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# Intimate Relationships Of Adults Raised In Same-Sex Families

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INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS OF ADULTS RAISED IN SAME-SEX FAMILIES

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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2012

This dissertation, submitted by Thomas Roskos in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

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## PERMISSION

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Thomas Roskos  
July 9, 2012

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To Rudy and John

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the close relationship experiences of adults raised by sexual minority parents. The study used a Grounded Theory (GT) method. Seven individuals that were either born to sexual minority parents or found out their parents were sexual minorities later in life participated in this present study. Each participant completed an over the phone, semi-structured interview. Specifically, questions were asked regarding their family history, relationships with their parents, peers, romantic partners, and others, their experiences with heterosexism, their experiences coming out, and their perspectives on sexuality and gender.

In accordance with GT, the data was analyzed by following three general steps: (a) creating codes for each participant's responses, (b) developing categories of common codes through a constant comparison technique, and (c) generating a theoretical model that was based in the experiences of the participants. This qualitative analysis revealed several meaningful categories pertaining to the relationship experiences of adults raised in same-sex families. The categories that emerged in this study included: (a) developing an identity, (b) managing discrimination experiences, (c) developing disclosing strategies, (d) selecting romantic partners, (e) understanding contextual influences informing partner selection, (f) generating gender roles, and (g) developing broader ideas on sexuality. The central construct, the unifying theme

among all the categories, was acceptance. These categories lead to a thorough and rich understanding of the participants' experiences of relationships, particularly romantic relationships. There are several important findings that have implications for future research.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Childhood experiences contribute to the way people initiate and maintain intimate relationships. For many individuals, their parents' relationship provided the first and most convenient and enduring example of a long term, intimate relationship. Often the parent's relationships are heterosexual, with one or two partners raising the children. Yet, in some families, the parents identify as a sexual minority. As a result, the family structure may look quite different than the traditional family structure, and children of these families may have different experiences than children raised by heterosexuals.

The literature on same-sex families blends words and worlds that have been historically kept separate; for example, the words "gay" and "family" or "lesbian" and "mother" are commonly used. Furthermore, traditional assumptions about parents and families, rooted in heteronormative ideologies, are often challenged (Lev, 2010; Stacey, 2006; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Reviewing the literature on sexual minority parents and their children, same-sex families and relationship development, many intriguing themes emerge. First, the notion of same -sex families challenges many of the fundamental beliefs about the typical, traditional family (Lev, 2010). Second, as a whole, sexual minority parents challenge the definition of what it is to be an effective parent. In spite of heterosexist attitudes that sexual minority individuals are woefully

inadequate parents, research demonstrates there are quite successful in the role. For example, lesbian mother's parent child interactions were rated to be higher than heterosexual mothers' interactions (Golombok, Tasker, & Murray, 1997) and lesbian mothers demonstrate more parenting skills than heterosexual fathers (Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995). Third, in a culture that only expects children of sexual minority parents to become a sexual minority themselves, there is growing evidence that they are in fact capable of much more. Psychological and social adjustments are comparable to children raised in heterosexual families and, in several areas, exceed children raised in opposite-sex families demonstrating fewer behavior problems (Gartrell & Bos, 2010).

Though just as well adjusted, children of sexual minority parents do have different experiences than their heterosexual family counterparts (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Given the importance of the parent's relationship as a model to their children, one would expect to find differences in the children's own close relationships. Additionally, the trusting bonds that develop between parents and children are thought to be replicated, at least to some extent, between romantic partners. Further, Bowlby (1988) noted that humans have a tendency to form and maintain attachment bonds, often enduring from birth across the lifespan. While children of sexual minority parents demonstrate secure attachment to their caregiver (Bennett, 2003), much less is known about how these attachment bonds manifest in later relationships of children in same sex families. Given the potential differences between the experiences of children raised in same-sex and opposite-sex families, there could be difference in their adult romantic relationship experiences.



There are notable missing topics in the extant literature related to children of sexual minority parents. Very little is known about the experiences of children raised in same-sex families after they become adults. In fact almost nothing is known about their close relationships as adults. To address a gap in the literature and investigate a new direction in same-sex family research, this study explored how these nontraditional families with sexual minority parents shaped the lives of their children. More specifically, it explored how the lessons, strategies, and experiences within their nontraditional families impacted their lives when those children, as adults, developed relationships with peers, romantic partner, and others. This study used attachment theory as the foundation and structure to understand the close relationships of adults raised in same-sex families. In order to learn about these experiences of this population, this study interviewed adults raised by lesbian and gay parents. To capture the experiences of participants in a structured, empirical way that honored the power of their stories, a Grounded Theory method was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded Theory allowed for an in depth exploration of participants and, through a process of data analysis, generated themes that were grounded in the experiences of the participants.

### Overview of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to create a context to appreciate the relationship experiences of adults raised by men or women in a same-sex relationship; it explores several topic areas including, the historical context of research on lesbian and gay issues, the experience of lesbians and gay men in society, the role of parents,

the experiences of lesbian and gay parents, the experience of their children, as well as romantic relationships and attachment. Each of these sections is explored next.

This literature also reviewed the qualitative methodology, Grounded Theory, used to explore the relationships experience of adult raised in same-sex families. Grounded Theory (GT) relies on a creative process where exploration and looking at data from a different perspective allows that data to tell their “story.” Unlike other research methodologies, GT does not encourage a lengthy, initial literature review (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While it is important have working knowledge about the particular area (experience with a population, knowing something about a phenomena), it is not necessary to be an expert. In fact, too much knowledge and expertise threatens to limit the process of discovery and exploration (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Rather than rely on exhaustive literature review, GT advocates for a cursory exposure to the literature so that researchers may immerse themselves in the data without attempting to fit it into existing theories or models. Therefore, the following literature reviews the general concepts and is intentionally not exhaustive; it involves in exploring same-sex families, men and women in same sex relationships, intimate relationships, and children raised in same sex families. A more thorough literature review occurs in the discussion sections of this paper which is congruent with GT research method.

#### *Historical Context of Research on Bisexual, Lesbian and Gay Family Issues*

The historical trends of research involving same-sex parents and their children have ebbed and flowed. Research on same-sex families began in the late 1970’s. This early research addressed the need of documentation in court cases on child custody, focusing on whether or not children would turn out “normal” if they were raised by

bisexual, lesbian or gay parent (Fitzgerald, 1999). Thus, research examined whether or not sexual minorities were fit to be parents. Critics were skeptical that children growing up in same-sex families would struggle with gender identity, have a higher “risk” of becoming a sexual minority, and struggle with discrimination as well as destroy the traditional heterosexual family and corrupt the moral fabric of American culture (Cameron, 2009). In order to address these concerns, researchers began comparing heterosexual families with same-sex families and children of heterosexual sexual families with children of same-sex families. This comparative research agenda looked for “no differences” between children (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

Research on same-sex couples in 1990’s was bolstered as a result of the political controversy regarding granting same-sex couples the right to marriage (Goldhaber, 2007). While the legal right to marry focuses on the experience of bisexual, lesbian and gay partners, it has crucial ramifications for the experiences of same-sex families. Among the ramifications include a legal legitimization of the same-sex unions. Although the stigma attached to lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents may not be eliminated it is important to consider how the experience of the family might change as a result a legalized same-sex couple marriage across the country. Some researchers separate the issues of gay marriage from same-sex families on the basis that political nature of the issues makes working among the terms and issues a bit cumbersome. These political issues are part of the daily lives of those advocating for same-sex couples right to marriage and it will impact bisexual, lesbian and gay headed families.

The identity of the same-sex family also challenges the traditional structure of the family. The social and political ramifications of such challenges weighed heavy on

the long-held notions that children would be somehow damaged if they were raised by homosexuals. That bisexual, lesbian and gay parents could raise well adjusted children threatened the hegemonic, patriarchal ideals used in the social construction of the identity of the family. Slowly, the literature is moving beyond the “no difference”, looking instead for unique aspects of the experiences of those in same-sex families (Biblarz & Savci, 2010).

Research on same-sex families has relied heavily on lesbian mothers; considering historical parenting trends among heterosexuals, this may not be surprising. In the 1990s, the number of sexual minorities raising children increased dramatically; this was particularly true among lesbian women. The trend was so pronounced it was labeled the “lesbian baby boom” or “gayby boom” (Patterson, 1992, 1998; Johnson & O’Connor, 2002). Consequently, much research has taken advantage of relative higher population of lesbian mothers at the expense of exploring families headed by gay and bisexual males, bisexual females, and transgender individuals.

Currently, the research on same-sex families aims to gather more representative samples and incorporate diverse methodologies and conceptualizes from a theoretical orientation outside the heteronormative perspective (i.e. Queer Theory, Feminist Theory). Understudied populations are beginning to receive more attention. These populations include sexual minority parents, including families parented by gay fathers, bisexual females and males, and transgender individuals (Goldberg, 2010). Samples in most research on same-sex families have over- relied on volunteer, White, middle to upper class individuals, and consequently future research and would benefit from more diverse samples (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Fitzgerald, 1999). .In terms of children of

nonheterosexual parents, the research continues to focus on comparing them to children raised by heterosexual parents, although some researchers advocate moving beyond comparative research (Stacey, 2006). Children that identify as sexual minorities being raised by sexual minority parents (Kovalanka & Goldberg, 2009), as well as the experiences of children after they grow up, move out, and establish their lives have also drawn some attention (Goldberg, 2007a, 2007b). Overall, research continues to explore and appreciate the unique contributions of the same-sex parents and their children.

### *Defining Same-sex Families*

A discussion of definitions for lesbian or bisexual mothers, gay or bisexual fathers, and their families is needed for a clear understanding of the populations described. But first, a brief discussion on sexual orientation is warranted. The term “sexual orientation” is more complex than simply one’s sexual preference; it specifically describes one’s true inclinations in sexuality across areas of arousal, attraction, fantasy, and others (Worthington & Reynolds, 2009). A closely related and often conflated term is “sexual identity”, referring to one’s personal understanding, awareness, and label of their actual sexual predisposition (Worthington & Reynolds, 2009). People may experience and practice their sexual orientation and identity at varying degrees of congruence.

These distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity allows for a more precise and complex understanding of one’s sexuality and allow for a broader range of sexuality expression. For example, a man in an opposite-sex relationship who is attracted to other men may have a sexual identity as a heterosexual male and have a sexual orientation as a gay or bisexual male; however, this male does not have to be

labeled with a term that narrowly describes his sexuality. Sometimes same-sex families are created when people leave an established, long term heterosexual relationship and begin a relationship with a partner of the same-sex; they may have had a clear, outward sexual identity as a heterosexual and a less clear awareness of their sexual orientation. The concepts of sexual orientation and sexual identity allow for a more honest and accurate method to describe sexuality (or how sexuality evolves).

Often sexual minorities and transgender individuals are categorized by the acronym, “LGBT”, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. While this term is accurate for some, it is not sufficiently descriptive for others. As a result, the term LGBT, is often used an inclusive term when it can actually unfairly hide nuanced differences in sexual orientation and gender expression (Short, Riggs, Perlesz, Brown, & Kane, 2007)

While terms such as these are helpful understanding individuals’ sexuality, they have not traditionally been used to describe families (Laird, 1993). In fact, developing a label to describe families with lesbian, gay, or bisexual parents has been challenging (Goldberg, 2010). The terms “lesbian family” and “gay family” have been used to describe families with at least one lesbian, gay, or bisexual member, or a family headed by a lesbian or gay person or couple (Patterson, 1994). By this general definition, any lesbian or gay member of a family, parent or child, would make a family a “lesbian or gay family.” As a result, these terms may be confusing. Moreover, Fassinger and Arsenau (2007) noted that some sexual minorities do *not* use labels such as “lesbian” and “gay” to identify their sexual orientation, thus limiting the inclusiveness of such labels when describing a population. The confusion could be reduced by adopting

more accurate terms. For example, Laird (1993) suggests that a family with at least one member who is lesbian, gay, or bisexual is a mixed sexual orientation household called a “dual orientation family.” Therefore, a lesbian female raised in a heterosexual family would refer to her family of origin as having a dual orientation family. However, she and her partner may maintain a lesbian household (Laird, 1993).

The term “same-sex family” has also been commonly used to describe a family headed by a lesbian or gay couple (Laird, 1993; D’Ercole & Drescher, 2004). This term allows for a much broader description of an individual’s sexual orientation and sexual identity within the family and does not lose descriptive power if an individual’s sexual orientation and sexual identity evolve. Therefore, this study uses the term same-sex family; which is defined as having two or more head of house-hold adults who share a same-sex relation or orientation, or when there is at least one lesbian or gay adult parenting or co-parenting a biologically related, adopted, or fostered child.

When reviewing the literature from the last ten years through *PsychInfo*, the search term “lesbian and gay family” returned more matches than “same-sex family”. While the term “lesbian and gay family” was the most common term used to describe this population overall, it has limitations. Importantly, this term excludes people who do not identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual that may be in same-sex relationships. As a result, the more inclusive term, “same-sex family”, was used to describe this population.

It is difficult to estimate the number of same-sex families. Based on the 2000 Census, data there were about 600,000 same-sex couples living in the United States. Gates and Ost (2004) estimated that 34% of lesbian couples and 22% of gay male

couples between the ages of 22 and 55 had children; based on this estimate, there are about 200,000 children under the age of 18 living with same-sex couples. The current study uses a definition of same-sex families that includes both single and multiple parent construction requiring a broader estimate of same-sex families. Bozett (1987a) noted that between 1 and 3 million gay males were natural fathers and Falk (1989) noted between 1.5 and 5 million lesbians were mothers--therefore, estimate of same-sex families might range from 2.5 to 8 million. Fitzgerald (1999) noted that the total number of children and adults with sexual minority parents was between 6 million and 14 million.

#### *Topic Areas and Trends in Same-sex Family Research*

The literature on same-sex families has changed and matured over the past 30 years. This change reflects the dynamic social, political, moral, and cultural attitudes that have shaped the structure of the same-sex family. Despite generally unfavorable attitudes, sexual minority parents and their children have established a foundation and built an identity in American culture. As this section demonstrates, aspects of earlier themes in the literature are still relevant today. For example, comparing the psychological adjustment of children raised by sexual minority parents to those raised by heterosexual parents was a chief task of early research and continues to draw attention. However, the research focus has matured; no longer is comparison between same-sex and opposite-sex families the primary aim of the research. Now, more researchers intend to understand the unique aspects of same-sex parents and their children (Stacey, 2006).



Several authors have summarized the literature on same-sex families.

Reviewing their work, several common themes emerge. The main topic areas, within the portion that focused on families, included same-sex romantic relationships, sexual minorities as parents, the social and the psychological development and adjustment of sexual minority parents and their children, and the political implications of same-sex families (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Fitzgerald, 1999; Allen & Demo, 1995). The following section briefly reviews trends in these topic areas; they are elaborated on later in the literature review.

Allen and Demo (1995) conducted a review of the literature to determine the extent to which same-sex parents had been integrated into the literature of several fields including family relations, psychology, and sociology. This thorough review included a two phase process and examined 8,000 articles from nine journals. The first phase included three journals; the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Family Relations*, and the *Journal of Family Issues*. The researchers searched all the content from these journals from 1980-1993 using general terms relating to sexual orientation, including “bisexual”, “gay”, “lesbian”, and “sexual preference”, and other terms like “sexuality”, “alternative family”, “non-traditional family.” The search reviewed 2598 articles yielding 12 articles that focused on lesbian and gay families. Next, during the second phase, the researchers expanded their literature search to include related fields like psychology and sociology to determine the extent to which they focus lesbian and gay families. Therefore, the authors reviewed articles from 1980 to 1993 in six journals including, the *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *American Sociological*

*Review, American Journal of Sociology.* Using the same search terms in the first phase, the authors reviewed 5,465 articles and found an additional 15 articles relating to lesbian and gay families

Allen and Demo (1995) discussed several implications from their findings. First, there are relatively few articles on lesbian and gay families across fields. Second, the authors indicated that much of the existing literature fails to include questions about family members' sexual orientation. Consequently, many researchers in a variety of fields have excluded same-sex families from their studies because they do not consider the importance of the demographic variables within their sample population, or because they find sexual orientation irrelevant. Third, the authors suggested that an underlying problem of research was societal heterosexism; this was thought to explain the lack of research in the area. The authors argued that individual and institutional heterosexism must be addressed in order for more integrative family research to occur.

More recently, some of these trends have been addressed. For example, over the past decade there have been dramatic increases in research focusing on sexual minority parents, including more interest in traditionally understudied gay and bisexual males and transgender individuals (Savci & Biblarz, 2010). Along with an increase in studies there has been an increase in the diversity of methodologies and sampling techniques in research on same-sex families. Studies aim to control for confounding variables such as path to parenthood, seek matched samples (i.e. donor insemination single lesbian mothers with donor insemination single straight mothers), and continue to draw from longitudinal studies. Not only does this produce more responsible science but it also challenges the questionable results of anti same-sex family researchers. For

example, researchers against nonheterosexual parents raising children claim paternal presence, in addition to maternal presence, is necessary for healthy child development (see Wardle, 1997). These critics cite research on single, *heterosexual* mothers and extend this to non-heterosexual single parents.

Researchers have suggested several recommendations to continue advancing research on same-sex families. Allen and Demo (1995) noted that more qualitative research needs to be conducted that focus on the lives of same-sex families. This research would bring their experiences, actions, and words to the heart of analysis rather than being bracketed and excluded from research with a heterosexist bias. Next, researchers (Allen & Demo, 1995; Stacey, 2006; Biblarz & Savci, 2010) suggested looking at the experience of same-sex families from different perspectives. Allen and Demon (1995) suggested thinking of same-sex families as “bicultural” helps conceptualize the lives of the people in those families more accurately. Using bicultural family identify as frame for doing research with same sex families would also encourage the examination of resiliency and adaptation, as well as how this group deals with oppression (Allen and Demo, 1995). Stacey (2006) and Biblarz and Savci (2010) recommended looking beyond comparisons between same-sex and opposite-sex families to develop what socially and psychologically unique about these families. While they do not deride elegant, comparative research designs, they lament that sexual minority research has often been interpreted from a heteronormative perspective using heteronormative-based theories and assumptions. The research on same-sex families has much more to offer when viewed outside of the traditional lens.

### *Lesbian Mothers and Gay Fathers*

The definition of the modern family is changing. In fact, as Hudak and Giammattei (2009, p.6) noted “dominant definitions of relationship and family have historically not included sexual minorities.” Certainly, families headed by sexual minority parents “queer” the monolithic, heteronormative idea of family (Biblarz & Savci, 2010). The concept of lesbian or bisexual mothers and gay or bisexual fathers challenges the preconceived, generally accepted notions regarding the definition of a parent and compositions of a family. Whether intended or not, lesbian/bisexual mothers and gay/bisexual fathers have generated much social, political, legal, moral, and psychological debate. This section explores the perception of sexual minority parents in society, the role of a parent, the changing definition of the family unit, the various ways sexual minority individuals create families, and the impact of same-sex parenthood on how society looks at lesbians and gay men.

#### *Creating Context for Research on Lesbian and Gay Parents*

Much of the research on lesbian and gay parenting addresses the degree to which these parenting styles are the same or different from heterosexual parenting. If similarities or differences are found, then authors may choose to interpret these results in a variety of different ways. Clarke (2002) reviewed the literature on lesbian parenting and identified four constructs that inform research and interpretation of this population. Clarke identified herself as a feminist constructivist, believing that realities are socially constructed and, as a result, lesbian parenting can be constructed in several different ways all possessing truth when looked at from a particular point of view.

The four constructs of lesbian parenting described by Clarke (2002) included lesbian parenting as (a) no different from heterosexual parenting, (b) different from heterosexual parenting and deviant, (c) different from heterosexual parenting and transformative, and (d) different from heterosexual parenting only because of oppression.

The *no different* construct reflected a movement to show the similarities of lesbian families and heterosexual families and develop research that showed children parented by lesbians were no different than children parented by heterosexuals. The *different from heterosexual parenting and deviant* construct was established by anti-gay psychologists and tended to search for differences among same-sex parents and heterosexual parents and their children. Literature within this construct portrayed lesbian and gay parents as unfit and living deviant, pathological, and invalid lifestyles not suitable to the nurturing needs of children.

The third construct, *different and transformative*, emerged primarily from lesbian feminists. The flavor of this construct reflected a notion of lesbian parenting that was opposite of the no different construct. Here, differences were emphasized. Because lesbian mothers were not bound to the same societal scripts as heterosexual women they could create something much better. Moreover, lesbian parenthood stood to defy the established heterosexual norms of family life. The fourth and final construct was *different but only because of oppression*. The unifying theme in this construct was that if societal oppression were removed, the lesbian families would be equal to heterosexual families. Therefore, advocates of this construct emphasized their

similarities between the groups as a way to bring lesbian parenting into the realm of the established constructs of parenting and family.

Considering these common styles of interpreting research is important when reviewing any research on sexual minority parents because of the social and political implications of the findings. For example, studies comparing sexual minority parents to heterosexual parents operate under a heterosexist standard. Consequently, there is an implicit assumption that two heterosexual parents are the ideal and other varieties of the ideal are less desirable until *proven* otherwise. Before reviewing more literature addressing sexual minority parents, the myth of the ideal two parent-heterosexual family is addressed.

#### *Deconstructing the Traditional Family*

Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) investigated assumptions that a father and a mother were essential for normal development of children. This research was in response to a growing trend in governmental agencies giving financial support preference to fathers over mothers on the basis that without a solid male figure, children would be maladjusted. The researchers indicated that during the 1980's and 1990's substantial research was conducted assessing the role of fathers in families. The results demonstrated a father's presence has both advantages and disadvantages. The authors noted the inclusive finding and posit that the recent surge of literature on the essential role of fathers in the lives and past literature on the essential role of mothers in the lives of children oversimplifies the complex dynamics occurring between parent and child.

Instead, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) drew an alternative conclusion from their qualitative research. Over the course of 6 years, the authors conducted interviews with over 200 fathers who reported positive relationships with their children. The sample had a wide range of identities including gay fathers, white fathers, divorced fathers, Greek grandfathers, Haitian Christian fathers, Latino fathers, and Promise Keeper fathers. As a result of their interviews with fathers, they found that well-adjusted children could be raised without mothers. Likewise, well-adjusted children were found in family structures that included fathers that were divorced, never-married and remarried.

Discussing their results, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) stated that it is neither the presence nor absence of the father and mother, nor the family structure in general, that determines positive child outcomes. Rather, children “need at least one responsible, caretaking adult who has a positive emotional connection to them and with whom they have a consistent relationship” (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999, p. 397). Moreover, their results indicated that neither the biological relationship to the children nor the sex of the parent functions as a reliable indicator of positive child development (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999).

Yet, there may be resistance to these ideas. Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) suggested society may be attempting unconsciously to reinstate male patriarchy back into nuclear families as a result of a perceived loss of power and privilege by dominant culture males. Another explanation might involve a reaction to changing family structures. The authors indicated that the loss of the importance of fathers started a cycle called a “change and change-back reaction” (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999, p.

404). Non-traditional families threatened the established societal norm of heterosexuality and marriage by introducing alternative values and norms. The dominant culture noticed the change and, consequently, pushed back to reassert its values and established norms (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). While the authors present a compelling argument to the role of parents in raising well-adjusted children, some limitations related to their method and conclusions do exist. For example, much of the evidence presented includes theoretical and qualitative works, and though this provides interesting rhetoric -- few causal statements can confidently be generated from this work without more experimental or quasi-experimental work.

The argument for deconstructing and reevaluating the assumed essential features of effective parents and supportive families is compelling. However, this challenge is strongly opposed by some. Homophobic and heterosexist attitudes interfere with adopting more open-minded ideas on parents and families. The next section in the literature briefly explores the attitudes toward different parents and families types.

An empirical study by Crawford and Solliday (1996) explored the attitudes of college students toward same-sex parenting. Citing a clear need among foster care agencies and adoption agencies to find new sources of suitable parents, the authors indicated same-sex families might be considered. The authors assessed the attitudes of a sample of 97 college students between the ages of 17 and 34 ( $M = 19.4$ ), on how suitable four different couples would be to adopt a child. Participants were given several measures and one of four case vignettes describing the couples. The measures included the Couples Rating Questionnaire (CRQ; Crawford & Solliday, 1996), the Individual Religiousness Scale (IRS; Latala & Socha, 1981)) and the 16PF (Cattell,



Eber, & Tatsuoka,1970). The four vignettes were identical except in the following ways: race/ethnicity and the gender of both partners. Therefore, participants could receive a vignette with a heterosexual White couple, a heterosexual African-American couple, a heterosexual inter-racial couple (African-American/White), or a homosexual African-American couple each trying to adopt an African-American male child.

The results of Crawford and Solliday's (1996) work indicated that participants rated the heterosexual African-American couple with the most favorable rating overall and the most emotionally stable and believed this couple would be the most likely to be selected as the parents of the child. Results showed that the same-sex couple was rated the most negative among the couples. Among participants rating the same-sex African-American couples, the results indicated an inverse relationship such that the more religious participants were the more likely they would negatively rate the same-sex African-American couple. Lastly, on the personality assessment (16PF), it was found that those rating the same-sex African-American couple less favorably spiked on the Tension factor (Q4). This factor measures one's experience of tension on a continuum where low scores indicate a relaxed, tranquil, and patient disposition while high scores indicate a high energy, impatient, and time driven disposition (Crawford and Solliday (1996).

Crawford and Solliday (1996) stated that their work showed similar findings to what was in the literature. Those endorsing the religious ideals of Western Christianity tend to hold more negative attitudes of homosexuality. To decrease negative perceptions the Crawford and Solliday recommended those with negativistic attitudes towards members of the GLBTQ community gain more interaction with those who

identify as GLBTQ. Citing Herek and Glunt's work (1993), Crawford and Solliday (1996) suggested that heterosexuals developed more tolerant attitudes toward lesbian and gay people when they personally know someone who is lesbian or gay. Finally, the authors indicated that at the time of this article, no empirical study has shown child well-being to be negatively impacted as a consequence of the parents being lesbian or gay.

The literature suggests that heterosexist and homophobic attitudes may function to keep the definition of the family and the role of parents very narrow. Attitudes towards nonheterosexual parents may be slow to change. Yet the literature on lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents suggests that these individuals function effectively as parents, whether they are assessed independently or compared to heterosexual parents. A brief review of literature on lesbian, gay and bisexual parents is presented next.

*Lesbian Mothers.* Citing observations in literature related to lesbian parenting, Dunne (1997) noted that lesbians traditionally represented a population of women that were free from the societal bounds of motherhood and the traditional patriarchal and hegemonic system of heterosexual marriage. She indicated that lesbians were much freer to construct their own identity compared to heterosexual women. Dunne (1997, 1998b, & 2000) argued that the identities of straight women were heavily dependent on the presence of children. The role and title of "mother" was traditionally held by heterosexual women; however, Dunne indicated a shift occurred in the 1990's regarding lesbians' view of motherhood. With the aid of advancements in fertility technology and in-vitro procedures, it became much easier for all women, including lesbian mothers to be, to have children. In fact, improved technologies and the influx

of lesbians opting into motherhood have created a lesbian baby boom (Patterson, 1992).

In light of this information, Dunne (1997) recruited participants for a study through the Lesbian Household Project. The project consisted of 37 cohabitating lesbian couples with dependent children. The author indicated that sample was not representative of a U.S. population as most of the participants were White and highly educated. Qualitative interviews were conducted to learn about the experience of lesbian women as mothers.

Results indicated that lesbian families from this sample generally include an intricate system of social support beyond the biological relatives of the same-sex couples. In fact, lesbian mothers provided a new paradigm of motherhood. They modeled less gendered styles of incorporating work, more egalitarian divisions of household chores, and effective co-parenting of children (Dunne, 1997). Lesbian mothers tended to be very intentional in their planning and rearing of children, balancing care, work hours, and household chores in an egalitarian way. However, the experience of lesbian motherhood often had a significant impact on relatives and friends of the same-sex parents. Often tension and emotional distance that existed between the participants and their relatives decreased when the participants became mothers (Dunne 1997). As a result of their freedom from traditional, gendered assumptions about a woman's role, their ability to construct their own definition of mother, and their effectiveness as parents, lesbian mothers have engineered a new model of what it is to be a lesbian and a mother.

*Gay Fathers.* Compared to the available literature on lesbian mothers, the literature on gay fathers is sparse. The research on gay fathers before 2000 was noticeably absent. In fact, this caused concerns regarding the generalizability of research finding on sexual minority parents, which were generally comprised of lesbian mothers, to gay father or bisexual men and woman (Cameron, 2009). However, the research over the past 10 years on sexual minority parents has focused more attention on the parenting experiences of gay men and their children (Biblarz & Savci, 2010).

A heterosexual female's role as a parent and her ability to raise children are well accepted in Western culture. But, the same tolerance of parental role and confidence in ability is not automatically afforded to males. Often, males are assumed to be secondary parents with the typical emphasis on the females for childrearing (Mallon, 2004). The situation becomes more complex when a gay male wants to parent. In a heteronormative culture, when gay men become parents they “challenge conventional definitions of masculinity and particularly paternity and even dominant gender and sexual norms of gay culture itself” (Stacey, 2006, p. 30). A traditional pathway for males then was to enter into a heterosexual relationship and have children. In the case of gay men, such convenience to fatherhood is less obvious. In fact, Mallon (2004) noted that for some gay men, the coming out process symbolically represented the loss of the opportunity to be a parent.

