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"I DON'T HAVE A MOMMY, I HAVE TWO DADDIES": GAY FATHERS' SOCIALIZATION STRATEGIES OF CHILDREN BORN THROUGH SURROGACY"

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Abstract

The present study qualitatively investigated the socialization practices of gay fathers with their children born through surrogacy and aged 3-9 years. Sixty-seven gay fathers were interviewed about their socialization practices, with questions such as how they explain their family structure to their children and how/if they prepare their children for potential bias or difficult questions from peers. A thematic analysis revealed three socialization approaches used by fathers: Proactive, Cautious, and Neutral approaches. The most common approach was a Proactive approach, which was defined by fathers consistently initiating socializing conversations with their children, accompanied by concrete actions that promoted pride and combatted heteronormativity. This approach also acknowledged that children could face homophobia and wanted to prepare them for it. Next, a Cautious approach was defined by waiting for children to ask questions about being in a two-father family and concern that preparing their children for homophobia would do more harm than good. Finally, a Neutral approach was defined by emphasizing the normality of the children's family unit and de-emphasizing the need for conversations about being in a two-father family. These findings have relevant implications for policies and clinical work with gay father families through surrogacy.

Keywords: Surrogacy, Gay Fathers, LG-Parenting, Socialization

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Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis aims to answer the question of how gay fathers with children born through surrogacy socialize their children. Socialization refers to how parents transmit values, information, and social perspectives to their children through dynamic family processes (Lee, 2003). Socialization was first conceived to understand racial socialization, or the explicit and implicit emphasis on racial and ethnic pride and promotion of cultural traditions and heritage (Hughes et al., 2006), but has now expanded to understand lesbian and gay parenting. Socialization in the context of gay father families can, for example, help children understand their family structure and prepare them for potential discrimination.

This study addresses a gap in the existing literature, as most current research on gay father socialization practices primarily focuses on children adopted by gay fathers (eg. Oakley et al., 2017, Goldberg et al., 2016). At the same time, the literature on gay-father surrogacy is expanding to include everything from motivations for surrogacy (Blake et al., 2017) to relationships with potential and actual surrogates and egg donors (Carone et al. 2018) to parental adjustment after surrogacy (Van Rijn-van Gelderen et al., 2018), but not the socialization practices of gay fathers through surrogacy. Therefore, this study is important to highlight the unique challenges faced and parenting strategies used by gay fathers with children born through surrogacy. Parenting children through surrogacy is different from parenting children through adoption in some ways because parents and children may have a harder time ignoring or denying questions of genetic relatedness and the role of the surrogate mother.

This being said, it was expected that gay fathers through surrogacy would use similar strategies to those used by adoptive parents and those used in racial

socialization. For example, research on racial socialization has predominantly centered around four major themes: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, Promotion of Mistrust, and Egalitarianism (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2014). The anticipated results were also informed by studies on LG-parents through adoption. For example, a study on both lesbian and gay fathers with children born through adoption described two to LG-parent socialization: an engaged or Cautious approach (Goldberg et al., 2016). Another study of 100 adoptive LG-parents found that a majority of parents endorsed socializing behaviors along three dimensions: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, and Proactive Parenting (Oakley et al., 2017). Because of this previous literature, it was expected that distinct strategies could emerge related to preparing children for bias, cultural socialization, or proactively explaining family structure.

To answer this research question, this thesis will first describe the current state of the art of the literature, describing what surrogacy is and what common practices are, the legality of surrogacy in the U.S. and beyond, the cost of surrogacy, and outcomes for children and parents. It continues with defining socialization, understanding the stigmatization of gay families and heteronormativity, and explores the use of LGBTQ+ media and books in socialization. Literature was found mostly from databases such as PubMed and Psynet. The thesis also incorporates some published texts, other websites, and a lot of information from surrogacy agencies, which are a wealth of information for prospective gay parents.

This study employed a qualitative approach and a sample of 67 gay fathers with children aged between 3 and 9 were interviewed about their socialization practices. A qualitative thematic analysis was then performed to allow a rich exploration of nuance

in the interviews and allow themes to emerge. Chapter two describes this research design, the choice and method of thematic analysis, the participants, ethical considerations, materials, and a description of the data analysis.

Next, in chapter three, the results will be discussed in detail with specific examples from the interviews. Finally, chapter four, the discussion, will explore the results in the context of existing literature, the implications of these results for psychology, the limitations, recommendations for future research, along with reflexivity from the point of view of the researcher.

Chapter 1 Literature review

This chapter provides an overview of the current state-of-the-art of research on gay fathers with children born through surrogacy. The chapter explores what surrogacy is and what common practices are, the legality of surrogacy in the U.S. and beyond, the cost of surrogacy, and outcomes for children and parents. It continues with defining socialization, understanding the stigmatization of gay families and heteronormativity, and explores the use of LGBTQ+ media and books in socialization. Finally, the rationale and aims of the thesis are described. It is important to note that although research on gay fathers with children born through surrogacy has increased exponentially since the early 2000's, gaps remain in the literature. Therefore, where research doesn't yet exist on certain aspects of parenting and socialization, research about gay fathers with children via adoption, and lesbian mothers with children through assisted reproductive technologies and adoption are referenced.

1.1 Introduction to the research

Gay men are choosing to become parents in a climate of continuously developing governmental policies, societal acceptance of gay relationships, and advancing reproductive technologies. These changes have made gay male parenting no longer the anomaly it once was. In fact in 2022, 5.5 percent of male same-sex couples in the United States had one of their own children living in their household (US Census Bureau, 2022). In particular, surrogacy has become an increasingly popular choice among gay men (Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007).

The research on gay families formed through surrogacy is growing to include a wide range of dimensions. Between 2013 and 2019, the number of empirical research studies on gay fathers and surrogacy increased fivefold (Golberg, 2020). The body of research has grown to include everything from motivations for surrogacy (Blake et al., 2017) to relationships with potential and actual surrogates and egg donors (Carone et al. 2018) to parental adjustment after surrogacy (Van Rijn-van Gelderen et al., 2018) and many more. This being said, literature has not yet addressed the socialization strategies of gay fathers with children born through surrogacy. A body of research does exist, though, on the socialization strategies of gay fathers with *adopted children* (Goldberg et al., 2016, Oakley et al., 2017, Battalen et al. 2016). This thesis aims to further the literature by addressing the socialization strategies of gay fathers with children born through surrogacy, such as how they prepare their children for bias and how they explain their family structure.

1.2 What does surrogacy look like for gay fathers?

Surrogacy is an assisted reproductive technology in which the aspiring parents forge a contract with a woman, or surrogate, to carry their child (Bergman, Rubio, Green, & Pardon, 2010). There are two types of surrogacy: traditional genetic surrogacy and gestational surrogacy. In traditional genetic surrogacy the surrogate mother is implanted with the sperm of a man, carries and births the child, and is genetically related to that child (Bergman et al., 2010). On the other hand, in gestational surrogacy, which can also be called in vitro fertilization (IVF) surrogacy, another woman's ovum is fertilized by one man's sperm using IVF and that embryo is transplanted into another

woman's womb (Bergman et al., 2010). In this case, the surrogate who carries the fetus is not genetically tied to the baby.

Surrogacy practitioners and agencies that work with gay fathers generally recommend gestational surrogacy over traditional surrogacy, because it provides fathers confidence of legal parentage (American Society for Reproductive Medicine, 2012). A study of 74 gay fathers through surrogacy found that most fathers were motivated to choose surrogacy firstly because they see adoption as a less desirable choice and secondly because they value a genetic connection to their child (Blake et al., 2017). The same study found that 38 out of the 40 studied surrogacies were gestational, and that half of fathers chose a gestational surrogacy because they felt that there was a greater risk of an unsuccessful surrogacy arrangement if the surrogate had both a gestational and genetic link to the child (Blake et al., 2017). According to Goldberg "Embedded in these decisions are issues of cost, access, and the extent to which a genetic relationship is perceived as important by men in their conceptualization of family (2020, p. 148). For example, this genetic relatedness can be even more important in countries/ cultures such as Italy where gay men are still denied legal recognition of their family and therefore genetic connectedness can make their relatedness undeniable (Carone et al., 2017). This being said, in research it is important to respect families born through surrogacy without setting up a hierarchy that privileges families with genetic ties over other forms of family such as adoption, fostering, or kinship ties (Golberg, 2020).

The next most popular reason for choosing gestational surrogacy was because it was recommended by the fathers' agency, which highlights the importance of surrogacy agencies in surrogate fathers' decision making (Blake et al., 2017). A study from the

Yale Fertility enter that studied 14 gay couples seeking gestational surrogacy found that 12 couples (80%), worked with an agency to find a gestational carrier; two couples had a friend who offered to carry the pregnancy; and one couple had a carrier who was a family member (Greenfield and Seli, 2011).

1.3 Legality of Surrogacy

Although gestational surrogacy is a desirable option for gay men in the US wanting to become parents, it is not without its barriers. The surrogacy industry in the US is highly regulated by private industry with rigorous testing, availability of genetic history, and careful matching of donors and surrogates (Bergman et al., 2017). This being said, surrogacy is not regulated by the federal government, leaving each state to decide its own laws, and therefore leaving prospective gay fathers to navigate a complex web of differing state laws (Creative Family connections, 2024).

As of 2024, 16 states are considered "Green Light" states where surrogacy is permitted for all parents, pre-birth orders are granted throughout the state, and both parents will be included on the birth certificate (Creative Family Connections, 2024). On the other hand, in 31 states surrogacy is legal, but additional post-birth legal procedures may be required in that state, (e.g. establishing legal parenting following the birth, rather than before). A further 2 states are "Yellow Light" states where surrogacy is practiced but fathers may face legal hurdles and results will be inconsistent. Three more states are "Orange Light" states where surrogacy is practiced and courts give parentage orders, but surrogacy contracts are void and unenforceable by statute. Finally, one state, Louisiana, is a "Red Light" State where same-sex surrogacy is completely banned and surrogacy is limited to married heterosexual couples (Creative Family Connections,

2024). This being said, many intending fathers from states where surrogacy is difficult can choose to work with a surrogate in a state where surrogacy is legally easier (Creative Family Connections, 2024). Although surrogacy is legally complex, it is sometimes less legally complicated than adoption, because one father maintains a biological connection to the child (Lev, 2006). Another important legal note is that sometimes gay parents may experience workplace discrimination and therefore may not experience the benefits of things like maternity and paternity leave, breastfeeding leave, unpaid leave, or flexibility in working hours, which can lead to one or more parents needing to leave their job in order to care for their child, or one or more parents needing to take second job (Boyacıoğlu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Outside of the US, few countries exist where gay men can become fathers through surrogacy. These include Mexico and Canada (which restricts surrogacy only to non-profit altruistic programs), Colombia, some states in Australia, and some European countries including the UK, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands (Sensible Surrogacy Agency, 2024).

1.4 Outcomes for children and gay parents who used ART

It is important to note that both children and parents born through surrogacy can flourish in the family setting, even as they face heteronormativity in society. According to Biblarz and Stacey, "Claims that children need a mother and a father generally rely on studies that conflate gender with other family structure variables" (2010). In a 2018 American study of 40 gay father families created through surrogacy and 55 lesbian mother families created through donor insemination, it was found that children in both families were described as having high levels of adjustment, and children in gay father

families showed consistently lower levels of internalizing problems than children in lesbian families (Golombok et al., 2018). In Italy, Baiocco found that children raised by lesbian and gay parents showed similar levels of emotion regulation and psychological well-being than children raised by heterosexual parents (Baiocco, 2015). In an Australian study of over 300 same-sex parents of children aged 0-17, Children in same-sex parent families had higher scores on measures of general behavior, general health and family cohesion compared to normative data (Crouch et al., 2014). The study also found that any negative behavioral outcomes in children were positively associated with experiences of stigma, rather than parenting variables (Crouch et al., 2014). In a study of 68 fathers with children aged 0-7 born through surrogacy, it was found that their children received significantly lower scores on internalizing (anxiety, depression) and externalizing (aggression, rule-breaking) than children in a comparison sample (Green et al., 2015). The study also found particularly low levels of internalizing problems for daughters of gay parents when compared to daughters in a national database (Green et al., 2015). Authors have identified various reasons for these positive outcomes. One could be because gay and lesbian families who use ART are never accidentally having children, whereas surveys of women in the US indicate that 45% of heterosexual pregnancies are unintended (Green et al., 2019; Finer and Zolna, 2016).

LG-parent families as a whole also have important strengths that include more egalitarian decision making practices, shared housework and childcare more equally, and showed effective parenting (Patterson et al., 2004). This egalitarian negotiation of childcare can actually lead to better family outcomes and wellbeing for parents (Crouch et al., 2014). These flexible roles can also lead to same-sex families being more able to problem solve and communicate to resolve conflict than heterosexual families (Gottman

et al., 2003). In a study of lesbian and gay parents in Italy, it was also found that parents reported higher levels of dyadic adjustment, flexibility, and communication in their family than heterosexual parents (Baiocco, 2015).

It is also important to note the ways that becoming a parent can impact parents' sense of well-being and self esteem. A systematic review of 19 studies about LGBT parenting found that parenthood was more important than the careers of LGBT+ individuals and that the relationship with their partners and families, along with levels of self-esteem and social support improved because of parenthood (Boyacıoğlu et al., 2022). Parents also perceived themselves as more important to society since becoming parents (Boyacioglu et al., 2022). Gay fathers also reported becoming closer to their family of origin (e.g. parents are excited to be grandparents, more family visits and family gatherings) after having children via surrogacy (Bergman et al., 2010). Gay parents also report similar sacrifices as heterosexual couples, such as decreased income, less travel, less alone time, less time spent and sex with partners, but fathers report that their child took precedence over everything and their sacrifices were worth it (Bergman et al., 2010). This being said, as mentioned earlier, gay fathers who use surrogacy tend to have high incomes, and therefore can buy themselves out of these sacrifices such as through hiring housekeepers, au pairs, nannies, and babysitters (Goldberg, 2020). In one sample of gay fathers who used surrogacy, 68% of men reported using childcare assistance (Bergman et al., 2010).

