectedness of men's trajectories to parenthood; indeed, the fact that eight of the 15 men who endorsed this theme were from four different couples suggests that one partner's lack of readiness was often salient to both members of the couple as an influential factor in the timing of parenthood.

Relationship stability: For 14 men (two couples, 10 individuals), attaining a certain level of stability in their relationships enabled them to move forward with their parenthood pursuits. They emphasized that they had wanted to wait until their relationships felt stable and committed before bringing children into their lives. As Trey, a 32 year-old White dermatologist, explained, "We've worked hard to make [our relationship] something that we're both really excited about and committed to and we feel 100% comfortable that it's going to last forever." Five of these men (one couple, three individuals) said that they also did want to move ahead with adoption until they had a commitment ceremony that symbolized their mutual dedication to each other. As Eric, a 40 year-old Latino marketing executive, said: "I told Chris that we should have a commitment ceremony if we're going to have a child. We should clearly get married. That's just the model that I know." Eric suggests that his feelings about the importance of marriage before children are rooted in societal norms (Schwandt, 2000). Although his relationship lies outside of the heterosexual "model" he felt compelled to approximate this model as closely as possible. His narrative reflects his awareness of the ways in which his values are shaped by heteronormative discourses. Rather than feeling impinged upon by the dominant model of family development and "appropriate" course of life events, he constructs "the model" as providing

a familiar template upon which he can build as he embarks on the next stage in his life with his partner (Umberson et al., 2010).

Work—Many men named work-related factors as salient factors influencing the timing of parenthood. Consistent with prior research (Dion, 1995; Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2003), job stability and financial stability emerged as salient themes in their narratives.

<u>**Job/career stability:**</u> Almost one-third of the men (21 men: seven couples and seven individuals) emphasized that they had not wanted to pursue parenthood until they and/or their partners had achieved some degree of job or career stability. Others named concrete milestones, such as achieving a promotion, that they had wished to accomplish before starting the adoption process. Additionally, several men had wanted to finish graduate school before beginning the adoption process. In many cases, both men's work/career trajectories played a role in determining the timing of parenthood. As Darius, a 41 year-old White graduate student, explained, "I started grad school three years ago and Bill was in a job transition three years ago. This summer it finally felt like the right time to [adopt]." The fact that two-thirds of the men who endorsed this theme were members of couples indicates that career stability was often mutually regarded as a significant factor impacting the timing of parenthood.

<u>**Financial stability:**</u> For 13 men (two couples, plus nine individuals), financial stability was viewed as a prerequisite for pursuing parenthood (Mackey et al., 1992). Cognizant of the costs associated with the adoption process and parenthood generally, men wished to be "at a point where [they] could afford it" before launching forward. In turn, they had spent the past few years saving their money, paying off debts, and "getting finances in order" in preparation for parenthood.

In a few cases, men's perceptions of financial stability clearly implied desiring more financial resources than were merely required for the adoption. These men discussed wanting to be financially "comfortable." Corey, a 31-year-old journalist whose family income was close to $120,000, said, "We wanted to make sure we were financially stable. There's a particular lifestyle that we wanted to give our children, so we wanted to achieve the financial goals that we had set forth. We like a nice house, we like a nice neighborhood, we like to be able to do things." Thus, financial stability was subjectively constructed. For some, it meant saving enough money to cover the adoption and basic necessities, and for others it meant ensuring that they had enough money so that their current lifestyle was not disrupted. Thus, as gay men projected themselves into the future as fathers, their perceptions of when to become parents was directly impacted by concerns about their desired financial well-being (Elder, 1998).

Life changes and events—Echoing prior research on gay men (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007), some men described key turning points in their lives that influenced their decision to parent. Seven men (two couples, plus three individuals) said that their parenthood plans had been put on hold until they had moved into a larger house, a more family-friendly neighborhood, or a more gay-friendly locale. Moving enabled these men to feel able to move forward with adoption, in that they were finally in an environment that felt conducive to raising children. Thus, a move constituted a transition that launched the parenting process (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). Xavier, a 39 year-old White software developer, said, "Seattle is easy to raise kids regardless of interracial to same-sex couples or non-married heterosexual couples. . . .We were going to [adopt] in New York but…here we have a yard and we are in a better neighborhood." Julian, a 33 year-old White teacher, felt that moving to an area with "lots of examples of same-sex couples having kids" was instrumental in helping him and his partner to feel comfortable moving ahead with adoption. These men

viewed their living quarters and location as key contextual factors that would impact their families' quality of life, and felt compelled to situate themselves in environments that would be affirming of their diverse (i.e., two-dad, adoptive, sometimes interracial) families. The fact that four of the seven men were members of couples may reflect the reality that moving is a discreet, objective event that both partners are likely to find salient when considering parental timing.