As taboo as gay males raising children appears to be in a heteronormative culture, some do become parents. Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) interviewed gay males to explore their experiences and thoughts on becoming and being a father. The authors interviewed 19 childless gay males and 20 gay males with children and found

several major themes including the impact of social and organizational influences on their perceptions of their ability to parent, the transformation of their procreative ideas across their lives, the influence of assumptions on gay males and their ability to raise children, and the nuances of interacting with surrogate mothers, partners and others (Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007).

Based on their results, the authors noted that gay men are capable of actively constructing their roles as parents and realizing their procreative potential; however, because gay males cannot procreate with each other, they must search out nonheterosexual methods to conceive. Through this process, gay males demonstrate a unique style of creating kinship bonds and raising children. For example, a gay couple mixed their sperm before artificially inseminating their donor egg and conceived twins. While it was unknown which father conceived, they reasoned that since there are two fathers and two children, each was a biological parent of a twin. While there remained an emphasis on the importance of biological ties to children, gay fathers demonstrated that much meaning and significance to the experience of parenting could be developed through creative negotiations and narratives (Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007). A chief limitation of this study was in the diversity of the sample; well above the majority of participants were middle to upper class and White. This is important to note because the pathways to nonheterosexual conception are incredibly expensive and thus not available evenly across socioeconomic status (Stacey, 2006). Additionally, they volunteered to participate for the study, potentially introducing a selection bias.

The paths to paternity for gay males are becoming more diverse. In addition to pre-existing heterosexual relationships, gay males become fathers through donor egg

and surrogacy, adoption, foster parenting, and informal and formal arrangements with others (i.e. friends, relatives, lesbian couples). While these might be nontraditional ways to parenthood, evidence suggests that gay males use creative narratives and negotiations to construct meaning for themselves as fathers (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). In fact, the experiences and expectations of paternity are shaping and redefining the identities of gay males. Stacey (2006) interviewed 50 gay males in the Los Angeles area in order to gather their thoughts on parenting. The results of this qualitative and ethnographic study suggested that gay males' interest occurs on a continuum, labeled "passion for parenthood" (Stacey, 2006). In particular, most gay males in the sample fell between the two ends of the continuum, "predestined fathers" and "paternal refuseniks" (Stacey, 2006). The former described males that pursued paternity at great cost, even at expense of losing a partner, and the latter described males that were almost relieved that their gay identity essentially excused them from procreation responsibilities (Stacey, 2006).

Other findings of the Stacey (2006) study related to how gay males defined their parenting experiences and expectations. In spite of the great challenges to procreation, Stacey (2006) noted gay males demonstrated tenacity and creativity to overcome these obstacles. As males, there were also gender role barriers to navigate and overcome; gay males appeared more motivated to tackle these gender barriers than straight males. Moreover, Stacey (2006) noted that gay males, because of their sexual orientation, were relieved of their allegiance to heterosexual male gender scripts. As a result, they were free to construct and define parenting roles. Interestingly, studies have suggested that gay father's parent in a way that is more similar in style to lesbian and heterosexual

mothers than to married heterosexual males (Mallon, 2004; Stacey, 2006). The results of this study cannot be generalized across gay males; however it does contribute to a deeper understanding of motivations, negotiations, and identities that gay males encounter when they become parents. In addition, this study's sample was socially and racially diverse—two thirds were multi-racial and, while the majority of the males that were parenting were White, a large majority of their children were not (Stacey, 2006) Indeed, the diversity in this sample is more representative of the typical diversity found in gay families in the United States. Stacey (2006) noted that, compared to all other families in the U.S., gay parented families are the most likely to be multi-cultural or multi-racial.

*Summary.* Research on lesbian and gay parents yields fascinating results. This population of parents challenges the heteronormative definitions of parents and creates new perspectives on what it means to be an effective parent. The extant literature focuses more on lesbian mothers than gay fathers; however, more attention has been directed to gay fathers over the past decade. One of the chief limitations of research with lesbian and gay parents is that samples tend to lack diversity. Johnson and O'Connor (2002) noted that more research samples of lesbian woman and gay man contain White, upper middle class participants. In addition, there are selection bias concerns; participants that are motivated to share their experiences might be more optimistic about their experiences as parents and feel more positive about their identity. As mentioned early in this section, there are many more studies looking at lesbians as parents compared to gay males (Savci & Biblarz, 2010). Consequently, the

generalizability of findings cannot be confidently made across gender and sexual orientation.

### *Same-sex Families*

As with other areas of the literature related to sexual minority parents raising children, the extant research on same-sex families is fascinating albeit limited. Because same-sex families present a nontraditional picture of the family in American culture, they are susceptible to harsh critiques. The identity of the family is different than the mainstream, traditional two-parent family and may be subjected to discrimination. Consequently, children and parents of same sex families may experience discrimination (Bozett, 1989), prompting both to keep the identity of the family hidden (Goldberg, 2007b; Breshears, 2010). On the other hand, researchers have demonstrated that parents of same-sex families and their children develop healthy identities, navigate heterosexist cultural norms, and offer a unique perspective on the creation and definition of the family.

Telingator and Patterson (2008) reviewed research findings about same-sex families, identified several ways same-sex families were created, and provided suggestions to clinicians working with children of lesbian and gay parents. In reviewing the literature, Telingator and Patterson found that sexual minorities become parents in several different ways. Many children in same-sex couples exist as a result of a previous heterosexual relationship, others result from adoption, and still others from sperm/egg donor and artificial insemination. Telingator and Pattern (2008) noted that over the past 20 years several other options including sperm and/or egg donors exist for same-sex couples wanting children. Lesbian woman may become mothers



through donor insemination. Lesbian women may also elect to carry a fertilized egg from an egg donor. In some situations, a known donor is involved in the child's life as a parent, aunt or uncle, or family friend. Within lesbian couples, one partner may decide to carry all of the children or this role may be alternated.

Telingator and Patterson (2008) noted that gay men may also seek donors. If a gay man or couple decides to have biologically related children, then they may find an egg donor and a surrogate mother. Gay men might also decide who will donate the sperm to fertilize the donor egg; as with lesbian mother's carry children, sperm donation can be from one partner or alternated. Lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men may also become parents through the process of adoption or by becoming foster parents.

Certainly, same-sex families use innovative methods to create their families; they are also creative when defining the identity of their families. Whereas traditional heterosexual families rely on heteronormative and hegemonic ideals to define their family's identity, same-sex families have to create their identity. Stacey (2006) suggested that while genetic relatedness may be important for gay males, sexual minority parents overall are more likely to endorse a socially constructed rather than a biologically constructed family.

Constructing a family identity through narrative has been documented. Galvin (2006) posited that all families were discourse dependent, such that families create meaning through their interactions, shaping members of family's thoughts, reactions, and behaviors as they navigate daily life tasks. Communication among members was the key to developing the story or narrative about the family's identity. Nowhere was communication as important as when it was among nontraditional families (Galvin,

2006). In the case of sexual minority parents, their non conventional ways of developing families draw criticism as a result of heterosexist attitudes. Therefore, in order to maintain a positive identity, sexual minority parents must be intentional, diligent, and committed to engaging their children in regular conversation regarding the family's identity (Galvin, 2006).

Same-sex families use a range of clever and creative methods to create *and* define a family. Because these families stand outside of the traditional heteronormative ideal, they may be vulnerable to stigma and discrimination. Using effective communication and positive narrative building techniques have helped same-sex families develop their identities as well as maintain positive identities. These strategies may serve to increase the resilience among children of same-sex families and provide strong examples of methods to disclose and discuss their family's identity with peers, future romantic partners, and others.

Some limitations exist. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) noted that the research on same-sex families has relied heavily on children that were conceived in a previously existing heterosexual relationship. Furthermore, as a greater number of sexual minority individuals become intentional in planning a family and using sexual minority methods to have children, the research must adjust in order to address these changes in the population. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) noted that much of the extant literature in same-sex families will cease to be relevant as the formation of same-sex families shifts from the majority created by previous heterosexual relationships to internally planned same-sex families.

### *Children of Same-sex Parents*

In 2005, the American Psychological Association (APA) released a publication called *Lesbian and Gay Parenting*. The publication provided a thorough review of the literature on lesbian, gay and bisexuals parenting and the impact of their children. While the literature on children of same-sex parents is limited, the results compiled by the APA indicated that children of lesbian and gay parents are no different than children raised in heterosexual families. Several prolific researchers have contributed heavily to the topic area and much of the literature focuses on young children and adolescents, and most of the empirical works compared children from same-sex families with those of heterosexual families. In contrast, very little research exists that examines adults raised as children in same sex families (a topic reviewed in a later section). The following section describes the research findings that address the experiences of children and adolescents raised in same-sex families.

Chan, Raboy, and Patterson (1998) conducted a study that compared a population of lesbian and heterosexual women that utilized a sperm bank for in vitro fertilization. One of the main advantages of this study was that it compared two groups of women where only the mother would be biologically related to the child. Participants included 80 families, 55 headed by lesbians and 25 headed by heterosexuals. Results from this study indicated comparable outcomes results on measure of adjustment for both the children raised by heterosexuals and lesbians. Adjustment levels were similar and there were no differences in behavioral problems as reported by parents. The researchers also surveyed the teachers of both groups of children and their reports corroborated the parents' reports. This study indicated that

parents' sexual orientation was not a significant impairment to child development (Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998). In fact, this study supported other lines of research that indicated well-adjusted children develop from parent-child relationships that are warm and affectionate. While the study compared two relatively equal groups, both groups presented a potential problem in that they both had substantial financial resources (in-vitro fertilization is generally expensive).

Patterson (2006) provided a detailed comparison of studies of child development in same-sex families using different sources of samples to determine if differences in sample source contributed to differences in child development outcomes. Much of the early research on children of lesbian and gay families focused on children that were born in heterosexual families and came to be in lesbian and gay families as result of a divorce and custody decisions (Patterson, 2006). Patterson (2006) indicated that previous research using this population yielded results that indicated few differences between children of same-sex families and those raised in heterosexual families. But, these results were controversial given that these children were exposed to a heterosexual family at some point, as well as the experience of divorce; thus, it was impossible to rule out this experience contributing or influencing normal adjustment (Patterson, 2006).

To more closely examine this possibility, Patterson (2006) used a convenience sample of lesbian woman that either adopted or used a sperm donor to have children. Patterson (1996, 1997) found that, based on measures of child adjustment, the children raised by lesbian mothers did not differ significantly from children raised by heterosexuals. The author concluded that it was possible for lesbian mothers to raise

well-adjusted children. But, while the results from the convenience example were favorable, it was difficult to rule out the possibility that well-adjusted families volunteered to participate in a study on the development of children.

Patterson (2006) organized a study using data taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescents Health (Add Health); this provided a representative sample where the children of same-sex families and children of heterosexual families could be compared. From a data set that contained 12,000 surveys and interviews from adolescents and their parents, Patterson (2006) selected a sample of 44 adolescents from the ages of 12 to 18 that lived with same-sex parents and a matched sample of adolescents from opposite-sex parents.

The results of Patterson's (2006) analysis were consistent with other work comparing these two groups of children; few differences existed. This study showed no differences in adolescents from same-sex parents and those from opposite-sex parents on self-reported measures of psychological development, measures of school outcomes, and of measures of family relationships. Moreover, both groups of adolescents equally reported that they had been in a relationship over the past year and a half and that they had been sexually active. The results indicated that one significant difference existed; adolescents living with same-sex parent were more likely to report feeling a greater sense of connection among school peers compared to those living with opposite-sex parents (Patterson, 2006). While the results of this literature suggests few differences among adolescents raised in same-sex families and those raised in heterosexual families, these results cannot be generalized to all populations.

Concerns about children of same-sex families being at greater risk of sexual abuse by adults, rejected by peers, or ostracized in lesbian or gay communities have received no support from the results of existing research (APA, 2005). The American Psychological Association (2005) indicated that the “picture of lesbian mothers' children that emerges is one of general engagement in social life with peers, with fathers, with grandparents, and with mothers' adult friends—both male and female, both heterosexual and homosexual” (p. 12).

Critics claim that children raised by sexual minority parents will encounter increased harassment by peers, show poor psychological adjustment, and have a greater likelihood of becoming a sexual minority (Cameron, 2009; Wardle, 1997). However, the literature on children raised in same-sex families does not support these claims (Biblarz & Savci, 2010). In fact, children raised by same-sex parents show healthy adjustment, peer relationships, and self-esteem (Patterson, 2006). Yet, there are limitations. The chief limitations of the research on children raised in same-sex families include an absence of research on same-sex families parented by gay males and a tendency to judge outcomes of children raised by sexual minorities by comparing them to children of heterosexuals. To date, there are no studies that specifically explore the experiences of children raised by gay or bisexual males. Consequently, much of the literature on children raised in same-sex families refers to lesbian or bisexual female headed families. Results found with this population cannot be generalized to the children raised by gay or bisexual males. Stacey (2006) and Biblarz and Savci (2010) recognize the importance of research using comparative samples, but strongly advocate for exploring and interpreting the experiences of children raised by sexual minority

parents. The “no difference” stance among children raised by heterosexual and nonheterosexuals has been well established. This signals an opportunity to shift research away from a defensive research agenda to a more pluralistic approach to understanding the lived experiences of children raised in same-sex families (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

### *Adults Raised as Children in Same-sex Families*

Most relevant to the research question addressed in the current study, this section addresses the experiences of adults raised as children in same-sex families—especially in relationship to how their family of origin experiences may impact their own intimate relationships as adults. As seen in the previous section addressing children of same-sex families, much of the research is focused on the experiences of children under the age of 18. However, there are a handful of articles that address the experiences of adults raised as children in same-sex families. For example, Golombok and Tasker (1995;1996) have published two articles focusing on adults raised by lesbian parents. Both articles use a sample of adults raised in lesbian families generated from earlier work by Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter (1983). These studies are significant because they were the first to gather information from a sample of adults raised in same-sex families.

In the first of the two identified manuscripts, Tasker and Golombok (1995) completed a qualitative study that interviewed adult children raised in lesbian families and single-parent heterosexual families. The purpose of the study was to gain insight in to lesbian families by interviewing children raised in these families across four categories; family relationships, peer relationships, sexual orientation and

psychological adjustment (Tasker & Golombok,1995). The study used a sample of lesbian and single parent heterosexual families that were part of an earlier study by Golombok et al. (1983). At the time of the 1983 study, the children averaged 9.5 years old. For the 1995 study, participants were gathered through contacting the mothers from the first study and asking whether they would provide their adult child's contact information to the researchers. Once contact information was gained, participants were contacted and invited to participate. Of the 74 potential children, 46 young adults between the ages of 17 and 35 ( $M = 23.5$ ) agreed to participate. From the lesbian families, there were 17 women and 8 men and, from the single parent heterosexual families, there were 12 men and 9 women.

Tasker and Golombok (1995) conducted semi-structured interviews that lasted 2.5 hours on average and included questions that explored the four categories of interest (family relationships, peer relationships, sexual orientation, and psychological adjustment). Related to the psychological adjustment category, participants completed the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck & Steer, 1987) and the Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, 1983) in addition to answering questions regarding psychological issues.

Tasker and Golombok (1995) found that young adults raised in same-sex families were more likely to indicate they were proud of their mother's sexual orientation. In terms of peer relationships, young adults of same-sex families did not recall any more bullying than those raised by heterosexual mothers. Lastly, there were no significant differences on the psychological well-being measure such that young adults of same-sex families did not differ from young adults of heterosexual families on measures of anxiety. While these results support findings in other research comparing



children of same-sex families with those of heterosexual families, several weaknesses exist. Adults raised by in lesbian families may elect to show they are well adjusted and report their experiences more favorably in order to “protect” their family. Since the sample size was small, these effects may not be obvious. Additionally, the results may not be generalizable given the selection of the sample. The experience of children of lesbian mothers may not be generalized to the experience of children raised by gay fathers just as children of single parents cannot be generalized to the experience of children raised in two parent relationships.

Golombok and Tasker (1996) more closely examined sexual orientation issues among the sample of adults raised as children in lesbian families and single parent heterosexual families from the Golombok et al. (1983) study. The purpose of this article was to determine whether the sexual orientation of the parents affected the sexual orientation of their children. The sample was identical to the one used in Tasker and Golombok (1995). The authors used information gathered from the same 2.5 hour interview on questions regarding family relationships, peer relationships, psychological adjustment, and sexual orientation. This study specifically addressed the issue of sexual orientation.

The authors gathered information on sexual orientation through the semi-structured interviews. The interviewer was blind to sexual orientation of the parents. After the interview, the information was coded into five variable categories and checked by another coder for reliability. The five categories included; the presence of same gender attraction, consideration of a lesbian or gay relationship, same-gender

sexual relationships, sexual identity, and same-gender sexual interest. Also, a Kinsey scale rating was generated based on responses.

The results of the interview showed no significant differences between the two groups of grown children on the measure of sexual orientation such that children raised by lesbian mothers were no more likely to identify as lesbian or gay than children raised by heterosexual mothers. The results corroborate other findings that indicated the sexual orientation of children was not affected by adult sexual orientation. Additionally, since scores were extrapolated from responses, there is a risk that the coded responses did not match the actual meaning from the participants. Also participants may tend to respond to questions regarding sexual orientation in a way that makes them appear favorable; they may respond in ways that maximize their heterosexuality while minimizing alternative sexual orientations. The results support other work showing parental sexual orientation does not significantly impact the orientation of their children but cannot be generalized across populations (APA, 2005). As indicated above, the sample size was small, the authors used the same sample of convenience for both studies, and the sample was not randomly selected.

In summary, the children of same-sex families--both children and adult children--were shown to have equal levels of adjustment as children raised in heterosexual families. The main limitation of these studies, with the exception of the Patterson (2006) study, was a small sample size and sampling techniques. Several areas of the experiences of children of same-sex parents were not explored; for example, satisfaction with romantic relationships and decision about how to raise children of their own.

### *Limitations of the Same-sex Parenting Research*

While the literature shows children of same-sex families can be well adjusted, and that the sexual orientation of the parent does not negatively impact one's ability to rear well-adjusted children, there are a few noteworthy shortcomings in the literature. Among these short-comings is that the literature on same-sex parents studies generally refers to the experiences of lesbian parents with children. The literature is conspicuously devoid of the experiences of gay men as parents. In fact, one article indicating support for lesbian *and* gay parenting indicated in the methods section that the 3 gay fathers were removed from the analysis because there were too few (Cameron, 2009). Therefore, studies indicating support for same-sex families may actually be more accurately described as indicating support for lesbian mothers.

Next, much of the literature comes from a set of prolific writers in the area of same-sex parents. While it is important to have bold researchers exploring new territory, multiple voices are generally stronger than one. Regarding the research, studies tended to come from specific fields which may indicate a myopic view of the subject. For example, much of the research on same-sex parents and their children occurs in the field of psychology. Indeed, the literature on same-sex families would benefit from perspectives from sociology, marriage and family disciplines, nursing and others.

### *Attachment Theory*

To this point, the reviewed literature has focused on the experiences and details of members of same-sex families; lesbian or bisexual woman and gay or bisexual or gay men and their children. A key aspect of this current project involves understanding

and exploring relationships that extend beyond the family, specifically the experiences of when those children of same-sex parents begin establishing close relationships with romantic partners. As a result, it is important to build a context to frame the romantic relationship experiences of adults. Over the past several decades, attachment theory has gained considerable attention in assessing, describing and predicting the emotions and behaviors between an infant and a primary caregiver as well as between intimate partners. Therefore, the following sections describe child and adult attachment, romantic relationships, and relationship maintenance behaviors.

#### *Overview of Attachment Theory*

Since parents often serve as models for intimate relationships to their children, it is helpful to understand how these early bonds impact future intimate relationships. Attachment theory can be used to provide a foundation to understand this relationship. The underlying structure of attachment theory is built on the notion that an infant has a set of genetically based behaviors and emotions designed to elicit responses from caregivers that ensures and promotes safety and survival. The interaction between what the parents provides and how the infant responds creates patterned styles of responding which can be assessed behaviorally and emotionally and described as an attachment style (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

According to attachment theory, early experiences have a very strong impact on the shaping and formation of one's personality and one's beliefs and expectations about intimate relationships (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Intimate relationship experiences are influenced by many factors. A large body of literature suggests that one's attachment style significantly contributes to one's ideas, feelings, and behaviors in

intimate relationships (Brinich, 1990; Shapiro, Shapiro, & Paret, 2001 ). Literature on attachment suggests that patterns of intimate relationships are introduced at young ages and can continue over the lifespan of the individual. Consequently, intimate interactions from early life serve as the basis upon which relationships later in life are formed. Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) noted that the love between a primary caregiver and an infant is the result of an attachment bond formed during the first year of life. Interactions between children and their mother form behavioral patterns that are reflected in later relationships; this bond serves as a prototype for close and warm relationships. Research indicates that children raised in same-sex families demonstrate they are capable of secure attachment to lesbian mothers and gay fathers (Patterson, 1996). Literature addressing attachment styles among lesbian and gay individuals shows that sexual orientation does not confound secure attachment (Ridge & Feeney, 1998).

Infant attachment styles to a caregiver have potential long-term ramifications for adult relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed the idea of adult romantic attachment, theorizing that attachment to a romantic partner followed similar steps and outcomes as in parent-child attachment. Much research (Elliot & Reis, 2003; Fraley & Shaver, 2000, Hazen & Shaver, 1987) supports the idea that early relationship experiences with primary caregiver shape attitudes and behaviors toward a romantic partner. The same basic biological drives designed to promote safety and survival in infants are also present in adults. In adult romantic relationships, one's partner represents the primary caregiver. Adults seek needs like reassurance, comfort,

accessibility, and security from their romantic partners, and this may elicit similar behaviors and emotions that one experienced getting needs met from one's parent.

Adult romantic attachment is often assessed by measuring two dimensions: anxiety and avoidance (Elliot & Reis, 2003; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). The distribution of these dimensions generates four different styles of attachment previously described by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). Those low in anxiety and avoidance are described as having a secure attachment and are capable of being open and comfortable with intimacy. Those with high anxiety and low avoidance have an anxious-ambivalent style and are concerned with abandonment and seek excessive intimacy. When anxiety and avoidance are both high, the attachment style is fearful-avoidant and people in this dimension simultaneously fear and desire intimacy. Finally, those with low anxiety and high avoidance fit the dismissing-avoidant style and tend to be self-reliant and remain emotionally distant from others. As a result, one's style of attachment has a strong influence on developing other future close relationships (i.e. romantic relationships).

### *Romantic Relationships*

Because of the profound effects attachment style and parent-child relationships have on adult close relationships, it is important to consider these concepts when discussing the development of one's adult romantic relationships. It is necessary to define romantic relationships; they are enduring voluntary relationships that are reciprocally acknowledged by each member of a couple and generally have strong intensity that can be manifested in emotionally and physically expressive ways (Collins, 2003; Reis & Shaver, 1988). People develop adult romantic relationships that

tend to mimic the attachment bond held with one's primary caretakers. Many research studies predict the behavior of individuals in romantic relationships based on levels of anxiety and avoidance in one's attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Anxiety is defined by an individual's worries regarding abandonment, and rejection and avoidance is defined by the degree an individual limits intimacy with others (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998).

The different combinations of anxiety and avoidance create different categories of attachment style. For example, those with high anxiety and high avoidance have a fearful-avoidant attachment style and tend to view themselves and others negatively (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Those with high anxiety and low avoidance have a preoccupied attachment style and tend to view themselves negatively (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). These individuals are said to have a negative model of the self as undeserving of love and desperately seek approval from others; however, they tend to view others as rejecting. Those with low anxiety and high avoidance demonstrate a dismissing-avoidant attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). These individuals are often uncomfortable with intimacy and view others as clingy and dependent. Individuals with low anxiety and low avoidance have a secure attachment and are generally confident they are worthy of love and project that others are warm and responsive (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

While attachment style predicts behavior in romantic relationships, one's attachment style may evolve through interactions with peer and romantic partners. In fact, Fraley and Davis (1997) found that attachment style created through parent-child interactions begins to wane in later adolescence and early adulthood as peers and

romantic partners assume the roles of primary attachment figures. So, while the research likely predicts how one will approach adolescent romantic relationships, other factors, such as later relationships which may alter one's attachment style from its original form (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), may be a better source of information to assess one's current attachment style. Simpson, Collins, and Salvatore (2011), drawing from a body of literature generated through a two-decade longitudinal study, offer a slightly different perspective. They suggest thinking of one's romantic attachment style as the full developmental history of attachment beginning at birth and continuing to one's current relationships. In this way, small pieces of one's childhood attachment style endure across one's relationships and impact them in specific ways; however, subsequent romantic relationships may serve to improve one's romantic attachments (Simpson et al., 2011). Therefore, one's peer relationships and subsequent romantic relationships may engender a significant impact on adult romantic attachment style causing the attachment style, to be different than that developed with one's primary caretaker.

### *Adolescent Romantic Relationships*

Once considered negligible in the development of romantic relationships, adolescent close relationships have recently become an integral part of the theory of human development (Collins, 2003). Recent research into the peer and romantic relationships of adolescents indicates that these experiences play a crucial role in the expectations for future close relationships; for example, marriage (Shulman, Rosenheim & Knafo, 1999). In addition, Collins (2003) posited that adolescent romantic relationships contribute to the outcome of adolescent developmental



achievements including autonomy, individuation, identity, and sexuality. Moreover, when peers are engaging in romantic relationships, the psychological and social consequences for not being involved in romantic relationships are harsh; this can alienate oneself from peers (Collins, 2003).

Research on parent-child attachment suggests that infants develop an attachment style based on the quality of the care and ability to respond to needs. Children use these internalized representations of parents as a structure that informs their behaviors and expectations about the behaviors of others in romantic relationships (Furman & Wehner, 1994). However, Furman (1999) has demonstrated that romantic relationships in early to middle adolescence are impacted more by immediate close peer relationships than with past or current parent-caretaker relationships. The implication of this finding suggests that while parents serve to develop the original attachment style of the children, it is not the best predictor of early and middle adolescent romantic relationships behaviors (Furman & Simon, 1999). Early adolescent romantic relationships tend to develop out of the peer networks and tend to be egalitarian. While later adolescent and young adult romantic relationships focus on the caretaking and attachment systems, early adolescent relationships focus on affiliative and sexual systems (Furman & Simon, 1999).

Despite findings that purportedly correlate adolescent romantic relationships with increased depression rate (see Darling & Cohan, 2002), these relationships offer some psychological and social benefits (Collins, 2003). For example, romantic relationship and the quality of that relationship can improve self-worth and self-concept (Kuttler, LaGreca, & Prinstein, 1999), competence in romantic relationship engenders

general competence (Matsen, Coatsworth, Neemann, Gest, Tellegen, & Garmezy, 1995), and, interestingly, romantic relationships tend to increase connection with other peers (Furman & Shaffer, 2003)

Because they have been categorized as shallow, transient relationships with minimal long term impact, adolescent romantic relationships have been undervalued until recently. Research that have explored these relationships have discovered important information on attachment styles, peer relationships, and behavior in relationships. While romantic relationships during early adolescence are typically brief affairs, they develop into more enduring and committed relationships during young adulthood (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). As a result, they provide important foundational experiences and expectations for future romantic relationships.

#### *Relationship Maintenance Behaviors*

Romantic relationships are developed under the strong influence of close interpersonal relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners across the lifespan of an individual. As important to the attachment styles of the partners involved in a relationship are the methods used to maintain the relationships. These methods could be especially important for individuals raised by sexual minority parents because of the pressures and stress placed on this population. Understanding how one uses relationship maintenance behaviors, or, the actions and behaviors partners employ to sustain a defined relationships, gives an important insight into the health of a relationship indicating the degree of satisfaction, commitment, liking, and mutuality of control (Canary, 2003; Goodboy, Myers & Members of Investigating Communication, 2010). Individuals may use both positive behaviors (Stafford & Canary, 1991) and negative

behaviors (Dainton & Gross, 2008) to maintain a relationship. Positive behaviors include positivity, openness, assurances, social networks, and task sharing. Two more behaviors, advice and conflict management, were added later (Stafford & Canary, 1991; Stafford, Dainton, and Haas, 2000). Dainton and Gross (2008) identified negative maintenance behaviors surveying undergraduate and graduate students. The behaviors included jealousy induction, avoidance, spying, infidelity, destructive conflict, and allowing control over one's actions by the partner. While the goal of both positive maintenance behaviors and negative maintenance behaviors is to prevent a relationship from ending, the latter may introduce or indicate various degrees relational dysfunction. On the other hand, quality relationships are maintained through positive relational maintenance behavior (Stafford, 2003).

Research suggests that family members, friends, and romantic partners each make distinct contributions to developmental outcomes (Burk & Laursen, 2005); however, they are also interdependent. As such, the bond between parents and children sets the foundation for close relationships with friends and romantic partners later in life (Bowlby, 1988; Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchey, 2002; Schaffer, 2000). Further, the development of close relationships with peers and romantic partners is inherently linked to intimacy development and support given in the context of close relationships (Kulter & LaGreca, 2004). Therefore, the quality of close adult relationships cannot be attributed solely to caregivers, friends, and early romantic partners, rather the quality and characteristics of each of these relationships contributes to the overall expectations of adult relationships.

Attachment theory demonstrates that parents and peers have a significant influence on forming close relationships. If a person's attachment style is impacted by experiences with parents and peers, then it would be reasonable to suggest that their romantic relationships would also be impacted by parents and peers. Moreover, as a result of the sexual orientation of the parent, same-sex families may offer a different model of the relationship maintenance behaviors expected in an intimate relationship, as compared to the model provided children of opposite-sex families (Patterson, 2000).