1.5 The Cost of Surrogacy

Theoretically, surrogacy arrangements can be made between gay couples and a willing surrogate without the help of an agency. Legally, however this involves high risk

and could create a quagmire of legal problems regarding custody of the child (like custody battles that can be seen between lesbian mothers and sperm donors) (Lev, 2006). Specifically this is because the current legal system still rests on connections between biological mothers and biological fathers (Lev, 2006). Therefore, the benefits of an agency can include connecting fathers with a surrogate mother, educating fathers about legal and medical processes, screening surrogate mothers medically and psychologically, coordinating the surrogacy arrangements, providing counseling for all parties, and mediating conflicts (Lev, 2006). With this said, it is not difficult to understand why many gay men choose to work with agencies despite its high cost.

Commercial surrogacy costs upwards of $150,000 in the US (Growing Generations, May & Tenzek, 2016). This price includes financing the participation of the surrogate, the services of an agency, physician services, legal fees, and health insurance to cover all procedures (Golberg, 2020). Gestational surrogacy (which, as mentioned previously, is recommended by agencies) incurs additional costs that include the services of an egg donor agency and IVF physician services (Golberg, 2020). These costs limit surrogacy to a small number of reasonably affluent gay men, which is reflected in the literature. In one study the mean household income of participants was $270,000 (Bergman et al., 2010), in another it was $230,000 (Tornello et al., 2015), and in a third it was $370,000 (Blake et al., 2017). This is in contrast to the national average income in 2023 in the US of $59,428 according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). It is also impossible to ignore that surrogacy is also being practiced largely by White gay men in the US. Referencing the previous studies, in the first by Bergman, 80% were white (Bergman et al., 2010), in the Tornello over 90% were white (Tornello et al., 2015), and in the Blake study, 84% of participants

were white (Blake et al., 2017). These facts highlight that surrogacy is a practice currently reserved for both economically and racially privileged men, and that much of the current research on surrogacy is based on white upper-class men (Goldberg, 2020).

This being said, there are organizations that advocate for making surrogacy cheaper for gay fathers. One of these includes the Gay Parenting Assistance Program of Men Having Babies, which "facilitates over a million dollars worth of financial support for gay prospective parents in two forms: Discounted and free services donated by more than one hundred leading IVF, surrogacy, egg donation and legal service providers to prospective parents and discounted and donated complementary services including fertility medication, escrow services, and insurance resource services" (GPAP, 2024) . This organization acknowledges that gay men face the highest barriers to becoming parents, both biologically and socially, as heterosexual couples, single women, and lesbian couples enjoy relatively easy access to biological parenting, and when there are fertility issues, there are many organizations to help them through the process that don't exist for gay men (GPAP, 2024).

1.6 What does socialization mean for gay families?

Parents and the family environment are the primary areas of social learning for young children (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Parents transmit values, information, and social perspectives to their children through dynamic family processes collectively called cultural socialization (Lee, 2003). The socialization process can include both implicit and explicit messaging, and in a broader sense can include things such as talking about history or historical figures, reading culturally relevant books, celebrating cultural

holidays, and encouraging children to use their native language (Aldoney, Kuhns & Carbrera, 2018).

Although this term originated to understand racial socialization, research is now being conducted to apply its concepts to LGBTQ+ child rearing (Goldberg et al., 2016; Oakley et al., 2017). LG parent socialization strategies can be defined as how parents talk to their children about two aspects (1) what it means to have two moms or dads and (2) understanding heterosexism and heteronormativity (Golberg et al., 2016). Specifically in LGBTQ+ families, parents are powerful socializing agents whose messages on identity and difference are powerful in promoting pride and empowerment and protecting children from shame and internalized homophobia (Goldberg et al., 2016). Without this reinforcement, children in LGBTQ+ families may lack the resources and vocabulary to handle stigma faced in schools and other environments (Goldberg et al., 2016). Specifically around ages 4-6, children may start to notice differences among races, family differences, and ways of entering families (Guerrero et al., 2010). Also at this age, children are entering preschool and kindergarten and are interacting with peers in an unprecedented way in their lives, and therefore may encounter inquiries about their family structure (Gianino et al., 2009).In a small study of adopted youth with LGB parents, Gianino et al. (2009) found that most socializing conversations they had with their parents were related to their specialness or uniqueness, rather than emphasizing how to deal with heterosexism. In a handful of cases, youth wished that their parents had better prepared them with the knowledge and language to deal with discrimination. (Gianino et al., 2009). Therefore, it can be beneficial to have these discussions with children at young ages.

In Golberg et al.'s 2019 study, researchers revealed three approaches towards LG-Parent socialization in adopted children. First, they described an engaged approach, wherein parents (a) had open and prideful conversations about their family structure (b) aimed to build supportive communities and (c) talked to their children about heterosexism (Goldberg et al., 2019). Secondly, they described a Cautious approach wherein parents believed addressing the reality of the family was important but feared that too much discussion could be harmful to the child or emphasize differences too much (Goldberg et al., 2019). In a similar study published by Oakley et al., It was found that gay and lesbian parents engaged in socialization primarily across 3 dimensions: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, and Proactive Parenting (2016). Each of these behaviors was designed to promote awareness of diverse family structures and prepare children to face bias and heteronormativity (Oakley et al., 2016).

In terms of socialization practices specifically related to gay fathers who used surrogacy to have children, an important aspect may be helping their children to understand their birth story and their surrogate mother. This is because as children get older, they cannot rely on cultural givens and therefore must establish their own meanings and significance of their extended family. Therefore, how their fathers answer questions about their child's conception serves as a model for how that child will answer questions and construct their own stories (Mitchell & Green, 2007). One way that parents celebrate the uniqueness of their family is celebrating not only their child's birthday but also their conception day which is an important date that gay fathers who created their families through surrogacy are unique in knowing (Mitchell & Green, 2007). Another way of celebrating the surrogate mother was naming her the godmother to the child (Lev, 2006). Another example of celebrating uniqueness for a gay father's

family could be attending pride events or celebrating Coming Out Day (Mitchell &

Green, 2007). Attending pride events can emphasize both membership to a larger

community, which is normalizing, while also highlighting the "specialness" of being in

an LG-Parent family (Goldberg et al, 2016).

Because it is nearly impossible to downplay or ignore the need of a surrogate

mother in order to have children, families formed through surrogacy are more open

about the origin of their family, regardless of parents' sexual orientation (Carone et al.,

2017). In one American study, 83% of gay fathers had begun to disclose their birth story

to their children by the time they were 5.5 years old (Blake et al., 2017). In a study of

Italian gay father families, all children older than 6 years old had learned that their

births were the result of a planned surrogacy (Carone et al., 2017). In that same study,

over half of children had a comprehensive understanding of their conception and

understood that one woman had donated an egg and another had carried them in their

body. The rest of the children did not explicitly mention surrogacy, but were able to

explain that their fathers needed help in creating them (Carone et al., 2017).

1.7 Stigmatization and facing heterosexism

Although both heterosexual and same-sex parents engage in socialization

processes, same-sex parents have an extra task of preparing children and the family in

general for homophobia and heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the presumption

and privileging of heterosexuality and heterosexual parenting and relationships (Pollitt,

2021). On a daily basis, children of gay fathers have to make sense of and contend with

"the hegemonic shadow of the heterosexual paradigm" (deBoer, 2009, p. 333). There

can be three types of stigma faced by sexual minorities; overt experiences of sexual

stigma or "enacted sexual stigma," expectations about the likelihood of stigma or "felt stigma," and self-directed prejudice (i.e. internalized homophobia) is "self-stigma" (Herek et al. 2009, p. 33). The stigmas can have serious outcomes. For example, a study of 68 gay families with children born through surrogacy found that fathers' reports of family members being victims of higher levels of antigay microaggressions were associated with parents' greater stigma consciousness, more anger/aggression from spouse/partner, and less positive parenting and co-parenting and support from friends and family (Green et al., 2015).

Even though children of gay fathers may not possess a stigmatized identity (e.g. be LGBTQ+ themselves), being raised by gay parents can equate to a stigmatized identity in the eyes of peers. Children of gay parents may experience homophobic attitudes and behaviors in the general/institutional domain, within the extended family, or from peers and classmates (Fairtlough, 2008). In a study of 97 Canadian adolescents and emerging adults of same-sex parents, 46.4% reported having experienced at least one instance of victimization due to their parents' sexual orientation (Bedard et al., 2023).

This can be prevalent in the school setting, where children may experience a sense of isolation for being the only child with gay parents in their classroom. These feelings may come up during discussions of family, Mother/Fathers day, or when reading books about families. A study of 3,000 Canadian students showed that students who reported feeling unsafe due to having an LGBT parent or their own sexual identity were 4 times more likely to report skipping school than gender-heterosexual (CH) students with non-LGB parents who felt safe at school (Peter et al., 2017). For this

reason, many gay fathers may seek out schools or neighborhoods where their children will be less likely to experience this type of discrimination if they are able to choose.

On the other hand, in a 2015 study of 49 adopted children with same-sex parents, children did report microaggressions and feeling different from peers, but by and large at a low to medium intensity and with neutral (not negative) emotion (Farr et al., 2015). The same study also found that more instances of resilience and positive family conceptions were found than instances of isolation and microaggressions (Farr et al., 2015). Furthermore, in a study of a national sample of children K-12 with LGBT parents, it was found that children faced challenges due to their family makeup both from peers and *parents* of peers, but the majority did not report victimization or excessive mistreatment (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). This research highlights that children of parents with LGBT parents are not guaranteed to experience discrimination based on their family makeup.

1.8 Debunking and facing stereotypes of fathers

Arlene Istar Lev said that "gay dads are challenging us all to see gay men, as well as fathering in general, in a new light" (Lev, 2006). Gay men can be stereotyped as uninterested in children and parenting (Mallon, 2004), but the literature on gay men's desire for fatherhood does not support these stereotypes. For example, a study of US national survey data found that over half of gay men (52%) reported that they hoped to become parents in the future (Gates et al., 2007). Another 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). Furthermore, studies have shown that younger cohorts of gay men are more likely to conceptualize and desire parenthood as

adults than cohorts of older gay men, who may not have seen parenthood as a possibility (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). Berkowitz and Marsiglio also found in their study that gay men's conceptualizations of fatherhood were influenced by institutions and ruling relations, such as adoption and fertility agencies, assumptions about gay men, and negotiations with birth mothers, partners, and others (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). This is in contrast to an earlier qualitative study about heterosexual men whose procreative consciousness was influenced by romantic relationships, sexual intercourse, and experiences with fertility events such as pregnancy, abortion, and miscarriages (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002). This qualitative research highlights how profoundly different gay men's conceptualization of fatherhood is compared to their heterosexual counterparts, but there is still a desire for fatherhood nonetheless.

For this reason, gay fathers must be very intentional about their choice to be a father, as gay pregnancies can never happen by accident. Many surrogates work harmoniously or even prefer working with gay couples because gay fathers turn to surrogacy joyfully, and not because of failure of other fertility treatments which is possible in some heterosexual couples (Goldberg, 2020).

Jeffries et al. found that although gay, bisexual, and heterosexual men all demonstrated a desire to become fathers, gay men were the least likely to become fathers (Jeffries et al., 2020). This can likely be understood in the context of financial and legal barriers to becoming fathers experienced by gay men (Berkowitz, 2013). Interestingly, though, the same study found that gay and bisexual men were less likely to be bothered by future childlessness (Jeffries et al., 2020). Here, it can be understood that even if gay men are not becoming fathers at the same rate as their heterosexual

counterparts, this is not entirely due to a lack of desire to parent but also should be understood in the context of various barriers gay men face in becoming fathers. Fatherhood aspirations can also have an interesting impact on the mental health of gay men. Bauermister found that fatherhood aspirations were associated with higher depressive symptoms among gay men living in states without discriminatory policies (such as adoption and marriage laws), but lower depressive symptoms in gay men living in states without discriminatory policies (Bauermister, 2014). The researchers understood this because while having future goals promotes psychological well-being, the belief or lack of belief in those goals being achievable is what can lead to positive or negative effects (Bauermister, 2014).

Gay men also have to face the stereotype of men as a whole as less nurturing than their female counterparts. In a post-modern and globalized society, gay male fathers are occupying roles that are both of the "provider" and "nurturer." Previously, mothers assumed a nurturing role, and fathers an economic role, which permanently associated femininity with motherhood and nurturing (Hicks, 2006). This being said widespread access to contraception, abortion, and advancing reproductive technologies have irreversibly broken the links between heterosexuality and parenthood (Stacey, 2006). A study that asked "Should researchers conceptualize motherhood and fatherhood differently?" found that there was not enough evidence to consider motherhood and fatherhood as unique concepts in research (Fagan et al., 2014). They said this was because several studies have shown these concepts are the same, secondly because "mothering" and "fathering" tend to impact children in similar ways, and because mothers and fathers are becoming more similar in terms of their family roles and the time they spend with their children (Fagan et al., 2014).

For this reason, children with gay fathers may be exposed to greater stigma than lesbian parents, because not only are their parents homosexual but are also nontraditional because they are families headed solely by men (Golombok & Tasker, 2010). Furthermore,gay fathers themselves may be exposed to greater stigmatization of their sexual identity than are lesbian mothers (Goldberg & Smith, 2011). Therefore, gay fathers are contending with new definitions of both masculinity in fatherhood. An example of this is the societal norm of men being providers financially to their family while being high achieving, but many gay men oftentimes negotiated their career prospects to be less demanding and focused on their parenting responsibilities as being primary, with some opting to become full-time fathers (Bergman et al., 2010).