For five men (one couple, three individuals), it was witnessing other gay men and lesbians in their social network become parents that prompted them to take the plunge. They noted that although they had been considering parenthood for some time, it was not until their friends began to pursue adoption, surrogacy, and insemination that they began to take steps towards parenthood. Exposure to the intricacies of various family building routes, as well as the excitement of seeing friends build their families, inspired them to "get moving." Richard, 37, said, "Our friends were getting into that. We kind of thought, 'Hey, if we are going to do this, we should get moving!' Just seeing their experiences and talking to them [got us ready]." Richard's sense of pressure stemmed from his view of his own transition to parenthood as being potentially "off time" as he compared his own life trajectory to those of his friends (Garrison, Blalock, Zarski, & Merritt, 1997).

Parenthood is the natural next step—For six individual men, parenthood simply seemed to be "the natural next step" in their lives. They had achieved stability on all fronts (jobs, finances, relationships, home) and expressed that upon having achieved that stability, they began to ask themselves, "What's next?" and "What do we do now?" After discussing it with their partners, the answer came: "Children." As Ryan, 37, described:

> When you're in your 20s it's just you. I think people kind of tend to be pretty self-centered and interested in buying a new car and staying out partying and doing stuff with friends…And then at some point, when you get to your mid-30s, it's like "Okay, I'm tired of that," and you become more domestic, working on the house or the yard or whatever. And then if you do a lot of that, it just kind of seems like a natural progression to "Gee, we've gotta have kids because we have a house and we spend a lot of time on the house."

Men like Ryan described a trajectory whereby settling down and becoming more domestic precedes consideration of parenthood. Men also emphasized economic and relationship influences as shaping their perceived readiness to embark upon parenthood as the "natural next step." Thus, gay men who viewed parenthood as the natural next step constructed the timing of parenthood as influenced by their personal development and by larger contextual factors (Umberson et al., 2010).

Discussion

This is the first study explicitly aimed at understanding gay men's motivations for parenthood, albeit in a select sample: namely, mostly White, affluent, well-educated couples who were seeking to adopt. Prior research has explored parenthood beliefs among young adult gay men who were considering parenthood (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Rabun & Oswald, 2009) and has retrospectively examined gay fathers' decision-making in choosing what route to take to parenthood (i.e., adoption versus surrogacy; Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Mallon, 2004). Yet no research to date has systematically examined perceived motivations for parenthood from the perspective of gay men who were actively seeking to adopt. Indeed, the current study is unique in that it provides an in-depth examination of the various personal, relational, systemic factors which shape men's motivations to parent prior to having yet embarked on parenthood. Studying gay men at different stages of the life cycle is important, as research findings may uniquely reflect men's particular life stage. For

example, it is intriguing that in Rabun and Oswald's (2009) study of gay emerging adults, the men considered their early 30s to be the ideal time for raising children. However, the men in this sample were older – in their late 30s on average – revealing how ideas about the optimal time to pursue parenthood may change over the life cycle.

Gay Men's Motivations for Parenthood

In addition to being shaped by the men's particular life stage, our findings necessarily reflect the men's sexual minority and adoptive status. Yet in some ways, our findings do converge closely with prior research on heterosexual couples. For example, similar to heterosexual couples, the men often emphasized the personal and psychological rewards of parenting (Langdridge et al., 2005). Interestingly, many men highlighted their positive upbringings and their strong valuing of family ties as motivators of parenthood. Thus, these men – who planned to raise children in a different type of family structure than that in which they were raised – emphasized family process as opposed to family structure in constructing their notions of family. This speaks to the socially constructed nature of parenthood and the complex ways in which men made sense of their own yearnings for and valuing of parenthood, whereby they drew from both their own family of origin experiences and also their current social context (Schwandt, 2000).

Another psychologically-oriented reason that men frequently emphasized was the notion that "having children is a part of life." In this way, similar to heterosexual couples (Langdridge et al., 2000), men incorporated dominant notions regarding parenthood as a key developmental stage (Fawcett, 1988). This finding is important, as it suggests that even among gay men who feel that they must "give up" on their dream of becoming a parent when they come out (deBoehr, 1999), life experience and historical changes may cause them to reconfigure their imagined life course trajectory to include that of becoming a parent.