Same-sex families provide an excellent model for comparison to heterosexual families because they represent a nontraditional family structure that can be as effective as traditional heterosexual families. This characterizes much of the literature on same-sex families that has used opposite-sex families as the model to which same-sex families are compared. But, the same-sex family structure is also unique. Thus limiting its exploration by only comparing it to heteronormative family structure, while interesting, does not facilitate exploration into the potential pluralistic value of same-sex families. As Stacey and Biblarz (2001) suggested, research on same-sex families can go beyond the "no difference" position and, instead, step out from the heteronormative shadow and stand in its own light.

In fact, adults raised in same-sex families likely have a range of unique experiences across family, parenting, child development, sexuality, gender, peer relationships, and romantic relationships. A structured, qualitative methodology facilitates an exploration and analysis of understudied phenomena. Among qualitative methodologies, grounded theory is well-established and reliable (Fassinger, 2005)

Therefore, Grounded Theory was selected to explore the influence of same-sex families on the relationship experiences on the adult children raised in these families.

### Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (GT) is a type of qualitative research methodology developed by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss, in the late 1960s (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The main ideas bolstering GT stemmed from a desire to generate theory that is not only firmly grounded in the data but also uses the data in a dynamic process to connect, discover, and develop concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Further, GT honors the complexity and variability of human thought and behavior. Grounded theory endorses a philosophical view that meaning is co-created and in a continual process of being redefined through complex interactions between people and their environment including how conditions set the stage for actions and consequences (Fassinger, 2005). Grounded theory, like other qualitative research methods, allows for analysis of intimate details. It is particularly useful for analysis of difficult to measure constructs such as human thought or the experiences of emotions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result, this method is well suited for researching cultural, political, and social phenomenon, behaviors, emotions, and range of attitudes and feelings. GT is used in the fields of sociology, psychology, nursing, health as well as business, education and myriad others. In fact, “[the] grounded theory approach is the most influential paradigm for qualitative research in the social sciences today” (Denzin, 1995, p. 39).

While GT has become a popular qualitative research method, it is important to note there are divergent views on the most effective ways to conduct research with GT. Grounded theory has been described as a positivist, interpretive, or critical approach

(Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010). Of course, this philosophy of science diversity could be attributed to the individual researcher's approach to GT. On the other hand, GT has matured and divided into different perspectives over the years.

In the early 1990s there was a radical change in the procedure, suggested by one of founders of GT, Strauss, that resulted in a new style of GT different from classical GT. The subsequent two styles are generally associated with their supporter, Glaser's classic GT and Strauss and Corbin's revised GT. There are several key differences between the styles. Glaser (1992) endorses a style that relies on deductive reasoning, constant comparison, and theoretical sampling. Strauss and Corbin describe their approach as "an interplay between data and researcher" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13). Both styles endorse constant comparison of the data; a process of comparing one piece data to another to discover whether they are similar or different in a continual "recursive" process whereby new and old data is always being compared (Rennie, 2006). However, Glaser's style relies heavily on the data speaking for itself, whereas Strauss and Corbin created a coding procedure designed to elucidate the data comparison process (axial coding).

Both forms of GT method have been critiqued by Rennie (2006) for potentially forcing the data comparison, rather than allowing the discovery process to occur as a matter of course as Glaser advocates. Of course, Strauss and Corbin advocate strongly for a more detailed and clear description of the comparison pieces which addresses a long held concern for researchers using Glaser's style of GT -- there is little guidance in the description of constant comparison to help a researcher effectively use this method. Moreover, the procedural shift engenders a more deductive style throughout the

analysis such that when something interesting or significant is noted in data analysis, researchers begin to generate ideas in an attempt to explain the process, testing those ideas and rigorously compare new and existing data to the hypothesized explanation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This is a much more deductive approach than Glaser's who reserves deduction to theoretical sampling arguing that rigorous interacting with and questioning participants' responses is only way to sensitize to data; other data sources can be facilitative in understanding a phenomena (Rennie, 2006). Grounded theory has been critiqued as failing to acknowledge fully the influence of the researcher across the data collection and analysis as well as theory construction (Bryant, 2002). Indeed the subjectivity of the researcher should be carefully considered during the coding procedures (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010).

The current research study uses the style of GT supported by Strauss and Corbin (1998) with a nod to constructivist influences of Charmaz (2006). Typical GT studies gather data through the means of interview and observations as well as other sources; for example, census data, previous recorded qualitative and quantitative data, and documents and various media. The ultimate product of an inquiry into these sources of data is a theory anchored in the data that meet the criteria for a satisfactory theory including; fit, understanding, generality, and control (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To achieve this end, a rigorous analysis process is used; the data are constantly compared, coded, categorized, and organized into a theory. The following sections describe in detail the analytical tools, coding procedures, and theory development process of GT.

### *Constant Comparison*

One of the key foundations of qualitative research is comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In GT, there is strong emphasis on comparing through a process of recursive, ongoing comparing of the data, called constant comparison. Constant comparison has been described by Charmaz (2006) as crucial to GT method. This data analysis tool is critical to the coding procedure and theory development because the data are compared to each other so that categories are developed, defined, and refined through this process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Unlike quantitative methodologies, the data are not organized into theoretical categories based on the literature; instead they are organized according to the categories that emerge in data comparison.

### *Theoretical Sampling*

Theoretical sampling is a cornerstone of GT method. It is an intentional and evolving process by which data is collected in a manner that maximizes finding variations in concepts and elaborate categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2006) described theoretical sampling as a critical process of theory building, as it helps define category properties, outlines and clarifies relationships between categories, establish boundaries between categories, and recognize saturation in categories. This type of sampling allows researchers to glean ideas, thoughts, or questions as they analyze data to inform further data collection efforts. Sampling is meant to be intentional, thoughtfully and consciously driven by the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, while interviewing an unmarried participant regarding the relationships experiences, the researcher, after analyzing and coding the transcript, may consider



how the same situation impacts one who is married and thus seeks the experiences of a married participant. Or, the same researcher may consider previous interviews and revisit the transcript looking for insights. As a result, sampling occurs in a sequential pattern after coding and can be in the form of a new case or participants or existing transcript or follow up with an established participant. Generally, sampling becomes more precise over time as the theory evolves and discoveries are made with the goal of maximizing the range, depth, and thoroughness of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical sampling can and often does continue well into the data analysis portion of a study (Fassinger, 2005). The ultimate goal of theoretical sampling, then, is not to gain a minimum set number of participants, but rather achieve a set of categories that are richly and densely defined (sufficiently saturated) without continuing to sample unnecessarily. Saturation of the categories refers to the point when categories are sufficiently descriptive when no new data falls outside of categories, and each category is well supported by data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Urquhart et al., 2010). The method of constant comparison also aids in determining saturation since each piece of data is rigorously compared to the other pieces of data. Without constant comparison, it would be difficult to determine when categories became sufficiently descriptive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, theoretical sampling is crucial to the theory development. It ensures the theory fits well with the data and that the theory is grounded in the data. Moreover, through constant comparison and theoretical sampling, the researcher is more likely to have maximized the theory's descriptive power and ensure the theory is comprehensive (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## *Data Analysis*

The GT method consists of three successively more specific coding procedures: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This style of analysis is suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and endorses a more systematic, step-by-step procedure compared to the less structured analysis process posited by Glaser (1998). The GT method endorsed by Strauss and Glaser endorses a slightly less constructivist notion than what Charmaz (2006, 2009) advocates in her style of GT.

### *Open Coding*

The first step in GT data analysis is the process known as open coding. Open coding involves identifying the concepts as well as setting their boundaries and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This style of coding aims to state what the participant is saying in plain and direct terms, label the concepts, and determine the meaning. The literature describes several ways to open code. For example, the pieces of information coded can be as small as one word, line by line, or as large as several pages (see Charmaz, 2000; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Rennie, 1995). Fassinger (2005) noted that often a combination of methods can be used to satisfy the aim of open coding.

### *Axial Coding*

The second step in GT analysis is called axial coding. Whereas the goal of open coding is to break down information into fractured pieces, the aim of axial coding is to bring the data together into meaningful (key) categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The driving force of the process involves a constant comparison method using four different comparisons including comparing and relating subcategories to categories, comparing

categories to new data, expanding the density and complexity of the categories by describing their properties and dimensions (ordering of the properties along a continuum), and noticing and understanding variations in the data and reformulating the categories and based on these variations (Fassinger, 2005).

### *Selective Coding*

The final stage of analysis, the process that generates the theory, is called selective coding. This coding begins with determining the central category that subsumes all other categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The central category is used to develop a narrative or theory about the coded data. This theory is checked for accuracy in a recursive process by comparing it to the experiences of participants as well as the literature (Fassinger, 2005).

### *Memo Writing*

Writing memos is a crucial brick in the structure of the GT analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of a memo is to document the evolving nature of the GT project. A researcher uses a memo to document the interview process including: (a) the researchers personal thoughts, reactions, and queries to participant responses; (b) the data analysis process across open, axial, and structural coding, for example, noting the expanding, shaping, and reshaping of the categories, and (c) the reflection process where researchers record their feelings, uncertainties, and insights throughout the life of the project. Memos tend to become richer and more complex of the course of the project, however, there is no expectation that each memo will be brilliant and contemplative as even small details and reflections are important (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The result is a rich and detailed narrative that clearly demonstrates the growth

and development of the project, as well as the constructive and reflective processes of the researcher.

### *Auditing*

Inviting another party to review, supervise, and provide feedback and guidance on GT project is known as auditing (Fassinger, 2005). Auditing in a GT approach is slightly different from other popular qualitative approaches. For example, in Consensual Qualitative Research (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess & Ladany, 2005) there are typically internal and external auditors with the focus of the external auditor placed on data analysis, providing an outside, unbiased perspective, whereas the internal auditor has “expert” understanding of the topic and participates in generating consensus. In the GT approach, Fassinger (2005) recommends the use of auditors at two levels (as suggested by Lincoln and Guba, 1985) peer debriefing and inquiry auditing. The peer debriefing is conducted by an approximate peer of the researcher who reviews and provides feedback on the categorizing, conceptualizing, and theorizing in data analysis. Inquiry auditing focuses on monitoring the overall project and provides support and feedback, ensuring that the study is conducted according to the GT approach.

### Purpose

The publicly identified structure of a family has changed over the past 30 years. What was once only accepted as a social unit consisting of a man, a woman, and children has expanded to include, single parent families, families that have adopted children, biracial families, and same-sex couple headed families. Each variation of the traditional family structure has advantages and disadvantages (Wainright, Russell, &

Patterson, 2004). Same-sex couple headed families provide a rich example of diversity in family structure. Much of the research literature related to same-sex families addresses the advantages and struggles of the family, the legality of marriage in same-sex unions, and the experience of children raised by same sex couples (Patterson, 2006; Wainright et al, 2004). While the research related to the experiences of children in same-sex families addresses the adjustment, self-esteem, sexual orientation, interpersonal development, and attitudes of children of same sex couples, there are very few studies that address the experiences of the adults raised as children of same-sex couples.

Goldberg (2007a) noted that this population was important to study for three primary reasons, including increasing awareness of undocumented perceived influences; sharing the experiences of growing up with LGB parents from the perspective of an adult rather than observations from parents, teachers, or others; and increasing candor through interviewing adults, as children and adolescents may become more defensive. Therefore, it is important to explore this population's experiences. There are several important reasons to study relationship experiences of those raised in same sex families. First, they provide another perspective on the relationships process. Understanding their experiences extends the knowledge regarding relationship development and maintenance. Second, this population offers a unique opportunity to explore gender roles and sexuality issues. While research in the past has emphasized the "no difference" comparison between heterosexual children by same-sex and opposite-sex parents, it is time to move beyond this defensive stance and explore the ways this population is unique (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Third, experiences of adults

raised by sexual minority parents offer insights into how they parent, manage homophobia and heterosexism, and develop supportive social networks (community). Finally, this population serves a unique role having a foot in the heterosexual and sexual minority worlds. Certainly, their perspectives are useful to help mitigate misunderstanding among the heterosexual majority.

Specifically, my intent was to describe how participants' experiences within a same-sex family of origin impact their view and experiences of intimate relationships in adulthood. Since there is little in the literature addressing the experiences of adults raised in same-sex families, a qualitative methodology was selected. Qualitative studies enable the researcher to understand the complex and dynamic experiences of a population and are particularly well suited for the experiences of understudied populations. The qualitative method, GT, was chosen for this study. This method uses an inductive approach that allows the participants to express their perspectives in their own words - their words then become the foundation on which the theory is built. Building a theory is an important aspect of the GT method. Theories not only help understand understudied populations and phenomena but also provide a solid foundation for future research to build upon. Moreover, this process allows participants to delve into topics and describe them using their own experiences from their own unique perspectives. In the area of same-sex family research this can be a helpful perspective; letting adults raised by sexual minorities speak for themselves helps avoid the tendency to measure or report something from a dominant culture, heteronormative perspective. Queer theory advocates for a destabilizing of traditional theories of family, sexual orientation, sexuality, gender and others as a way to not

recreate or force research findings into a heteronormative perspective (Oswald, 2002). GT allows for an exploration of the ideas and emergence of theme rooted in the participant's responses.

Therefore the essential question of this study was, from the perspective of the adult child, how did the experience of growing up in a same-sex family impact relationship experiences. This study explored experiences of adults in same sex families. General categories of questions were asked to participants in the areas of family, social, and environmental influences impacting the development and maintenance of close romantic relationships, relationships with peers, relationships dynamics, child rearing and navigating homophobia and heteronormativity. The intent of this study, then, was to add to the literature a study that explored relationship experiences of those raised in same-sex families from the perspective of the adult child.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

This study explored the relationship experiences of adults raised by same-sex couples. Using semi structured interviews, participants were asked to describe how participants' experiences within a same-sex family of origin affected their view and experiences of intimate relationships in adulthood. Particular attention was paid to navigating and managing homophobia and heteronormativity, sexual minority parents' influences, preferences for romantic partners, relationships dynamics, child rearing, and gender and sexuality issues. The methods for conducting the study are described in this chapter. It focused primarily on the procedures for recruiting participants and conducting the interviews as well as coding and the analysis of the data.

#### Participants

This study sampled adults that were raised by a lesbian or gay male couple or a lesbian or gay male single parent. Participants knew about their parent(s) sexual orientation; however, some knew while they were living at home and one discovered after she moved out of the home (although her father was living with her when he came out). The age of participants ranged from 24 to 39 years old. One participant lived abroad and the other participants lived in the United States, across several regions including the northeast, northwest, and southwest. All of the participants had at least one romantic relationship lasting for at least 6 months. The sample consisted of six



females and one male. All participants identified as White, heterosexual, and had professional careers (5) or were students in professional school (2). Four participants were raised by lesbian mothers and three were raised by gay fathers. One of the four participants raised by lesbian women was raised by transsexual females that identified as lesbian. One of the participants raised by gay fathers was born to a lesbian mother that later died, leaving custody to her biological gay, partnered father. Five of the seven discovered their parents were nonheterosexual in young childhood to young adulthood. Two participants were raised from birth by sexual minority parents, one by lesbian mothers, the other by a lesbian mother (who died) and then partnered gay fathers. Four of the seven participants were married and three of those participants had children.

Participants were recruited through organizations such as Parents and Families of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG), a national non-profit organization that promotes health and wellbeing of the LGBTQ community and Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE), a national movement that supports children and adults with LGBTQ parents. A description of the study was provided to these organizations with the principal investigator's contact information. In order to sample as broadly as possible, organizations were encouraged to forward the description of the study to anyone that fit the requirements.

### Measures

Participants were given a demographics form that gathered basic information including gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, relationship status, parent's sexual orientation, method of conception or adoption, and employment status (see

Table 1). Participants were also asked for a preferred address that a modest \$30.00 compensation check could be mailed to, and they were given the option of donating their compensation amount to a charity or organization.

### *Research Team*

The research team consisted of an interviewer and two auditors. Each member of research team has a role and roles are not mutually exclusive; this allows for greater consensus among members. Potential power differentials were recognized among the team members (doctoral candidate, doctoral student, professor) and open dialogue was strongly encouraged to ensure equal voice among members. The interviewer's role in this study was to conduct both the initial interviews and the follow up interviews, transcribe the interviews, and code and analyze the data. The auditors, formally called the peer debriefer and inquiry auditor (Fassinger, 2005), provided feedback on interview questions, interview protocol and contributed to consensus on data analysis in open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Auditors served as sources of consultation on the process of GT research.

The PI was a 31-year-old, White, partnered, heterosexual male with no children, enrolled in a Counseling Psychology graduate program. He was born into a heterosexual family and, at the age of 16, his father disclosed he was gay a year after divorcing his wife. His father had primary custody of him and his two siblings. The peer debriefer identified as a 30 year old, queer, White, Native American female, with strong rural ties living as the first generation of her family to live off of their tribe's reservation. She was currently in a relationship with a male. She is in a combined clinical, counseling, and school psychology PhD program and has conducted research

in the area of sexual minorities. The inquiry auditor identified as a middle aged, White, same-sex partnered stepmother of two children and was a professor in a Counseling Psychology program at a Midwestern university.

### *Procedure*

The principle investigator recruited participants in various ways including distributing fliers and emails to organizations such as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) and others. This study also used snowball sampling. Persons interested in participating in the study contacted the PI. The PI sent a copy of the informed consent in an email also containing instructions for the informed consent, a brief overview of their participation, and possible interview times. After completing the interviews and demographics questionnaire, the PI obtained an address where the monetary compensation of \$30.00 could be sent. Once interviews were transcribed and all identifying information removed, the PI sent the transcript to the participants for their review.

### *Interview Questions*

Before the interviews were conducted, the interviewer responded to the questions the way it was expected participants would respond. This feedback process generated a discussion of attitudes, perspectives, and reactions toward the participant population. It was also noted that the interviewer and the auditors shared a bias for GLBT affirmative research. The interviewer and the auditors contributed personal experiences that informed the development of the initial core of interview questions. These initial interview questions were used in a pilot interview. After the pilot

interview, it was determined that a lead in question relating to the family of origin should be standardized for each participant in order to create a context for the interview and build rapport. The inquiry auditor suggested a question regarding how the participants managed transitions. This question emerged as a result of a discussion between the interviewer and inquiry auditor when it was noted that themes of “transitions” were frequently discussed among participants. As the interviews continued, the inquiry auditor noted a particular behavioral pattern among parents. After discussing this pattern with the interviewer, the inquiry auditor and interviewer determined that the participants’ parents were consciously or unconsciously protecting their children from heterosexism and discrimination experiences. As a result, participants were asked to reflect on various ways participants’ parents protected them. Throughout the interview process, the auditors and interviewer remained open to revisions to the questions in order to reflect the major themes that emerged from the interview. This feedback process of revising interview questions based on themes presented by participants continued until the sixth interview when no new themes emerged.

### *Interview Protocol*

This study used semi-structured interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted that this style of interview can facilitate an effective interview while simultaneously creating opportunities for the interviewer to follow the themes that emerge from the participant’s story. The interview protocol began by asking participants about their experiences as children of same-sex parents; specifically focusing on how they came to understand their parents were GLBT, a description of the family system they grew up

in, and how they feel about their family's identity. These questions helped prime participants for the primary questions and help generate thoughts, beliefs, and experiences related to their experiences as members of a same-sex family. The questions also allowed interviewers to build rapport with participants. The final interview questions were as follows:

1. Tell me about the family you grew up in.
2. Tell me about any transitions you experienced as a result of your parents coming out.
3. What has been the impact of being raised by same-sex parents on your adult relationships? Dating relationships?
4. How has having same sex parents informed your ideas about gender roles and gender identity?
5. How do you tell your partner, your children, community, employer you have gay/lesbian parent(s)?
6. How did you see your parents communicate with each other? How has this impacted your communication style?
7. How did your parents handle emotions with each other? How has this impacted how you handle emotions with others?
8. How did your parents handle conflict with each other? How has this impacted how you handle conflict with significant others in your life?

9. How has this experience influenced the way you are sexually intimate with your partner?
10. How has this experience affected how you view marriage and long term commitments?
11. Has your partner's family been supportive? If not, how has their behavior affected you?
12. Do you have children? How have thought about having children with your partner with same-sex parents?
13. How has [will] the experience of being the child of same sex parents influence how you will parent?
14. What has been your experience of prejudice or discrimination as a result of being a member of a same-sex family? How does that influence your own adult relationships? How does that influence your parenting?
15. Where you ever aware of your parents protecting you from discrimination?

Next, the interviewer transcribed the interviews and sent a digital copy for the participant to review. Participants reviewed their interviews making additions, deletions, or clarifications and returned the edited transcripts. A follow up interview was scheduled after the initial interview if there was need for clarification or to ask additional questions. In addition, participants could clarify or add content to the interview, allow interviewers to ask additional questions, and allow both interviewer and participant to discuss any other issues related to the experience.

While Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend transcribing only the relevant dialogue, the entire discourse of all interviews was transcribed. All interviews were conducted through Skype and digitally recorded and encrypted using a software program called PowerGramo. Each interview was transcribed by the primary investigator. All identifying information was removed to ensure the interview was anonymous and each participant was assigned a unique letter code. The auditor reviewed the anonymous interviews and provided feedback.

#### *Procedures for Analyzing Data*

The data were analyzed using the Grounded Theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). The PI and the inquiry auditor read through the transcripts before they were coded. The PI transcribed all of the interviews and coded all of the data. The technique of constant comparison was used to compare all existing codes with new and emerging codes in order to determine which codes could be categorized together. The inquiry auditor reviewed the coding procedures and supervised the development of the codes and emerging categories. The process of open coding for the first two interviews was monitored by the inquiry auditor; feedback on the coding procedures was provided and recorded in weekly notes. In addition, feedback was provided during weekly meetings and notes were recorded to document the evolution of the interviewing, coding, and analysis procedures.

The peer debriefer also reviewed all of the transcripts used in the data analysis. The peer debriefer provided comments, posed connections, and made suggestions for changes to questions. Comments were recorded through memos and memos were discussed during weekly meeting between the PI and the peer debriefer. In addition, the

peer debriefer collaborated with the PI on developing and defining categories and provided insights and suggestions on the development of the grounded theory.

During axial coding, the PI searched for phenomena, contexts, interactions, and consequences of the emerging categories in order to develop dense categories with sufficient descriptive detail. Feedback was critical for the coding process; it enhanced validity of the code and emerging categories and introduced alternative perspective. Both auditors reviewed the emerging categories and provided feedback on their development. Here are some examples of the feedback provided by the auditors.

The peer debriefer noted the mix of characteristics that a female participant wanted in a partner. This observation corroborated similar observations by the interviewer.

This strikes me as a very interesting juxtaposition of what she wants in a mate. In some ways, she wants him to conform rigidly to male gender roles (e.g. watching football, not being too metrosexual) and in others she wants him to be capable of acting in ways not consistent with that role: communicating more openly and talking about feelings. This would be an interesting guy!

Collaboration on this code led to the development of a “characteristics of partner” subcategory which eventually evolved into the partner selection and gender roles. The peer debriefer also challenged the code and categories, generating fruitful discussion the meanings of categories. In this example, the interviewer conceptualized a method of disclosing without considering the potential internal factors that could be motivating the participant’s disclosing behavior.

Feels a little bit like internalized homophobia to me. Some level of acceptance of the notion that the “normal” and ideal response to having gay parents would be avoiding disclosure, not talking openly. I think it probably is a wise approach given people’s judgments, but still is not really how things have to be, if there were not homophobia. And if she were to “blab” it to everyone, and



people had a problem with it, that's not her fault for blabbing. It's theirs for being bigoted. (My bias, I know).

The result of such challenges led to more internally valid and clearly developed categories. The peer debriefer also helped guide the study toward theoretical sampling by noticing trends in the participants.

So far, there has been a theme of parents who were initially in heterosexual marriages and later entered same-sex partnerships. Nobody so far was born into, or adopted into, having same-sex parents

Theoretical sampling helped achieve saturation among the emerging categories.

Overall forty-seven categories were initially generated in the data analysis. This ultimately resulted in 7 categories including; identity, discrimination, disclosing, partner selection, contextual influences, gender roles and sexuality.

The inquiry auditor provided feedback on the interview process, coding process, data analysis, and theoretical sampling. Her role also included overseeing and ensuring the development of the project remained within GT method. The inquiry auditor provided feedback in the form email correspondence, weekly telephone calls, and memos on the transcripts. Here are some examples of feedback provided by the inquiry auditor. One piece of feedback helped discover the theme of protection. The inquiry auditor noted in reference to the action of participant's mother, "Her mom worked to protect the kids – especially by making choices to stay closeted." This led to the development of questions that assessed participants' awareness or reflections on their parents' effort to shield or protect them from heterosexism and homophobic attitudes. In addition, the inquiring auditor made direct suggestions to adjusting the interview questions. For example, during a feedback session after the third interview, the inquiry auditor advised adding questions to explore the emerging theme of transitions.

Table 1. Participant Demographics.

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Sexual Identity-Marital Status	Kids	Parents & Parent sexual orientation	Career Type
1	32	F	White	Heterosexual Not in a relationships	No	Bio dad gay, partnered	Professional Career
2	31	F	White	Heterosexual Married	Yes	Bio mom lesbian, partnered	Professional Career
3	39	F	White	Heterosexual Married	Yes	Step-dad gay, partnered	Professional Career
5	34	M	White	Heterosexual In a relationship	No	Bio mom lesbian, partnered	Professional Career
6	27	F	White	Heterosexual Married	No	Trans dad/ lesbian, single	Professional Career
7	30	F	White	Heterosexual Married	Yes	Bio mom lesbian & partnered gay dads	Professional Student
8	24	F	White	Heterosexual In a relationship	No	Lesbian mom partnered	Professional Student

*Note.* Participant 4 was removed from the data analysis because she did not have a romantic relationship of at least 6 months.

Often the inquiry auditor and interviewer collaborated on the determining the meanings of codes and categories. This was particularly useful when further developing and expanding categories. Here is an example of a memo provided in response to the developing category, contextual influences, “I think be a bit more specific here [referring to developing a category details]; maybe something like focusing on the parent’s interpersonal skills more than their sexual orientation.” In addition, the inquiry auditor advocated for diverse participants throughout the data analysis process and into theoretical sampling. This encouragement and the feedback from the peer auditor led to more specific sampling of participants through the process of theoretical sampling.

The process of coding the data led to a subtle change in the original exploration of this study. While the focus had initially focused on the romantic relationship experiences of adults raised in same-sex families, the participants’ responses often included descriptions of other close relationship; for example, relationships with peers, parents, and other significant persons. Recognizing the importance of following the data and themes generated by participants, the overall aim of this study adjusted to include not only the romantic relationship experiences of participants but also their close relationships with peers, parents, the parents of partners, and other significant relationships.

During the coding process, categories began to saturate during the sixth interview. Saturation is a critical process in the GT method (Charmaz, 2006; Fassinger, 2005). The process of saturation occurred when categories became firmly established and no new codes were generated. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined saturation as the

point in data analysis when new information no longer emerges from the data. Moreover, saturation is reached when “no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences” are found in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.138). After the sixth interview, the PI, on recommendation from the peer auditor and inquiry auditor, began to theoretically sample for participants that were born into a sexual minority families and participants that were male and represented both an ethnic and sexual minorities. The results of the theoretical sampling yielded two female that were raised by sexual minority parents from birth. Despite an effort to target these specific populations, no males, sexual minorities, or ethnic minorities responded to interview invitations.

After the sixth interview, the data analysis process demonstrated several very detailed and specific categories. Additional participants continued to develop and saturate these categories. Additional evidence of saturation occurred when no new codes emerged in the data analysis process during the seventh interview. The eighth interview was completed in order to verify saturation of the categories had occurred. The categories were considered saturated when no new codes emerged from the eighth interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While no new codes emerged, the additional interviews provided crucial details that elaborated the categories. This detail and elaboration process provided confidence that the categories were well defined and firmly anchored in the experiences of the participants.

After categories were saturated, the PI began outlining the story of the participants’ experiences. The final step in data analysis was selective coding and generating the theory. The data were coded to similar themes in order to make sense of

the data collectively. Another literature review was conducted based on the findings in the data analysis. During the process of data analysis and literature review, a theory was generated. The PI, inquiry auditor and peer debriefer discussed the themes and agreed upon the final supporting categories; seven categories emerged as well as the central category. Conclusions, based on the results of the analyzed data, were made about the categories and resulting grounded theory.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

“When I was a kid, people asked, ‘What’s it like to have gay parents?’ I’d say, it’s not like anything, they are just my parents.” - Participant 7

The study interviewed seven individuals that were raised by sexual minority parents. They were asked questions about their experiences growing up in a same-sex family and the impact these experiences had on relationships with peers, partners, and others. They were also asked about their experiences discussing their family’s identity and the methods they used to manage heterosexism and homophobic attitudes. The participants’ transcribed interviews were analyzed using the GT method. First, all transcripts were coded and common codes were categorized together. Next, categories were further detailed, described, and refined until they were sufficiently dense. Finally, the main categories and central category were used to create a story, or theory, of the participants’ experiences. The semi-structured interviews facilitated equally efficient and flexible interviews with participants. This generated a process that allowed the interviewer to explore established topics with each participant and follow participants’ spontaneous ideas and themes. As a result, this discovery oriented process led to categories that were intriguing, surprising, and compelling.

This chapter provides results of the data analysis. The following section describes the categories that emerged through the interviews with the participants. The supporting categories included Identity, Discrimination, Disclosing, Partner Selection,

Contextual Influences, Gender Roles, and Sexuality and the central category was Acceptance. The main sections of this chapter detail the theoretical model, the supporting constructs, and the central category. The supporting constructs and the central category are described; participants' quotes are used to provide a richer, detailed description.