When gay men choose to become parents, they challenge not only societal norms of masculinity and paternity, but also dominant gender and sexual norms of gay culture itself (Stacey, 2006). According to Bozett's 1981 article "Gay Fathers: Evolution of the Gay Father Identity," fatherhood in the gay community may be stigmatized, whereas it is a status passage in the "heterosexual world." He further explains that this may be because many gay men have accepted that their homosexuality and fatherhood were incompatible, and therefore experience cognitive dissonance when combining these identities, especially after rejecting heterosexual narratives (Bozett, 1981).

This being said, these ideas, although important for gay fathers to be aware of, are dated and stereotyped, especially as access to family-building tools expand for both lesbians and gay men. Brinamen & Mitchell proposed a 6-stage model of identity development for gay men who become parents that can combat this stigma (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2007).. These included "(1) a coming out experience that assumes being

gay means not parenting; (2) increased self-awareness and confidence as a gay man; (3)

recognition of the strength of newly constructed gay families; (4) observation of gay

families and learning about the effects of gay parents on children; (5) valuing the unique

gits a gay man has to offer a child; and (6) an integration of the gay and father

components of identity, including both a narrowing and expansion of support networks"

(Brinamen & Mitchell, 2007). This model highlights that gay men can integrate

fatherhood into their identity, and in this process, they can use role models and

self-reflection to see their gay fatherhood as a gift.

1.9 Media and books as socialization tools

An important socialization practice for parents and their children can be

watching media together and having conversations together about the topics. The book

Understanding Media and Culture notes that "Since its inception as an integral part of

American life in the 1950s, television has both reflected and nurtured cultural mores

and values" (University of Minnesota, 2016). For this reason, gay fathers may seek out

media that positively represents LGBTQ+ families. Luckily, today LGBTQ+

representation is prevalent in American media, with 596 LGBTQ+ characters featured

across cable and streaming media in 2023 (GLAAD, 2023). Children's media has also

begun to represent LGBTQ+ parenting. For example, in 2023, Disney Jr.'s show

Firebuds featured characters with both two moms and two dads (GLAAD, 2023). The

network's *Dino Ranch* also included a plot where the cast worked together to help two

male dinosaurs adopt an egg (GLAAD, 2023). Netflix's children's programming also

included a show called *Princess Power* in which a character Beatrice Blueberry has two

fathers (GLAAD, 2023). For gay families, watching media that is representative from a young age can lead to children having positive conceptualizations of their family.

Children's picture books can also play an important role not only in developing literacy but also in the socialization of young children, as they communicate ideological beliefs and values from the dominant culture (Liorla, 2019). According to Hoster Cabo, Lobato Suero and Ruis Campos (2018): "The picturebook is a place of communication where readers perceive visual as well as verbal signs. Furthermore, readers are invited to explore them, thus making their own hypothesis regarding the picturebooks' meaning."

Specifically for young children of gay parents, books can be a conversation starter and a place for children to construct their ideas of family (Liorla, 2019). The earliest examples of LGBTQ+-themed children's books were mostly published by alternative presses and sold in alternative gay, lesbian and feminist bookstores (Sapp, 2010). The first main-stream children's books to feature LG-Parents were *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman in 1989 and *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite in 1991 (Epstein, 2012). The number of picture books with LGBTQ+ families increased throughout the late 1980's and 1990's as there was an explosion of LG Parents adopting children (e.g. Lesbian Baby Boom), and it is reasonable to assume these parents wanted books to read aloud to their children that reflected their families (Epstein, 2012). Both of these books featured LG parents, but not LG kids, and emphasized that LG-Parent families were normal and acceptable. In an analysis of 5 Children's books with gay fathers, it was found that children's books did in fact represent new modalities of masculinity and family concepts.. This was seen visually

through affectionate contact between male parents, between fathers and children, and representations of gay fathers sharing household work and responsibilities equally (Liorla, 2019). It is important to note though, that children's books featuring LGBTQ+ themes are often among the most commonly banned books, and both *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate* were in the top 10 of the list of the 100 most challenged and banned books of the 1990s (American Library Association, n.d).

This being said, LGBTQ+ children's literature is not without its shortcomings. For example a study of 68 queer children's books which featured queer characters found that these books emphasized gender norms, the nuclear family, and mostly features white upper-class characters, and featured "non-threatening" LGBTQ+ characters (Lester, 2013). In this way, while subverting heteronormativity, they also reinforced other forms of oppression in society (Lester, 2013). Studies have also shown that gay fathers can be depicted as more sexualized and less parent-focused than lesbian families, and that lesbian parents can be depicted as hyper feminine (Lester, 2013; Sunderland & McGlashan, 2012). For this reason, parents need to look at children's literature with a critical lens and search for more intersectional literature for their children.

1.10 Rationale for the Current Study

The body of literature related to gay fathers with children born through surrogacy has become increasingly wide. This being said, to date a study has not been published about socialization practices of gay fathers with children born through surrogacy specifically related to socialization practices, representing a major gap in the literature. Additionally, many studies of gay men who became fathers through surrogacy

feature very small sample sizes, and therefore this study widens the amount of gay fathers through surrogacy that have been studied.

This thesis builds on the studies about socialization strategies already conducted on gay fathers and lesbian mothers with children through adoption (e.g. Oakley et al, 2017, Goldberg et al., 2016) and also builds upon studies of racial socialization practices, which is where LG-socialization frameworks were expanded from(e.g Hughes et al., 2006).

It is plausible to believe that socialization practices differ between gay men with adopted children and those who had children through surrogacy because children need to conceptualize their biological ties to their fathers and also understand their conception story and the surrogate or egg donor which made their birth possible. Furthermore, understanding this process may be especially difficult for young children, and even more difficult to explain to peers, who often ask difficult questions about family structure to their peers. Socialization practices of gay fathers would differ to those of lesbians, as gay fathers and their children may face an extra level of stereotypes about male parenting and gay men being uninterested in children (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). For this reason, it is important that the literature continues to explore the unique challenge of children born through surrogacy, as this family type presents unique challenges as compared to other family types.

1.11 Aims of the Study and its Relevance to Psychology

The aim of this study was to qualitatively analyze the socialization practices of gay fathers with children born through surrogacy and to identify common practices used in this process. Two major areas within socialization are how fathers explain their

family structure to their children and how and if they prepare their children for potential bias. The research question covers both the approach or thought process behind socialization and also specific practices that parents engage in. A qualitative thematic analysis was appropriate for this study, because it allowed fathers to expand on questions and speak freely about their experiences, especially the thought-processes and emotions behind their behaviors (Braun & Clark, 2006). Also, allowing fathers to share stories, examples, or anecdotes added a richness to the data.

This research is relevant to several key groups within psychology and services for gay fathers and their children. First, it is crucial for psychologists who work with gay fathers and their children. By understanding how these families think and what strategies they use to conceptualize their family, psychologists can provide more informed support. Secondly, the findings from this study can be invaluable for surrogacy agencies. Agencies can offer informed guidance based on evidence of what has worked well for other gay fathers. This can help prospective parents make more informed decisions about whether surrogacy is right for them and help them navigate the process effectively. Thirdly, this research can be useful to schools and teachers to help them create more accepting and understanding environments for LG-parent families, such as making discussions of families more LGBTQ+ friendly. Furthermore, this research is of importance to gay fathers themselves. Knowing what strategies have been effective for others in similar situations can provide a sense of community and shared experience. For example, from this study, gay fathers can learn how to explain the role of the surrogate mother to their children or to prepare them for difficult questions from their peers. Moreover, understanding that they are not unique in their

challenges can be comforting and empowering for gay fathers. It highlights that there is a network of families facing similar experiences and challenges.

Chapter 2 Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the research was designed and carried out. Thematic analysis shall be explored as the method used for data analysis as well as ethical considerations made as part of the research planning.

2.1 Research Design

Qualitative Design

This research was conducted with a qualitative design, which focuses on *how* and *why* something works (Sullivan & Sergeant, 2011). Qualitative research is also thought to be hypothesis *generating* rather than hypothesis *testing,* as is seen in quantitative research (Sullivan & Sergeant, 2011). Results from qualitative studies also are assumed to apply to the small group studied, and generalizability to the entire population is not expected (Sullivan & Sergeant, 2011). Qualitative research is also helpful in studies that explore social and context-dependent concepts and those that explore human intentions and motivations (Maudsley, 2011). Qualitative methods allow participants the freedom to elucidate their ideas and respond to questions in their own words, which is critical to a study like this about an area that is not heavily researched (Barker et al, 2002). This approach is particularly beneficial when exploring under-researched areas, as it can reveal insights that might be overlooked in quantitative studies. However, qualitative research also has limitations. It often involves smaller sample sizes, which can limit the generalizability of the findings (Barker et al., 2002). Additionally, qualitative data analysis can be time-consuming and requires a high level of skill to ensure reliability and validity. This freedom for participants to expand on

ideas and give rich detail to their experience was important when conducting this research so that gay fathers could give nuance to their answers and describe not only the socializing behaviors they engage in, but also the emotions and thought-processes behind them.

Epistemology

The epistemological perspective that guided this research was a critical realist perspective. One of the most important tenets of critical realism is that ontology (i.e. what is real, the nature of reality) is not able to be reduced to epistemology (i.e. our knowledge of reality) and that human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality (Fletcher, 2017). Critical realism, which was first proposed by Bhaskar in 1975, critiques empiricism and positivism as they only focus on observable reality, and realism considers causality by placing emphasis on the underlying mechanisms that are related to events and situations (Bhaskar, 1975). Furthermore, critical realism adopts three domains of reality: the real, the empirical, and the actual (Bhaskar, 1975). These levels can be considered to be like an "iceberg" with the empirical level above the water which are observed events though a human lens, then then underwater there is the actual level which says that events occur whether observed or not, further below the water, there is the real level which pertains to causal mechanisms of reality (Fletcher, 2017). It is emphasized that these cannot be thought of in isolation (Bhaskar, 1975). Ontology exists on a continuum between realism and relativism; critical realists accommodate aspects of both and therefore are positioned in the middle (Willig, 2008). Critical realism, with its focus on underlying mechanisms and causality, is particularly suited to this study as it enables an exploration of the

deeper social, cultural, and legal structures influencing fathers' experiences. By acknowledging the complexity of reality and rejecting reductionist approaches, critical realism allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study (Bhaskar, 1975). This perspective informs not only the research questions but also the approach to data collection and analysis, ensuring that both observable behaviors and the underlying structures that shape these behaviors are considered (Fletcher, 2017).

2.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data by minimally organizing and describing a data set in rich detail (Braun & Clark, 2006). A thematic analysis consists of themes, which are something which is important about the data in relation to the research question or questions, and represent some amount of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). The keyness or importance of themes does not necessarily need to be quantified (such as being seen in more than 50% of participants), but rather whether or not it captures something useful related to the research question (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six steps to conducting a thematic analysis. They noted that the steps did not need to be approached linearly as the researcher may need to move back and forth between the stages (Braun & Clark, 2006).

1. In the first phase, the researcher must familiarize themselves with the data, which might include highlighting or jotting down initial ideas.
2. Phase two includes generating initial codes and collecting data relevant to each code.

3. Phase three includes searching for potential themes, or combining codes into groups and gathering data related to each theme.

4. Phase four involves reviewing themes by checking if those themes match the existing codes, if they match the entire dataset, and finally creating a thematic map of the analysis.

5. Phase five includes defining and naming themes, which necessitates refining themes further and generating clear names and descriptions for the themes.

6. The final and sixth phase is producing the report, which includes selecting vivid extracts and relating the themes back to the research questions and existing literature.

Braun and Clarke (2006) also suggest that, when beginning thematic analysis, it is important to consider the ontological and epistemological framework being followed, whether coding shall be semantic or latent and whether it shall be used inductively or deductively.

Semantic or Latent Themes

A thematic analysis is usually conducted either at a semantic or explicit level or at a latent or interpretive level (Braun & Clark, 2006). With a semantic approach, themes are identified according to their explicit or surface meaning and the analyst does not look beyond the meaning of what has been written (Braun & Clark, 2006). In contrast, a thematic analysis at the latent level goes further than the written meaning and searches for underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations (Braun & Clark, 2006). In the present research, a semantic approach was taken towards the data. This was because it was important to directly describe the strategies that fathers took. This

was easy as most fathers in the interviews were very candid about their thought process,

therefore it was not necessary to look for deeper meaning as it was already made

explicit. Additionally, most content of the interviews describes actual conversations and

actual behaviors that fathers and their children, and therefore the semantic level was

sufficient to understand the socialization strategy.

Inductive or Theoretical Analysis

A thematic analysis can also involve inductive or theoretical reasoning. A

thematic analysis that uses an inductive approach could be described as a "bottom-up"

approach where the themes are entirely informed by the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). On

the contrary, deductive or theoretical approaches incorporate previous theories into the

analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). In this analysis, the data were originally analyzed

inductively to create the first map (see Appendix 1.0). This resulted in a map that was

bursting with themes and required a bit of refinement. To refine the themes some

theoretical or deductive reasoning was used from Goldberg (2016) and Oakley (2017),

by incorporating previous research on the socialization of children born through

adoption Looking at this research helped the data to become more succinct and to

contribute more helpfully to the existing literature. This process is further discussed in

the Data Analysis section.

2.3 Participants

Participants were 67 gay fathers through gestational surrogacy (from 34

families), with a child aged 3-9 years. Multiple strategies were used to recruit as diverse

a sample as possible, through associations of sexual minority parent families, sexual

minority parent web groups and forums, events with sexual minority parents attending,

and word-of-mouth from participating fathers. The inclusion criteria were that the couple had a child aged between 3 and 9 years, had conceived through surrogacy, and that the child had no congenital abnormalities and was not born preterm. Fathers' mean age was 45.12 ($SD = 5.89$), most were White and with a medium-to-high socioeconomic status. Children were mean aged 6.14 ($SD = 2.67$; 58.8% assigned females at birth).

