

# Gay Fatherhood: What We Know, and What We Need to Know



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# Introduction & Overview



- Why is it important to study gay fathers?
- The number of gay fathers is increasing
  - In 2010, 314,000 male same-sex couples were living in the US; of these, 10% were raising children
- Studying gay fatherhood has the potential to challenge and refine our understanding of “fatherhood” in general
  - Offers opportunity to test our theoretical assumptions about fatherhood, parenthood, and gender
  - Challenges us to refine our assumptions about, and vocabulary for describing, fatherhood



# What Do We Know About Gay Fathers?



- Note about data sources
- Small samples
- White middle class men
- Qualitative and quantitative data
- Most studies use volunteer, convenience-based sampling methods



# What Do We Know About Gay Fathers?



- **Research in the 1980s**
- Focus on gay fathers who came out after having children in heterosexual marriages
- Most children responded positively; those who responded negatively worried about peer reactions; tried to control their environment and their fathers' behavior (Bigner & Bozett, 1989; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989a, 1989b)
- Older children struggled more than younger children
- Men married because they strongly desired children and hoped that marrying would eliminate their homosexuality (see Bigner, 2004)

# What Do We Know About Gay Fathers?



- **Research in the 2000s**
- Increased research on gay fathers after 15+ years of focusing mainly on lesbian mothers (see Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Goldberg, 2010)
- Early 2000s: shift to studying planned lesbian/gay parent families
- These studies have focused on:
  - Motivations for parenthood
  - Barriers to parenthood
  - The transition to parenthood
  - Parent and child adjustment



# Motivations for Parenthood



- Initially, many gay men view coming out as synonymous with relinquishing their dreams of fatherhood (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Goldberg, Downing, & Moyer, 2012)
  - Turning points: social and political progress; meeting other lesbian/gay parents; overcoming internalized homophobia
- Like heterosexual fathers, gay fathers emphasize a love of children, desire to care for and raise children, and partner's desire for children as motivations for parenthood (Goldberg et al., 2012)



# Barriers to Parenthood



- **Barriers to parenthood**
- *The legal system*: many states do not allow same-sex partners to adopt (Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, & Goldberg, 2009; Mallon, 2004)
- *Adoption agencies* may refuse to work with gay men or pressure them to hide their sexual orientation (Downing et al., 2009; Gianino, 2008; Goldberg, in press; Hicks, 2006; Mallon, 2004; Matthews & Cramer, 2006)
- *Families of origin* may resist gay men's parenthood aspirations and threaten abandonment (Goldberg, in press)





# The Transition to Parenthood



- Perceived parenting skill increases for all new adoptive parents (Goldberg & Smith, 2009)
- Mental health declines for all new adoptive parents (Goldberg & Smith, 2011)
  - Predictors: Low social support, neighborhood and workplace homophobia, and living in states with unfavorable legal climates
- Intimate relationship quality declines for all new adoptive parents (Goldberg, Smith, & Kashy, 2010)
  - Predictors: poor mental health, poor coping skills, and dissatisfaction with one's adoption agency





# The Transition to Parenthood



- Division of unpaid labor is more equal in same-sex couples (Goldberg, Smith, & Perry-Jenkins, in press)
- Gay male couples are often dual-earner, (Goldberg, in press; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002)
- Gay men often report changes in their social support networks upon becoming parents (Bergman et al., 2010; Gianino, 2008; Goldberg, in press; Mallon, 2004)



# Parent and Child Experiences and Outcomes



- **Work-family roles**

- Sharing family labor common among gay adoptive and surrogate fathers; associated with relationship satisfaction (Farr & Patterson, 2012; Kruczkowski et al., 2012)



- **Parenting stress**

- Gay adoptive fathers report similar stress levels as do lesbian and heterosexual adoptive parents (Farr et al., 2010)
- Associated with older children, adopting at older ages, less social support, and less positive gay identity (Tornello et al., 2011)

# Parent and Child Experiences and Outcomes



- **Parenting approaches**
  - Using effective discipline techniques similar among adoptive gay, lesbian, and heterosexual parents; no significant differences (Farr et al., 2010a)
- **Coparenting**
  - Gay adoptive fathers least supportive, compared with lesbian and heterosexual adoptive couples, but less undermining than heterosexual couples (Farr & Patterson, 2012)



# Parent and Child Experiences and Outcomes



- **Relationship quality**

- High on average among gay adoptive and surrogate fathers (Farr et al., 2010; Kruczkowski et al., 2012); associated with parenting stress (Farr et al., 2010)



- **Child behavior**

- Few behavior problems, no different from other families (Averett et al., 2009; Erich et al., 2005, 2009; Farr et al., 2010)
- No more likely to be gay (Bailey et al., 1995), but more flexible attitudes re: gender and sexuality (Goldberg, 2007)

# Parent and Child Experiences and Outcomes



- **Gender development**

- Preschoolers with gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adoptive parents gender-typical; no significant differences (Farr, Doss, & Patterson, 2010; Farr et al., 2010)
- Gay fathers have no shortage of females in their lives (Goldberg, in press)

- **Visibility/other unique issues**

- Gay fathers likely to adopt transracially (Farr & Tornello, 2010; Farr et al., 2010; Goldberg, in press)
- Questions about “where’s the mom?” (Gianino, 2008; Goldberg, in press; Mallon, 2004; Silverstein et al., 2002)

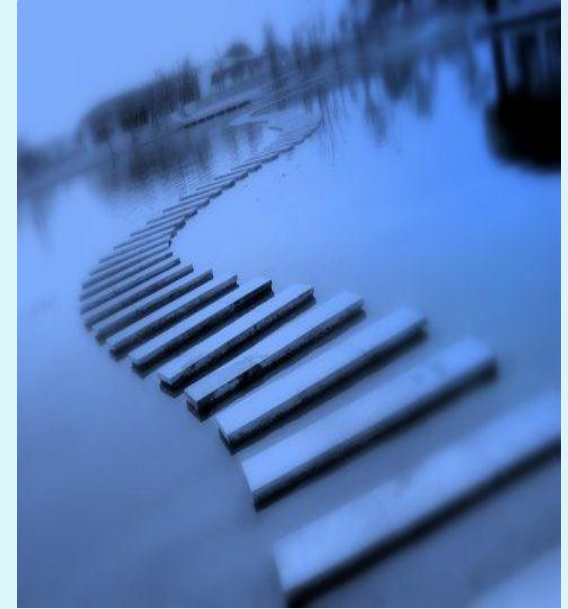




# What Do We Need to Know?



- Longitudinal studies
- Questions about sexual orientation and parenthood route
- Funding
- Validation of measures
- Diverse samples
- Gay fathers who are “divorcing”
- Relevance to law, policy, and practice



# Questions?



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