### Categories

Through semi-structured interviews, participants shared their experiences of being raised by sexual minority parents. They discussed their thoughts, reflections, and feelings across a range of topics including relationships with parents, peer, and romantic partner, dealing with discrimination, learning to disclose their family's identity. Consistent with GT method, their stories were recorded, coded, categorized and reorganized into a theory that described and detailed their experiences.

The following sections describe the core categories, which are the major themes that emerged through the data analysis, and the central category, which is the common construct that unifies and explains each of the categories. The core categories included; Disclosing, Discrimination, Partner Selection in Relationships, Contextual Influences on Relationships, Gender Roles, and Sexuality. In addition, the central category was labeled Acceptance. Each of these categories was defined according to the particular themes that emerged in data analysis and were supported by direct quotes from participants.

### *Identity*

The data analysis revealed an identity development process among participants. This process was dynamic and different for each participant although there were

common themes among all of the participants—including a series of phases the participants tended to go through. The process began with when participants realized that they were children of a sexual minority parent or a member of a same-sex family. This realization carried the additional weight of suddenly being part of a nontraditional family. This generated a reflection phase when participants considered what this meant for them and their family. The next phase, best captured by the word “adjustment”, occurred when participants realized and began to grapple with the stigma attached to “gay” people, and, consequently, to having same-sex parents. This adjustment phase transformed over time, and participants who worked through passed into another phase—labeled appreciation.

The appreciation phase included more themes of acceptance and appreciation. More specifically, it was characterized by respect, caring and concern for parents and the same sex family, and this family identity was openly shared with important others including peers, partners, children, and others. In this phase, participants disclosed freely to others, found active ways to not only manage but also challenge discrimination, and sought to educate others and to support and advocate for same-sex families.

#### *Discovery Phase*

The first marker of the identity development process occurred when the participants realized their parents were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. This process was different for participants born into a same-sex family and participants born into an opposite sex family and was complex. The discovery phase generally occurred in young childhood for those that were born into same-sex families; for example



Participant 7 and Participant 8. The discovery phase occurred at slightly older age, adolescence or young adulthood for those that were raised in heterosexual families.

### *Reflection Phase*

The phase following the participants' discovery of their parents' sexual orientation was called the reflection stage. This stage generally marked the beginning of a process of understanding what it means to be a member of a same-sex family. The reflection phase manifested in slightly different ways depending on when the participant was discovered their family identity. For example, Participant 7 recalled:

When I was a kid, people asked, "what's it like to have gay parents?" I'd say, it's not like anything, they are just my parents. This is it, this is all I know, I can't tell you what it's like, so I can't tell you what it's like. That's what I am seeing now as an adult, there's something else in other people's families, how other people [in opposite sex families] raise their kids. It's interesting; it gives me much insight into society.

Participant 8 described a similar experience reflecting over her childhood regarding what "normal" was for her as child of a lesbian mother, "For me, like all my Barbies were lesbians because I didn't know any different and I didn't know it was 'wrong'." For those that found out later in adolescence, like Participant 1 and Participant 6, the reflection process included an emerging awareness that other's may or may not be accepting of their parents' sexual orientation. Sorting through these concerns led to the next phase.

### *Adjustment Phase*

Participant 6 described the next marker related to adjusting to the change in family identity. She recalled her process of adjusting coming from an opposite-sex family:

[I felt] a lot of shame, and I don't know why. Because I mean at the time I was very open minded, I thought. But at 14 how open minded can you be? And my mom had it made it clear she was pretty pro-gay, but some reason, it was so weird. I didn't know anybody else that this was happening to. Ya know? So, I had to come out.

*Participant 7:* I was very shy so I wouldn't confront them. This one girl, there were four of us that were pretty good friends, I think, one of them knew her already, and I'd told the other two when we were hanging out together, and the one girl was making faces and going "Ew, ew, ew." And I immediately decided she was no longer my friend and I hated her, but I wasn't really going to say anything."

Moreover, Participant 5 brought up a complex issue shared by some participants born in an opposite-sex family. Reflecting over his experiences, he noted he was proud and accepting of his mother; however, there was recognition that if she had embraced her sexual orientation before marrying his father, he might not have been born:

But, all in all I would not go back and change it. If I could somehow go back and control things...I would still have my mom growing up in this kind of repressive culture, because I think otherwise I might not exist, apart from that.

This was a complex experience for participants that were born into a heterosexual relationship that later dissolved because one parent came out. Participants worried that if their parents came out before they entered into a heterosexual relationship, they might not have been born. Participants appreciated societal pressures that kept their parents closeted long enough to conceive children. On the other hand, participants were proud of their sexual minority parents and reviled a heterosexist culture that stigmatized

sexual orientation. It created a catch-22 where participants resented the very societal pressure that helped them be conceived. Experiences like these illustrated unique the challenges of adults raised by sexual minority parents.

As participants navigated this adjustment process they developed a wider perspective on their parents' sexual orientation and their own role in a same-sex family. Many found acceptance for this identity. Yet, several participants noted that they had siblings or knew of other children of same-sex families that revolted against this identity. None of the participants interviewed said they personally experienced these feelings related to their identity. However, by their account, participants recognized that an alternative to working through the adjustment stage to acceptance of one's identity was the rejection of one's identity in a same sex family.

#### *Appreciation Phase*

The final phase that emerged in the participants' responses was the appreciation phase. The marker for this developmental process was gaining a broader perspective on the identity of parents, including the coming out process. Certainly, participants grappled with their parents' sexual orientation and their process of coming out.

Participant 6 reflected back on this transition:

I don't blame her [her father is a male to female transsexual] for this, I just recently came to grips with why she transitioned when she did, ya know? It had to be pretty hard for her. She was basically keeping a secret from all of us from the get-go. Not on purpose, but she was. And then once she did come to terms with it, she and my mom kept this secret for 5 years, from everyone. I know it was a strain on their marriage and on how they parented my brother and me. And so, I think I am being aware that it wasn't terribly healthy.

Participants born into both types of families, same-sex family from birth and heterosexual to nonheterosexual parents after divorce, developed an understanding of

their parents' struggles. Participant 1 said, "I'm sure he was in a relationship that was not working for him - intellectually, definitely not sexually, that's frustrating." For Participant 7, describing her father's young adulthood, she recognized the value of living with a feeling of acceptance:

[H]is father was a religious leader, so it was pretty difficult, when he grew up and realized he needed to get out of there. And one time he said to me, I needed to move to the east coast because I needed someplace to be gay.

Markers for the appreciation phases tended to include statements referring to open, direct disclosing, acceptance of identity, and acceptance for parent/family identity. For example, Participant 3 said "I'm very open about it when it comes up. I don't make a big deal of it; now it's a matter of fact thing." This was similar to how Participant 5 broached the subject, "Usually, I'd just say it. My mom and her partner...something like that. It's common enough that it comes across pretty quickly..." Moreover, Participant 5 summarized:

"Once I got old enough to figure out what it meant, or say to come to terms with why mom made that choice. Maybe it wasn't really something that she could choose, whether to stay or not, but more of coming to terms of who she was. It was really easy for me to accept and I never thought about how things could have been different or would have been different"

Participant 7, when thinking back across her experiences and thinking about her life today said, "I mean growing up I have to say I don't think it made a difference that my parents were a same sex couple versus opposite." Most participants noted they would not change their experience growing up in a same-sex family or evolving into a same-sex family. That the participants valued their experience was also an indicator of identity comfort and congruence as a child of same-sex parents. Indeed, no one

interviewed actively rejected their parent and all were maintaining a relationship with their sexual minority parents.

### *Discrimination*

Among participants, the experience of discrimination was universal. All participants encountered discrimination. The participants defined Discrimination through their experiences; instances of heterosexist and homophobic attitudes, reactions, or behaviors--by partners, peers, or communities--toward oneself, family, or the GLBTQ community at large and could be expressed directly, indirectly, or implied. Participants reported that Discrimination was painful, frustrating and offensive for them and their parents. Consequently, in order to cope with such dehumanizing experiences, participants and their parents developed a variety of strategies. These strategies, which were dynamic and evolved overtime, were classified into two groups, protective strategies and advocacy strategies. Protective strategies, for example nondisclosure, were subtle, indirect, non confrontational methods whereas Advocacy Strategies were more direct challenges and confrontations to Discrimination. Parents also served as models for protective and advocacy strategies; sometimes participants adapted and adopted these strategies and applied them to their own methods for managing Discrimination.

### *Experiences of Discrimination*

The experiences of the participants became increasingly powerful as common themes emerged; being discriminated against was an unpleasant experience. Participant 8 shared several discrimination experiences she endured as a child and as an adult.

So there were a couple friends that I could stay over at their houses and I could go over there but they were not allowed to come over to my house and my mother tried to shield me from that as much as possible, because the parents talked to her and not to me.

*Participant 8:* People were like “you must be a lesbian because your mother’s a lesbian.”

*Participant 8:* No one, as an adult, to my face, has been like, “You’re disgusting because you are the child of a lesbian.” I have had people say, “Your mom is going to hell” as an adult or they think her lifestyle is sending her to hell, but have said it as nicely as possible. So it’s interesting they try to say it and wrap it up like, I am sure she is a nice person but she’s going to burn in damnation.

Participant 6 shared a similar discrimination experience when she was in grade school. Her experience was a typical example of a negative reaction to the process of disclosing:

I remember telling a girl in my gym class, testing the waters, so I have this weird thing I want to tell you and she’s like OK...so I told her and she goes “Ewwww, that’s gross!”

Overall, participants were shocked, irritated and angered, when they heard offensive remarks toward GLBT individuals from their peers, or children. Participant 7 expressed her frustration when she was asked about experiences of discrimination she has recently experienced:

The biggest one that irks me is when people say, “that’s so gay.” And they have no idea they might be hurting people around. They have don’t know it’s hurtful because their friends say it. That irritates me more than outright, well not exactly discrimination, but more like people don’t realize what they are saying. Think about that for a second. It’s not the word to use in that situation.

Family members of the participants sometimes made disparaging remarks and discriminated against their lesbian or gay parent. Several participants indicated their siblings would not have agreed to give an interview because they were not proud or accepting of their parent's sexual orientation. Participant 3 noted members of her family were not accepting of her gay father:

My bio dad and my brothers, and really it's my one brother, they're the most likely to be snide about it. Behind his [my father's] back. But I don't know if that's a gay thing...Do you know what I mean, I think it might be mockery of my dad in general and then being gay just plays into that."

### *Managing Discrimination*

As a result of experiencing discrimination, participants developed different ways to manage discrimination. Not surprisingly, participants as well as their parents used strategies to manage discrimination. These methods to manage discrimination included protective strategies and advocacy strategies and they were individualized to the particular situation, circumstance, and person.

One method, the protective strategy involved methods that were intended to proactively reduce or eliminate experiences of discrimination. Parents played a role in finding safe communities to raise children and modeled ways to deal with people that discriminated against them. Later, these children used these skills to set boundaries with peers and partners and live in relatively open and accepting environments. The other method, the advocacy strategy, involved methods that were intended to directly engage, confront, challenge, advocate, or educate experiences of discrimination, homophobia, and heterosexism. The parents strategies are discussed first followed by the participants strategies.

*Strategies Used by Parents to Manage Discrimination.* A very intriguing theme emerged as participants talked about the communities they grew up in or lived in and sometimes the friends and partner they encountered. They tended to conceptualize the discrimination they experienced as comparatively light to what might have been experienced in less open communities and they attributed experiences of acceptance to “luck.” However, it was noticed in data analysis that parents had exercised some intentional choice in selecting more open or accepting communities. It seemed fortunate to them because they did not actually make the choice but rather found themselves cognizant of the accepting environment reflecting back across their life. No parent moved from an accepting community to a non accepting community.

This “protective factor” may not be the intention of the parent when coming out of a heterosexual relationship, perhaps it was their intent to find a safe place to come out and it was mostly oriented to their safety. However, there was a fortuitous benefit to these children of same- sex families because it increased (but did not guarantee) the chances of experiencing a supportive and open community, thus reducing the discrimination experiences. When asked if his mother had done anything to protect him from discrimination, Participant 5 noted that nothing was obvious:

Yea, I would imagine that she thought about it, seriously. I’m sure for herself it had to be this massive, massive thing that she was struggling with for years and years and years. I’m sure she would have thought about us. But if I ever saw something like that, it was never apparent

However, he was fully aware the community his mother lived in was open and accepting, In fact, the community was one of the more open cities in the state. He acknowledged this saying:



I was lucky enough, well I don't know lucky enough, but we lived in a relatively progressive area, our region is not known for being particularly progressive... there are some [progressive areas], and we were lucky enough to live in one. It wasn't that bad there for mom, I don't know, I got that impression anyway.

Participant 7 also noted that she felt safe in the community she grew up in and initially attributed this to luck, though later she recognized that her parents raised her in a open community:

I was really lucky because we grew up in a pretty open area which was very open, even back then it was crunchy granola type atmosphere. But people were by and large very open and accepting. I hardly ever, I never heard anything negative from an adult.

But I think our parents did a good job of trying to keep up us in a safe community, I think we were in a good area and we made good friends. I think we were raised not to *not* (emphasis added) confront people but also to know where our boundaries are. If someone is not accepting they are gone, they don't need be your friends.

When asked about her experience of discrimination, Participant 2 acknowledged that her mother was active in creating a safe environment, recalling a strategy of avoiding high risk situations of discrimination:

I think that would be something I'd remember. It's been pretty easy and I that is just because she has made it easy. We don't put ourselves in situations where we would be easily discriminated against."

Sometimes, parents demonstrating a more direct, intentional style of protection. This style, labeled advocacy strategy, involved intervening in the lives of their children or advising how to handle social situations. For example Participant 8's mother advocated on behalf of her for equal treatment in school. When describing her mother she recalled:

She tried to, ya know always, whenever a teacher found out, she would go talk to the teacher and it was like OK, this is what is going on. Please be on the alert. Whenever I was getting bullied, she talked to the principal at my school,

and said this is something that is important and you should not allow this to happen. She really did try to go to people.

Her mother also directly advised actions to minimize exposure to discrimination, Participant 8 said, “My mother told me, ‘Don’t tell people that I’m gay’.” Considering that most of the parents of the participant grew up in a social and political culture that pathologized homosexuality and closeting sexual orientation was one way to cope with homophobia, this admonition was not surprising. Interestingly, the desire to protect their children in social situations actually recreated the pressure to remain hidden in society for their children.

*Strategies Used by Children in Same-sex Families.* As a result of their parents’ examples and their experiences, participants evolved their own protective strategies and advocacy strategies to manage Discrimination. Protective strategies were subtle methods to minimize the experience of Discrimination and advocacy strategies were more direct methods to exercise control over the experience of discrimination, homophobia, and heterosexism. Protective strategies are discussed first.

Participants sometimes chose to use subtle, less direct ways to manage Discrimination. These protective strategies were closely related to the category of Disclosing, particularly when a Disclosing strategy was used as a method to manage Discrimination. Several participants reported nondisclosure or disclosure when absolutely necessary in situations where they perceived a negative reaction. For example, Participant 6 recalled managing the reaction of her future in-laws, “I didn’t tell his parents until shortly before we were married.” Moreover, in the context of

partner selection, Participant 2 was intentional in the way she picked partners in order to manage negative reactions:

I don't ever remember getting a bad reaction to that. I never had to go through a break up because of that reason. I don't think so. Yea, I think I picked pretty open people to be in a relationship with from the beginning so I didn't really expect it."

Participants described a theme of careful disclosure to manage the identity of their parents when encountering people that would perhaps not understand or be open to their family identity:

*Participant 2:* I wouldn't consider [my mom's partner] ever my parent. She was more like a fun aunt or my mom's friend, basically that's how we would describe her to other people, ya know people who were not part of the family and who did not understand the family situation.

*Participant 1:* Because in like a non dating setting like people at work with, I'm not sure what they think, I'm definitely aware and careful what I say about my parents.

*Participant 7:* I had a few...there was one girl in my class that may not have been aware of my family situation, most of friends, most of the school was, she was like the "high religion" so she started spouting anti-gay religious stuff one time and my friends came to my rescue, and I was kinda shy so I was just going to let it happen, but they said, you're wrong! It's not an illness! It's just how people are!

Another example of a protective strategy was choosing to live in an open-minded community. This protective strategy benefited themselves, their children, or their parents as a result of not having to hide one's identity. Participant 3 moved to a liberal community in the northwest, a place where her father and his partner have felt comfortable visiting her. She also recognized that she does not enjoy hiding her father's sexual orientation or her identity in a same-sex family:

I am really fortunate, I live in the Northwest in a liberal community... I don't know if I'd be different if I was in a conservative community, but I might be. In

this environment there's not a reason for me to hide it or pretend and it's really not in my nature to do that anyway.

Participants sometimes attributed their ability to find open peers and partners to luck. Participant 6 said "I am lucky enough to have friends that were cool with it."

Similarly, Participant 7 credited luck with finding her partner, "Well I got lucky with him because I met him through my ex-boyfriend, they used to work together. And I knew my husband was good friends with him so I knew he was "safe" to speak to."

Just as parents acted to protect their children the participants sometimes acted as protectors of their parents by not sharing all of the experiences of discrimination encountered in everyday life or simply not disclosing their identity:

*Participant 7:* I guess I felt like, and this kinda sounds mature for a kid, but I felt like they had probably had to deal with it enough, and this was my cross to bear, so to speak, my issue that. ...But I didn't really, I think I didn't want to bother them with it, I don't know, it's hard to explain. I felt like it was my thing to deal with. Even though technically, it wasn't.

*Participant 8:* And she really did try, but I will say, whenever she tried so hard I would wonder what am I doing wrong? So, I stopped telling her whenever people would make fun of me... I didn't tell my mother about the pool thing because I did not want to stop going to the pool and having fun because I thought my mother might stop it and I did not want my mother to worry about me, I was getting to the point of "Fuck it I don't care." I didn't tell her.

*Advocacy Strategy.* Participants used strategies to manage Discrimination that were direct, assertive, and intentional. This was referred to as an advocacy strategy.

Using this method, participants may confront homophobic comments, educate others on GLBT discrimination, act as an ally by challenging heteronormative beliefs, and stand up rights of sexual minorities. Examples of the advocacy strategy occurred in a variety of situations and with a range of people. Here were some of the descriptions:

*Participant 3:* There were a couple times I just said, look, I really don't appreciate that. Or say, you know I realize that dad behaved badly, but dad is not all gay people.

*Participant 6:* Do you remember a few years ago, there was a man whose wife could not get pregnant and still had a uterus and stuff, he carried a child. I remember talking about that with people and they would get so... I worked with a guy for a while that was not overtly homophobic, but he really was, he just knew better than to say anything. And it was a struggle for him, I think. It came up one day and he said, "That's gross, it doesn't make any sense to me at all." And I said, "Hey, let's sit down and talk about this."

*Participant 7:* I think as an adult I have come to be more vocal. I don't tolerate that in particular. I have had friends, they don't say it, but friends of friends come over and a few times they have said things like ['that's so gay'], do you mean happy? Because that's what 'gay' means. And they stop and look around, and I say, yea, didn't you know that's what that word means? So I don't like confrontation and I try to keep it light"

*Participant 8:* I try to do a lot of outreach, I'm part of a national organization that advocates for children of same sex parents in the southeast and I try to educate, because it really tough growing up with people making fun of you

*Participant 8:* And someone comes up to me the next day and they say, I hear you are openly a lesbian now." So what if I was? I am not. I'm not going to prove to you that I am not a lesbian... I'm not proving to anyone else, anymore, that I am not a lesbian. If I was a lesbian, there is nothing wrong with that. So that's what I told them. And if I was a lesbian I would proudly proclaim it - but I am not.

*Participant 8:* I am absolutely a nazi about these things where someone uses the word "gay" around me that is not acceptable. "That's so gay", I have stopped many a random person in the street and done that [confronted them].

*Participant 7:*[My dads] were not marching in parades or wearing rainbows, they were blending, gently. They were not going to give in to anything, not pretend to be roommates, but they also were not going to wave flags. So I think that has shaped the way I handle it. I am for gay marriage but I am not going door to door, I am not making phone calls. I support it, I talk to my friends and coworkers, but I am not, I am not, I don't know if its just confidence, or just trying to be.

Participants were also interested in introducing their children to nontraditional families as a way to educate about sexual minorities and diversity. For example:

*Participant 7:* In the Northeast and we've had a few rounds of trying to get gay marriage passed...there was this big rally and we all went and wore red shirts... I had the kids come along and they said its great publicity to see a straight family for the gay family. So we took the kids with us and I was trying to explain what it's for, it's for gay marriage.

*Participant 8:* I want to raise my children with the knowledge that their grandmother is a lesbian and that's OK, that's acceptable. Ya know like, that's a family style that is completely acceptable and I'd like to make that something they can see, like for my kids, even though I am not a lesbian, to go to things like COLAGE and see gay families out there and make that their norm.

When participants used advocacy strategies they expressed satisfaction in their assertiveness and felt positive sharing their opinions. These strategies tended to reflect congruence between their internal feelings and their actions. In addition, participants modeled both the protective strategy and advocacy for their children which may have implications for the way they deal with homophobia and heterosexism in their lives. Sometimes confronting Discrimination using these strategies was uncomfortable and support from partners, peers, and parents was helpful in coping with discomfort. Nevertheless, these experiences were instrumental in facilitating ways to disclose effectively in the future as well as helping participants to assertively stand up for themselves.

### *Disclosing*

The act of sharing one's identity (as a child of same-sex parents) with others was an important experience across all participants. The experience was complex and dynamic across the situations, time, and people. Disclosing was a vehicle for interacting with the world, and for forming identity and relationships. Most participants recognized that disclosing was a way to show that they valued friendships, a way to feel out relationships, or a way to share deeper parts of their identity. On the

other hand, “disclosing” sometimes led to uncomfortable situations or awkward experiences.

Disclosing involved several layers including telling others about the identity of self, parent, and family. Disclosing was used as a process of relationships building with peers, partners, and others. Certainly, disclosing was an ongoing, evolving process. Most participants said that the method of disclosing became more refined over time, across situations; often this process was facilitated by trial and error learning, advice from parents, and previous experiences disclosing.

#### *Parents Coming Out to their Children*

Often the first model for disclosing about the family identity that participants experienced was their parent coming out. This occurred in a variety of ways depending the age of the participants and the specific circumstances. Participant 5 experienced his mother and father divorcing when he was a child and shortly after his mother began dating a woman. He described how his mother first introduced the idea of same-sex relationships:

You know the game of “Life”, I remember my mom putting two pink people in front two seats of the car instead of the pink and the blue and saying, “This can also work,” kind of alluding to what was going on.

Children born into a same-sex family had a slightly different experience when parents disclosed because they were not previously parented in a heterosexual relationship. Indeed, their basis for comparison was the family they grew up in with lesbian or gay parent(s). Participant 8, conceived through a donor to a lesbian couple, recalled that her mother first explained what “gay” meant when she was in the third grade:

Ellen came out and that was in third grade and there was an article about it, and I was like “what is this ‘gay’ word mom, what is this?” And she goes, “well, I am gay” and I thought, “cool.”

Later, the next day, she went to school and, against her mother’s advice, disclosed to peers that her mother was a lesbian, like Ellen. Participant 8 was received neutrally by her peers in grade school, but, later in middle school, the information she disclosed to her peers was used by some of them to bully and disparage her.

### *Disclosing to Peers*

Peers often represented the first experience with the external world in experimenting how to come out. Disclosing was an important issue to consider when interacting with peers. Peers might be accepting and stand up for the participants or be rejecting and discriminate against the participants. This was a potentially risky situation--if a peer was rejecting then the participant might feel vulnerable or embarrassed and might be the target of homophobic harassment. On the other hand, disclosing to peers could enhance a friendship, bringing peer closer together. Consequently, participants learned methods to find safe people and avoid risky disclosures. Disclosing was sometimes used as a demonstration of the level of relationships, such that closer people are generally, but not always, disclosed to most often. Participants described their concerns and introduced the reasons for the methods of disclosing they use.

*Participant 8:* I mean, it’s always been, people have litmus tests for people they surround themselves with and I’ve always considered that one of my litmus tests. If you don’t think gay and lesbians should have the same rights then maybe we are not so compatible as friends or in a relationship. I mean, for me, it’s non negotiable. You’re going to be treating people with the same leniency.



*Participant 7:* I moved to a larger metropolitan city for high school and that was a little different. And most of my friends, I had to feel my way out. Do I want to tell them, are they good enough friends, it was definitely a barrier if I wanted to have a friend over I have to explain.

*Participant 6:* I think it's one of those things I pick and choose, I don't broadcast to the world but its like if I feel like you can handle it and we're going to be friends then that is something you need to know about me because it's something that made me who I am.

*Subtle Style.* Participant 1 described one strategy of disclosing, the subtle style.

For example, around her coworkers she was very careful not to share too much information about her family because she could not be certain if they would be accepting. As a result, she dropped subtle hints and observed how people responded as a way to predict whether people were open to the idea of same-sex families.

Participant 6 described her process of disclosing about her family and how it shifted as she found acceptance for her identity as a child of sexual minority parents in college. She noted a strategy that shifted from more subtle and with tact to more open strategy

When I was in college it was similar to how I was in high school. I was very careful about who I told and it was big, kind of, coming out deal. And I realized that no one cared, so...I definitely didn't seek out new people to tell everyday but I think you just get a feel for who will be OK with it and who will not. Based on who their friends are, what they think..."

*Direct Style.* Participants also reported using a direct and open strategy of disclosing. This style tended to demonstrate more openness and personal acceptance of identity. For example, Participant 3 said "I'm very open about it when it comes up. I don't make a big deal of it; now it's a matter of fact thing." This was similar to how Participant 5 broached the subject, "Usually, I'd just say it. My mom and her

partner...something like that. It's common enough that it comes across pretty quickly..."

### *Disclosing to Partners*

Romantic partners were very important people to disclose to. The stakes were high for participants when they disclosed to a potential partner. Some participants had concerns they would be rejected by a potential partner (or partners family) when disclosing their parents were sexual minorities. In some situations, disclosing to a partner was the highest risk situation. Disclosing was crucial to all participants because if there partner was not accepting of same-sex families, the relationship would immediately end. Participants described their typical approach to disclosing to people they were interested in dating; participants used subtle and direct methods to disclose to their partners.

*Participant 8:* It's been an interesting topic and one I've struggled with whenever I'm dating because people wonder, and I don't hide that fact that she's [my mom's] gay. She used to hide it a little bit more but now it's a little more culturally accepted.

*Participant 1:* Usually it's just if I need to. If I am interested it will be some random comment like "oh my dad and his partner," or "my dads" ya know nothing outright blatant, but if you are listening to the conversation you might catch something like that."

*Participant 6:* [I]t definitely was still kind of a marker of how well I liked you as to whether or not I shared that with you."

In fact, all members reported current partners handled disclosure well – and it was unremarkable. It was ironic that such a disclosure was often difficult to remember. After the partners indicated support, the tension appeared to be neutralized. Participant 1, using a subtle style strategy to assess how socially liberal her partners were before

disclosing noted, “So far it’s not been an issue.” Here are the responses of other participants’ partners:

*Participant 8:* So I am pretty up front with it, with my current boyfriend of two years... I told him, I think, on our first or second date.

*Participant 2:* Oh I don’t even remember...he was going to come home with me for a weekend [to meet my family] and I think I told him then...it wasn’t any really big reaction. I think he kinda knew already from hearing me talk about my family.

*Participant 6:* I don’t remember how I brought it up to him [husband] but probably the way I started to bring it up in college. Like an offhand remark...

*Participant 5:* That’s a good question, I can’t remember off the top of my head. It wasn’t that big of deal and it’s a relatively accepting culture here compared to the average southwest mindset.

*Participant 7:* I don’t actually remember. I don’t remember telling him. So, it must not have made an impact. It must not have been a great deal.

All participants indicated that if a person did not accept their parents it would be a deal breaker.

*Participant 6:* I don’t remember how I brought it up to him [husband] but probably the way I started to bring it up in college. Like an offhand remark, “well my dad does this...” and I’d say “well my dad is a woman!” and if you can’t deal with this then that’s your problem.

*Participant 8:* Basically, I have always been like if you don’t support gay and lesbian rights this is end of story. We go no further.

*Participant 1:* Yes, people that I date need to be OK with gay people. So if I am serious about a person in the relationship I bring it up relatively early in the relationship because that’s part of me. I have gay parents. And if my partner has a problem with that there will be a big problem in the relationship. I don’t think it could go any further.

### *The Impact of Disclosing*

Results of disclosing varied. Disclosing with former partners did not always go well. There were negative reactions. There were no instances of the participants’

parents being rejected by the partner; however, there were less welcoming responses by the partner's parents. As unwelcoming as they might have been they were not relationship ending issues for participants and their partners.

*Participant 8:* His family was very Catholic, very conservative Catholic, and his mother and father seemed to think it was a little weird. And they asked a lot of questions about it. They were nice, but it felt like, whenever, if a three-eyed alien came in front of you, what would you ask it? Without offending it? That's how it felt.

*Participant 6:* And she came to church for Easter, I think, she had this really beautiful dress and she...facially I don't think she's ever quite looked very much like a woman but it could be because I have known her as my dad. But she looked nice and I remember, I was like so, this is what's going on. And he was like, "Oh, cool, she's like Marilyn Manson a little bit." And I thought, of course, yea.

*Participant 8:*I dated on guy and did not tell him for awhile and 6 months in...and he got really angry at me because I didn't trust him because I hadn't told him. I didn't think it was important - it does not change anything about me.