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and no financial compensation was provided. Written informed consent was obtained from fathers, who were interviewed on an online platform (e.g., Zoom, Skype). Fathers were informed that they could withdraw at any time from the study without providing any explanation. Another ethical consideration was that all interviews were anonymized with codes and pseudonyms were used when referring to interviews.

2.5 Materials

A semi-structured interview was conducted over zoom with fathers of children born through surrogacy (not by the present researcher, but by his advisor). The following questions were the primary questions that informed the analysis (see full and detailed list in appendix 2.0).

1. Have you talked [child] about being in a gay parent family?
2. When did you begin talking to him/her?
3. What did you say to him/her?

4. In the last year, roughly how often do you think you have had conversations about being in a gay-parent family?

5. Has this changed over time?

6. Who initiates these conversations?

7. Has this changed over time?

8. What are [child's] questions?

9. Have you talked to them about problems they may face/ possible teasing?

10. To your knowledge do you think [child] has ever experienced homophobia or has been teased for having two dads?

11. Have you given [child] any advice of what to do if it happens again?

12. Have you experienced any negative reactions from others?

2.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed according to Bruan and Clark's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. In the first stage, interviews were read through a minimum of two times and the researcher jotted down initial notes to start creating a familiarity with the transcripts. This process helped to immerse the researcher in the data, enabling a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and thoughts about socialization. In the next stage, initial codes were generated both for answers to specific questions and general themes across each interview transcript. In the next stage, codes started to repeat and lead themselves into themes, and therefore a first-draft thematic map was created. In the next stage, it was necessary to refine the first map that was created. The first map included 6 different themes, which described the behaviors and practices discussed in

the interviews but lacked coherent strategies (see Appendix 1.0). Additionally, six

themes were too many and would not lead to an easy-to-read report. At this point, it was

necessary to use some deductive thinking and look at other studies that had been done

on socialization. Specifically, research from Goldberg (2016) and Oakley (2017) gave a

helpful way of thinking about the data in terms of *strategy*. It was clear after re-reading

the interviews that there were coherent strategies that emerged in the data. Therefore,

the different codes were organized into three different strategies of socialization

(Cautious, Neutral and Avoidant) which made the data easier to understand and

organized the sub-themes. Next, it was important to refine these themes further. For

example, in this step, the researcher decided to rename an approach (from Avoidant to

Neutral) from the existing research to better match this specific data. Finally, the report

was written, which gave even more insight into the data and reinforced the clarity and

coherency of the map.

Chapter 3 Results

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis, highlighting how gay fathers approached socializing their children along with specific examples from their lived experiences. The thematic analysis revealed three distinct approaches toward socialization practices: a Proactive, Cautious and Neutral approach to socialization. Each theme and its sub-themes are described using quotes from interviews with fathers.

Research note: The father's real names were de-identified from the transcripts of the interviews and pseudonyms were then applied to each father in the study. Therefore, when fathers are quoted in this chapter they are quoted by their pseudonyms.

3.1 Overview of main themes

Within the interviews, it was found that fathers did have distinct, intentional approaches to socializing their children. Fathers described having conversations with children in various settings (school, home, family outings), and that conversations were initiated by both them and their children. Most fathers acknowledged that their children and their families existed in a heteronormative culture and that their children had already realized or would soon realize that having two fathers was not the norm. The interviews were dominated by discussion of place, fathers often pointed out whether or not LGBTQ+ families or people were "normal" in their city or school. Their conversations also involved media, other families, children's friends, caregivers, and extended family. They did mention experiences of homophobia. Most commonly, facing homophobia was described as children needing to answer difficult questions from their

peers such as "is your mom dead?" and sometimes have to defend why they had two dads. This being said the phrase " I don't have a mommy, I have two daddies" or simply just "I have two dads!" satisfied a majority of children and their peers. Some parents even described funny anecdotes of other children being jealous of their kids having two dads, like in the following examples.

Stephen: *[the fact of having two dads] doesn't make them stand out. It actually makes them sort of cool. They are like, a kid at school will go, "Hey [child], where is your other dad?"*
James: *I thought it was really great that one day a neighbor boy said to his parents when we were all out there "You guys are so lucky, I wish I had two Dads" because he viewed it as more grown up men to play sports with at that age. I never expected that comment.*

This being said, the three distinct approaches will be discussed in further detail in this chapter along with their subthemes (See figure 1.0).
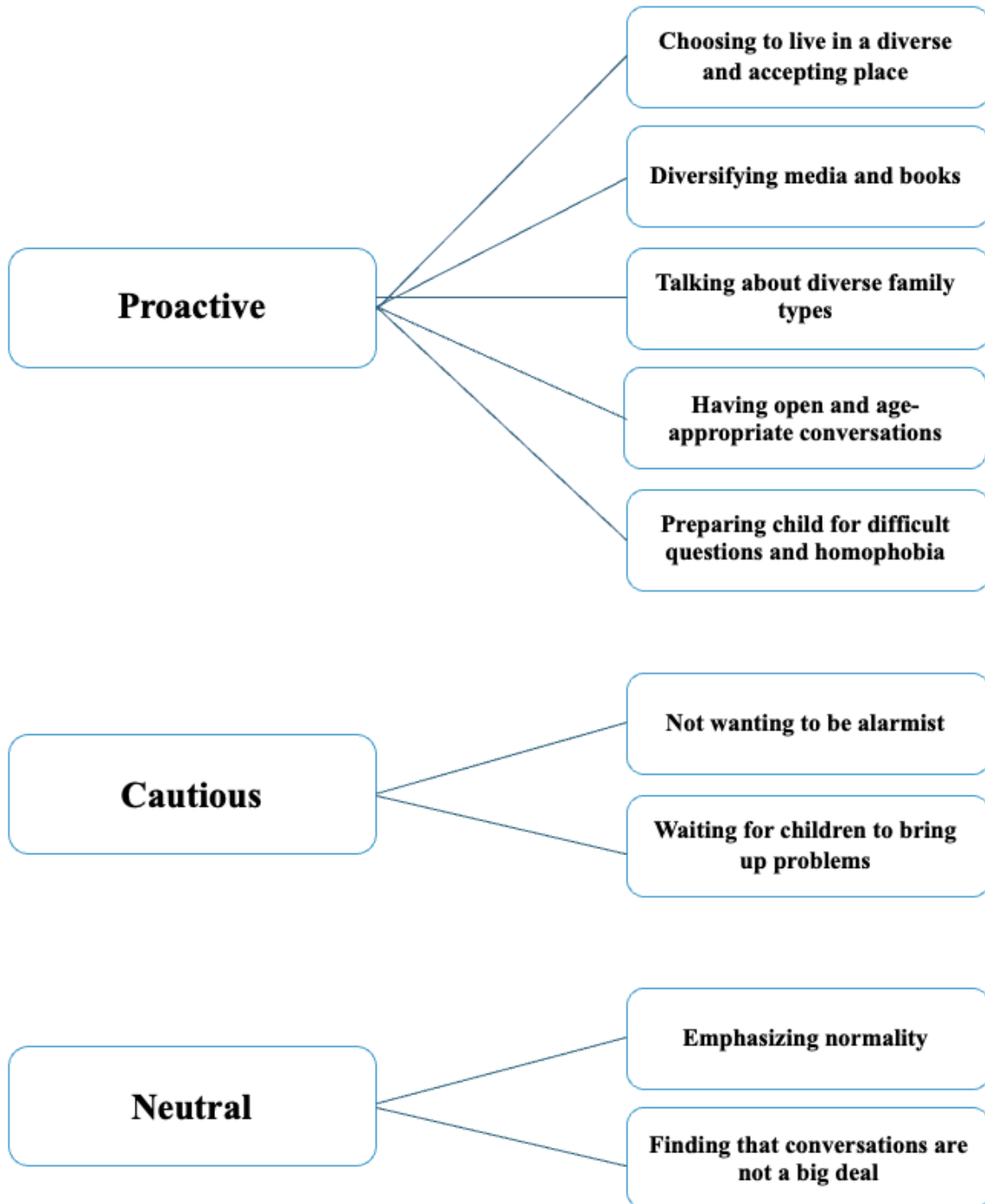
Figure 1.0: Three strategies used by gay fathers and their subthemes

3.1 Approach 1: Proactive

The most common approach to socialization was a Proactive approach, which was seen in a majority of interviews. This approach was defined by parents consistently initiating socializing conversations with their children and accompanied by concrete actions that promoted pride and combatted heteronormativity. In general, these fathers acknowledged that their children could face homophobia or probing questions and wanted to ensure that their children were equipped to handle it. These fathers also thought often about what questions their children might have in the future and intentionally thought about how they would handle them. Within this theme, five major sub-themes were identified which included: choosing to live in a diverse and accepting place, diversifying media and books, talking about diverse family types, having open and age-appropriate conversations, and preparing children for difficult questions and homophobia. One father named Nathan succinctly summarized this approach with the following quote:

Nathan: "*If it [being in a two-father family] wasn't mentioned we would mention it [first] so that they see that exposure.*"

This quote highlights that Proactive fathers are not waiting for their children to ask questions or come to them with problems, but rather initiating socialization in a structured way.

Choosing to live in a diverse and accepting place

One way that fathers displayed a Proactive approach was by choosing to live in diverse and accepting environments. This meant choosing states, cities, neighborhoods,

schools, and churches that were either openly pro-LGBTQ+ or had large populations of LGBTQ+ people living there. Below are specific examples of places where fathers seek out diversity.

School environments. Fathers emphasized choosing schools that would be a safe place for their children. Parents sought out environments that would not only protect their children from teasing or bullying but also where they would not be the only LG-parent family. In the following quote, Mark describes that the private school he chose for his children protects them from bullying because there are many progressive parents.

> Mark: [in response to a question about if their children have experienced teasing] *It's not very likely to [happen]. Um, that's kind of why we have them in a private school. You know, there's a lot of like-minded parents there who are, uh, very progressive.*

Fathers Brian and Douglas both described their school as being a safe place for their child due to the diversity of the classroom and the open-mindedness of the school staff. Firstly, Brian describes feeling fortunate because there are both gay and lesbian parents at his child's public school.

> Brian: *In her class, there's another girl who has two fathers and there is one girl who has a mother who has a female partner…the school is actually quite set up to address the fact that some kids have 2 fathers and so I think that we are*

fortunate..to live where we are. This is the public school right down the street

which is a wonderful school, wonderful teachers, wonderful principal.

Next, Douglas also describes similarly feeling lucky that his school is diverse in terms of nationalities and family structure and was involved in the cities' pride, which passed by the school itself.

Douglas: *I think we're very lucky that she is in a school environment that tends to be very open, inclusive, embracing of diversity. I think at her school there's 10 or 20 nationalities and we're sitting in the capital of the city and last year, some of the parents and staff marched in the gay pride parade, which went by her school. So the school's very inclusive and reaches out to gay parents, which I think creates a better environment for [Child].*

Jesse reflected similar sentiments about his child's school and said that the education and accepting environment made bullying less likely.

Jesse: *Well the school that he goes to is very accepting of just about everything and that's one of the benefits of the school, it's pretty amazing, in this day and age when you hear about all this bullying and stuff like that, these kids are, it's just the education, they don't have that.*

Having diversity in the classroom and a sensitive teacher can actually create an environment where children can have discussions about issues of gay families and solve

them themselves. One father named Jack gave the following example of what happened in his child's kindergarten class, where his child's classmates resolved questions about gay parents amongst themselves.

Jack:*In his kindergarten class, a couple of the boys were goofing around and one of the boys said something like 'You guys really like each other, you should get married". And one of the other boys said 'Well you can't get married'. So the teacher was telling [partner] this story as she heard this, it was like open playtime, and so she clenched up and was like, 'Oh my god how am I going to deal with this?' And before she could do anything a girl in the class said, 'Well no, that's not true, my moms are married, [child] aren't your dads married?' 'Yeah they are.' And I forget about which other kid it was, but there was a third kid, 'Hey aren't your dads married? 'No but they want to be. And the kids just shut it down, like themselves, in the context of that.*

Cities and Neighborhoods. Fathers also mentioned consistently that their city or neighborhood was an important conduit for socializing their children. They mentioned choosing where they lived based on a lot of LG-families living there because the diversity in their city made pointing out diverse family types to their children very easy and their children often got to play with older children from other diverse backgrounds.

Christopher said that LA was a place that made their kids feel that their family makeup was normal.

Christopher: *Living in LA they are not isolated, we have a lot of friends and they have kids and they are gay couples. So for them it's not something that they feel that they are the only one in the world, there are kids in the same situation.*

Nathan reflected similar sentiments about New York City.

Nathan - *Being in New York City it's easy to see other families [like ours] too.*

Matthew also said that San Diego impacted the conversations he has with his children.

Matthew- *I think because we live in Metro San Diego, and I think because of the school, our circle of friends, and the neighborhood we live in…we haven't really had that conversation in regard to that not everybody thinks that, you know, having two men or two women together is okay.*

Kenneth and Gregory reflected that living around diversity of all kinds was normalizing for their children. Firstly, Kenneth said diversity was apparent even on the playground.

Kenneth: *If you go to any playground in our area, everyone's like them, everybody's some kind of hyphen - they're Jewish -Chinese or Japanese and Mexican or something like that." And I think that coming from a same-sex family is something similar so I'm hoping that the risk factor of teasing will have diminished.*

Next, Gregory said that South Florida was diverse not only in terms of LGBTQ+
families but also interracial and interfaith couples.