Several themes pertaining to men's motivations for parenthood are particularly notable in that they seem to be shaped by their positioning both as sexual minorities and also as prospective adoptive parents. For instance, men frequently described their perception that they "had a lot to give" and, more specifically, that they wanted to provide a child with a good home. This theme of altruism likely in part reflects the men's status as prospective adoptive parents; indeed, altruistic motives have often been cited as an important factor influencing men and women's motivations to foster or adopt children (e.g., Cole, 2005). Men who were adopting via foster care were especially likely to voice altruistic motives, revealing how financial status may intersect with adoptive status to shape ideas about and motivations for parenthood (Malm & Welti, 2010). Another unique psychological reward that men associated with parenthood was teaching a child to be tolerant, in part as a means of affecting future generations. Given the larger context of systemic heterosexism, some gay men may be particularly attuned to becoming parents as an avenue through which they can help shape a more accepting society. Thus, parenthood was uniquely constructed by some men as a value-laden endeavor that has sociocultural ramifications beyond the nuclear family.

The men in this sample rarely mentioned role-related reasons, which are frequently cited by heterosexual couples (e.g., Dion, 1995). This may reflect their positioning as *gay adoptive* fathers: Indeed, both their sexuality and lack of biological relatedness to their child may have precluded their interest in parenthood as a means of continuing the family line and the family name – factors sometimes emphasized by heterosexual men to explain their interest in parenthood (Langdridge et al., 2005). Gay men – particularly those who adopt - may feel somewhat released from prevailing masculine norms that emphasize the importance of parenthood as a way to carry on the (biological) lineage (Hammer & McFerran, 1988). Thus, just as lesbian women appear to be less influenced by notions of generativity in considering

parenthood than heterosexual women (Siegenthaler & Bigner, 2000), gay men may similarly de-emphasize role-related reasons because they parent outside of the heteronormative nuclear family ideal.

The sometimes relationally interconnected nature of gay men's parental desires is worth highlighting. Some men said that they would not have sought to become parents had it not been for their partners, who introduced them to the possibility of parenthood and/or challenged their internalized homophobia. This reveals how gay men's parental consciousness may in some cases be altered by a partner's interest in parenthood (Goldberg, 2010). In many cases, however, the men's reasons for pursuing parenthood were not viewed as arising out of their partners' influence, but rather, were described in terms of their own personal values and beliefs. Furthermore, the factors that they invoked as significant in their desire to parent were frequently different from those of their parents, as evidenced by the fact that in most coding categories, at least half of the men's responses were from only one partner in the couple. This reveals how interviewing partners separately can elucidate perspectives that might be lost in the context of obtaining a couple narrative (Goldberg et al., 2009) -- clearly, some men in the sample were pursuing parenthood for very different reasons from their partners. Indeed, such discrepancies between couples also show, more generally, the subjectively constituted nature of parental yearnings.

The Timing of Parenthood for Gay Men

Whereas the men's parental *motivations* were often subjectively constructed (i.e., distinct from those identified by their partners), the men's parenting *trajectories* – and, specifically, the nature of the timing of parenthood – were understandably more interconnected. For example, some men noted that the timing of parenthood was, for them, heavily influenced by the fact that they had been waiting to meet a partner who was similarly motivated to parent, an event which had only happened recently. Still others emphasized the need to wait until both partners were emotionally on board before beginning their parenthood journey (Gianino, 2008). Furthermore, the importance of job stability and a move to a more gay- or family-friendly locale were both frequently endorsed by both partners within a couple. The salience of these themes to both partners suggests that they were mutually viewed as important in dictating the timing of parenthood, thereby highlighting the interconnected nature of the men's parenting journeys.

Our findings regarding the timing of parenthood revealed that in thinking about *when* to become parents, gay men seem to consider many of the same factors as heterosexual men, such as age, financial stability, and various relationship factors (Langdridge et al., 2005). But they also considered personal and contextual factors that may be uniquely shaped by their status as *gay* men. For example, some of the men's narratives hinted at the significance of coming out – a unique and important life course process for sexual minorities – in delaying the timing of parenthood. Resolving coming out issues and overcoming early socialization regarding the impossibility of gay parenthood was necessary before embarking on parenthood. As noted, some men also invoked geographic location as influencing the timing of parenthood, highlighting the perceived importance of developing their families in affirming environments, a finding that has been cited in prior research on gay fathers (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). The emphasis on location as *controllable* reflects these gay men's intersecting status as gay men and middle-class; working-class gay men may have less discretion in choosing where their children will grow up (Rabun & Oswald, 2009).