Other people represented unique challenges; this included participants' children, employers, teachers, community at large, and others.

*Participant 8:* If I get to the parent level in the relationships and I get to the parent level where I feel comfortable telling my mother, about my mother's sexuality, because that is not something I blurt out whenever I meet someone's parents. They have all been welcoming.

*Participant 7:* When I first started dating him [my husband] we went to meet his parents... I first met the brother ahead of time, and their parents were religious, and he said, "Don't say anything to them", was basically his advice. Just be friendly and try not to say anything to them. Then I met his brother before his parents, and he said the same thing, "Don't talk about your parents to my parents." So, I was just really hesitant after hearing that, I was not going to saying anything..."

*Participant 6:* But also my boss is very, very nosy. He puts his foot in his mouth way too often and I thought it was in everyone's best interest if I just told him up front before he came to our wedding. He would like to meet my dad, I'm sure, that's how he operates, he wanted to meet everyone, so I just want to

let you know right now, this is who my dad is. And he was also pretty cool about it.

*Participant 6:* We are very active in our church and my mom and I were, my brother not so much, and my dad not so much. Just my mom. So I know she talked extensively to her church support group and her pastors who talked to me too. I grew up Lutheran and I am lucky enough they are good with the gay thing. I never once heard that “your dad is going to hell” so that was good.

### *Disclosing to Children*

Strategies emerged when participants considered disclosing to their children.

The method of disclosing tended to focus on age-appropriate information and encouraging questions. Some participants noted that their children were uncertain how to conceptualize lesbian and gay couples. Using the participants’ parents (the children’s grandparents) as an example tended to reduce concerns and normalize the idea of same-sex couples. Here are some example of the experiences of participants disclosing or talking about disclosing to their children.

Participant 2 acknowledged she had not discussed this with her partner but had some ideas regarding how and what she might say to her children:

I honestly haven’t talked about that. I guess we would probably wait until they are at least five and a little bit more able to understand, but I think my mom’s partner is such a huge part of our family, ya know, she always will be. She is in all of our family wedding photos...so I don’t think it will be something challenging, I think it will come naturally as she’s involved in the child’s life.

Participant 6 also discussed telling her children with her partner:

He’s like, whatever you want to do is fine. And in this situation, that is exactly what I need to hear. I have thought about it some. I’m not sure, I think when the time comes, I’ll probably just talk to my mom and [my other mother] and see what they want to collectively do.

Similarly, Participant 1 did not have children, but had considered how she would discuss this subject with her children:

I think my kids, at an earlier age than most, would have some understanding of the concept of a gay lifestyle, an alternative lifestyle. I don't know if I would use the word alternative lifestyle but it would be like you have two grandpas that live together. You would really have to play it by ear when my kids would understand what gay means. I think I'd start with they are just two guys that love each other and live together and they are your grandpas.

A couple participants with children had disclosed the sexual orientation of their parents.

Participant 3: So we've tried to be matter of fact with it because the kids are young, so far that's worked and my oldest son, because he was introduced to it at a pretty young age and got a real matter of fact explanation, he seems to be ok with that.

*Participant 7:* [I explained] men can marry men and women can marry women if they want to. And they [my stepchildren] went, "Ah, that's weird!" and I said it's like my parents. And they stopped and were like, oh ok, it's fine. The concept was weird until they realized it was already a concept they were OK with.

Participants' experiences of disclosing their family's identity generated much discussion in the interviews. Disclosing to peers, partners and children were important tasks requiring the development of disclosing skills in order to effective during disclosure. Participants developed methods to facilitate disclosures; styles tended to be subtle or direct. Often participants drew from their experiences to build disclosure skills, for example, they learned through disclosing experiences by their parents, trial and error with peers, and desire to educate. The results of disclosing varied: sometimes it was accepting and positive, and other times it was rejecting and negative.

### Relationships

The development of relationships was another dynamic process for participants. Several categories emerged through discussion on relationships including; Partner Selection, Contextual Influences, Gender Roles, and Sexuality. Originally, it was conceptualized that the relationships theme was broad enough to capture each of these

categories yet specific enough to explain the participants' experiences in detail. The relationships theme originally included any thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that were designed to initiate, enhance, maintain, and/or terminate a relationship. However, over the course of data collection and data analysis, each category became more specific, unique, and detailed. As a result, the relationships theme split into the four categories: Partner Selection, Contextual Influences, Gender Roles, and Sexuality.

In addition, the relationships theme also included an emerging subcategory, "Disclosing to a Partner"; this subcategory was coded under the category that became Partner Selection. But, as data collection continued, "Disclosing to a Partner" became more similar to the Disclosing category. Therefore, the "Disclosing to a Partner" subcategory was subsumed into the Disclosing category. Likewise, Sexuality and Gender Roles, originally subcategories under the relationships theme, developing into their own categories as data collection and analysis continued. While the relationships theme was no longer a valid category, it provided an excellent context and generated much interest among participants. This interest facilitated the rich and full descriptions of relationships experiences that resulted in the four categories of Partner Selection, Contextual Influences, Gender Roles, and Sexuality. This section described the results of each of these categories.

### *Partner Selection*

Within the theme of relationships, the first category that emerged through data analysis involved the methods participants employed to choose a partner. This category did not include the previous dating experiences, advice from parents, or learned behaviors; however these factors were closely related and often mentioned

because it created the context to describe how they thought about selecting a partner. Therefore, partner selection was defined as process or outcome of choosing a person with a set of preferred traits that would likely provide, or has provided, a satisfying match in a relationship. Often partner selection began as a selection of traits that were used to predict a likely match. Once partner selection was completed, for example, in a long term relationship, this theme was referred to as an outcome. Just as other categories inform this category, disclosing and discrimination were important things to consider as traits or character of a partner. This section described the experience of participants' partner selection.

### *Gender Expectations*

Participants tended to select partners that reflected their own interests and social-political ideals, and philosophy on accepting minority status individuals. In the case of expectation for gender roles, female participants indicated a preference for males that demonstrated some stereotypically male traits. However, these preferences were more nuanced as participants expanding the descriptions of their partners. Participant 1 summarized her partner selection bias stating, "In the last couple of years I've come to appreciate that I like the manly man." That a man would appear not heterosexual enough, strongly impacted her selection process and affected her romantic interest. She provided a detailed description of her thought process:

If they have something that might be stereotypically gay or if you do something I typically do with my dad and his partner, for example, we went to a musical, ya know I love doing that with dad and his partner. If I met a guy that was like "let's go to that," I would be...that would not be positive or work in his favor in terms of getting into an intimate relationship with him.



She further explained her strong preference for a male partner that was undoubtedly straight:

Yea very straight. And I am conscious that I am making that decision, ya know I'll talk to other friends that are girls about what kind of guys do you like and what are you interested in and they might mention things like, 'oh I want them interested in opera or symphony' or they have to dress really well. But for me, that is not important. If anything, that would turn me off.

My dad and his partner, and they are great, they both have really great attributes that I want and value and respect but I find that when I am looking for someone I want to date I really almost want the opposite of that. They have to be very male.

Participant 1 also nicely illustrated how the category of relationships interweaves with Disclosing and Discrimination. In her description of choosing partners, she noted a style of choosing a partner that was similar to the way she assessed other situations for safety in order to disclose her family's identity. In addition, she applied a similar method in partner selection that used in managing discrimination; gathering information through observation in order to infer a level of acceptance:

I also feel that I tend to be selective and with whom I am even thinking about dating, ya know. I can...and because, maybe because I have gay parents, but I am attracted to more socially liberal people. They have usually said something about else's, some kind of non gay topic that would lead me to believe they are pretty liberal on social matters so they'll probably be OK with gay dads.

When discussing her partner, Participant 6 noted strong preferences for a partner that was clearly heterosexual, that was similar to, but with less detail than, Participant 1's description. She summarized her partner, noting:

He is a man's man. His thing is hockey. He watches a lot of sports. He puts up with me and he is really nice, really nice. And he is not dramatic at all. It really helps the relationship...he's like emotions aren't for men, we joke about that"

While a preference for a “man’s man” type of partner was noted by two females, it was not representative among the females in the sample. However; an intriguing theme emerged; it is noted here it and will be further explored in the Gender Roles section of this category. The outward preference and some hobbies and approach to emotions was stereotypically male but when more information was gathered about their male partners it was discovered that they were not stereotypical males and, indeed had layers that were surprising.

*Moderate Partners.* Broadly, participants tended to search for socially moderate or liberal people that valued diversity, were open-minded, and accepted same-sex families. According to most participants, these features were highly valued in partners because participants could infer their acceptance of sexual minorities. Here Participant 8 noted several of these traits:

I generally go for a more liberal, understanding man. So, I am not normally disclosing like to people, like oh we are in a relationship and you’re an uber-conservative who doesn’t like gays.

In addition, other participants made specific references to seeking socially liberal individuals as method to pre-screen individuals for a friendship or a potential romantic relationship. In the case of Participant 1, she sought liberal men as dating partners. Participant 3 was interested in a romantic partner that matched her more open minded political and social views.

*Peer Influence.* Sometimes participants used peers to aid in the selection process. Friends and previous partners were a reliable source of information for some participants. Indeed peers were helpful in guiding participants towards a match as well as steering them away from a match. Participant 7 recalled the way she met her

husband, “Well I got lucky with him because I met him through my ex-boyfriend, they used to work together. And I knew my husband was good friends with him so I knew he was ‘safe’ so to speak.” As a result of having a previous relationship with her husband’s friends, Participant 7 felt comfortable disclosing her family’s identity. Participant 2 also noted that friends were a great source of corroborating information on partner selection, she recalled, “I think they actually went about it in the same way. We actually kinda all dated similar people, if not the same people.” On the other hand, Participant 1 noted that her peers had a different preference for men and generally, if they indicated interest in a man, she was immediately skeptical:

Seeing what I am attracted to and then when you go out with your girlfriends and you are looking at guys I just realize that I go toward a specific type and a lot of my friends gravitate toward a different type that seem a bit more like my father than someone I want to date.

### *Contextual Influences*

In the previous category, Partner Selection, it was noted that the opinions, experiences, and advice of others often created the context for a relationship. These factors, labeled Contextual Influences, were defined as experiences with parents or previous relationships that influenced how participants selected partners and developed their intimate relationships.

### *Previous Relationship Experiences*

Participants offered a window into their relationships experiences as they discussed the Contextual Influences in their lives. One the primary sources of information in choosing a partner was the participants’ previous relationships experiences. Here are some of experiences in the participants’ words.

Participant 3 learned from a previous marriage what traits were desirable and what traits were challenging. She used this information when choosing her current partner:

And he, and it's not that he wants me to do things his way, I can do things the way I do. And he can do things his way and I can like it or lump it. And so I think one of the things I was attracted to about my second husband after having a runaway consciously from a very accommodating first husband was that he gave me a little more trouble. In terms of standing up for himself. Not dominating me, it's about, here is his line, here is how he will do it, and this is just how it is.

She continued to explain her partner's interpersonal style and noted that it sometimes frustrated her in the moment; however, she appeared thankful that his style was unlike her father's and previous husband's style:

We got married in 2000 and it will be 12 years in October. I'm so lucky, I'm so fortunate. But one of those things still, I'll get really, really frustrated with that he's not going to do what I say. It's like sometimes I'll say something and he's going to do the opposite. I have to have a little conversation with myself when I get really frustrated, you know this before you married him, and one of the things you love about him, and one of the things that was attractive was that he was a strong voice for himself and not going to be malleable in the way that one of my dads and first husband were.

Participant 6 was strongly affected by her previous dating experiences, "I dated a couple of melodramatic men and I was like, I can't take this. I'm sure they are perfectly wonderful human beings but I can't deal with this." Ultimately, she chose a partner that did not have "melodramatic" tendencies.

Experiencing mutual interest and investment, Participant 8, noticed her current relationship was unlike her previous relationships. The experience of being in an equally committed relationship facilitated her development of different strategies of communication allowing her partner to more effectively attend to her concerns. "Now,

it was not that I was disinterested and he was totally interested; we are equally interested. And this is my first relationship I've had that was like that. With someone equally committed." She continued:

And what I like about my current relationship, is whenever I say, and I can do the whiney thing, "What the fuck you didn't wash the dishes?", a bit of nagging, but if it's important to me, and I say this is important to me, and he listens, whether or not he agrees.

### *The Influence of Parents*

Parents were a substantial contextual influence on relationships. Most participants indicated there were things that parents did that they were certain they did and did not want to copy, mimic, reproduce, in their current relationship. Here Participant 1 described traits she admired as well as disliked what her dads had modeled in their relationship that would inform her relationships:

There are some things about having gay fathers that I like; you have to be able to acknowledge your feelings and to be able to communicate them. The relationship dynamic I saw play out between my dad and his partner is something that I want to emulate.

Maybe this is contradictory but this is me...I like how my dad and his partner can talk about their feelings and how they are in tune with that and that's important in a partner for me. But I still, it's ok, if my partner would talk a little less about relationships. And I distinctly know it's something that my dad and his partner do and that's not something I necessarily want in a partner.

Participant 6 explained that she disliked her mother's style of listening and actively monitors her behavior in order to avoid mimicking her style.

And she often assumes she knows what I want in my life. Because really the last good amount of time we spent together was a teenager. I've changed some since then. She came to visit me last summer. And the first thing that she actually knows about me that she's asked is, we were at dinner and I ordered a beer and she said "Oh, you like dark beer?" And was like "Yea!" So in terms of communicating...its...yea. So I try to be better than that. Sometimes I do

the same thing, my mom does that too, kinda, so I've noticed that I do that too and I always feel really horrible. I'll catch myself doing that yea, so

Similarly, Participant 7 endeavored not to repeat her father's mercurial style of communication when he was under the influence of alcohol. However frustrating this experience was for her, she used it to motivate a more moderated style of communicating with her partner.

So, it was like, that doesn't exist [dad's alcohol problem], there's no problem. So we didn't talk about important things much.. I like that about my husband, he is from a family will sit for hours and hours and just talk about things.

There would obviously be something on his mind and it would come up, out of the blue, it felt like out of the blue to everyone else, and he's this thing that is pissing me off in the moment and I am going to rail on it, just getting it out and yell it everybody. I have caught myself doing that on occasion, but, because I didn't like it as a teenager, I try to notice it and stop. Back off and apologize and say, I'm not crazy, this is just irritating me.

Another example of using parents' behaviors as a signal to try a different way of responding Participant 8 stated:

I would see certain things in my relationships and I would run as far away as possible, like whenever... my mother has a tendency to be a bit of a doormat, so whenever I felt like I was being a doormat it was done. I just couldn't do it.

In the context of talking about life events his mother experienced, Participant 5 shared a characteristic about his partner and the way it encouraged a collaborative, supportive relationships style for them:

I would say that the divorce was a larger impact than simply her fact of being gay... I have talked about this with my current partner, she sees it the same way, I think she is a little better at reading people, maybe not reading, but understanding interpersonal relationships that I am...and she helps me.

When asked about comparing his relationship with his mother's relationship with her partner, he described how he and his partner were different and have negotiated different roles that what his mother modeled:

I don't think so, I think we are a little more equal, I would say. No one is really the dominant person, maybe we both like to play that role, to be the decider. We both, of course, can't always do that.

*Summary.* Contextual Influences were important factors that informed the way participants selected partners. These influences encouraged participants to adopt or reject a behavior or a preference; in this way participants developed their own individualized selection process when constructing a relationship. The most common Contextual Influences reported among participants were parent experiences and previous relationships. As a result of these experiences, participants learned to incorporate their identity as child of a same-sex family into their intimate relationships.

### *Gender Roles*

The context of partner relationships showcased many intriguing aspects of the gender roles of participants. Participants also noted that gender identity and gender roles were memorable themes from their childhood and adolescence. Indeed, participants had rich histories of gender role formation. The category of Gender Roles was defined as the influences of past experiences and parental models for prescribed behaviors of a particular gender and how these attitudes and behaviors, and style of responding were negotiated in a current relationship.

Interviews revealed that participants matched some predicted gender roles while diverging sharply from other gender roles. Participants recalled that parents influenced the exploration and development of gender roles early in childhood. These gender roles

were further shaped and defined as participants spent more time with peers and partners. Some participants recalled the gender roles modeled for them by their parents, recalling that they were very open and nonconforming. Participants noted that they still adopted some typical gendered behaviors. Participant 2 described her mother's gender role and the impact it had on her gender development:

I think since she was a single parent essentially, she did all of...she did everything from cooking, cleaning, to fixing the pilot light, or mowing the lawn or taking the trash out. I think those old ideals of the guy cuts the grass and the wife cleans the bathroom...that never happened in my family. We grew up with my brother and I doing all the same chores, we never really had any gender bias as far as that goes. I mean, I still painted my room pink and my brother painted his blue ya know, I think we did, ya know, from traditionally being around our friends, ya know gear more towards one gender or another and my mother supported that. She really let us have a lot in the decision making as far as, ya know, if I wanted to do girly things or guys things it didn't really matter

Participant 7 described a similar experience, but her parents were more intentional in raising children in a gender neutral environment:

My brother and I were raised as just about gender neutral as you could possibly be, I was dressed in overalls, Osh-Kosh-Bagosh, and I still migrated to the dolls, bows, and tea set. My little brother, I wanted him to be my little sister, and he pretended to be my little sister and he loved it. And in dresses and everything until he hit about age 3 and he decided he didn't like it and he decided he wanted to play with trucks, blocks, and the sound system in the living room. So, it was like our parents gave us everything, options, they still migrated to the typical girl toys and boy toys.

Parents served as models for gender roles and division of labor, Participant 7 described a common experience of same-sex parent's roles:

And in terms of gender roles in a relationship or something. It doesn't matter. I have one dad that does all the cooking and all the driving, one of my dads just only recently got a driver's license because of where he lived...anyway, one cooked and drove and the other one cleaned and did laundry, and that's how it was. There was no wife versus the husband, which role was which, you just do what you are good at and what you enjoy. That's how it worked in their relationship.



Participants were open to less restricting gender roles in their relationships. All endorsed an egalitarian style of dividing household chores, where partners chose roles based on strengths. Participant 5, a male, described this succinctly:

I have no problem with having my partner take any kind of control in raising kids. I want it to be real, see it as real partnership. No roles are really defined - this person is for this thing and this other person is for this thing..."

In the Partner Selection section, some female participants noted a strong preference for very masculine men when looking for a mate. However, a very interesting theme emerged in the data analysis. Participants tended to select partners that had an open-minded attitude toward gender roles and were willing to endorse behaviors and roles that were not stereotypical of their gender. Recall that Participant 6 described her husband as a "man's man." When she continued describing her partner she explained that he was a sensitive and nurturing male and that he would likely be a stay-at-home parent while she earned the lion share of the family income:

I am the one getting my degree and hopefully getting the job that pays pretty well. And we've talked, probably when we have kids he'll be the one to stay home with the kids, do most of the laundry; he's a better house keeper than I am..."

Participant 3 had a similar arrangement with her partner:

I tell people that we each play to our strengths...In some ways we have the reversal of traditional gender roles; he, most nights makes dinner, by far he does more cleaning in the house than I do, and by far, he's been a stay at home parent since 2004... I'm still very much mommy with the kids its not a complete reversal, its that we each play to our strengths and there are things that he does well and there are things I do well and we work together.

I work full time and my husband is a full time stay at home parent. But at that time, even when were married, my husband would say he wanted to be a stay at home dad. And I'd just laugh, and he says things and you never know if they are true. He's that way. So I was like yea, whatever, you don't really want to be

that, and he would say I do. I never thought I would be in that position where I could support us any way so I didn't think it mattered.

Participant 2 also acknowledged she was primary earner in her relationship and that described their roles as modern:

I guess we do have some traditional roles but we're pretty open I mean I make more money than my husband but that doesn't really change....it doesn't make me more of the man in the relationship, we share in the responsibilities we both have things we like to do. I would say we don't have a traditional 40s or 50s husband wife relationship, I mean I'm pretty feminine, I'll wear heels and dresses and jeans and he is very masculine. As far as roles in our relationship goes I'd say we are pretty with our generation.

Participants had diverse and intriguing experiences with gender identity and gender roles. These experiences were enriched by the gender roles modeled for them by their parents and environments there were raised in. As a result of these experiences, participants reported a broader understanding of their own gender roles. In the context of intimate relationships, female participants sought male partners that were stereotypically male in some areas but less traditionally male in other areas. Female and male participants tended to create egalitarian relationships and divide chores equally as well as develop their relationships without following traditional heterosexual scripts.

### *Sexuality*

The Sexuality category was broadly defined. It included thoughts, experiences and reflections on sexual orientation and sexual identity as well as sexual intimacy. Participants tended to think more broadly about the concept of sexual identity. This facilitated a more open-minded approach to sexuality in themselves, their partners, and their peers. Previous research with children of adults has focused on whether or not

these children will identify as sexual minorities. The current results address this traditional question but also go beyond sexual orientation labels.

*Sexual Identity and Attitudes.* All participants identified as heterosexual; two participants reported experimenting with same-sex physical intimacy and one of those participants had a short term relationship with a same-sex partner. Participant 8 described her exploration of her sexual identity:

I gave homosexuality a try in college-ya know the old college try. Because I had this in the back of my head, I haven't tried it, my mom is lesbian, maybe that is what it is? People know. I am pretty sure I am heterosexual but if there is a girl that wants to make out with me, I'd be fine.

She said she had a two month relationship with a woman and ultimately determined that her sexual orientation was not "lesbian" or "bisexual." She summarized her experience saying, "So, I am verified heterosexual, not that it matters." Other participants said they had thought about their sexuality, although they had not explored same-sex relationships. Participant 1 discussed how understanding her own sexuality helped feel more confident with sexual intimacy in her relationship. She noted that her experience of gay male culture involved much emphasis on the penis; in art, jokes, conversation among peers, and gay-oriented media. These experiences shaped her attitude:

If you're comfortable with your own sexuality you can offer a lot more to an intimate relationships rather than being unaware, embarrassed, or unsure. In some ways sex is so...well penises are such a common experience in the lives of gay men....all around the house, that it makes it easier.

Participants tended to express open minded attitudes toward the sexual orientation and sexual identity of others. Acceptance for those who identified as GLBT

or who were questioning their sexual orientation was evident. Participant 8 summarized her thoughts:

It's just people are used to a cookie cutter human sexuality look and so whenever people are like "I can't believe bisexuals exist", I think, well people didn't really think homosexuals were homosexuals back in the 1960s, come on. So I think it makes me more open to all types of people, all types of sexuality, all types of what they do.

Participant 3 shared a similar attitude of acceptance and discussed her thoughts on sexual orientation occurring on a spectrum:

I do think my awareness of him [her father] being gay but not living gay influenced this. Sometime in my early adulthood, I came to an awareness that sexuality for everyone, is on a spectrum. I don't think you have 100% gay or 100% straight. You may have people on the far end of the spectrum but I think really, people could be slotted along a scale someplace and there are more people somewhere in the middle. I think it's natural for human beings to have complicated feelings about each other and some of that might be sexual attraction and some of that might not be. And I, ya know, consider myself heterosexual, for my whole life I have behaved as a heterosexual, but I don't think that I'm 100%, again I don't think anyone is 100%. I recognize in myself and in my own reactions there is room for that. So I think probably part of that realization did come from being aware of dad as kind of having this otherness about himself but not operating from a place where this was recognized.

When considering her own sexual identity, Participant 2 noted that she has been heterosexual; however, her experiences with her mother shaped her attitude toward other sexual identities:

I mean, I'm heterosexual and I've always only been interested in guys, I dated guys through high school and I'm now married. I guess other than...it hasn't changed how I feel about my sexuality, but it has made me more open to how other people feel about their sexuality.

Participant 8 also noted she was heterosexual. During her adolescent years she over-identified with her heterosexuality to make a point to her peer that, contrary to their teasing, she was not a lesbian.

And I was like, no I am not [a lesbian], and I tried to prove that I was not, I never did anything ridiculous, but I dressed in lower cut things in middle school and early high school...I was a little more hyper sexual. I am straight, I like men. I'll talk about boys all the time, and I think a lot of that was to prove that I was not lesbian.

*Openness with Parents.* When participants were asked whether growing up in a same-sex family influenced the way they thought about sexuality, they tended to interpret the question differently. Some answered the question in a way that focused on sexual intimacy or the act of sex for their parents. This sometimes resulted in tabling the discussion saying that they did not think about or broach the subject with their parents. For example, Participant 6 recalled "When you're 15 you really don't want to talk about sex with your parents. That's not something you want to do." Similarly, Participant 5, a male, noted that discussing issues related to sex was difficult with his mother and her partner:

I never really thought about my parents as sexual people. Growing up with them, being raised by them, they are somehow special in society. I don't know, that's how it was for me. I never really saw them as those kinds of people. I also found it difficult to talk to both of them about relationships from an early age, when I started dating, I never really said anything, maybe, I am dating this girl... and of course sometimes parents were around when we were together. But we wouldn't talk about much, well safe sex talks and talks about what love means but about who this girl is and what she means to me and what we do together, never really any talks like that.

On the other hand, some participants talked openly with their parents on topic of sexuality. Participant 1 attributed a more fulfilling sex life as a result of her openness to her sexuality and open communication with her dads. In addition, she compared her experiences with those of her peers, all raised in heterosexual families, and observed that her friends were likely not talking about sexuality with their parents:

I don't know they would find that out, I don't think most daughters would talk to their straight fathers about penises and sex. And I don't know about mothers, I don't have a relationship with my mother, maybe other people talk to their moms and get that information. I think the fact gay men like sex so much, I think intentionally or unintentionally, I think it rubbed off. I enjoy sex, I enjoy it more than my girl friends

*Summary.* Considering the experiences of adults raised in same-sex families, there was a range of response that reflected each individual's experience. The common themes that emerged in data analysis included openness to a range of sexual orientation, appreciation of sexuality, and acknowledgment that parents influenced thoughts on sexual identity regardless of whether or not sexuality was discussed with them as children.

#### Central Category: Acceptance

The central category is a construct that unifies the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The category has explanatory power in that it is present in nearly all the categories and cases and can account for much of the variation within categories. Moreover, it is sufficiently abstract (allowing it to capture variation); yet specific enough to present the main point of the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A central category is more than the lynch pin holding a system together; it permeates nearly all aspects of the participant's experiences, the data, and the categories providing the bonding as well as the greater structure. Often a central category is adopted from the list of categories generated and refined during axial coding; however this is not always the case. Alternatively, a central category is a recognized theme ubiquitous across experiences and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Such was the case with the central category in this theoretical model. The construct of “acceptance” was determined to be the central category. It emerged as a theme through the process of writing the storyline for the data, and was present in almost all of the categories described in the results section. Acceptance can be defined in several ways; (a) the action or process of being received as adequate or suitable, typically to be admitted into a group; (b) agreement with or belief in an idea, opinion, or explanation; (c) willingness to tolerate a difficult or unpleasant situation. (Merriam-Webster, 2012) In social psychology, Leary defines acceptance as “meaning that other people signal that they wish to include you in their groups and relationships” (2010, p. 234). Social acceptance occurs on a continuum that ranges from merely tolerating another person’s presence to actively pursuing someone as a relationship partner. The opposite of social acceptance is social rejection; this is defined as others having little desire to include a person in their groups and relationships (Leary, 2010).

Acceptance in this current study was a complex experience and borrowed aspects of each definition mentioned above. For the participants, acceptance was sometimes a goal, an outcome or a process. It might describe something searched for or something advocated for perhaps on the interpersonal, community, national, level. Acceptance was also present in the way participants thought about their identity. Acceptance was present across all of the categories: Identity, Discrimination, Disclosing, Partner Selection, Contextual Influences, Gender Roles and Sexuality. The following section was based on the responses provided by the participants. Their responses highlighted the presence of the central construct throughout the categories.

### *Dealing with Heterosexism and Homophobia*

Adults in same-sex families struggled with cost and benefit of acceptance when they considered the different privileges afforded to heterosexuals. This was a complex feeling for heterosexual children of same-sex parents because they were granted societal privileges that were withheld from their parents. For example, the acceptance experienced by heterosexual children of same sex parents on issues like marriage created dissonance when they considered the level of acceptance afforded to their parent(s). Participant 1 described her frustration that her gay dads cannot be married:

I don't care what you call it but I think there needs to be some sort of legal recognition that people of the same sex can have the same privileges and protections that opposite sex couples get when they commit to each other. I think my dad and his partner have been together for over ten years; that's a committed relationship and I think they should be able to make medical decisions for each other and file a tax return together. They should enjoy the same benefits of heterosexual couples that have been married for ten years. They're committed, they're doing what they should be doing; it's frustrating they can't enjoy the privileges and protections of the law.

Other participants questioned whether or not to give up their socially granted acceptance, for example, the right to marry, because it was not legal for their parents to do so. Participant 8 discussed this struggle, "Part of me feels really guilty that my mother cannot get married in our state...she would not be able get married and have the same benefit [as I]. And that sucks, it taints it."

While the participants may experience acceptance in places they live and work, the acceptance afforded their parents impacted other parts of their lives. While not experiencing much discrimination herself, Participant 1 strongly considered the level of acceptance in the town she lived in:



And because of that narrow mindedness it influences where I live. I chose to live here because I know it is a place my dad and his partner would feel comfortable visiting. I would not move to Wyoming, I would be apprehensive because I don't want anything bad to happen to them. Because of narrow-mindedness.