> Gregory: *Fortunately where we happen to live in South Florida there is a highly
> populated gay community. We tend to live in a mostly democratic state so, you
> know, it's more...liberal, there's all different kinds of families, so it's not like
> they're interacting with just one mummy or one daddy, they're interacting with
> one mummy, one daddy, two mummies, two daddies... interracial couples and...
> inter-faith couples so.../ think they're kind of getting a good exposure*

Vincent also agreed that he chose where they lived because of the diversity it
created among their children's friends. Vincent described where he lived as a "bubble"
that protected his kids from feeling different.

> Vincent - *it's for them we chose to live here specifically because of that
> diversity… all the kids that they're with, so and so has two moms, so and so has
> two dads, so and so has one mom and it, it truly to them…if someone were to
> react weirdly they'd be like I don't understand. And that's for kids in our
> community through high school because that's this specific community. Do we
> live in a bubble? Yes. Did we choose to live here in a bubble so our kids would
> have that experience so that it wasn't um, so they didn't feel other than or
> different, yes.*

Daniel mentioned that living in California also allowed his family to have a progressive church community.

> Daniel - *We live in California, and I feel like we're very fortunate to be surrounded by a progressive church community, a progressive teaching community, great friends... We don't want to isolate him, that's also something I don't want to do, be aware of what's out there we...So that's important, but um I prefer to take conscious effort to expose him to diverse families, which is what we are already doing, than to prepare him for the, you know, the crazies of the world.*

Diversifying media and books

A common practice among fathers who took a proactive approach to socialization was the use of books and media to spark discussions about living in a two-father family. Fathers described reading these books since the child was an infant, Douglas said that he started reading the book *King and King* with his child from the age of 6 months. One father named Christopher chose to donate two copies of *the Family Book* by Todd Parr to their child's preschool with the permission of the preschool director. Larry even chose to go into his child's Kindergarten classroom and read *the Family Book* out loud.

Fathers mentioned a number of books by name in the interviews. The most commonly mentioned book by fathers in this study was *The Family Book* by Todd Parr which was originally released in 2003, and has now been published in multiple languages, which celebrates the uniqueness of families in a humorous and silly way, and

mentions same-sex families, adopted families, single-parent families, stepfamilies, and more (Hachette Book Group, 2024). Another book was *Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, which described the journey of two male penguins in the Central Park Zoo who get help from a zookeeper to help them have children (Simon & Schuster Publishers). *King and King* by Linda de Haan and Stephen Nijland (which was originally written in Dutch and then subsequently translated into 10 languages) was also mentioned and describes a story about a prince whose queen mother wants him to get married but he ends up admitting at a ball that he prefers princes over princesses, and then he marries a prince, and therefore they become the "king and king" (Random House Publishers). It can be seen that fathers chose books that both celebrated diverse family types and also gay love itself.

Jacob noted that books were important to his child from a young age and allowed her to celebrate diversity in family structure

Jacob: [Interviewer: when did you begin talking to your child about having two fathers?] *We started reading her books about different families from when she was born.*[I: And what did you say to her about it?] *There are all different types of families, I use real things and then silly things. Some parents have two moms, two dads, mom and dad, grandparents, sisters, five dogs, two this, city country, moon, a bunch of books written like that. Jack Parr is the author's name so that would just be part of the repertoire of books we use.*

Edward said that his young child verbalized being reflected in the pages of a book.

Edward: *We got a book from where I work, it's about different families and [child] doesn't really read it, and I was choosing something to read one day and I said, look, read this one and then she picked it up and read it and bought it back and said look look, this is a family just like ours. This is daddy and this is papa and this is me,*

Beyond just reading books that reflect their family structure, one father mentioned changing the pronouns in books from mommy and daddy to daddy and daddy. Similarly, one father changed the lyrics to a popular children's song so that the lyrics were about two daddies rather than a mommy and a daddy.

Sean said that he sometimes changed mommy and daddy dinosaurs to become two daddy dinosaurs

Sean: *we've been given some books too…he's really into dinosaurs and there's this one set, they're really great and they're so creative and it's like human parents will have dinosaur children and they don't like muck that up but it's always mom and dad, husband and wife, not even part-you know, it's very marriage heterosexual it's like disappointing. So sometimes when reading the books, not so much now cause now he's more the wiser, I would just change it to Daddy and Papa so, he would at least hear that*

Larry also expanded this concept beyond books and incorporated it into songs.

Larry: *Do you know Laurie Bruckner? She's this children musician that people were obsessed about. She writes a lot of kids' songs, and it's always about mom and dad. So I wrote her a letter saying 'Do you think you could re-record this one song and daddy and dad'. And she wrote back saying we can't really entertain that request, but here's a signed photograph and a CD. I was like, thanks [Laughs]. But then we just sang the lyrics with two dads instead of dad and mom, not to tell them that dad and mom isn't normal, it's like from the time they were tiny we would just incorporate our world, our existence, into their narrative*

Outside of books, various fathers also mentioned that TV or movies were something that they used to spark conversation with their children. For example, William mentioned that *Modern Family* was one of their kids' favorite shows which they watched weekly. John said that because of the Disney movie *Frozen,* his child thought that her mother was dead and told her classmates this, so this sparked a conversation about her being born through surrogacy.

Joshua mentioned that one episode of *Jeopardy* featured a contestant with two moms, which caused a discussion with his children.

Joshua: *It's interesting, this past week [partner] saw a kid on Jeopardy who was from Park Slope and he was on the show and they showed his 2 moms and [partner] worked with one of the moms so he was telling us a story about working with one fo the kids parents' who was on jeopardy and he had 2 moms*

[so we talked about it]but we don't like, sit around and say lets talk about the

fact [of being in a two-father family].

Thomas said similarly that sometimes when the news talks about LGBTQ+ issues it will spark discussions.

Thomas: *You know, we talk about [being in a two-father family] if we're watching the news and an issue comes up about - for example, same sex marriage or things like that .We'll talk about it because it's something we've heard about on the news and try to explain to the boys that, that, how what they're hearing on the news relates to us as a family. How it would be better for us to have our marriage be recognised all across the country and not just in California, for example.*

Talking about diverse family types

Fathers who used a Proactive approach often discussed and pointed out diverse family types. Firstly, they emphasized the acceptability of all families looking differently and that that diversity was a strength and not a weakness. Secondly, they (or their children) pointed out often when another family looked like theirs whether in school or out in public. Additionally, they also encouraged their children to notice that LGBTQ+ families were not the only type of difference that could exist in families, that families could also be diverse in many ways, for example with single parents or parents from two different cultural backgrounds.

Interviews with Joshua, Andrew and Brian reflected this emphasis on diversity when asked about how they have discussions about being in a two-dad family.

First, Joshua noted that when he talked about diversity he made a point not to just mention two-father families.

Joshua: *We didn't really talk about it as two dads per se, we would talk about it in the context that families look all sorts of different ways now. Some parents have, or some families have a mom and dad, some have two dads or two moms, some have...And that's kind of how we explain it, that we are just one other family type.*

Andrew said that observations about other families often started conversations.

Andrew: *Often it's an observation about another family, another two dad or two mom family or even in our lives "so and so is gay, one of our teachers is a lesbian, she married another teacher," this kind of thing...We just want them to get reference points so they know they're not unique.*

Brian said that he talked to his child about their neighbor having two dads.

Brian: *Whenever we see our neighbor we say "[neighbor's name] has two dads."*

Fathers also took concrete steps to expose their children to diversity. This looked like attending gay family events in their cities, traveling to LGBTQ+ family weeks or weekends, and aiming to have LG-Parent friends. This being said, some fathers expressed that they did not have so many LGBTQ+ people in their community and wanted more LG-Parent friends. Of course, this was highly influenced by the cities families lived in and the schools their children attended, as mentioned in the previous subchapter. For example, David mentioned a plethora of ways his family is involved in the LGBTQ+ community and with other same-sex parents.

> David: *[I: And when did you start having those kinds of conversations?]: I think sort of forever again we're involved with the Gay and Lesbian Centre in New York so we go, they have monthly playdates, we just had the gay pride month, big family party, barbecue and we tell her it's the party for kids with two Dads and two Moms and she's very aware of it.*

Raymond said that this practice was even more important than any words or conversations could be to prepare his child for bias.

> Raymond: *So that's important, but um I prefer to take conscious effort to expose him to diverse families, which is what we are already doing, than to prepare him for the, you know, the crazies of the world. So that's...I would prefer to take actual action instead of preparing him like in words.*

Having open and age-appropriate conversations

Fathers who used a Proactive approach also discussed consistently having open and age-appropriate conversations with their children. Fathers also described encouraging schools, daycares, nannies, babysitters, etc. to help continue the conversation about having two fathers as a further way to help normalize the topic for children. Words that came up when describing these Proactive conversations included *explicit, lighthearted, and normal.*

For example, Michael used the word explicit to describe his conversations with his kids about having two dads.

Michael - *We talk about it very often…we're very explicit about it*

Anthony also emphasized talking about his surrogacy story without shame.

Anthony- *Yeah I would say so, we had an awesome surrogacy experience, we're really happy with that, there's no shame in that and I hope we project that to the kids. I think it's an open story, I want to round out the story with the donor. We haven't told that story yet and we haven't told the story of biologically which dad is [the biological father] but we'll get there.*

Aaron said that conversations were lighthearted and didn't create angst.

Aaron - *It's never really been a heavy thing, it's a more lighthearted thing - ten lines go back and forth and we go onto another subject, it's pretty easy, I don't think there's a lot of issues behind it at least at this point. I think it's about where*

they came from and how they were born and all that kind of stuff - I don't sense a lot of angst around that.

Fathers also described that they tried to speak to their children in simple ways and explain sometimes abstract and difficult concepts such as conception and love in words their children could understand.

Joseph explained to his child why he needed to use a surrogate by breaching the topic when he had a pregnant friend visiting. He also uses the simple terms of "daddies can't have babies in their tummies" to help his child to begin to understand surrogacy.

Joseph- *You know, I actually had this conversation in the car this morning. Because we have a friend that's pregnant right now who came over last night, so we were talking just about how, you know, boys and daddies can't have babies in their tummies, so I explained that, you know, daddy and I asked [surrogate] to help us make a baby.*

Eric explained to his child that he wanted to create his child because he fell in love.

Eric - *so we'll talk and say sometimes boys like boys. Sometimes girls like girls like girls. Sometimes boys like girls. We tell him daddy and papa fell in love and we decided we wanted a family so we created you*

John also described two names he gave to his surrogate to help his child conceptualize her role, "helper mommy" and "tia."

John: *we've talked a little bit about [surrogate and egg donor], the ladies who helped us out because now she's gotten, as she's gotten older she's realising, 'Oh wait your two boys! And so we've used that sort of language like helper, and when she hit kindergarten suddenly the questions about, you know, mommy came up. So we, we actually talked to [surrogate] about language that she was comfortable with, and we said, 'What about helper mommy' because she's not her mom, but what about she was her helper mommy, and she helped us because she carried you in her belly…*Like, 'No you don't have a mom that way. You have two dads, some people have two moms, and you know [surrogate], tia,' which is Spanish for Aunt, 'so you know tia [surrogate], and tio [surrogate's husband].

Tyler said his daughter sometimes comically called her father "mom," but this was language that worked for his family.

Tyler: *I said "Doesn't it sound silly to call Poppa 'Mom'?" and she said "No, you're like Mom" and I said "You're right, Poppa can pretty much do anything a Mom or a Poppa or a Dad can do, so that's fine by me".*

Some fathers who utilized a proactive approach also mentioned that it was important that every person in their child's life was able to have conversations with them about having two fathers, including nannies, daycares, or au pairs. Fathers found

this important so that these figures could reiterate points that they were communicating to their children.

Michael talked about nannies, daycare, and teachers.

Michael- *It was important in the daycare, all the nannies and the daycares that we've had, to be part of that conversation. We make sure the teachers know [in their school now].*

Brandon mentioned that he spoke often with his nanny about including her in socializing conversations.

Brandon- *And our nanny, we speak with her often and she'll always tell them, reiterate, you have 2 dads who love you so much, so you might be a little bit different from others.*

Preparing children for difficult questions and homophobia

Fathers who utilized an active approach often acknowledged that their children could face homophobia, and wanted to minimize the effects that bullying could have and ensure their children were prepared to handle it.

The question that came up over and over again in the interviews that children faced from their peers was "Where is your mommy"? or "Is your mommy dead?" and the most common response from children was "I don't have a mommy, I have two daddies." This was sometimes organically said by children, but was also a phrase that

fathers encouraged their children to use. This phrase is impactful because it emphasizes the presence of two loving parents rather than the absence of a maternal figure.

For example, Christopher taught his kids to "spin around" difficult questions, emphasizing the presence of two parents rather than the absence of a mother.

> Christopher: *And from time to time the kids get asked about that like "Where's your Mom?" and he'll say" don't have a Mom". And I would always try and get him to like spin that around a bit and say " have two Dads", talk about what he does have as opposed to what he doesn't have but when you're little especially the not having a Mom thing is always puzzling.*

Daniel also reflected that he wanted his kids to think about their family and any potential teasing they could face in the most positive way possible and that this was something that he was actively working on.

> Daniel: *I want to make sure I always have something to say that's positive not negative around it, and so l've been working on that very much and we've had, it's no longer about not having someone, it's about having two dads.*

Jason, Benjamin, and Jack all emphasized the importance of pride and also the importance of having a thick skin in response to potentially homophobic bullying or teasing. Here it is obvious that they do acknowledge the possibility of bullying occuring, and it is not a conversation that they avoid.

Jason said he wanted his child to know there are special families everywhere.

Jason [In response to a question asking if he talks to his kids about potential teasing they could face] *Uh, a little bit sometimes, but, you know, about how some people have problems with things that aren't the same. But, that, not everyone's, you know, there's special families everywhere and he shouldn't worry about it.*

Benjamin emphasized pride with his children.