These findings, taken together, reveal how men's decision-making regard the timing of parenthood is inextricably connected to larger contextual forces (Downing et al., 2009; Mallon, 2004). They further show how barriers to parenthood – such as personal doubts, financial instability, being single, and living in a homophobic community – can be overcome

by various life experiences, such that the "push away" from parenthood is overwhelmed by the "pull toward" it.

Limitations

Although this study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of gay men's motivations for parenthood, the selective nature of our sample – in terms of relational status, education, financial status, level of commitment to parenthood, and parenting route – necessarily influenced our findings. The motivations and timing of parenthood may differ considerably for gay men who are single, working-class, or pursuing surrogacy or other arrangements. Single gay men are not influenced by the feelings, values, or priorities of a partner; thus, their motivations for and timing of parenthood may differ in that they reflect only their own considerations. Gay men pursuing surrogacy may particularly value the importance of biological ties; in turn, altruism might be featured less prominently in their reasons for seeking parenthood. Further, in that most of the sample was pursuing private domestic adoption, it is possible that the theme of altruism may have been even more prominent if we had greater representation of public adopters. Also, although individual interviews allowed us to explore each participant's unique perceptions, our choice to not conduct conjoint interviews prevented us from being able to analyze a shared, co-constructed story for each of the couples. Finally, some men's reasons for the timing of parenthood (e.g., financial stability) were likely shaped by their privileged socioeconomic status. Of interest is how working-class gay men describe financial factors as shaping their motivations for or timing of parenthood.

A final limitation is that our recruitment strategy of contacting agencies that were inclusive of same-sex couples may have resulted in some degree of bias in our sample, whereby our sample was likely engaged with more gay-friendly agencies than the population of gay adopters as a whole. Also, insomuch as gay-friendly agencies are more likely to be found in states whose laws and policies surrounding gay adoption are at least somewhat favorable, is no surprise that most of the sample lived in states that allowed couples to jointly adopt. Thus, our sample was also biased geographically. Gay men who live in states with restrictive policies surrounding gay adoption may encounter legal struggles that influence their motivations and timing of parenthood, which were not captured in the current study.

Implications

Our findings have implications for practitioners who work with gay male couples during the transition to parenthood. First, practitioners should be sensitive to understanding the specific factors that may uniquely influence gay men's perceptions of parenthood (e.g., the desire to pass along values of tolerance). Second, clinicians should note the unique developmental trajectory of gay men's route to parenthood, which may be impacted by the timing of their coming out and social network factors (e.g., whether they know other gay parents). Third, practitioners should understand that the desire to parent is both subjectively and relationally constituted. That is, gay men often construct reasons for pursuing parenthood that are unique and distinct from their partners -- although some gay men do view their own desire to parent as resultant from, or emerging out of, their partners' desire to parent. When it comes to the timing of parenthood, gay men are more influenced by relational factors, such as meeting the right person, their partners' emotional readiness, and their own (and their partners') career stability -- although subjective factors, such as age, may also shape their perceptions of the timing of parenthood. This knowledge can aid practitioners as they seek to counsel gay male couples who are pursuing parenthood.

Conclusion

Parenting can be viewed as a core human issue, and the desire to parent as one that crosses the lines of sexual orientation (McCann & Delmonte, 2005). At the same time, homophobia continue to shape the lives of gay men; thus, their decision to parent "must be seen in the context of the prevailing social, moral, religious and legal mores of the day" (McCann & Delmonte, 2005, p. 335). Gay men's parenting desires are inevitably shaped, in some ways, by their sexual minority status as well as societal heterosexism. For example, our findings highlight the ways in which the men's life course trajectories - and the timing of parenthood - have been influenced by life course processes and events related to their gay male status, such as their own coming out and their relationships with other gay parents. The men's adoptive status, financial status, and geographic location also emerged as important social locations that influenced their constructions of and path toward parenthood. At the same time, the men's narratives echo dominant norms regarding the value of parenthood, whereby parenthood is regarded as psychologically fulfilling, and as an important part of the "natural" life course. By focusing on male same-sex couples who were seeking to become parents, the current study helps to illuminate a subgroup of gay male prospective adopters who give meaning to constructing families outside of the heteronormative nuclear family ideal. Our findings illustrate the complexity of gay men's motivations for parenthood, and underscore the need for further research on the life course of gay-father families.

Acknowledgments

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