In a similar way, Participant 3 described an experience where acceptance and the hope of acceptance were present on several levels when her dad and his partner visited her son at grandparent's day at school:

They [my gay dads] sat down, had lunch with him [their grandson], I was actually there when they got there because I was volunteering at the school that morning, and no one batted an eye. And when I left, I walked through the cafeteria, I stopped by their table to say hi and they are both just beaming at me, and beaming at my son, just thrilled to be there. I was concerned that maybe some kids would bug my son about it afterwards, but he didn't mention to me that he had any problems at all.

Of all the experiences of Acceptance, the most striking occurred when there was none or when it was replaced with the opposite experience of acceptance; rejection. When rejection occurred, participants encountered aggressive verbal and physical behavior that was emotionally damaging. Participants described these experiences as discrimination, homophobia and heterosexism. These experiences were complex across the sample. It was possible for participants to experience discrimination, homophobia and heterosexism in direct and indirect ways. Sometimes in a large group of people, there was a person making offensive bigoted remarks about gay people. Other times, participants experienced direct disparaging remarks. During her adolescent years, Participant 8 recalled:

This girl would not stop making fun of me, she called me "rug muncher", she called me all sorts of crazy lesbian names, and she didn't want me in the dressing room so if I went in there she would tell everyone I was in there and get out.

Discrimination, homophobia and heterosexism were sometimes subtle and veiled. As a result, it was not immediately apparent that comments or situations were intended to be demeaning. As Participant 7 described when her in-laws visited her dads, “At one point my dad threw a barbeque and invited them because they wanted to meet my husband’s parents. They came but they just, they looked so uncomfortable, just standing in the corner. It was awkward.” The profound absence of acceptance and presence of discrimination in these situations, for those that experienced them, impacted the way participants interacted with others and, in some instances, informed the methods used to talk about same-sex families with peers, partners, and others.

#### *Disclosing the Family Identity*

Participants developed various methods to disclose their identity in a same-sex family and the sexual orientation of their parents; protective strategies and advocacy strategies. All disclosure experiences had an element of risk. However, some participants developed methods to disclose whether or not they expected acceptance. Further, because their family of origin identity was not immediately apparent to those they encountered, participants could choose how to disclose depending on the situation. As a result, participant used methods of disclosing that ranged from subtle and selective, labeled protective strategies, to direct and broad, labeled advocacy strategies. Here Participant 1 and Participant 7 described protective and advocacy styles respectively:

*Participant 1:* I don’t feel like that I have personally been discriminated against but as I’ve already told you, I’m not just blabbing my mouth to everyone that I have two fathers and this is what they do... You know, there are clearly people in society that do not approve of that and, you know, it’s just a little self preservation and I don’t think I need to take them on and announce my family

situation to them when I feel like it's not going ...they're not going to approve and it's just going to make me mad.

*Participant 7:* I didn't like feeling like I'd have to kind of hide who they were or any of that from anybody. It's not easy when you meet somebody at work or something and you really have no reason to talk about your family but you want to refer to your parents and... So I'll say "My parents" and sometimes I'll say "My dads...", and I've had a few double takes, "Dads"?

### *Identity*

Participants noted how the process of gaining acceptance may bring distress and relief, as in the case of children from a pre-existing heterosexual relationship. Not allowing oneself acceptance might spare a partner from emotional distress, as Participant 3 observed in her parents' heterosexual marriage, "I thought he's so deep in denial and he'll never admit it to himself and that will protect my mother." Although later, through finding acceptance for his sexual orientation, her father decided to leave his marriage, "So the deal was she thought she was coming out here to live with her husband and, she came out here and he told her he was leaving the church, told her he was gay, and he wanted a divorce."

Watching parents find acceptance in their own sexual orientation was difficult for some participants. Finding acceptance, for some parents, meant ending a heterosexual marriage through divorce in order to live more congruent with their sexual orientation. Some participants expressed mixed feelings regarding these experiences. On one hand, they were sad their parents divorced. On the other hand, they were delighted that their sexual minority parent was finally "out." In one example, Participant 1 described the cost of acceptance when reflecting over the course of her father's life, before he came out:

In retrospect I think it was obvious my dad was gay, but in [my] childhood he was in a marriage with a woman. I mean that clearly was not a great relationship and that may have had an impact. I'm sure he was in a relationship that was not working for him - intellectually, definitely not sexually; that's frustrating.

This process was slightly different for children born into a same sex family or for children that were very young when parents divorced and came out. The messages of acceptance emerged as stories of ways the parents searched for acceptance. For example, participants were told stories of their parents' struggles with heterosexism and their strong desire to find an accepting, supportive community to live. These experiences tended to engender a sense of reflection for their parents struggles.

Participant 7 and Participant 5 provide their comments:

*Participant 7:* That's what I got from my parents; they just want to be who they are. I actually remember one of them saying that, my other father, not my biological one, he grew up in the Midwest and his father was a religious leader, so it was pretty difficult, when he grew up and realized he needed to get out of there. And one time he said to me, I needed to move to the east coast because I needed someplace to be gay. That's it. So that it the message we received, you just want to be, not fighting battles, just be.

*Participant 5:* Once I got old enough to figure out what it meant, or say to come to terms with why mom made that choice. Maybe it wasn't really something that she could choose, whether to stay or not, but more of coming to terms of who she was. It was really easy for me to accept and I never thought about how things could have been different or would have been different

### *Close Relationships*

When participants formed their own close relationships with peers, partners, or their own children, they tended to prioritize acceptance. All participants expressed a preference for peers that understood and accepted of their same-sex family. If a peer began qualifying acceptance, then the friendship would corrode. Participant 8 described an early experience of disclosing to her peers that later backfired:

*Participant 8:* So I go to school the next day, even though she [her mom] tells me not to, I say, “My mom’s gay, she’s a lesbian! She is like Ellen.” And I think everything is going to go OK, and at first, in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade, no one said anything, but then in middle school, things got weird.

Since experience with peers often set the stage for interactions with potential romantic partners, participants indicated they used similar strategies to screen for acceptance in their partner. Participant 2 captured this process well, “I guess I would pick people to date that were people I would be friends with first, so they were people that were nice, loved all kinds of people.” In fact, when it came to dating, most participants explicitly indicated that if a partner did not accept their same-sex family, the relationship would end. As a result, most participants found partners that were accepting and open to the idea of dating or marrying a person from a same-sex family. Participant 6 illustrated how her partner responded, “He was probably, like, OK, that’s interesting. No more questions asked. Like that, it’s your family, that’s cool.”

When discussing same-sex families with their own children, participants emphasized an intentional style of introducing the topic. The participants with children and some of the participants planning on having children in the near future noted they would teach their children about same-sex relationships, sexual orientation types, and acceptance for people that were different. Participant endorsed teaching their children basic sexual orientation education that was age appropriate. Further, they intended to keep dialoguing with their children regarding sexual minority issues to enhance awareness of diversity. Participant 8 stated:

And I think how do I tell my kids [about different sexual orientations] at different levels, like ya know, to make it... because I would like my kids to have the same acceptance as I do because I think no one wants to consciously teach their children bigotry

## *Sexuality and Gender Roles*

Participants noticed how they have a unique understanding and appreciation of the sexuality of others. Through their experiences watching their parents come out or the process of learning how their family is different than other families and responding to stigma of same-sex families, participants offer acceptance to others. In the following statements, Participants 2 and 8 noted how open they are to a range of sexuality expressions,:

*Participant 2:* I think I'm pretty open to any sexual orientation to someone as a friend. I don't put a bias on that because of how and where I grew up. Even gay and lesbian families that have children, I'm definitely probably more open to that than other people, and gay and lesbian marriage too."

*Participant 8:* Ya know, so I think it makes me more accepting over all. I really try and reflect and think about the golden rule, what would I want people to do to me?

Moreover, participants sometimes provided acceptance to others that were looking for a source of understanding and connection or when they were questioning or exploring their sexuality. Participant 2 formed a close friendship with a coworker because she had same-sex parents:

It makes you more familiar and comfortable with people that are in a same sex relationships, ya know, if you didn't grow up in that environment. So my friend...[who is in a same-sex relationship] works with me; I think she feels more comfortable around me... sharing about her personal life, compared to some other professionals where we work.

Participant 7, because of her status as a child of same-sex parents, noticed how she was sometimes the person other sought support from or came out to:

I have had a number of people, because they knew my parents were gay, decided that it was safe and confided in me or came out to me...Nothing to do with me particularly, but just because they know I am safe, I have had people tell me things they would not tell other people.

Moreover, Participant 8 noted that she was by her mother to accept herself and others:

That is something that my mom has always tried to tell me, she says, I am a lesbian and that is who I am. I am a lesbian, I am not going to hide it; I am going to be who I am and you should never make someone's body a prison.

Finally, Participant 3 summarized her experiences grappling with her understanding of sexual orientation issues and how it helped her find acceptance:

What it really came down to was, ya know, god would not have made [her friend] something that would cause him to hate himself so much that he would commit suicide. Obviously [her friend] didn't choose to be gay because he was so conflicted and so upset, and he had tried not to be and all those things. So I knew it was not a choice--which was the popular thing at the time, "it's a choice"... Then I knew it could not be in god's plan for people to have to lock away a whole part of themselves so they would commit suicide. I just couldn't reconcile that so I decided it had to be a trait people had, an inborn trait, it couldn't be a choice. That kinda began my realization and kinda my journey out of prejudice on that front.

As a result of their experiences, the participants demonstrated the importance of acceptance. Across virtually all aspects of their lives, including identity, family relationships, interpersonal relationships, work and community relationships, participants tended to value acceptance. Because this was such an important part of their lives, they developed diverse and complex methods to detect, garner, and maintain acceptance. Similarly, participant created strategies to deal with situations were discrimination, homophobia, and heterosexism blocked acceptance. Certainly, acceptance strongly impacted how participants chose to describe themselves and discuss their families.

The model (Figure 1) shows the relationships among the categories (derived from participants' responses through the process of data analysis) within the context of relationships with the self, partners, peers, and significant others. These interactions

occur in the overall context of acceptance, the central category. Participants enter the model as raised from birth or young childhood in same-sex families from birth or from young childhood or adolescence if they were born into heterosexual families.

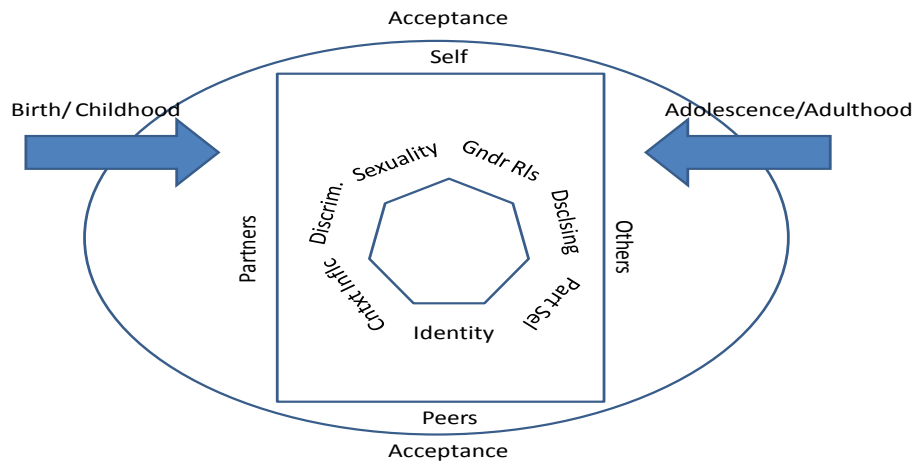


Figure 1. Categories and Central Construct Model.

*Note.* The categories have been abbreviated such that: Discrim = Discrimination; Sexuality = Sexuality; Gndr Rls = Gender Roles; Dsclsng = Disclosing; Part Sel = Partner Selection; Identity = Identity; Cntxt Inflc = Contextual Influences.

The categories interact with each other in a dynamic process. Each one of the categories provided a foundational experience that was learned, observed, or developed over time. While they were all interconnected, the categories did not all develop at the same rate or to the same degree; therefore, each participant had a unique set of experiences within the constellation of the categories. Moreover, the categories depended heavily on the participants' relationships with the self, peers, partners, and others (i.e. significant people, the environment). Just as participants had different constellations of categories they also had different relationships. The entire model is



framed within the construct of acceptance, the central category. Acceptance provided an overall context where the relationships and categories could interact. While there were fluctuations in the experiences of categories and relationships among participants, the presence of acceptance was essential.

This chapter provided the results of the data analysis. Several categories as well as the central category emerged from in depth interviews with seven adults raised by same-sex families. The supporting categories included identity, discrimination, disclosing, partner selection, contextual influences, gender roles and sexuality and the central category, the unifying theme present across supporting categories, was acceptance. The results are compared to the literature in the next chapter in order to further explain and understand the findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the close relationships of adults raised by non-heterosexual parents. Participants in this study were interviewed about their experiences in a same-sex family, including how that experience influenced their relationships with their parents, peers, romantic partners, children and others. While the population of children being raised by sexual minority children is increasing, research in this area is still in its early stages. The intent of this author was to gather and analyze empirical data regarding the experiences of grown children of same sex-parents in a way that honors their stories, and a Grounded Theory method was chosen to achieve this aim. This method is also well-suited to explore the experiences of understudied populations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As noted in the literature review in Chapter I, this discussion chapter included a second review of the literature. This is consistent with Grounded Theory method which strongly advises researchers to avoid becoming deeply immersed in the literature before gathering data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2006) noted this procedural step serves two important functions; first, it reduces preconceived ideas about the topic areas that can artificially guide data collection and analysis, and, second, it focuses the category development on the themes that emerge directly from the participants words. The second literature reviews compares the result of the data analysis with the

literature. This facilitates a process of corroborating as well as challenging the findings.

### Overview of the Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, the theoretical model contextualized in the data (constructs and categories) and in outside literature is discussed. Second, the core constructs and categories underpinning the theoretical models are compared and contrasted to the existing literature. Third, the practical limitations of this study and the potential implications of the findings for research and practice are discussed. The chapter begins discussing the category of discrimination. This category sets the context for many of the participants' responses. While discrimination was not the central category it was frequently mentioned in the experiences of the participants.

### *Discrimination*

All participants experienced discrimination. For the purpose of this study, discrimination was defined as instances of heterosexist and homophobic attitudes, reactions, or behaviors toward the participants their families, or the GLBTQ community at large. Participants reported that discrimination could be expressed directly, indirectly, or implied. Discrimination took several forms ranging from subtle heterosexist attitudes to direct, disparaging remarks. In response to discrimination experiences, participants expressed disappointment, confusion, frustration, anger, sadness and fear. In order to cope with discrimination, participants developed different ways to respond. In particular, methods ranged on a continuum from protection

strategies to advocacy strategies and were adjusted to the particular person, circumstance, or situation.

### *Protective Strategies*

Protective strategies were intended to proactively reduce, control, or manage experiences of discrimination. One of the most common protective strategies involved nondisclosure or selective disclosing. Sometimes this was not as reliable an option when participants were in grade school, middle school and high school living at home with their sexual minority parents. The proximity to parents and the intersection of their family life with other social networks made participants more vulnerable to unplanned disclosures. Generally, as adults, participants could manage who they told about their family identity with little concern that unintentional disclosure would occur; this was a selective disclosure/nondisclosure. For example, at work, participants determined whether or not they tell coworkers and if they decided to disclose could chose who to tell. In other situations, nondisclosure was used to manage fear of homophobia; for example, if a partner's parents were homophobic, nondisclosure could be used to delay "awkward situations" (Participant 1). The literature provides some insights into these protect strategies. Goldberg (2010) suggested that one possible reason for nondisclosure could be internalized homophobia. While this was not directly noted by participants it could account for delayed disclosure or hesitancy while disclosing. For example, in the case of partner's parents, nondisclosure was a temporary strategy until a disclosure occurred. Goldberg (2007b) found that participants in her study often surrounded themselves with like-minded others, a strategy that made disclosing and living authentically much easier. In addition, Joos

and Broad (2007) suggested that children raised by sexual minority parents may develop, over time, more effective strategies to disclose as well as more pride or confidence in their identity. This finding has implications for the current study. Perhaps the protective strategies used by participants were indicators of a stage of positive identity development as children of same-sex families.

Another protective strategy participants used to manage discrimination was by developing safe social networks and living in safe communities. Parents played a role in finding safe communities. In fact, a very intriguing theme emerged as participants talked about the communities where they grew up. Participants minimized the discrimination they experienced as comparatively light to what might have been experienced in less open communities. As a result they felt it was “lucky” to end up in an open community. However, it was noticed in data analysis that parents had exercised some intentional choice in selecting more open or accepting communities. This “protective factor” may not be the intention of the parent when coming out of a heterosexual relationship, perhaps it was their intent to find a safe place to come out and it was mostly oriented to their safety. However, there was a fortuitous benefit to these children of same- sex families because it increased (but did not guarantee) the chances of experiencing a supportive and open community, thus reducing the discrimination experiences. Parents in same-sex families understand that their children will have to manage inherent differences in their family’s identity (Clay, 1990). Moreover, this may be complicated by homophobia which can engender a negative identity development of the family (Murray & McClintock, 2005). Stacey and Biblarz (2001) noted that it would be reasonable to predict that parents would move children to

a reasonable safe place in order raise them. Participants may have experienced this as fortuitous because they did not actually make the choice but rather found themselves cognizant of the accepting environment reflecting back across their life. Later, these children used these skills to set boundaries with peers and partners and live in relatively open and accepting environments.

Participants in the current study reported that their parents tried to protect and advocate on their behalf. Some participants indicated that parents discussed the damage of homophobic remarks made at school with the principal or intervened when participant's childhood peers made disparaging remarks. However, some participants noted that they also protected their parents from what they were experiencing. This trend was found in participants that were raised from birth by sexual minority parents in this sample. Participants took on the "burden" (Participant 8) of their experiences of homophobia and heterosexism for several reasons. First, participants wanted to protect parents from additional stress. Second, participants felt it was their problem to deal with and did not want to involve their parents. Third, they feared that telling their parents would result in making the situation worse or losing social privileges. Of course, these findings could be attributed to other motivations; for example Goldberg (2010) suggested that some adults of same-sex families might think of their parents' sexual orientation as irrelevant. In the current study, participants could be focusing more on the immediate actions and consequences of bullying or teasing; they could see this interaction as more related to interpersonal conflict rather than negative attitudes toward their parents. Rivers & Smith (1994) noted that internalizing and not sharing their bullying experience is a coping methods children and adolescents use. The

experience of telling someone about the bullying experience, while very adaptive, can be anxiety provoking (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner,2002).

### *Advocacy Strategies*

For participants in the current study, there were positive experiences that emerged out of years of responding to homophobia and heterosexism. Most participants learned strategies that helped them challenge homophobia, develop confidence in their identity, educate and advocate on sexual minority issues, and/or raise open-minded and accepting children. These strategies were labeled advocacy strategies.

Most participants reported they would not tolerate homophobic comments among their friends, partner, and children. Comments like “that’s so gay” were particularly irritating and insulting for participants and they used a direct style to correct, challenge or confront the person saying the comment. For example, a gentle correction reported by a participant was asking whether the person saying “that’s so gay” meant the situation being described was “happy or joyful” because that is the definition of the word “gay.” A more direct confrontation might be when a participant hears a stranger making homophobic comments and stops them to educate on heterosexism. Children were also educated by participants; for example informing their own children that two men or two women can also fall in love and have a family. Sometimes these teachable moments involved referring to the child’s grandparents as an example.

Most participants indicated an interest in educating their children on sexual minority issues. For some participants, this meant taking them to pro-gay activities,

such as a rally in support of same-sex marriage, in order to introduce their children to alternative family forms. For other participants, this meant age appropriate sex education where parents taught their children about men falling in love with other men and women falling in love with other women and how they can start a family. Parents appeared to take the initiative in educating their children on these issues - perhaps as a result of growing up in school systems that offered a limited sex education curriculum.

These results corroborate results of other studies examining managing heterosexual experiences among same-sex families. For example, Saffron (1998) found that lesbian mothers had a positive influence on their children's moral development and appreciation of diversity. These children tended to view this experience and the experience of growing up in a nontraditional family as an advantage because it nurtured a more pluralistic view of family and gender relations (Saffron, 1998). As a result, according to Saffron, participants may develop pride in their families. Tasker and Golombok (1997) noted that pride in one's family may contribute to disclosure about the identity of the family. This finding may help explain the motivation to disclose as a way to educate others about sexual minorities seen in several participants in the current study.

In addition, some participants in the current study discussed their sexual minority family experiences with regard to multiple generations (especially involving their kids in their grandparents' lives). Grandparents that identify as sexual minorities are an understudied population. Orel and Fruhaut (2006) examined the generational aspects of having same-sex parents by interviewing 16 lesbian and bisexual grandmothers. They found grandmothers relationships with their grandchildren were



conceptualized in the context of the relationship with their adult children. This was an important finding because the relationships grandmothers had with their adult child had the largest impact on the development of an emotionally close relationship between grandmother and their grandchildren (Orel & Fruhaut, 2006). All of participants in this current study that had children and some of the participants that did not have children reported it was important that their children have a relationships with their grandparents. Some participants indicating an interest in grandparent-grandchild relationship noted that they wanted to live in open and accepting communities so that parents would feel comfortable visiting. This may also facilitate a closer relationship between their parents and their children

Goldberg (2010), reflecting on the experiences of heterosexism of children raised in same-sex families, noted that children's concerns about having sexual minority parents during childhood might be replaced with more proud feelings as they enter into adulthood. This statement sounds hopeful; however there are two sides to this trend. While there is evidence that homophobia is different today than it was 40 years ago, it still exists in society (Herek, 2004). Children of same-sex families may very well adapt more confidence in their identity and demonstrate more pride when educating others over time; however, this may not always be the case.

It is very possible that the identity of an adult with sexual minority parents may not become easier or less discriminating over time (see Joos & Broad, 2007) After all, most participants in the current study were raised in relatively open communities and were comfortable establishing a social network of "safe" people when they were adults. But there are unsafe people. There are likely children of same-sex families that are not

proud of their parent's identity and struggle with their own identity (Cameron, 2009). Participants in this study developed a variety of ways to successfully cope with heterosexism and homophobia and should be recognized as a portion of adults of sexual minority parents that show what is possible. On the other hand, it would be an overgeneralization to present them as representative of all adults children of same-sex parents (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

### *Acceptance*

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a central category is a recognized theme ubiquitous across experiences and categories. A central category can be chosen from the categories established through the data analysis process or a central category can be a construct that captures the themes of all the categories. Such was the case in this theoretical model. The construct of "acceptance" was selected to be the central category. During the process of writing the storyline of the data, a broad theme of acceptance emerged from the participants' experiences.

The definition of acceptance for this study draws from several sources; for example, dictionary definitions and psychological definitions. From the dictionary, acceptance includes being received as adequate or suitable, typically to be admitted into a group; the agreement with or belief in an idea, opinion, or explanation; or, the willingness to tolerate a difficult or unpleasant situation (Merriam – Webster, 2010). Psychologically defined, acceptance refers to an active process of taking in an experience without attempting to alter its form or frequency (Herbert, Forman, & England, 2009). In social psychology, acceptance was defined as other people wanting to include someone in their groups or relationships (Leary, 2009). As important as

experiencing acceptance was for participants, they also endeavored to avoid rejection. Rejection was the experience of others excluding individuals from a group or relationship (Leary, 2009). This dynamic interplay of finding and maintaining acceptance as well avoiding and managing rejection permeated the experiences of the participants. This section describes the impact of acceptance on the lives of adults raised by sexual minority parents

The need for an individual to experience acceptance has foundations in our species' evolutionary history as well as in our social and family structures. The need for acceptance has roots in our biology. Given the cooperative nature of our early ancestors, being accepted into a group had strong survival advantages. The benefits of group acceptance were so strong that rejection or ostracism from the group greatly compromised individual survival. Consequently, rejection was a profoundly negative experience that, for our ancestors, might result in the death of the individual.

### *Families*

Families of the participants provided an excellent source of support and acceptance. Importantly, families were a safe group that valued and accepted the identity of the participants. In fact, it could be argued that in no other group was there as much acceptance for their identity that in their same- sex families. Parents of participants facilitated the experiences of acceptance. For example, parents moved to or lived in safe, GLBT friendly communities. Establishing safe and supportive communities among LGB individuals has been well documented. Weston (1991) suggested that when their family's reject them because of their sexual orientation, LGB individual establish "families of choice", close networks of individuals defined by

support and emotional ties rather than by legal, historical, and biological ties. As a result, for some LGB individuals, when support is not available from family, they create accepting communities. For the children of sexual minority parents, there was evidence that they created families and supportive network of friends that served similar functions to the “families of choice” their parents may have established. These created communities were strong sources of acceptance. In fact, among the participants with their own families, all indicated a strong emphasis of acceptance for sexual minorities. This finding may be helpful in understanding the desire of participants to seek open and accepting people rather than those that are heterosexists and homophobic.

Families provided an important source of acceptance for the participants’ identity as well as managing discrimination in a heteronormative world. Family support is helpful reducing the minority stress participants experienced as children of sexual minority parents. For example, Hershberger and D’Augelli (1995) found that family support for LGB individuals reduced mental health problems. Also, Savin-Williams (1989a) found that family approval of sexual orientation increased comfort with identity among lesbian and gay individuals. Moreover, some studies suggest that relationship quality among LGB individual is enhanced through family acceptance. While these studies demonstrate finding based on adult LGB participants there may be important implications for adults raised in sexual minority families. While no participants identified as nonheterosexual, all were exposed to discrimination. In fact, Goldberg, Kinkler, Richardson, and Downing (2012) found that adults raised by sexual minority parents experience minority stress as a result of the affiliation of their parents

sexual orientation. Therefore, some of the protective or resilient factors generated from families may be applied to the participants. After all, developing self acceptance can depathologize the experiences of being a minority (Elizur and Ziv, 2001).

### *Gender and Sexuality*

When asked about their experiences with gender roles and sexuality, participants said they accepted broader and less traditional notions for themselves and others. Participants demonstrated more acceptance in several areas including; sexuality and gender roles, the sexual orientation of their parents, peer, and acquaintances and sexual minorities in general. Acceptance was so highly valued that participants, including those with and without children, indicated they would teach the value of acceptance for sexual minorities to their children.

Goldberg (2007b) found that among a sample of adults raised by sexual minority parents, acceptance for range of sexual expressions was highly valued and consistent among participants. Moreover, Goldberg (2007b) found that participants tended to express acceptance for their sexual orientation and thought about their own sexual orientation in more nuanced ways. Very similar findings were found in the current study. For example, while participants often used labels like “heterosexual” to identify their sexual orientation, their personal thoughts on sexual orientation were more nuanced recognizing it was something occurring on a continuum. In term of their gender roles, participants reported feeling more freedom to define their own and sought romantic partners that shared similar ideas regarding roles. Overall they reported acceptance for a broader definition of what it meant to be male and female. This finding is consistent with findings in the literature. Goldberg (2007b) found similar

results among her participants. Female participants found more acceptance for a wider range of career options. Male participants with lesbian mothers were often more open to a nontraditional gender roles and showed more acceptance of their partner's emotional needs (Goldberg, 2007b).

In summary, the experiences of acceptance, whether rooted in biology, attachment styles, or family systems, were frequently manifested in the experiences of the participants. Gaining acceptance appeared to enhance identity development and self-concept, buffer discrimination, facilitate disclosures and offer more open minded attitudes toward sexuality and gender role. In addition, acceptance was highly valued and encourage in participants' families. Some participants used their experiences of acceptance to advocate for and engender acceptance of same-sex families.

#### *Disclosing*

Participants used disclosing as a way to interact with their people in their environment and garner information about their environment. All participants reported experiences disclosing that they have sexual minority parents. All participants indicated they had disclosed to their romantic partners and all participants had disclosed to peers, coworkers, teachers, community members, their own children and others. All participants experienced a variety of responses ranging from affirming to invalidating. As a result of a wide variety of disclosing opportunities and a range of responses, participants developed various methods of disclosing, often from Subtle to Direct styles. Several themes emerged in the context of disclosing including, screening relationships, developing relationships, and educating others.

### *Parent's Disclosure*

For most participants, the first disclosure experience regarding the identity of their family was from their parents. Depending on the circumstance and situation, this disclosure occurred at various ages and in a variety of ways. For example, a parent disclosing sexual orientation to a teenager after divorce was different than a parent disclosing to child raised from birth or from a young age by sexual minority parents. Participants indicated the disclosures were oriented to their age and addressed their concerns. The main difference between participants raised by sexual minority parents from birth or young age and those raised by a sexual minority parent that divorced a heterosexual partner was the adjustment - children of the former assumed their family was just like others whereas the latter understood their parent was part of a stigmatized minority group.

The literature indicated that ages of children at the time of disclosure of a minority sexual orientation can have an impact on their adjustment. Patterson (1992) noted that early adolescence may be a difficult time to learn about a parent's sexual minority identity. Effects of the age at which children learn of parents' gay or lesbian identities were examined by Paul (1986), who found that those who were told either in childhood or in late adolescence coped with the disclosure better than those who first learned of it during adolescence. In a similar study, Huggins (1989) found that children showed higher self esteem when they were told about their mother's sexual orientation during childhood compared to those that were told during adolescence.

Breshears (2010) interviewed 13 lesbian mothers regarding their experience of disclosing their identity to their children. The study found evidence of three substantial

turning points, or opportunities for mothers to talk with their children about the identity of the family, in the process of disclosing including coming out to the child, challenges to family identity, and announcement of commitment ceremonies/wedding. The results of these turning points facilitated development of the family identity. Breshears (2010) noted a limitation of the study was that it lacked the perspective of the child on parent disclosure. This current study addressed a limitation in the Breshears study by offering evidence on how that the disclosing process is likely different for children born into same-sex families compared to those born into heterosexual families with a parent coming-out later.