Benjamin: *So...if anything it would be more like conversations about like, you know, just be proud of who you are and...and if anybody bothers you about anything don't take it to heart, you know, kind of like any other number of reasons a kid might be teased...maybe*

Jack emphasized instilling self-confidence in his children.

Jack: *We've certainly felt that we need to, that you need to have that conversation enough so that they understand it's different and why people might tease them about it, but also give them the tools and the self-confidence to be able to deal with it.*

Arthur interestingly reflected that growing gay and being teased for it gave him empathy and sensitivity for what his children could possibly go through and motivated him to try to minimize the effects.

Arthur: *Growing up gay, we were young and you get teased and stuff. We are very sensitive to that. So I want to make sure that that was, um, we know how to approach that. Make sure that, there will always be some of that I suppose, but make sure that we try to minimize the effects and be careful.*

Thomas even mentioned training his child in martial arts to instill confidence and preparedness for bullying

Thomas - *We've talked about [bullying] because I wanted [child] to be prepared as he goes through elementary school, kids can be mean at times, right? So we've had him trained in different martial arts because I want him to be able to defend himself if it ever, if he ever gets bullied in school because he has two dads. But it hasn't happened yet…and [child] is a confident kid because he can handle himself well. I think he would prevent it before it happened…We presented ourselves as a family unit in our community.*

Overall, the proactive approach was unique from the other approaches because it acknowledged that homophobic teasing was a real possibility and that children should be made aware of it and prepared for it were it to happen. This along with the other sub-themes of choosing to live in a diverse and accepting place, diversifying media and books, talking about diverse family types, and having open and age-appropriate conversations exemplify that this approach mixed active conversation with concrete

actions. These parents emphasized preparing for difficult situations rather than waiting for them to come and discuss them.

3.2 Approach 2: Cautious Approach

The second approach identified in the interviews was a Cautious approach. This approach was epitomized by waiting for the child to ask questions about being in a two-father family or being born through surrogacy. Fathers with this approach were especially concerned that preparing their children for homophobia or explaining heteronormativity in society would do more harm than good. Fathers who used this approach wanted their children to see themselves as normal and continue on without alarming their children. Within this theme, two subthemes were identified. First, fathers with this approach did not want to be alarmist. Secondly, fathers mostly chose to wait for their children to bring up potential issues or teasing rather than start conversations themselves.

Not wanting to be alarmist

Parents with a cautious approach didn't want to create an issue out of nothing or make their child feel like there was a problem with their family when there wasn't. They wanted to live their lives normally, and neither downplay nor advertise that their family could be different from the "normal" of heterosexual parenting. Kevin reflected that he never wanted to make a big deal of being in a two-dad family.

Kevin - *We've never made a big deal of it. Just, um, that he's grown up with this and grown into it*

Zachary reflected a similar sentiment, emphasizing that other people's problems with a two-father family were not any of his or his child's business.

> Zachary - *You know. We just do our thing. We go about our business. I don't flaunt anything. I don't hide anything. I don't bother people. I do me, and we do us. And you can have a problem. That is your business. But don't bring it to me. You know. And I think that has really worked for us and [child].*

Samuel also mentioned that this approach of not emphasizing the differences of his family also worked for this child.

> Samuel: *Oh yeah, [child] doesn't advertise the fact that he has two dads, which is probably a smart idea in Texas.*

Jonathan said that at his child's age, bringing up her family type could create more anxiety. Therefore, emphasizing how she's the same to her peers could be more helpful during this developmental period.

> Jonathan: *I think it's pretty age appropriate too that she doesn't necessarily want to feel like she's different. It's possible that even bringing these things up, whereas I think that developmentally that's helpful for her, it might create anxiety for her and she just, I don't know. She's not by temperament not a particularly anxious child but, you know, these are big abstract concepts and my*

focus is more on helping her see where she's the same versus where she

perceives herself as different.

Choosing to wait for children to bring up problems

Fathers with this approach saw that their family composition was normal for their children, and therefore wanted to wait until their children came to them with any issues or problems. In this way they followed the lead of their children. For example, Gregory said he wasn't sure if teasing would ever happen, but it was a possibility.

Gregory: *It's just one of those things where...we have a very mixed group of friends, single parents, straight...gay, black, white so I think it's all so normal to him that he doesn't ask." "You know, I don't know if we'll wait and see if it happens. I think he's bound at some point in his like that some idiot may make a comment."*

Jerry also reflected that the topic of sexuality was something difficult to talk about, but acknowledged that that conversation could be coming down the line.

Jerry- *There's always sort of the discomfort of discussing sexuality, we sort of know especially with [child] that the time is coming and we're not looking forward to it. We'll deal with it.*

Kevin mentions the same sentiment, that he will wait for what his child has questions, and that he hopes that he will feel positive. This is in contrast to some active parents who wanted to instill pride from a young age. He emphasizes that his child will

likely process his family makeup himself, rather than processing it alongside his

parents. He also mentions that when his child brings up a conversation about having

two dads, their conversation is "sufficient," and therefore does not need to be mentioned

further by the parents.

Kevin - *Definitely there are going to be questions. Before he gets old, you know.*
He will get it eventually. He will know how he came to be, and then when he is
older he will probably want to know why did you guys do this and hopefully he
won't have a negative feeling and [unclear] it wasn't that bad at all. So I am
sure of that kind of conversation. We say, whenever it does come up, which is not
often, it is always the same way: 'you happen to have a daddy and a papa, and
some people have a mommy and a daddy and some people have a daddy or some
people have a mommy.' And it has always been sufficient.

Jonathan echoed this and used the words "follow the lead", which encapsulates

succinctly the Cautious approach of letting the child bring up problems as they come

Jonathan - *[I: have you talked to your child about potential problems or*
teasing?] Oh sure, I'm sure they will come up and I'll sort of follow her lead on
that.....You know, I recognise that, you know it's not, I don't have an inclination
to send her to the therapist or anything like that. My inclination might be if I feel
like something is too close, or I'm not ready, l'll postpone it or hold it off.

Joseph also mentioned a Cautious nervousness about what his children could bring up in the future.

> Joseph: *I think the one thing that I'm nervous about is when they start asking why they don't have a mum. I think that's going to be a hard conversation to have. But I don't know when that's going to happen. I have some friends that have used surrogates as well and their kids who were like 2, were already asking 'where's my mum?'. We haven't had that discussion yet. It hasn't quite clicked with them yet.*

Overall, the Cautious theme was distinguished by parents not wanting to generate unnecessary anxiety in their children and letting conversations happen spontaneously as their children came to them with questions

3.3 Approach 3: Neutral Approach

The third approach that was identified in the analysis was a Neutral approach, wherein fathers emphasized that their families were normal and that they and their children were more worried about other things, and the issue of a two-father family did not come up often. This was the approach that came up the least often in the interviews. If the topic did come up, they often noted that one conversation was sufficient and their children did not have further questions. Within this theme, two sub-themes were discovered. First, fathers emphasized that their family was normal to their children. Secondly, they found that socializing their children in a two-father family was not as big of a deal as they expected or not as difficult as they expected.

Normality

Fathers who employed a Neutral approach tended to emphasize that their children's lives were normal, and therefore having two fathers did not need to be a topic of discussion.

George, for example, said that this topic has not come up yet and not come up with his child, outside of giving his child information about how he was conceived, but the topic of having two dads is not something that he discusses with his child. In the following quotes, Frank said that being in a two-father family just "is what it is," and hasn't been a topic of discussion.

> Frank: *[I: And do you talk to the children about growing up in a two-dad family?]: Not too often really. I mean it's just, it's just how it is. They obviously know that their family is not like most of their friends, [almost] all of their friends but it hasn't been like a topic of conversation.*

Henry also said that his children are not isolated and that being in a gay father family is not something that makes them different in Los Angeles. He also seemed confident that his children wouldn't have questions as they got older.

> Henry- *it's something that is part of their life. Living in LA they are not isolated, we have a lot of friends and they have kids and they are gay couples. So for them it's not something that they feel that they are the only one in the world, there are kids in the same situation. But anyway if one specific moment they ask 'Why we don't have a Mom?' or something like that, I suppose we can explain it to them. But I don't know that this is going to happen to be honest with you because it's*

something that's so normal for them in their normal life and we are lucky

because we have such supportive families here and in Spain, nobody seems to be

'This is something special', it's normal, they are the daughters, we are the

fathers. I think everything has been normal.

Carl emphasized that he didn't see a point in initiating a conversation with his
child, and similar to early discussion from the Cautious approach, worried that a
conversation could "disabuse" his child of seeing his family as normal. Here is
approach is distinct from Cautious because he speaks with certainty that he does not
want to initiate a conversation.

Carl- *I don't think there is a point in initiating a conversation right now. I don't*

see what it accomplishes. He sees it as normal, and… so, no need to disabuse

him of that.

Finally, fathers Kyle and Stephen said that their conversations were matter of
fact and therefore didn't have a lot of emotion attached to them. First, Kyle said his
conversations had no specific emotions attached to them.

Kyle -[*I: have you talked to your child about being in a two-dad family?]*

Basically just that he has two dads. That's, that's, that's a, at this point it is still

just a fact that seems to be, has no, has nothing attached to it. There's no, uh, uh,

there is no condition, no stigmatization. Or whatever or specific emotion

attached to this.

Next, Stephen described being a "given" in his family that is not discussed.

>
> Stephen- *It is just sort of a given, it is just present, we don't really talk about it.*

Not a big deal

Secondly, fathers who employed a Neutral approach said that their conversations were not a big deal and that their children were not very interested in the topic beyond basic conversations. For example, Frank said that socializing conversations with his children about being in a two-dad family did not take much attention or time.

>
> Frank*: [I: Yeah. And so the children ever initiate those conversations, or would it normally come..?] Yeah they do. Again, it's very, it's very infrequent. And again it's the same kind of thing, but again it hasn't been a big focus of attention and time.*

Steven even mentioned he spends more time talking to other parents about this topic.

>
> Steven: *[I: and do you have many discussions with [child] about being in a two Dad family or not so much ?] Not so much, she does not question it so often. We probably spend more time talking to other parents of other kids who've brought the subject up. When she first became aware she said "why don't I have a mom?" we said, "well you do have a mom, your birth mom," and so that satisfied her. So that's pretty much been it. The only reason it comes up is because [child] will walk into a room and say "I have two dads!"*

Kyle said that his child says the same phrase as Stephen's child "I have two dads," and celebrated that his child's maturity allowed him to easily accept having two dads.

> Kyle - *Uh, I know there was a time when the first thing he would say would be I'm [child] and I have two dads…, he never came home and never questioned us, or said, you know, what is going on? And, why am I so different or anything like this? Which again, points to maturity, but that's what he is, that's just who he is. He is [child], and he has two dads.*

Vincent also mentioned the point that having a simple statement of facts was sufficient for his child and that after a brief period of scrutiny, his children moved on quickly from the topic of having two dads

> Vincent- *He knows he has 2 dads. That's as far as we've gone. That's, that's where he is, the mechanics of sexuality are not something he's interested in or care about you know the identifying difference in gender is about as far as he goes…You know there was a period I want to say it was probably nine or twelve months ago when they were really starting to get into the family structure of who has two moms, who has two dads, who has a mom and dad, who has one mom and who has one dad, whose parents are divorced, I men we went through all those permutations. And that was I don't know, six or nine months ago and there was a period of intense kind of scrutiny around every family and now its kind of moved on.*

Jeffery also described that he had one conversation about being in a two-father family that satisfied his child, and then the conversation didn't really come up again.

Jeffery: *[Child] actually came home and said, um, why do I have two dads and why does Sabrina have a dad and a mom? And we said, well there are different families. Some families have two dads, some have only one dad. And same with like, one dad and one mom, or just one mom. So, again, that was something he listened to us and, um, I think it made sense to him and he didn't have more questions.*

3.4 Agreement or disagreement of Dyads

Another aspect that was considered within the results was whether or not there was agreement or disagreement between the dyad of parents. It was found that a majority of the time both parents of the child had the same approach to socialization. Because of this finding, we can assume that socialization was mainly considered a family process done within the family unit, rather than just by one parent or the child alone.

This finding makes sense, especially in the context of Proactive parents who often involve schools, babysitters, nannies, and other caretakers in their socialization process. It could be that without agreement between parents, it would be especially difficult to involve other entities. It also makes sense that fathers would need to create a united front in the face of heterosexism and homophobia because it would not be

helpful for the child to get mixed messages about the presence or lack thereof of homophobia.

Where there was disagreement of dyads, it was relatively nuanced, and there was disagreement on some aspects and disagreement on others, rather than a complete disagreement on all topics.

For example with parents John and Jonathan, while both agreed they wanted to explain surrogacy to their child in an age-appropriate way, Jonathan expressed some hesitation that did not come up in John's interview.

> Jonathan: *It's possible that even bringing these things up…it might create anxiety in her.*

Although Jonathan expressed a slightly more cautious approach, it is possible that John shares these concerns, but simply did not mention them in his interview.

In the dyad of Anthony and Patrick, both agreed that they wanted to prepare their children for potential teasing, but Patrick was slightly more avoidant and emphasized the normality of his childs' life.

> Patrick: *Because having two Dads is so normal to them, of the spectrum of what they worry about in life it's not that. Like she's more worried about if she's going to advance to the next ice-skating class in the spring than she's worried about the fact that she has two Dads. Because two Dads is very normal and contextual to her.*

At the same time, Anthony said he acknowledged his children could experience homophobia and wanted to prepare them for it.

Anthony: *No I think we will talk about it because they're gonna bump into it [potential teasing] and I want them to be prepared for it. It's gonna happen, that's the world we live in. We definitely will, sometimes we softly broach that "Has anybody ever said anything to you?". But it doesn't seem like it has yet so I keep waiting and fortunately they haven't had that.*

Again, both of them were very aware of their child's experiences but looked at it through different lenses. This doesn't necessarily mean that they parent differently, but the interviews exposed different ways of thinking about socialization.