#### *Participant's Disclosure*

For most participants, their first disclosure was to a peer. Since some peers were accepting and other were rejecting, participants developed methods of disclosing to fit the situation. Often, a subtle style of disclosure was used; for example broaching the subject of gay rights or dropping clues about one's "dads" or "moms" and noting the reaction. Other methods were more direct; for example, saying openly that one has a gay dad or lesbian mom. In addition, participants would observe people and gather information on whether or not they would likely be open to the idea of same-sex families. They may listen for conservatism, religiousness, and/or heterosexist attitudes to inform their disclosure.

These patterns of disclosing were reflected in literature and corroborate other findings on experience of adults disclosing their family identity. Goldberg (2007b) interviewed 42 adults to explore their experiences disclosing their family's sexual minority identity. Several themes emerged from the data including four styles of



disclosing: First, about half of the sample disclosed for the purpose of education (briefly define what this means). Second, disclosure was performed as a litmus test to determine whether a person or group would be supportive, such that this person would be supportive should they decide to pursue a friendships. Third, some adults disclosed as a response to growing up in a family where nonheterosexual identity was a secret. More specifically, while these adults recognized the benefits of remaining closeted, the experience of keeping a secret made them abhor dishonesty in their relationships. The authenticity practiced in their life was the reaction to years of hiding. Fourth, a few adults did not disclose their family's identity because they said it was irrelevant and would otherwise keep it private unless a disclosure was absolutely necessary (Goldberg, 2007b).

Participants in this current study reported that disclosing their identity to romantic partners was very important. All participants had experience disclosing their parent's sexual orientation to partners. Disclosing was used as "litmus test" to determine whether the relationship could continue or it was a way to bring partners closer together. Almost all participants reported that they could not specifically recall the experience of disclosing their identity to their current partners. Also, they were unable to report the reaction of their partners to this disclosure. This was a curious finding as it was assumed that disclosing would be a big deal, particularly with the understanding that not accepting a parent's sexual orientation was a relationship ending prospect among participants.

It was possible that the participants were very careful in partner selection practices earlier on in the dating process or had observed enough information to make a

reasonable guess that their partners would be understanding. After all, they had gone through the process of disclosing to peers and others before disclosing to participants. A more parsimonious explanation may be that participants dropped hints for their partners over the course of dating that gave their partners enough information to figure it out on their own. Therefore, the disclosure may not have been a singular event, as it most often is not for LGBTQ people, and may involve many different types of disclosures across one's life (Oswald, 2002).

Very little in the literature discusses the disclosure process to partners of adults raised by sexual minority parents. Herek (1996) and Boon and Miller (1999) have forwarded several motivations behind LBG individuals disclosing their identities including; to improve interpersonal relationships, to put an end to secrecy, and to live more congruent with their identity. Goldberg (2007b) suggested Boon and Miller's (1999) motivation to reduce secrecy as an explanation for why some adults of same-sex families disclosed. Perhaps participants disclosed to significant others as a result of a strong desire for honesty as a reaction to dealing with the secrecy of their parents' sexual orientation and their collusion in hiding this identity from a heterosexist culture.

The current study makes an important contribution to the literature through corroborating other finding adults raised by nonheteorsexuals motivations for disclosing. Further, the finding contribute to the literature by describing disclosing experiences in romantic relationships among adults raised in same-sex families. This current study found similarities in motivations to disclose. Notably, participants disclosed to educate others, for example peers and their children, on sexual minority issues or to address misinformed opinions. Similar to what Goldberg (2007b) found in

her sample, participants used disclosing as a “litmus test” to determine whether or not to pursue a friendship or a romantic relationship with a person. Participants were also motivated to live openly and honestly as a reaction to hiding their parents’ sexual orientation growing up. In addition, participants reported developing different methods of disclosing ranging from Subtle to Direct styles. Determining who to disclose to and how to disclose was an invaluable skill for participants because it informed how they interacted with their environment.

### Relationships

Developing a romantic relationship was an important theme among participants. In fact, the topic was intriguing to participants and questions related to this topic generated much discussion. As a result, several interesting themes emerged. The primary themes that emerged from discussion in relationships included the process of partner selection, contextual influences that supported or informed romantic relationship development, gender role and sexuality issues.

### *Gender Roles*

Participants indicated their ideas of gender were influenced by having sexual minority parents. The category, Gender Roles, was defined as the influences of past experiences and parental models for prescribed behaviors of a particular gender and how these attitudes and behaviors, and style of responding were negotiated in a current relationship. The definition also encompassed the traditional definitions of gender identity and gendered roles. Gender identity is the extent or degree that an individual self defines as female or male (Bem, 1974) and gender roles include behaviors and attitudes that are considered by a particular culture as appropriate for

female or male (Bem, 1974). The major themes included having nontraditional gender roles modeled for them by parents, egalitarian styles of dividing house work and chores among participant and their partners, and looking for very stereotypical men among female partners. Because results regard gender roles in partner selection were discussed in the Partner Selection section, they are not discussed in detail here. Instead, the focus of this section is on participants' experiences of having nontraditional gender role-models and their thoughts on gender roles.

Participants recalled that their parents modeled nontraditional gendered roles. For those with lesbian parents, participants noted that their moms demonstrated a broad range of roles from cooking and doing laundry to house maintenance and yard work. As a result, participants believed that their mothers could competently engage in the roles of both genders. Among those with gay fathers, participants recalled that fathers divided house work by interest and skill and chores were not rigidly prescribed to one parent or another. For all participants that described their sexual minority parents' gendered roles, it was common to describe the division of labor as egalitarian. Participants acknowledged that this parental modeling influenced their interest in having egalitarian role division with their parent. These results corroborate findings of Goldberg (2007a), where adults of sexual minority parents emphasized the impact their parents had on their ideas of gendered roles. Because sexual minority couples and families are not as influenced by socially prescribed gendered roles, their decisions about who does what in a relationship are often based on what each partner has skills in or enjoys, and are more likely to be egalitarian in household chores and childcare (Green, 2008; Patterson, 1995). Moreover, in their review of the literature, Stacey and

Biblarz (2001) posit that the effect of parent gender outweighs the effect of parent sexual orientation among children of sexual minority partners. The authors suggested that, when examining differences in parent characteristics, there are more differences across gender than across sexual orientation. As a result, children with parents of the same gender should adopt less gendered ways than children of heterosexual parents (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). This trend played out in the experiences of most of the participants in this study.

In terms of gender identity, participants raised from birth or young age in same-sex families recalled that there were raised “as gender neutral as possible” by their parents. Participants said they and their siblings were given equal access to “boy” and “girl” toys and not discouraged away from any interests that were not traditionally congruent with their gender. This result is not surprising; for example, Fulcher, Sutfin, Chan, Scheib, and Patterson (2006) found that children’s activity preferences were less gendered in families where the division of labor among parents was less gendered. Participants also reported that despite their parents’ best efforts to remain neutral, they sometimes gravitated toward the toys that were typically associated to their gender. This process of gravitating toward toys is very different than being prescribed certain toys and punished for not having interest in the “right” activities for children. Participants that had parents come out after their childhood noted similar ideas about gender but not necessarily the same trends in recalling parents (while in heterosexual relationship) raising them in a gender neutral way.

The influence of sexual minority parents on gender roles may have implications through several generations. For example, there is a tendency for same-sex couples to

have more egalitarian roles divisions (Kurkek, 1993). This was corroborated in the current study. The participants indicated that they adopted egalitarian roles in their relationships and are modeling this or will model this role division for their children. Shulman, Rosenheim, & Knafo (1999) found support for the socialization model which suggests that when egalitarian roles are present in traditional, heterosexual families, children tend to adopt those egalitarian roles. Therefore, the division of labor in the relationships of participants' children may be more egalitarian. Certainly, more research with the children of adults raised by sexual minorities will need to be conducted in order to explore this idea.

The gender roles experiences described by participants were full of rich examples of socially and culturally constructed aspects of gender. Participants tended to have more egalitarian gendered roles in their intimate relationships and they and their partners did not closely follow heteronormative scripts of gender. In addition, participants did not indicate any confusion regarding their gender expression or develop, a concern often held by critics of sexual minority parents. Overall, the gender role and identity experiences among participants consistent with and extends the extent literature on gender issues in children raised by same-sex couples.

#### *Partner Selection*

Across the theme of partner selection, several trends emerged in the data analysis. First, for most participants, there was an interest in partners that were open-minded, accepting, or politically moderate or liberal. Second, participant relied on their friends as a source of information regarding choosing safe or open partners. Third,

among female participants, half indicated a preference for male partners that were very masculine ('manly men').

### *Open-minded and Accepting Partners*

The trend of participants wanting a socially liberal or moderate person was generally found to explicitly mean that participants wanted partners that were accepting of their identity in a same-sex family and, often, that partners respected the rights of sexual minorities. Moreover, all participants required that their partners were open and accepting to sexual minorities and if they were not, the relationship would end. While there is very little literature on the romantic relationships of adults raised by sexual minority parents, one qualitative study, Goldberg (2007a), found similar results. In her interviews with adults with sexual minority parents, there was a strong preference for open-minded and accepting partners. Under the theme of "*Selective Association: Choosing Progressive Communities*", Goldberg (2007a, p. 556) indicated participants "were very careful about the people they invited into their lives and refused to date or form relationships with people who demonstrated signs of homophobia." The current study found similar themes among participants regarding partner preferences.

These results can be understood from a social cognitive perspective. Social Cognitive Theory posits that human functioning is the result of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences such that personal factors (cognition, affect, and biological events) behaviors, and environmental forces create interactions that result in a triadic reciprocity? (Bandura, 1986). Because individuals are active agents in their lives and can respond and be influenced by environmental agents, they are both creators and products of their environments. In addition,

Bandura's work can be extended to include social systems and groups. Individuals can work cooperatively with others, for example, in a family, group, or community, to develop and enhance their capabilities (Bandura, 1986). The family does not directly dictate the behaviors of the individual; however they influence self systems of individuals which contribute to personal standards, self efficacy beliefs, and emotional states. Therefore, participants with same-sex families are likely influenced by their parents' responses to being a sexual minority and may develop openness and empathy for their parents, sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups. It does not guarantee that a child will adopt these responses because, according to the SCT, the familial structure does not dictate behavior.

Goldberg (2007a), however, noted that participants that grew up in non heteronormative families were more open and accepting and expressed much empathy of marginalized groups. This would make partners that were open minded to gay rights not only appealing to children of same-sex parents, but the partner would also likely find their beliefs reflected in the participants' beliefs and perhaps the family identity. Of course it could be argued that other factors may have attracted a partner to one of the participants and the potential partner simply accommodated the beliefs of the participants over the course of their relationships. Yet, marital research does not necessarily support this. In fact, longitudinal studies demonstrate that partner similarity is not a product of mutual influence resulting from years of living together but rather are present at the time of marriage (Pike & Plomin, 1997). Therefore, the partners of adults with sexual minority partners likely were open-minded and accepting *before* dating the participants rather than becoming open-minded after starting the relationship.



### *Peer Influences*

Some participants noted that peers were also a source of information regarding partner selection. Peer influence among participants included providing social support, opportunities to practice disclosing, and direct or indirect feedback on potential partners. The literature strongly supports the influence of peers. By the time children enter adolescence non classroom time spent with peers exceeds that spent with family (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). While parents remain influential over future educational and career aspirations, peers contribute a greater influence in decision-making (Hartup, 1983). Pike and Plomin (1997) noted that compared to the shared environment (the family), the non-shared environment, which includes peers, contributes a significant amount to the differentiation that occurs among siblings in a family. Therefore, peer influences extend broadly to experiences of the adolescent individuals.

Research also demonstrates that as children develop into adolescence and into young adulthood, the influence of parents yields to the influence of peer relationships. Adolescent friendships are qualitatively different from those of children and peers take on an increasingly important role in the lives of adolescents (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). These peer relationships, particularly close peer relationships, strongly impacts romantic relationship development. For example, Sharabany, Gershoni, and Hofman, (1981) noted that close peer relationships in early adolescence are built around acceptance and mutual respect. In later adolescence, acceptance continues to be important in close peer relationships but the key feature becomes sharing personal

problems and emotions without fear of losing the close peer's respect (Sharabany et al., 1981).

Importantly, peer relationships set the stage for romantic relationships. Selman (1980) applied Social Cognitive Theory to adolescent romantic relationships. The model described the development of closeness and individual autonomy in intimate relationships. Selman (1990) suggested adolescent partners begin by sharing experiences through imitating feelings and behaviors (Selman, 1990). Next, partners learn to negotiate differences; although a deeper sense of connectedness was not yet developed. Then, in the final stage, partners develop a deeper concern for each other that is categorized by respect for uniqueness, a desire for shared experiences, and an ability to collaborate for mutual interest (Selman, 1990).

Close peer relationships impact the development of romantic relationships. Peers provide an opportunity to learn disclosing skill, to share problems and emotions and receive support, to experience acceptance and respect of differences and uniqueness, and to create shared experiences. For participants raised by sexual minority parents, peers served an important role for romantic relationship development because they provided role models of supportive interactions. Peers that were open and understanding helped the participants feel accepted. It is possible participants, as suggested by the research, would generalize these experiences with peers to potential partners for a romantic relationship, thus helping them find open and accepting partners.

### *Manly Men*

Half of the heterosexual female participants stated a preference for a partner that was a “manly man” or “very heterosexual” (Participant 7 and 1, respectively). A convenient explanation to this finding would be that these heterosexual women are like other heterosexual woman and seek certain types of masculine traits in their partners. Heterosexual woman in the United States tend to seek a heterosexual male with the following attributes (for reproductive success); recent research finds that males who are more dominant (Wolff & Puts, 2010), muscular (Frederick & Haselton, 2007) and physically and facially masculine (Rhodes, Simmons, & Peters, 2005) report more short-term sexual partners whereas males with high incomes (Hopcroft, 2006), attractive faces (Jokela, 2009), and deep-voices (Apicella, Feinberg, & Marlowe, 2007) have more offspring.

Alternatively, while there is not extant literature that supports this thought, it may be hypothesized that participants want to avoid a partner that might later come out as gay; thus looking for very “masculine” traits would somehow protect themselves from the experience of losing a relationship as a result of a mismatch in sexual orientations between partners. It is possible that hetero- normative beliefs and internalized homophobia would pressure participants to seek more stereotypical males with more stereotypically male behaviors.

But on closer examination of the trends that emerged in the data, the female participants sought males that embraced nontraditional gender roles. For example, among married females participants, most were the primary bread winners in their family or had male partners that stayed at home to raise the children. However, while

gender roles where generally nontraditional, they still described seeking partners that had traits considered “very male,” including watching sports, not being meticulously groomed, not being melodramatic, and not overly focusing on relationships and emotions. On the other hand, traits desired that were not as traditionally male-oriented were being emotionally supportive, having an ability to discuss emotions, demonstrating an interest in healthy communication, and being open minded and accepting. The stereotypical male does not stay at home while his partner earns a wage to support the family. In the case of these participants, they wanted partners that had some stereotypically male traits and interests but also had an ability to take on a broader definition of what it is to be male. Indeed, they wanted partners that acted in socially masculine while offering a more open minded approach to gender roles.

Literature on adults raised in same-sex families provides some insight into this trend. Goldberg (2007a) found that adults with sexual minority parents tend to be more comfortable with gender nonconformity. More specifically, Goldberg found that children of lesbians attribute less rigid gender roles to having a strong, feminist female role model (though not simply as a result of having a lesbian mother). As a result, sons tended to value capabilities in their female partners, aspire to less traditionally male interests, and be more sensitive; whereas daughters felt empowered to be more independent and pursue less traditional female career and interests. These findings corroborate results of Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray and Smith (1986), who found that daughters of lesbians tended to show higher career aspirations than daughters of heterosexual mothers.

Participants tended to report more egalitarian gender roles in their romantic relationships. Perhaps this was as a result of less pressure to conform to gender roles. Other researchers noted similar findings, with adults of sexual minority parents endorsing more equal roles in relationships (Goldberg, 2007a) and described this phenomenon in terms of Oswald, Blume, and Marks' (2005) notion of 'complex gendering.' Complex gendering suggests that partners resist gender stereotypes and freely choose their roles without gender restraints. For the male partners of the female participants, this may contribute to higher satisfaction in marriage; for example, research has shown stereotypical gender roles are unhealthy for romantic relationships (Gottman, 1994), and Amato and Booth (1995) found that when husbands adopt less traditional roles, their perceived marital quality increases. Moreover, less marital satisfaction was found among husbands with more traditional gender roles. (Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005).

#### *Influence of Parents*

Participants reported that parents served an important role in their lives. In terms of selecting romantic partners, parents often created a context to think about romantic relationships. Some participants reported learning from their parents' relationships; they indicated these experiences, good or bad, helped shape their idea of a relationship and sometimes the characteristics of a potential partner. As a result, parents' influence, whether direct, indirect or observed through interaction, contributed to participants' partner selection process. The findings on the impact of sexual minority parents on adult romantic relationship development have not been documented in the literature. Consequently, these results are on the research frontier among adults

raised in same-sex families. In order to provide a framework to understand the results, this section draws from attachment theory as well as sociological and evolutionary perspectives.

Attachment theory demonstrates the impact of parents on their children's future close relationships. Research in attachment theory demonstrates that, in terms of developing romantic relationships, the parents care and attention given to their children significantly impacts the child's style of behaving and responding in close relationships later in life. In fact, one way parents influence partner selection in the future, albeit indirect, is through establishing the child's attachment style. Research demonstrates that, in terms of attachment styles, romantic partners can be found on the basis of the following three attachment related styles preferences: similarity (e.g., Frazier, Byer, Fischer, Wright, & DeBord, 1996), complementarity (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990), and attachment security (e.g., Chappell & Davis, 1998). Holmes and Johnson (2009) indicated that when given a choice of hypothetical partners, individuals will primarily show a preference on the basis of similarity and attachment–security, but in terms of partners that romantic relationships are maintained with, the preference appears based on complementarity (Holmes & Johnson, 2009). Therefore, one way parents impact the partner selection experiences for their children is through the quality of early care giving styles that set the stage for attachment style development. This result might be interpreted cautiously as other influences beyond parental influence contribute to attachment style. Nevertheless, attachment style, regardless of its origin and shaping forces, is an effective predictor of expectations individuals hold for their partners.

Another explanation, from the sociological and evolutionary perspective, may explain the impact of parents on partner selection. Buunk, Park, and Dubbs, (2008) suggested that parental investment contributes to partner selection. For example, there are characteristics that parents may be especially attentive to in their children's partner, because those characteristics predict a higher overall reproductive payoff for the parents. In addition, parents may be especially attentive to traits suggesting that the potential partner of their children will contribute to family and group cohesion, will help them in their old age, and/or will socialize their grandchildren in a culturally appropriate manner (Buunk, Park, and Dubbs, 2008). Considering the experiences of participants in this study, there were several overlapping experiences. First, it was vitally important that their partners to be accepting of their parents' sexual orientation. A partner that was not accepting of sexual minorities would threaten group cohesion in the family. Second, participants wanted to live in communities where their parents would feel comfortable living or visiting. As sexual minority parents, feeling safe and comfortable visiting offspring would enhance connectedness and, perhaps, frequency of visits. Third, participants reported that they had or intended to raise their children with an open-minded attitude toward sexual minorities. Since grandchildren represent the fulfillment of parenting responsibilities grandchildren with more open-minded attitudes towards same-sex families may spend more time with their grandparents

Moreover, parents may also seek to establish alliances or boost their own social power via their children's romantic relationships. It has been demonstrated that parents encourage their children to find partners that are similar in the family's ethnic group, religion, and the same (or higher) social class" (Buunk, Park, & Dubbs, 2008). In the

case of same-sex families, sexual minority parents might increase their social power through raising children and having a family.

In summary, there is little in the literature investigating the partner selection process of adults raised in same -sex families. It is important to look at the factors involved in developing romantic relationships among adults raised by sexual minority parents because it provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of this population. This study finds that peer influences and parental influences as well as previous dating relationships contribute to choosing a partner. In addition, participants demonstrated a preference for open and accepting partners and partner that were capable of living outside of a traditional gendered role script.

### *Sexuality*

Participants reported the sexual orientation of their parents impacted their ideas on sexuality. The category of sexuality was broadly defined referring to thoughts, feelings, behaviors, experiences and attitudes toward sexuality in the context of the self and for others. Common themes emerged in data analysis, including; openness to a range of sexual orientations, appreciation of sexuality, and an acknowledgment that parents influenced thoughts on sexual identity regardless of whether or not sexuality was discussed with them as children.

Previous research (Green et al., 1986; Goldberg, 2007a) has found that children, adolescents, and adults of same sex families attributed developing more flexible ideas about sexuality to growing up with sexual minority parents. These results make sense considering the family of origin has a substantial impact on sexuality, modeling first experiences of love, acceptable behaviors, and ideas about sex (Harvey, Wenzel, &



Sprecher, 2004). The results of this study supported this idea. Results indicated that participants valued openness to a range of sexual orientations. For example, all participants were accepting of their parents' sexual orientation. Participants also served as important allies for friends that were working to understand their sexual orientation. Indeed some participants reported that having a lesbian or gay parent gave them a special status to those that were questioning their sexual identity indicating people felt comfortable discussing sexuality issues with them.

Participants indicated that having sexual minority parents increased their appreciation of their own sexuality. While only one participant engaged in a same-sex relationship, most participants noted they had thought deeply about their sexuality, including their sexual orientation. In fact, some participants noted that understanding and appreciating their sexuality helped them feel less anxious about their sexuality and made them more open to their partner's sexual interests. These findings were in concert with Saffron (1998) and Goldberg (2007a), who both found that adults of sexual minority parents were more open to thinking about their sexuality in more nuanced ways. Moreover, this trend suggests that adults raised by sexual minority parents challenge the heteronormative belief that all individuals are assumed heterosexual until they prove otherwise.

Some participants recalled that they did not think about their parents as sexual people and did not discuss sexuality issues (i.e. dating, sex education, sexual orientation), while other participant reported they often spoke to their parents on sexuality issues. This result should not imply that children in same-sex families inherit a form of open-mindedness and acceptance. Participants have had many, many years to

reflect on the sexuality issues related to their parents, whether or not they reflected on them as children or adolescents. It does demonstrate that children of same-sex parents may not think about their parents as sexual people just as some children of heterosexual parents do not think of their parents in those terms (Jaccard & Dittus, 1991). However evidence suggests children talk to their parents more about sexuality as they move from adolescence to emerging adulthood. (Jensen, Arnett, Feldman, & Cauffman, 2004)..

These results corroborate other findings in the literature. For example, in a study comparing adults raised by divorced, lesbian mother and divorced heterosexual mothers, Tasker and Golombok (1995) found no significant differences between groups with respect to sexual identity or experiences of same-sex sexual attraction. (This is getting at the politically safe “no different” attitude.) However, young adults from lesbian families were more likely to have considered the possibility of having a same-sex relationship and to have actually been involved in a same-sex relationship. Tasker and Golombok (1995) suggested that, consistent with a social constructionist perspective, having a lesbian mother appeared to broaden young adults’ views about their potential sexual orientation.

In summary, the category of Sexuality emerged out of participants reflections on their parents’ sexual orientation and through discussions of their own sexuality. Major themes noted by the participants included an appreciation for the sexuality of others, a deeper appreciation for their own sexuality, and more flexible and broad ideas of sexuality. Similar to their concerns on the with potential unhealthy gender development, critics have expressed concerns that children raised by sexual minority parents will themselves become sexual minorities (Cameron, 2009). However, the

results of this discussion on sexuality demonstrate that participants gained a deeper understand and appreciation of their sexuality and the sexuality of others.

*A Proposed Theoretical Model of Familial Sexual Minority Identity Development*

One of the hallmark features of grounded theory research entails the development of a theory. Theory building results from analyzing the data and telling the story of the categories. While the theory is not necessarily generalizable to other populations, the theory should reasonably describe the experiences of the participants and account for the variance among the stories. In this study, there was a distinct identity development process among participants, their parents, and their families. Taking a broader perspective, the families that participants were raised in provided the roots of identity, acceptance, and belonging. While the focus on this study was often the individual and the individuals' relationships, the core grounding factor in their lives was their family. Indeed, the identity of the family was central to the lived experiences of the participants. Therefore, considering the importance of the family, the experiences of the participants and story of the categories, this study forwards a theory of same-sex family identity development, or, the *Proposed Theoretical Model of Familial Sexual Minority Identity Development*.

First, the context of the model, indeed the identity of family, is located in a heteronormative culture, heavily influenced by heterosexist attitudes. As a result of this relationship with the culture, the family's identity is impacted and shaped as a consequence of this relationship with the culture. For example, Lev (2010) noted that after legal systems determined lesbian headed families raised psychological normal children, there was an implied expectation for lesbian parents to do just that --

introducing pressure to measure up to heterosexual standards. Consequently, although same-sex families often question and challenge the traditional family structure (Riggs, 2006), they are also under pressure to prove that their family structure was valid (Lev, 2010). One of the defining features of this model is that families demonstrated a resistance to heteronormative definitions of the family and created an identity apart from these scripts. Hudak and Giammattei (2010) call this phenomenon, “doing family”, referring to de-centering the heterosexual family ideal and instead focusing on the unique features of same-sex families. For families in this study, this process began at different points; for some it was the birth of their children (the participants) for others it was when the participants’ parents disclosed their sexual orientation

Second, the strength and closeness of the family’s identity was moderated through the relationships among family members. Healthy attachments to parents helped participants address and accommodate their parents’ sexual orientation, both managing the event when it is distressing and updating their attachment system to reflect their parent’s identity. As a result, children were able to accept their parents and, in turn, acceptance from their children validated sexual minority parents’ identity as parents. Accommodation to change is supported through Minuchin’s Structural Family Model (Colapinto, 1982). This is a way to maintain the relationships in the family and sustain the status quo. Discovering the sexual orientation of their parents introduced change into the family system; based on their stories, participants adjusted to this change results in family homeostasis. Therefore, if the strength of the participants’ relationships with their parents was not strong or their attachment with

parents was insecure, then the family identity development process could be delayed or prematurely foreclosed.

Third, the family identity development process interacts with the social and cultural environment. In the study, the strongest example of this was participants' relationships with their peers; this was particularly true when they were still living with their sexual minority parents. When peers expressed acceptance for the participants' family identity it increased pride and confidence in their family. Moreover, the support of peers could reduce minority stress experienced by members of a same-sex family (Elizur & Ziv, 2001). Minority stress refers to stigmatization and negative attitudes towards a group of people; in the case of sexual minorities, it can manifest as actual experiences with heterosexism and homophobia, perceived anticipation of discrimination, and internalized homophobia (Bos, Van Balen, Van Den Boom, & Sanfort, 2004). De Graaf and Sandfort (2000) indicated that sexual minorities frequently experienced a range of minority stress events including violence, heterosexist and homophobic attitudes, and exclusion. Because sexual minorities experience minority stress, children of same-sex families may also be vulnerable. There are very few studies that address the minority stress experiences of same-sex families and nothing in the literature regarding minority stress experiences of children or adults of same-sex families.

Bos et al. (2004) noted that lesbian mothers experience stigmatization as a consequence of being compared to the heteronormative parental standard. In their study, Bos et al (2004) found that among a sample of lesbian mothers, experiences of minority stress did not impact psychological adjustment of their children. This finding

is similar to the conclusions of Golombok ( 2000) who indicated that children of lesbian mothers were no more likely to be teased or bullied compared to children of heterosexual partners in the UK. Yet, these findings do not suggest that children of same-sex families do not experience minority stress. The experiences of minority stress remain under-studied in the literature.

According to Minuchin, because the family is an open, living system, the environment impacts the family just as the family impacts the environment (Colapinto, 1982). Because reference group rules and norms can impact the family in healthy and unhealthy way, peer relationships are an important factor to consider. When participants interact with their peers and community and the feedback is positive, it reinforces the identity of the family. When the feedback was negative, as a result of discrimination or heteronormative rules dictating normal family development, the family identity was threatened and relied on coping mechanisms to neutralize the identity threat.

Fourth, the family identity was expanded through participants' romantic relationships. There was a dynamic interaction between the family identity, the participants, and their potential romantic partners. Because of their pride and acceptance of their families, participants sought partners that were also open and accepting of their same-sex family. If the partner was not accepting, then the relationship ended. This finding is consistent with Goldberg's (2007a); this study found that most participants would never partner with person that did not accept their same-sex family identity. With an open and accepting partner, participants found little threat to the family's identity. In addition, participants' partners essentially became a

supporting member of the family's same-sex identity. (However, the parents of partners where not automatically included as supporting members).

Finally, an important task of same-sex families was to develop and perpetuate legacy. Legacy, in the heterosexual sense of the word, involves passing on genetic information to future generations and implies heterosexual relationships. In the case sexual minority families, they pass on "queer legacy." The word "queer", as used in academic literature, generally refers to a position, sentiment, or idea that is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant (Halperin, 1997). Talburta and Rasmussen (2010, p. 5) defined "queer" as

Movement away from identitarian politics, a skepticism of knowing in advance the ends or purposes to which knowledge and research will be put, and a questioning of change in the future as intrinsically ameliorative.

Queer legacy, then, refers to attitudes, values, perspectives, and behaviors that are passed from sexual minority parents to their children and successive generations that generally reflect a de-centered, non-heteronormative perspective. This current study found evidence of queer legacy in first generation (the participants) and second generation (the participants' children) individuals. Examples included accepting attitudes towards sexual minorities, a broader understanding of sexuality, and a less traditional view and script of gender roles.