Overall, where there was disagreement it was more so in the ways that parents thought about socialization and their strategy rather than their actions. In general, the interviews exposed that parents worked as a team to socialize their children.

Chapter 4 Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to draw conclusions based on the findings and to reflect upon the study as a whole. First, the findings are contextualized within the existing research on gay fathers with children born through surrogacy. Then implications for psychology are outlined, along with limitations of the study methods and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with personal reflections by the researcher and a conclusion of the thesis.

4.1 Discussion of findings

This thematic analysis found that gay fathers with children born through surrogacy engaged in unique socialization strategies that included a Proactive, Cautious, and Neutral approach. A Proactive approach is described as parents consistently initiating socializing conversations with their children, accompanied by concrete actions that promoted pride and combatted heteronormativity. This theme was accompanied by subthemes of choosing to live in a diverse and accepting place, diversifying media and books, talking about diverse family types, having open and age-appropriate conversations, and preparing children for difficult questions and homophobia. Secondly, a Cautious approach was defined as waiting for the child to bring up socializing conversations and concern about alarming the child too much to homophobia. Finally, a Neutral approach was defined by emphasizing the normality of the child's family unit and de-emphasizing the need for conversations about being in an LG-parent family. While the Cautious and avoidant approaches are similar, the Cautious approach involves waiting to address potential stigma until children encounter issues, aiming to avoid

unnecessary anxiety, while the neutral approach minimizes emphasis on family structure differences, treating them as non-issues unless raised by the child. It found that all parents engaged in socialization in some way and that this socialization was unique to being in a LG-parent family and understanding or preparing for a heteronormative society. It was found that parents employed practices that celebrated being in an LG-Parent family, while also engaging in practices that discussed or prepared children for discrimination.

Most fathers described socialization practices as unique to being in an LG-parent family. This concept of socialization builds upon the work of racial and ethnic socialization practices, which in this domain refers to the explicit and implicit emphasis on racial and ethnic pride and promotion of cultural traditions and heritage (Hughes et al., 2006). This research has predominantly centered around four major themes: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, Promotion of Mistrust, and Egalitarianism (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2014). Cultural Socialization was seen in this study, with many fathers choosing to engage in pride events or take their children to LGBTQ+ family events or trips. Preparation for bias was also seen, with parents talking to their children about potential teasing and explaining how to respond to questions about their family type. Promotion of mistrust, which refers to sowing mistrust in other ethnic groups (Hughes et al., 2006), was not seen in this study, as fathers did not encourage their children to mistrust, for example, heterosexual people. This being said, there was some discussion about distrusting certain areas of the United States, such as the South or more rural areas, but this was not mentioned as being an explicit conversation with children. Egalitarianism, which is a strategy in which parents explicitly encourage their children to value individual qualities over group membership

or avoid conversations about race and ethnicity altogether (or in this case, parent sexuality) was seen in this study. This approach was seen in this study, especially by parents with a Neutral approach, who emphasized that their children were just like their peers and their family type was normal and not worth pointing out. Therefore, this study builds upon the literature that suggests a socialization framework is appropriate to be applied to LG-parenting. It is important to note that certain aspects of LG-Parent socialization are made easier by parents being LGBTQ+ themselves, such as engaging in pride or LG-parent events. This is different from, for example, gay parents who adopt a child of a different race and then aim to socialize this child into being a part of a group that they themselves are not a part of (Golberg et al., 2016). These nuances and intersections of parent identities with privilege can be important to note when comparing LG-parent socialization and racial socialization.

The literature currently does not include research explicitly about the socialization practices of gay fathers with children born through surrogacy. Therefore, these findings build most closely upon the work of previous studies conducted on gay fathers with children through adoption. For example, a study on both lesbian and gay fathers with children born through adoption described two to LG-parent socialization: an engaged or Cautious approach (Goldberg et al., 2016). Within the engaged approach in this study, three strategies were found: holding parent–child conversations aimed at instilling pride, seeking communities that reflect their child's identities, and educating about heterosexism (Goldberg et al., 2016). All of these strategies were also seen by fathers with children born through surrogacy in this study, with all being sub-themes of the Proactive approach. The Cautious approach described in this study was also similar

to the Cautious approach described in this study with parents not wanting to over-emphasize difference (Goldberg, 2016)

Fathers in the present study often described facing intense questioning about the lack of a mother in their family, and were often mistaken as "giving mom the night off." This was also true of their children who were asked questions like "is your mother dead?", "Where is your mom?" or "How is it possible that you don't have a mom, everyone has a mom." This makes sense given the centrality of mothers to contemporary ideas about families (Freeark et al., 2008) and also the biological necessity of females. Goldberg et al., found in their study that compared lesbian and gay adoptive parents fathers were more likely to be Cautious because they were more sensitive to their children being labeled as different for not having a mom (2016). The study also found that gay fathers were more likely to prepare their children for heterosexism, which the authors theorized may be because of this increased questioning (Golberg et al., 2016). Fathers in the present study often noted that they felt more discriminated against as two fathers due to societal norms about men not being primary caregivers or caregivers at all. The fact that this study was all fathers was certainly influential on the data in informing experiences of discrimination or questioning and is markedly different from what is experienced by lesbians.

The Proactive parenting strategies described in this study are similar to the results from a study of nearly 100 adoptive LG-parents, which found that a majority of parents endorsed behaviors designed to promote children's awareness of diverse family structures and prepare them for potential stigma along three dimensions: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, and Proactive Parenting (Oakley et al., 2017). These findings are aligned with the active parenting strategies described by parents (Choosing

to live in a diverse and accepting place, diversifying media and books, talking about diverse family types, having open and age-appropriate conversations, and preparing children for difficult questions and homophobia). Interestingly, this study also studied the frequency in which each of these topics was discussed and found that parents more often engaged in promoting pride and teaching LGBTQ+ history rather than preparing for potential victimization, which was not a measure in the present study (Oakley et al., 2017). Overall this study complements the present study in confirming that there are unique socialization strategies employed by LG-parents.

These results also align with a quantitative study that employed the Sexual Minority Parent Socialization Beliefs Scale (SMP-SBS) found that parents either agreed or strongly agreed that socialization practices in general were important in their family, and on a different scale the Sexual Minority Parent Socialization Self-Efficacy Scale found that most parents felt efficacy in socializing their children (Battalen et al., 2019). The study also found that "Parents' own experience of discrimination and marginalization as a sexual-minority person and anticipation that their children may encounter it too can create stress, leading them to consider different ways to prepare for and manage bias with their children" which is certainly inline with what fathers in this study had to say about preparing for bias, with multiple respondents mentioning their own experiences with discrimination concerning their children (Battalen et al., 2019).

A theme that came up in interviews on multiple occasions was fathers wanting their children to understand their surrogacy origins. In the interviews it was seen that fathers talked about surrogates, giving them names such as "helper mommy," kept photos or scrapbooks about the surrogacy process, and sometimes kept a relationship with the surrogate mother. This is in line with a study on 31 children born through

surrogacy with gay fathers which found that before the child was aged 4 years had started to disclose their use of a surrogate (Carone et al., 2017). Most of the children also showed a clear understanding of their surrogacy process, and of those with awareness of the surrogate mother, most displayed gratefulness towards her (Carone et al., 2017). Disclosure is also an important theme within research on heterosexual couples or single people who use surrogacy. For example, a longitudinal study of children born through surrogacy found that more positive family relationships and higher levels of adolescent well-being were found for adolescents who had been told about their biological origins before age 7 (Ilioi et al., 2017). It would be interesting to see if this effect would also be seen in gay father families, and these results may show how a Proactive approach can be better in the domain of disclosure.

In the interviews fathers generally described their children as being happy and well-adjusted. This was specifically prevalent in fathers who employed a Cautious approach, as they didn't want to disturb this contentment with discussion of heavy topics such as stigma or their conception. This is in line with the literature on the adjustment of children born through surrogacy with gay fathers. For example, a study of 40 gay father families and a comparison group of lesbians with children born through donor insemination in the US found that Children in both family types showed high levels of adjustment with lower levels of children's internalizing problems reported by gay fathers (Golombok et al., 2017). A parallel study, also with 40 gay father families through surrogacy and lesbians through surrogacy conducted in Italy found similar results, Externalizing and internalizing problems in both groups scored within the normal range (Carone et al., 2017). Another study that compared seventy gay fathers through surrogacy, 125 lesbian mothers through donor insemination, and 195

heterosexual parents through spontaneous conception found that Children of gay fathers and lesbian mothers were reported as showing fewer psychological problems than children of heterosexual parents (Baiocco et al., 2018). Overall, fathers' confidence that their children were happy and healthy seems to be reflected in the literature as we

4.2 Implications for psychology

The results of this thematic analysis has implications for multiple areas of psychology and services for gay fathers. These include family therapists who work with gay fathers, counselors and psychologists who work with individual gay men who are fathers, schools and educators, and finally by surrogacy agencies and surrogate mothers.

Family therapists and counselors

According to the American Psychological Association, family therapy focuses on the improvement of the behavioral patterns of the family unit as a whole, and should include systematic thinking that considers the biological, environmental, and cultural influences on the family unit (APA, 2018). Approaches that fathers take to socializing their children should certainly be considered within biological, environmental, and cultural factors. Family therapists should aim to understand the approach that fathers take to socialization and to tailor the therapy to their unique needs. Therapists should also understand whether or not there is agreement in socialization strategy between fathers, and to understand what other entities or people may be involved in socialization. If there are conflicts in terms of socialization strategy, it could be useful to help families resolve this conflict and come to a clear and well-communicated approach to socialization. Understanding gay fathers' approach to socialization can also create deeper understanding of family dynamics, such as understanding how the family unit

understands stigma and how they might react to or process a stigmatizing event. Finally, understanding fathers' socialization approach could be helpful in understanding how children themselves may think about topics of family diversity.

Individual counseling and therapy for gay fathers

In terms of individual therapy for gay fathers, socializing children should also be understood as a potential stressor. Fathers, especially those with a cautious approach, may experience stress about how they should socialize their child, and also can experience anxiety due to the stress of socializing their child. According to the Minority Stress Theory, stigma and prejudice experiences can affect both physical and mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ people (Meyer, I. H., 2003). Experiences of stigma can lead to hiding and concealing behaviors, internalized homophobia, and healthy or unhealthy coping strategies (Meyer, I. H., 2003). Gay fathers not only have a stigmatized identity, but also may experience further stigma as a gay father and as a male parent in general. Therefore, it is critical for therapists to understand how fathers are coping with these compounding stressors. Many fathers in the interviews did mention experiencing looks or inappropriate questions from strangers in public. The following quote from Matthew summarizes what other fathers said, that they often got looks or comments when it was obvious that they were a family unit in public.

Matthew: *I think you get looks when they see you being tender, and it's obvious that you are a family unit. I think you get looks you notice. I don't try and pay attention because it's just not worth my effort, just see you staring at me in the mall, or just see them staring at us at the restaurant, you know.*

Another interesting aspect is that parents may be re-living or remembering childhood experiences of childhood teasing, and this is another topic that may be helpful to explore in individual therapy. Arthur mentioned this in his interview.

Arthur: *Growing up gay, we were young and you get teased and stuff. We are very sensitive to that. So I want to make sure that that was, um, we know how to approach that.*

Beyond stigma, gay fathers may also experience anxiety about difficult conversations they could have with their children about their conception, why they don't have a mother, or why their daddies wanted to have them. One way a therapist could support a gay father would be going through a role-play scenario where the therapist acts as a child and asks the father these difficult questions. In this way, the father could try out various responses to these questions and see which one feels the most authentic. Then, when the child asks these questions the father would already have his responses ready.

Schools and educators

The results of this study also have important implications for schools and educators. Many fathers in the study talked about choosing their child's school based on their acceptance of LGBTQ+ families because they wanted their child to feel safe and also have other examples of family diversity around them. They also talked about how classroom discussions of family often brought up conversations with their children such

as Mother's day card-making or drawing families. On days like this or while doing projects that celebrate families, teachers can use this moment to educate about family diversity and talk about how not every family has a mommy and a daddy. Teachers should also understand how gay fathers socialize their children about being in a gay father family and follow the lead of parents to help the child feel supported from all sides. Teachers should also be mindful of potential teasing and let children know that they are not required to explain any details about their family to their peers, and should only talk about what they are comfortable with.

Surrogacy agencies

As mentioned in the literature review, surrogacy agencies are a critical part of the journey most gay men go through when becoming fathers through surrogacy. These organizations should understand that once fathers have a child, the process has only begun, and now fathers are faced with the socialization and parenting process. When agencies are working with potential fathers, they could consider asking fathers how they would talk to their children about being in a two-father family. While fathers are considering the legal, financial, and logistical aspects of having a child through surrogacy, they should also be prepared for the emotional aspect of socializing their children, and what approach makes the most sense for their family.

Another important service that surrogacy agencies provide is connecting potential fathers with other gay fathers who have had children through surrogacy, and creating community among this very small portion of the population who are gay fathers through surrogacy. Making these connections can help fathers understand that they are not alone in their challenges raising children born through surrogacy. Like

mentioned in this thesis, it is possible that fathers can exchange ideas such as how to explain surrogacy, what to call surrogate mothers, what media to consume with their children, and general parenting strategies that have worked or not worked. For example, this could look like a support group either digitally or in person about how to answer difficult questions from children.

4.3 Limitations

Although this study aimed to ascertain as much helpful information from fathers about socialization as possible, there are also some limitations to this study.

First of all, the fact that this study was a qualitative analysis meant that it lacked some information that a quantitative study could have provided. For example, in Oakley's study (2017), the researchers collected information about the frequency of different items on a 20-item scale developed for the study which had items about to assess three underlying dimensions: Preparation for Bias (8 items), Cultural Socialization (5 items), and Proactive Parenting (7 items). This allowed the researchers to understand how often fathers employed different practices in the past year. The present study being qualitative meant that questions were open-ended, and therefore every father did not respond to questions about each specific practice and item like in the Oakley study.

Another limitation of this study was that most fathers were White and with a medium-to-high socioeconomic status. This homogenous sample is an unfortunate consequence of the extremely high cost of surrogacy, with commercial surrogacy costing upwards of $150,000 in the US (Growing Generations, May & Tenzek, 2016). For example, many fathers in this study discussed using nannies or private schools, which is not affordable to many families in the US. As technology advances and if costs

improve for surrogacy, there is hope that more diverse families will begin to use surrogacy and it will be available to people of all incomes, and hopefully, psychological research will reflect this as well. This sample size was also limited by this factor, and therefore a larger sample size could lead to more representative data.

As noted in the methods, multiple strategies were used to recruit as diverse a sample as possible, through associations of sexual minority parent families, sexual minority parent web groups and forums, events with sexual minority parents attending, and word-of-mouth from participating fathers. The fact that some participants were recruited through associations of sexual minority parents means that these parents may already be biased towards a Proactive approach, given their involvement in an organization. Additionally, given that no compensation was provided, fathers in the study volunteered their information, meaning that the sample may have been biased toward parents who wanted to contribute to research about the LG-parent community.

An additional limitation is that the study's findings are situated within the social and legal context of the time it was conducted. As societal attitudes and legal frameworks continue to evolve, future research will be needed to understand how these changes impact socialization practices of gay fathers using surrogacy.

4.4 Recommendation for future research

Although the parent perspective featured in this analysis is very enlightening, future research could also focus on the perspectives of children born through surrogacy with gay fathers. For example, one qualitative study studied youth aged 13-20 with adoptive LG-parents and found that parental preparation for dealing with adoptism and heterosexism/homophobia can facilitate an easier disclosure process for youth regarding their family structure and that in a few cases, youth wished their parents had spent more

time discussing difficult situations that they might encounter (e.g., teasing about having two moms) and language for handling such situations (Gianino et al., 2009). It would be interesting to replicate this for socialization strategies with gay fathers with children born through surrogacy and to follow longitudinally how the strategies (Proactive, Cautious, neutral) affected variables such as child psychological adjustment and ability to deal with discrimination later in life. Additionally, since in the present study, most children were under the age of 10, it would be interesting to see how socialization practices change throughout the teen years.

The present study used a qualitative design to explore fathers' socialization strategies. Future research could also take a quantitative approach to this data, which would give more insight into the frequency of conversations and help to quantify the differences between the three approaches to socialization. For example, A study could be made using the Sexual Minority Parent Socialization Beliefs Scale (SMP-SBS) which was modified from racial socialization literature and has already been used to explore the socialization strategies of adoptive parents (Battalen et al., 2018). Additionally, the Minority Stress Scale (MSS) could be used to quantify parent or child experiences of stigma. The MSS consists of 50 items assessing (a) Structural Stigma, (b) Enacted Stigma, (c) Expectations of Discrimination, (d) Sexual Orientation Concealment, (e) Internalized Homophobia Toward Others, (f) Internalized Homophobia toward Oneself, and (g) Stigma Awareness (Pala et al., 2018). This measure could be useful to understand both parent and child (older children) experiences of stigma.

Although this study built upon studies on gay fathers with children through adoption, gay fathers with children through adoption were not directly compared in this

study. Therefore future research could utilize identical methodology to compare fathers both through surrogacy and adoption, to understand differences in socialization strategies and child outcomes. Additionally, it would be interesting to understand the satisfaction levels fathers have with each of these processes, children's outcomes, and if they would consider a different approach to having children if they could go back in time.

Finally, many studies (eg. Oakley et al., 2017, Goldberg et al., 2016) compared samples of gay adoptive fathers with samples of lesbian adoptive mothers. In terms of surrogacy, it could be interesting to compare socialization strategies of lesbian mothers who used donor insemination surrogacy with gay fathers who used surrogacy. Since Goldberg found gay fathers experience more discrimination and prepared their children for bias more, it would be interesting to see if this effect could be changed or influenced by having a genetic relation to their child.

4.5 Conclusion

This study has successfully contributed to the existing literature on gay parenting by employing qualitative thematic analysis that investigated the socialization strategies of 67 gay fathers with children born through surrogacy. It fills a gap in the literature that has been left because current studies only focus on the socialization strategies of gay fathers with children born through adoption. It concluded that these fathers adopted three strategies to socialization: Proactive, Cautious, or Neutral approaches, all of which aim to help children understand their family structure and prepare children for potential discrimination. A Proactive approach was defined by concrete actions to promote pride and combat homophobia, with an acknowledgment

that children could face discrimination. A Cautious approach was defined by ambivalence as to whether or not talking about family structure or homophobia with children could do more harm than good. Finally, a Neutral approach emphasized the normality of gay-father families and didn't see conversations about it as necessary. These three approaches show that not all gay fathers with children born through surrogacy think the same about how to socialize their children. The limitations of this study included that it was qualitative, and therefore was missing information that could be ascertained only by a quantitative analysis, and a lack of diversity in the sample in terms of race and socioeconomic status. Future research on gay fathers with children born through surrogacy could employ quantitative methods, and focus on children's perspectives or children's outcomes. There is a potential for these findings to contribute to the practices of surrogacy agencies, family therapists, schools and teachers, and therapists to gay fathers.

4.6 Reflexivity

This section is written in the first person as it reflects upon my personal experience of this research. I came into this analysis with a deep passion for LGBTQ+ psychology. This being said, I think the LGBTQ+ community as a whole is unaware of the obstacles that are faced by LG-parents, and the great lengths that they go to become parents. The literature review in particular taught me a lot of new information that I didn't know about gestational surrogacy.

I definitely didn't consider previously how gay parenting is the most challenging and expensive way to become a parent, as lesbians are able to carry a child. I would not

have guessed that it costs over $150,000, but now understanding all the factors that go into especially gestational surrogacy, it now makes sense.

Beyond this, a lot of men in this study faced a lot of negative comments and negative reactions due not to being gay, but to being a male parent. This was surprising as I was expecting homophobia to be the source of the majority of negative comments or uncomfortable questions. But really, it came from people believing that caring for young children must be associated with women. Therefore, it can be hard to parse out for gay fathers if the discrimination they are facing is because they are men or because they are gay.

Secondly, I was not previously aware that the US is the only place in the world where surrogacy for gay men is common and somewhat regulated or industrialized. This caused me to reflect on the importance of this research and the privilege that I experience as an American gay man.

Because of this double stigma, and the high cost, many gay men do not believe that they even have the option to become a parent. Gay fathers through surrogacy truly face the highest barriers yet their passion for parenting drives them past each barrier. Therefore, I feel this research is significant, and I hope someday surrogacy can be a more common or accessible practice. But first, there needs to be greater understanding and I believe psychological research can be a stepping stone on that path.

In terms of research challenges, at times it was hard to divide fathers into different strategies because naturally, most fathers exhibited a mix of these behaviors. Therefore, I tried to divide them into strategies by how they *thought* about socialization. For example, cautious and neutral approaches were distinguished mostly by whether they *thought* more about alarming the child or if they thought socialization wasn't

necessary because their family was normal. Therefore, fathers changed strategies at times upon multiple read-throughs.

Although the categories were at times difficult to define, I do now feel that the results overall represent a large portion of what the fathers were saying. I really enjoyed the process of synthesizing the interviews into something coherent and easy to understand. The process taught me so much both about gay parenting and also qualitative research.

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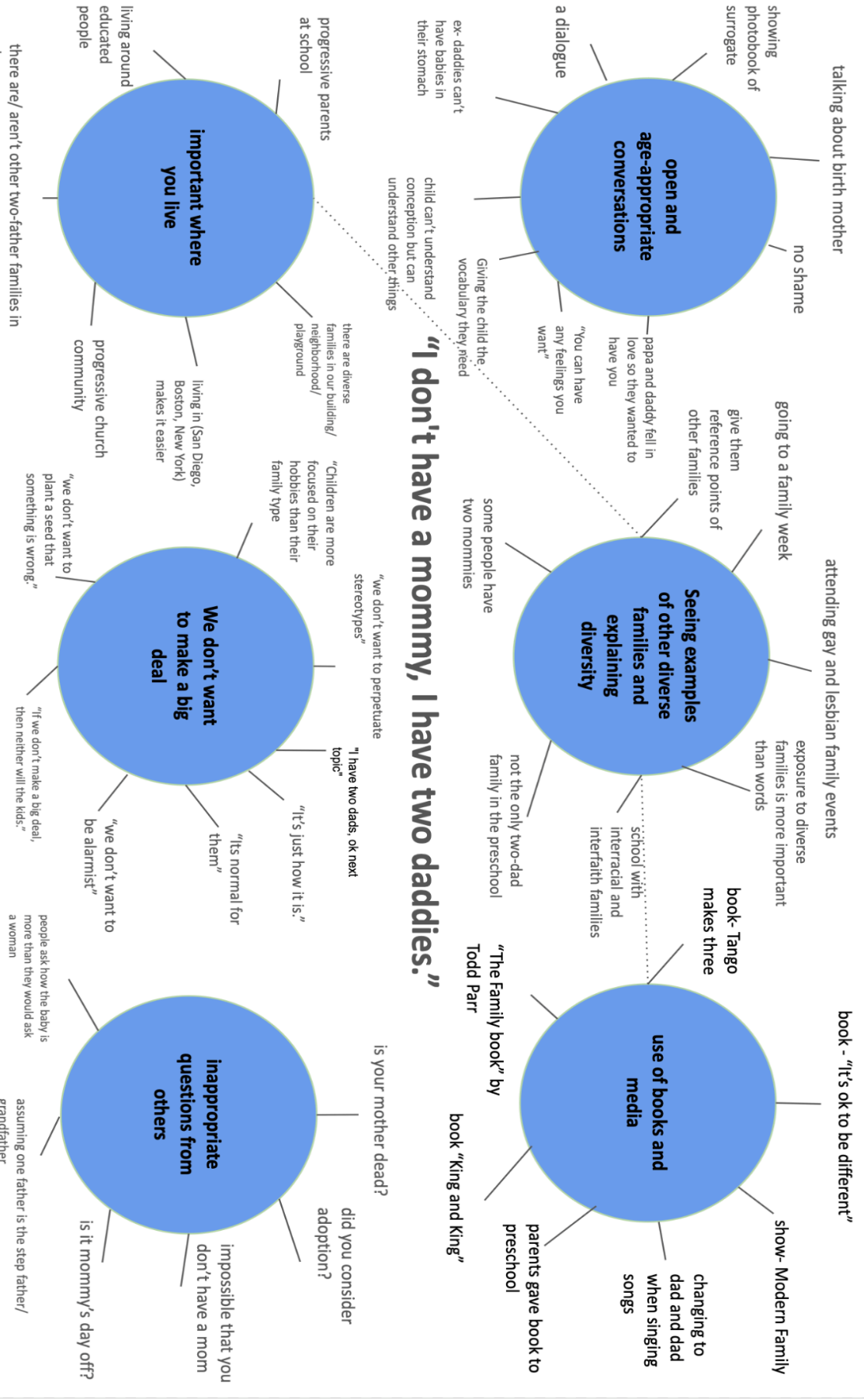
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Appendix 1.0: First-draft map

"I don't have a mommy, I have two daddies."

open and age-appropriate conversations
- talking about birth mother
- showing photobook of surrogate
- no shame
- a dialogue
- ex- daddies can't have babies in their stomach
- "You can have any feelings you want"
- papa and daddy fell in love so they wanted to have you
- give them reference points of other families
- Giving the child the vocabulary they need
- child can't understand conception but can understand other things

important where you live
- progressive parents at school
- living around educated people
- there are/ aren't other two-father families in
- progressive church community
- "we don't want to plant a seed that something is wrong."
- living in (San Diego, Boston, New York) makes it easier
- there are diverse families in our building/ neighborhood/ playground

Seeing examples of other diverse families and explaining diversity
- going to a family week
- attending gay and lesbian family events
- exposure to diverse families is more important than words
- some people have two mommies
- not the only two-dad family in the preschool
- school with interracial and interfaith families

We don't want to make a big deal
- "Children are more focused on their hobbies than their family type"
- "we don't want to perpetuate stereotypes"
- "I have two dads, ok next topic"
- "It's just how it is."
- "Its normal for them"
- "we don't want to be alarmist"
- "If we don't make a big deal, then neither will the kids."

use of books and media
- book- Tango makes three
- book - "It's ok to be different"
- "The Family book" by Todd Parr
- book "King and King"
- show- Modern Family
- changing to dad and dad when singing songs
- parents gave book to preschool

inappropriate questions from others
- is your mother dead?
- did you consider adoption?
- impossible that you don't have a mom
- is it mommy's day off?
- assuming one father is the step father/ grandfather
- people ask how the baby is more than they would ask a woman

Appendix 2.0: Interview Questions

Questions for families headed by gay fathers

- Have you talked [child] about being in a gay parent family?

    o   If not, do you think you will?

- When did you begin talking to him/her?

- What did you say to him/her?

- In the last year, roughly how often do you think you have had conversations about being in a gay parent family?

- Has this changed over time?

- Who initiates these conversations?

- Has this changed over time?

- What are [child's] questions?

- Have you talked to them about problems they may face/ possible teasing?

    o   What have you said? How have they reacted?

- To your knowledge do you think [child] has ever experienced homophobia or has been teased for having two dads?

    o   If yes, what happened?

    o   How did [child] react?

    o   What did you do?

- Have you given [child] any advice of what to do if it happens again?

- Have you experienced any negative reactions from others?
    o   Family members, friends, or strangers?

- Is there any advice you would give to gay men wishing to become a parent?