This model of family identity development among same-sex families offered a conceptual framework to better understand the impact of the family on the lives of the participants. In addition to offering a unique perspective on the same-sex families, it included several tasks that were common among the experiences of the participants and their same-sex families. The tasks of adjusting to same-sex family life were evident

across the members in family. In the next section, the identity development process of the children of sexual minority parents is addressed.

### *Identity*

Participants noted that developing an identity as a member of a same-sex family was important. The participants in this study generally experienced a process of developing their identity that appeared to be impacted as much by their family of origin as it was by managing homophobia in a heteronormative culture. There is no existing identity development model specifically for children of same-sex families. Certainly, any model of development designed to capture this process would be remiss to exclude the important contributions of social and psychological factors affecting children with non-heterosexual parents.

Through data analysis of the results, participants detailed a process of adjusting to their identity as a member in a same-sex family. The evidence supporting a developmental process emerged through analysis of stories. Participants revealed that they were at different points of understanding their identity from the time they discovered their parents' sexual orientation to their understanding at the time at interview. Further coding and analysis of their descriptions generated support for their identity development. The process included several phases for children of same-sex parents, beginning with a discovery phase (often prompted by parental disclosing), then a reflection phase, followed by an adjustment phase, and finally an appreciation phase. Each phase had markers roughly indicating the transition into a new phase. More detail is provided to clarify the phases.



### *Discovery Phase*

First, participants needed to learn of their parents' identity. This process differed for those born to or raised from a young age by sexual minority parents and those born to heterosexual parents that later came out as nonheterosexual. Participants born into sexual minority parents were told at young ages and the process of disclosing was not limited to one event. For participants born into a heterosexual family, the disclosure occurred in their childhood or adolescence, typically after a divorce. The chief difference between the experiences for the two groups seemed to be in the degree that participants understood homophobia and heterosexism. For those who were raised early-on by sexual-minority parents, there was likely little understanding of these concepts. They became aware of homophobia as they developed into childhood through adolescence. On the other hand, those that were in adolescence when their parents disclosed, likely understood the stigma associated with being a sexual minority. As a result, the experience of parents disclosing their sexual orientation might not have a large, immediate impact on a very young child whereas disclosing might have a greater impact during adolescence or early adulthood.

### *Reflection Phase*

Second, participants experienced a reflection stage, which was characterized by dissonance. Depending on how old they were and their family constellation, participants may think their family is normal and the rest of the families in society are now different or that society is normal and their family is now different. Markers of the reflection stage included confusion about the consequences of the disclosure for their relationships with family, friends, and community, awareness that the family identity is

different than other families, and uncertainty about the future of the family.

Participants in this phase might struggle with their identity, react to internalized homophobia, express tentative support to the parent's disclosure, and occasionally disclose their family's identity to others. The dissonance in this phase moved participants to the next phase, adjustment.

### *Adjustment Phase*

During the adjustment phase, participants grappled with the ramifications of their family's identity. They wondered about their parents' sexual orientation, considered the differences between their family and other families, and were sensitive to fully embracing their identity as a member in a same-sex family. Among the participants that found out their parents were sexual minorities in childhood and adolescence, most discussed reflection on their parent's coming out process. They tended to acknowledge how challenging and difficult it was for their parents to come out or how miserable it must have been to live closeted or in an unfulfilling marriage. These statements tended to indicate resolution toward the structure change of their family. Another task of this phase reported among the participants was to accommodate the new information about their family and its relationship to society into their worldview. Often participants were practicing disclosing their family's identity and learning, through observation and trial and error, how to navigate their social environment as the child of a same-sex family. Adjustment was facilitated by family support and, depending on age of disclosing, peer support.

One of the issues in the adjustment phase is figuring out how the individual's identity as a child of same-sex parents will impact their romantic relationships.

Romantic relationships in the adjustment phase may or may not be with partners that are accepting of the participants' same-sex family. On the other hand, peer relationships tended to be exclusively with peers (but not necessarily the peers' parents) that were accepting of the participants' family identity. The support experienced from peer relationships tended to set higher expectations for open-minded accepting in romantic partners, a feature that marked the transition to the appreciation phase.

### *Appreciation Phase*

Finally, as these issues from the adjustment phase were resolved, participants entered the appreciation phase. Markers of this phase were a deeper understanding of their parents' sexual orientation, confidence in disclosing their identity to others, acceptance of their identity in the family, and a desire for a supportive network of people. Sometimes, participants in the appreciation phase acted as allies, advocated on behalf sexual minorities, and educated others on the damages of homophobia.

Relationship quality was another marker of participants in appreciation. For example, peer relationships tended to be with open and accepting peers; however, at this phase, participants reported friendships, working relationships, and other relationships with peers that were not as open minded or accepting of their identity. On the other hand, participants exclusively partnered with people that were open and accepting of their families. This relationship pattern appears reversed in the adjustment phase where peer relationships are exclusively accepting while romantic partners may or may not be accepting

While the evidence suggests an identity development process among participants, it does not suggest a timeline, a clear order of phases, or a preferred end

point. As a result, participants could spend varying amounts of time in phases or repeat phases. For example, children raised from birth by sexual minority parents could cycle through phases several times as they passed through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood; this could also be possible for those born into heterosexual families whose parents came out after divorce. Moreover, it is possible participants' experienced different degrees or levels of phases. For example, features of the adjustment phase could more intense if experienced in narrow minded community or less intense if experience among a supportive network of friends, relative, and "families of choice." This model of identity development is compared with other models of sexual minority development in the next section.

#### *Models of Sexual Minority Development*

While there are no identity developmental models that specifically describe the identity development process of adults raised in same-sex families, there are several theories that focus on LGB identity development. These theories include Cass' model of homosexual identity development, D'Augelli's life span model, and Savin-Williams' Differential Developmental Trajectories. The models are not a precise fit for adults from same-sex families; however, they have features that account for many of the experiences of the participants. These features include recognized identity formation is a process, accounting for heterosexism and homophobia (internal and external experiences), acknowledging the social and cultural factors interacting with identity developing, and recognizing the process from the perspective of a minority population.

D'Augelli's (1994) model presents human development as unfolding in dynamic ways and across multiple paths. Accordingly, identity development of LGB

individuals is embedded in the social context; which is an improvement over earlier stage models. Environmental and biological factors also play into the identity development process. D'Augelli (1994) explains development through identity processes that, unlike stage models, occur independently of each other and in no prescribed order. The processes included; existing heterosexuality, developing a personal LGB identity, developing a LGB social identity, becoming an LGB offspring, developing an LGB intimacy status, and entering an LGB community. This model provides several advantages when applied to the identity development of adults raised in same-sex families. For example, the model recognizing that a participant can be at more than one process at time and at different levels among the processes occurring. Moreover, this model accounts for the social context's influence on development.

Savin-Williams (2005) developed a model of adolescent sexual orientation development out of a recognized lack of empirical support for previous stage models called Differential Developmental Trajectories. Rather than looking at sexual identity development from a stage perspective, Savin-William proposed tenets. The four tenets recognized that sexual minority youth follow similar developmental trajectories that other adolescents do, that sexual minority youth in some ways do not follow similar developmental trajectories that other adolescents do, that great variability in developmental trajectories exists among sexual minority youth, and that every single person's developmental trajectory is unique (Savin-Williams, 2005). This model contributed a view of sexual orientation development that acknowledged sexual orientation identify differs based on ethnicity and generational differences and recognized that more variability is found among sexual orientation groups than between

them. Moreover, the model was generated from strong empirical support, a benefit over other stage models (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). This model helps conceptualize the experiences of the participants in this study in two important ways. First, the participants of this study, particularly across their childhood and adolescent experiences demonstrated development that was similar to their peer and development that was very different. Second, the identity development among participants raised in same-sex families was indeed unique. As a result of the broad tenets presented in Savin-Williams model, much of the variability of the participants experiences can be accounted for. One notable limitation existed. Savin-Williams suggested the influence of gender “trumps” the influence of sexual orientation in most cases – this is not the case in the identity development of children raised in same-sex families. The sexual orientation of participants’ parents was much more salient than the parents’ gender with regard to the influence on identity development.

Cass (1979) proposed a model of sexual minority identity development that is strongly influenced by "the sociocultural environment in which a [gay man or lesbian woman] lives in, rather than the result of inner psychological mechanisms that can be found universally in all human beings" (p. 229). Therefore, Cass’ model suggested that sexual orientation identity develops in the context of a strong interaction between individual and their environment. As a result, the interaction produces beliefs about how individuals think about developing a LBG individual (Mobley, 1998). Cass’s model describes six stages of development toward a *positive* LGB identity including, identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis.

Cass's model was chosen as the main comparison model. Similar to Cass's description, adults raised by sexual minority parents demonstrated a dynamic interaction with their environment. Moreover, the participant's process of identity development approximates Cass's (1979) LGB identity development model. Adults with sexual minority parents described phases that were similar to or overlapped Cass's stages. For example, the identity confusion and identity comparison stages share similarities to the disclosing and reflection phases respectively. Identity confusion for LGB individuals involves noticing that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are likely defined as sexual minority. The result of this awareness generates confusion because the previous identity is questioned (Cass, 1984). For participants in the disclosing phase, learning the sexual orientation might generate similar questioning of the identity of the family. Cass (1984) described identity comparison as the point where LGB individuals grapple with the awareness of differences between the self and heterosexuals become more apparent. In the case of participants in the reflection phase, their primary task was sorting through how their family's identity differed from traditional, heterosexual families. The identity tolerance stage shares similarities with the adjustment phase. In both, there is increased identification with their emerging identity and disclosure to those outside of the identity is limited. In the Cass's (1984) identity tolerance stage, there is very limited disclosing to heterosexuals and among the participants in adjustment phase, there is little disclosing to those outside the family. Also, Cass's (1984) identity acceptance and identity pride share similarities with the appreciation phase. The participants in appreciation phase show confidence in disclosing to others, have adapted to their identity as a member in a same-sex family,

and seek to educate and advocate to others on the sexual minority issues. This mirrors the appreciation stage's characteristic selective disclosing and stable identity among LGB individuals (Cass, 1984) and the pride stage's loyalty to other sexual minorities and anger at heterosexuals and homophobic attitudes (Cass, 1984).

While there are similarities between Cass's (1979) model and this process of identity development among the participants of this study, Cass's model also has several limitations that are relevant to this comparison. First, Cass' model is very linear in its depiction of identity development, where most scholars today agree that identity development is an ongoing process and does not end at a particular point (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Rather, identity development is thought of as a lifelong process that may fluctuate depending on the context and environment (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, Sophie 1986). In terms of the present model, it was impossible to verify whether participants were on a course, navigating various phases, in order to arrive at an end point. While participants shared that they were comfortable with their identity as a member of same-sex families, it cannot be assumed that positive identity is the destination of their phases of development. Moreover, there are limitations with stage models overall; they may artificially narrow the developmental process because not everyone follows the same course in development to the same destination (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). For example, Cass's model posits that identity synthesis is the destination of gay and lesbian identity development. Since the final outcomes of each individual can be different, stage models can unfairly categorize individuals that take a different path.

A second limitation of the developmental model for grown children in sexual minority families is that only participants with a reasonably positive identity as a child



of a same-sex family agreed to be interviewed. Consequently, it is unknown whether those that express different feelings about their identity (i.e. identity in same-sex family may not be important or it may be negative) would experience similar phases. In addition, participants in these studies may have tendency to portray themselves and their non-heterosexual parents in a positive light (Goldberg, 2010). For example, at the beginning of the interview Participant 5 reported an optimistic view of his adolescence, “I can say that I’ve never felt ashamed of her in any way; in high school, I mean everyone knew what was going on that my mom was a lesbian and knew her partner and it was not an issue.”

Therefore, comparing the identity development of the participants of this study (children raised in same-sex families) to the identity development of lesbians, bisexual, and gay males, using Cass’s (1979) model, demonstrates similarities and challenges. Participants described a developmental process as they adjusted to their identity as a child of sexual minority parents that mirrored some aspects of the developmental stages posited by Cass’s (1979, 1984) model of identity development. Unlike Cass’s model which implied a linear, developmental path, the model in the current study suggests that children of same-sex families move through the phases more than once depending on circumstances.

#### Implications for Future Research

This study illuminated the dynamic and intricate experiences in the relationships of adults raised in same-sex families. Since this study does not compare alternative family systems to the dominant family systems it allows for a phenomenological exploration of the unique struggles, success, and nuances of same-sex families. In

addition, the results of this study were broader and more diverse than what was originally anticipated, notably, the interviews generated rich descriptions of many types of relationships rather than just romantic relationships. Recognizing that little research exists on this topic, the current study revealed important areas to explore in future research on the adult children in same-sex families. In addition the findings of this study have important implications to clinical practice with this population.

The results of this qualitative study could inform future quantitative work on the relationship experiences and attachment styles of adults raised in same-sex families. This study used attachment theory as a structure to understand the relationship experiences of the participants. However, the attachment styles of the participants were unknown; they were not assessed in the context of romantic relationships or in the context of their relationships with their children. Relationship satisfaction was also not formally assessed. The current study relied on self-reported narratives to assess relationship satisfaction. Future studies that utilize the attachment theory perspective could benefit from measuring the attachment styles of participants just as studies exploring romantic relationships could benefit from formal measurement of the relationships.

It can be argued that the environmental conditions in which we evolved have changed very much. In fact, it is possible to live more individually than prehistoric ancestors. However, the genetic propensity toward group member persists as a legitimate survival need in the form of belonging. Further, there are motivators for acceptance beyond our biological survival needs. This has been documented through Bowlby's (1951) early work on the function of caregiver attention and mental health.

In fact, regardless of abundant access to food, water, and shelter, infants may fail to thrive in the absence of consistent and reasonable efforts of caregivers to meet their attachment needs (Bowlby, 1951). That attention and affection were necessary for healthy human development formed the basis for attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988).

In fact, attachment style may be important to the development of self-acceptance. Mohr and Fassinger (2003) postulated that attachment style predicts self-acceptance. This assertion was based on the observation that attachment styles are activated not only in relationships with caregivers but in challenging and uncertain situations (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Consequently, when individuals encounter a distressing situation it activates their attachment systems which generate responses consistent with the individuals' attachment style. If they have a secure attachment, low in avoidance and anxiety, they are likely to show more adaptive responses to challenging situations because they are more confident in their self-concept and identity where if they have anxious or avoidant attachment style they are less capable of responding effectively.

In the case of participants in this study, what manifested as self-acceptance for their identity could be grounded in a secure attachment style. Frequently, the participants reported experiences where they were uncertain whether individuals would accept their identity or found themselves in threatening situations facing discrimination. Since participants developed assertive methods to address homophobic comments and demonstrated confidence in their identity, it could be reasonable to assume that their attachment style was secure enough to manage these situations. The literature offers support for this finding. Collins and Read (1990) and Mikulincer (1998) demonstrated

that individuals with high avoidance in their attachment styles are less likely to believe that others will respond to them in a trustworthy, sensitive, and accepting manner. On the other hand, those with low avoidance in attachment style tend to see others as capable of providing support, trust, and intimacy (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

These findings also have implication for disclosing sexual orientation. Mohr and Fassinger (2003) found that LGB individuals with high avoidance were less likely to disclose their identity and be publically out compared to those with low avoidance. In the case of participants, most were adept at disclosing to peers, partner, and others in their community and about half of the participants openly educated others and advocated on behalf of sexual minority rights. This finding may suggest that participants had reasonably secure attachments because of their willingness to disclose and that they accepted their identities as children of sexual minority parents.

In addition, the current study demonstrated a partner selection process for adults raised by sexual minority parents. No other studies address this process. Consequently, future research could focus on other aspects of the partner selection process; for example exploring the dating experiences of adolescents in same-sex families or the how the attachment figures evolve and shift over time with children raised by same sex families and its impact on romantic relationships. In a related area, future studies could also focus on the unique experiences of gender and sexuality among this population. Questions regarding gender and sexuality generated much discussion across participants. Their unique experiences challenge gender scripts and defy heteronormative prescriptions for gender behavior. Participants demonstrated a deeper understanding of their own sexuality and were open-minded toward sexual

minority individuals. More research is needed to determine whether it was the influence of sexual minority parents that shaped these perspectives and attitudes or another unseen variable driving this process.

The current study contributed a model of individual identity development for adults raised in same-sex families. Of course, this model cannot be generalized to other adults raised in same-sex families without more research. Future research could use the markers of the various phases of development noted in this study as a foundation to build a more empirically valid model of development. A more systematic approach could also generate support for the markers used to differentiate the various phases. Since there are no current models for this developmental process, researchers have relied on identity development models designed to explain the process for LGBT individuals. While these models (i.e. Cass, D'Augelli, and Savin-Williams) are helpful starting places, more research is needed to specifically adapt these models to the children and adults raised in same-sex families.

Future research could benefit from addressing broader samples of both the parents and children of same-sex families. There could be important differences in the lived experiences of those born to sexual minority parents compared to those that were born to heterosexual parents that later came out as nonheterosexual. Future research could clearly operationalize these groups and conduct studies looking at them separately. In addition, continued research that involves the experiences of gay male fathers, bisexual males and females and transgender parents is needed. The study intended to gather participants' experiences from a range of sexual minorities; the sample included results from three participants with gay fathers and one with a

transsexual mother. While this contributes a small increase to the extant literature more research is needed to address the experiences of these understudied parents.

Loftus (2001) noted that attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals have improved and that there is increasing support for sexual minority rights, however, there are still negative attitudes toward these individuals and their families. The current study found evidence of discrimination across the life span of adults raised by sexual minority parents. While participants developed methods to manage heterosexism and homophobia, little is known about how this process occurred. Future research could further explore how adults raised in same-sex families develop their strategies to manage discrimination. In addition, the implication of dealing with discrimination could be explored among the second generation (grandchildren) of the LGBTQ individuals.

#### Implications for Clinical Practice and Theory

Results of the current study have important implications for clinical practice. Training programs could benefit from this information. Many counseling and clinical psychology program could enhance training understanding the particular strengths, challenges, perspectives of this population. After all, this population highlights the intersection of the experiences of sexual minorities with heteronormative culture. Further, this information could be used to broaden coursework related to family systems and family therapy. Certainly, same-sex families and their children provide a unique perspective on the evolving definition of the family in the United States.

Clinicians working with adults raised by sexual minority parents could benefit from the finding in this study. Adults raised in same-sex families could present with a

variety of issues that are unrelated to their family's identity. Just as issues with sexual minority are not always the presenting concern among LGBTQ individuals, issues with family would not always be the presenting concerns among adults in same-sex families. However, the results of this finding suggest that this population does encounter discrimination and minority stress. As a result, a responsible clinician could explore how individuals of this population coped with heterosexist or homophobic attitudes. Furthermore, working clinically with this population, a clinician should not assume the experiences of children and adults raised in same-sex families are the same as those raised in opposite sex families

The findings in this study, particularly the identity development process adults raised by same sex families and the Proposed Theoretical Model of Familial Sexual Minority Identity Development, have implications for identity development and family identity development, respectively. The results of this study suggest there is a developmental process that occurs when individuals discovery they have sexual minority parents. This process could enhance or qualify other theories of development (e.g. Erikson) giving them more applicability across populations. Also, the family identity development model suggested in the current study could extend and enhance other models of family development. The unique contribution of the Proposed Model of Familial Sexual Minority Identity Development is that it focuses on alternative families. Considering the changing landscape of families in the United States, updated model that account for the experiences of minority population could be useful.

## Limitations

This study does contribute to an underdeveloped area of the literature on adult children of lesbian and gay parents and same-sex families. However, there are several limitations with this study that warrant discussion. The lack of diversity and low number of participants are limitations of the sample. The sample contained 6 females and one male that all identified as White and all had professional careers or were getting professional degrees. Perhaps a more diverse sample of participants would have contributed different experiences leading to richer, more detailed descriptions of peer and romantic relationships and family dynamics. The lack of male or ethnic minority volunteers could be the results of the dual minority status and perhaps an extra measure of homophobia that may be present in these populations. Consequently, these individuals could be reluctant to participate in the current study. Because the sample is homogenous the generalizability of the results is limited. While this is an acknowledged limitation of qualitative methodologies, the strength of such methodologies is in their applicability (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). Further, the goal of qualitative work is to describe, interpret, and understand an identified populations' lived experience, not to generate findings that characterize all people (Kazdin, 1998).

There could be limitations as a result of the selection process. Invitations to participate were sent to Listservs that are outwardly supportive of sexual minority rights or actively advocate for the children of sexual minority parents. As a result, the population could have very positive identities as children of same-sex families. Moreover, only participants that reported positive relationships with their parents



participated. This phenomena has been documented in the literature. Goldberg (2007a, 2007b, 2010) found that adults raised by sexual minority parents could feel pressure to paint their families in a positive way. They may emphasize positive experiences and downplay negative ones. As a result, participants may have volunteered to participate in this study as a way to advocate for their non traditional families. Thus, results should be interpreted in the context of volunteers with positive feelings toward their same-sex families.

In addition, different participants could have very different experiences than those presented in this study. For example, adults of sexual minority parents could have partners that reject their parent's sexual orientation. This was not found among participants in the current study but it would add a different dimension to the categories. As another example, different participants could decide to disclose *and* maintain a friendship or romantic relationship with people that have different (i.e. conservative, religious) perspectives on sexual orientation. Exploring how these experiences impact the relationship with the same-sex family and the relationships with parents, children, and peer could lead to different perspectives.

Some limitations may exist as a result of participants growing up in heterosexual families. Among participants that were born into a heterosexual family, they could have been significantly impacted by the experiences of their parent's divorce. Certainly, this could have been a transformative life event that occurred for the lives of the participants and might have also required developing disclosing skills, responding to adversity, adapting and accommodating new identities of the family.

However, it would be unlikely to see as much similarity in responses and experiences among the participants born in to a same sex family.

In a related vein, the interview questions may have minimized the influence of the other significant people in the lives of participants. The clearest example of this among participants born in heterosexual families was the parent that did not come out – the influence of the remaining heterosexual parent. This study did not explore the influence of heterosexual parents on the relationship experiences of the participants. It is possible that the remaining heterosexual parents contributed much to the ideas, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of the participants' relationships. Future studies may include questions that account for these influences and their resulting impacts.

Another potential limitation was that the primary investigator completed all of the interviews. While this establishes consistency across interviews it is possible that the interviewer's style, language, and demeanor influenced the participants' responses. Moreover, the primary investigator was a White, 31 year old male that was raised by his gay father. Such similarities between the primary interviewer and the participants in this study helped establish rapport but could also influence their responses. Perhaps they would have told different stories or gave different answers to an investigator that did not approximate their ages, ethnicity, and family constellation.

Similarly, the subjective influences of the primary investigator, inquiry auditor, and peer debriefer could influence the data analysis process. While the process of constant comparison and theoretical sampling strongly supports the development of categories firmly based in the experiences of the participants, there is subjective influence from the research team (Charmaz, 2006). As a result, the categories

generated by this research team may not be replicated by another research team (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### Conclusion

This qualitative study significantly adds to our understanding of the relationship experiences of adults raised in same-sex families. This study was specifically aimed at understanding how sexual minority parents impacted the relationships of their adult children. Based on this qualitative analysis, the participants' stories provided strong evidence suggesting that their romantic relationship experiences as well as other relationships experiences were influenced by their sexual minority parents.

The results of the data analysis generated several categories based on the experiences of adults raised by sexual minority parents. These categories provided a rich discussion of the issues, challenges, and strengths that this population encountered across experiences with family, peer, discrimination, and romantic relationships. Participants demonstrated how they navigated a heteronormative culture, managing discrimination and developing strategies to share their identity, to develop meaningful relationships with peer and romantic partners. The lessons learned for their parents helped participants on this journey. The lessons of openness and acceptance were passed on to the participants' children and shared with their communities through advocacy and education. Further, participants developed a deeper understand of their sexuality and tended to have more open minded attitudes on gender roles. In addition to the categories, this study generated a model of individual identity development in the context of sexual minority families.

The findings of this study make important contributions to the extant literature. Many of the findings illustrate new information on adults raised by sexual minority parents. Other findings corroborate and expand findings in other studies on this population. Among the findings, the results on romantic relationships of adults raised in same-sex families describe previously unstudied experiences; these results could generate more research into this area. Also, the model of identity development in the sexual minority families is the first model to describe the lived experiences of children raised by sexual minority parents. As a result, this model could generate new research further exploring this dynamic developmental process.

In conclusion, adults raised in same-sex families are capable of deep and meaningful relationships with their parents, peers, romantic partner, children, and communities. These individuals provide unique perspectives and experiences that challenge assumptions of the traditional families. As pioneers in the development of a broader, more inclusive definition of the family, the participants in this study modeled the potential benefits that can be gleaned from growing up in a same-sex family. Certainly, the adults raised in same-sex families interviewed in this study show what is possible when supported by a caring and supportive family.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT FORM

#### **INFORMED CONSENT**

You are invited to be in a research study on intimate relationships because you were raised by lesbian or gay parent(s). The purpose of this research study is to learn about your experiences being raised in a same-sex family (a family headed by parents that are lesbian or gay) and how these experiences have influenced your intimate relationships across your life. Your experiences will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with a researcher from the University of North Dakota. The interview will consist of questions like: What, if any, has been the impact of being raised of same-sex parents on your adult relationships? How were your early friendships impacted? How did this experience influence your dating life? How has this experience impacted your long term relationships? How did you see your parents communicate with each other? How has this impacted your communication style? Your responses and the responses of other participants will be reviewed and analyzed for common ideas. The results of the study will produce a comprehensive descriptive narrative about the intimate relationship experiences of adults raised in same-sex families. Your experiences are valuable because there are very few research studies that focus on the lives of those in same-sex families. As a result, this study aims to add to the overall knowledge adults raised by lesbian and gay parents, discover common themes among intimate relationships of those raised in same-sex families, and generate a theory that specifically describes the experiences of this under-researched population. Between 8 and 25 people will take part in this study through telephone interviews.

#### **HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in the study will include one interview, a follow up conversation after the interview, and a review of the transcript from the interview. The initial interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and the follow up conversation regarding the interview will last 30 to 60 minutes. The review of the transcript will take about 30 minutes.

#### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?**

You will be contacted by the interviewer to set up an appointment for the interview. The interviewer will contact you at the schedule appointment time. The interviewer will ask questions to generate a conversation regarding your

intimate relationships as they relate to being raised by lesbian or gay parent(s). The interview will be recorded using computer based recording software. After the initial interview, the interviewer will transcribe the interview and send the transcript to you for your review. The interviewer will schedule an appointment for a follow up conversation regarding the initial interview. You may contact the interviewer to ask questions or provide additional information at any point during your participation in the study. The total amount of time involved for participation in this study will be approximately 2 - 4 hours. Your participation in this research will occur over the course of several weeks beginning with the initial interview and ending after the follow up conversation. You may contact the interviewer after the follow up conversation to add information or ask questions. You may choose to skip any question that you would prefer not to answer.

### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?**

There are limited risks associated with this study. We will protect your confidentiality by using a coded number instead of your name on interview transcriptions and by storing your informed consent separately from your transcribed interview. Because we are asking about your life experiences, you may experience discomforts such as frustration, embarrassment, irritation, or sadness. However, these risks are not anticipated to be greater than minimal risk. If, however, you become upset by questions, you may stop at any time or choose not to answer a question. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings about this study, you are encouraged to contact:

- The National Mental Health Association (NMHA) at 1- 800-969-6642 (Mon-Fri, 9-5 ET). NMHA provides free information on over 200 mental health topics including manic-depression, bereavement, post-traumatic stress disorder, and warning signs of mental illness. They also provide referrals to mental health providers.
- Parents, Friends, and Family of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) ([www.community.pflag.org](http://www.community.pflag.org)) is a non-profit organization providing support, resources, and information for well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

Some people enjoy talking about their experiences otherwise you may not personally benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that this research will help understand the lived experiences of an understudied population, adults raised by lesbian and gay parents. This study may also contribute to knowledge of intimate relationship and relationship dynamics in same-sex families.

## **WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You may have a small cost for being in this research study related to telephone usage. The researcher will make calls from a Skype account to your preferred telephone number (Skype is an internet based software that allows free audio and video communication between users). You may minimize your cost by setting up a free Skype account and receiving the telephone calls through this software.

## **WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

You will be paid for being in this research study. The amount you will be paid will depend on your participation. You will be paid \$15.00 for completing the first interview and \$15.00 for the follow up interview for a possible total \$30.00. You may be asked to provide an address where payment may be sent.

## **WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?**

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board. Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Because interviews will be transcribed, you have a right to review and edit the transcription and you will be provided a copy of the transcribed interview. Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning your transcription a coded number (no names will be used). Additionally, the information will be stored in locked storage bag, inside of a locked file cabinet in a locked room. Only the researcher, Tom Roskos, MA his advisor, Kara Wettersten, PhD, members of the research team, and those individuals whose job it is to assure research participants are treated justly (Institutional Review Board Auditors) will have access to the data. The data will be stored for a period of at least 7 years then it will be destroyed by fire. If we write a report or article about this study, we will describe the study results in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified.

## **IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?**

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect



your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota. If you decide to leave the study early, we ask that you contact the researchers to let them know. You may contact Tom Roskos at 218-341-6015 or Kara Wettersten at 701-777-2729 during normal business hours.

### **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?**

The researchers conducting this study are Tom Roskos, MA and Kara Wettersten Ph.D. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Tom Roskos at 218-341-6015 during normal business hours. You may also contact Kara Wettersten, Ph.D at 701-777-2729 during normal business hours. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subjects Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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