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What is This?

The Desire for Parenthood: Gay Men Choosing to Become Parents Through Surrogacy

Dean A. Murphy[1]

Abstract

Gay men are becoming increasingly involved in reproduction despite significant barriers limiting their access to reproductive technologies or legal parentage in many jurisdictions. Based on in-depth interviews with gay men in the United States and Australia who have become parents through surrogacy, I explore how gay men understand their desire to have children and what frames their parenthood experiences. The notion of choice is widespread in understandings of gay parenthood and family formation. Most of the men in this study did not develop a "procreative consciousness" as a result of sexual and fertility-related events. The majority also initially accepted the notion that homosexuality was synonymous with childlessness. Awareness of the possibilities for parenthood emerged over time through the promotional activities of surrogacy agencies, through media, peers, and relationship partners. Additionally, men played with the symbols of kinship to negotiate and obscure biogenetic paternity.

Keywords

gay men, surrogacy, parenthood, biogenetic paternity, kinship

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Introduction

Although there has been a substantial amount of research published on parenthood choices made by lesbians (Donovan, 2005; Dunne, 2000; Haimes & Weiner, 2000; Mamo, 2007; Ryan-Flood, 2005), there is still a dearth of literature on gay men's parenthood projects. A small number of recent studies have started to examine gay men's understandings and experiences of parenthood in different countries including the United States (Bergman, Rubio, Green, & Padròn, 2010; Berkowitz, 2007; Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Friedman, 2007; Greenfeld & Seli, 2011; Lev, 2006; Lewin, 2009; Mallon, 2004; Mitchell & Green, 2007; Ryan & Berkowitz, 2009; Schacher, Auerbach, & Bordeaux Silverstein, 2005; Stacey, 2006), Australia (Dempsey, 2010, 2013; Riggs & Due, 2010; Tuazon-McCheyne, 2010), the United Kingdom (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001), Norway (Folgerø, 2008), and the Netherlands (Bos, 2010). Whereas earlier research tended to involve studies of gay men who had become parents through previous heterosexual relationships, this recent scholarship has shifted to "planned gay parenthood," in which gay men proactively "choose" to become parents through adoption, fostering, coparenting, or surrogacy (Biblarz & Savci, 2010, p. 486).

Some of the research on gay men and parenthood has explored the idea that fatherhood and gay identity are incommensurate, also referred to by Schacher et al. (2005) as the "heterosexist gender role strain" (p. 42). Berkowitz (2009) also examined the "identity work" required to perform the role of gay father. The findings of several studies however challenge the assumption—often held by these men themselves—that gay identity and parenthood are mutually exclusive. Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) found that after coming out as gay, "many men underwent life changes that heightened and activated their respective procreative consciousness and fathering desires" (p. 372). However, these men also became aware of social, structural, and institutional barriers to becoming parents. Similarly, Weeks et al. (2001) noted that the "notion that parenting can be openly chosen by non-heterosexual people is relatively recent" (p. 159). Where and when people "come out," and their access to community resources, are crucial in these accounts. By choosing to become primary parents, gay men also challenge the conventional definitions of masculinity and paternity and even dominant gender and sexual norms of gay culture (Schacher et al., 2005; Stacey, 2006).

As Berkowitz (2009) notes, gay men and lesbians emphasize choice in describing their experiences of family and parenting. The trend of gay men and lesbians choosing to form families with children, however, can also can be seen as reinforcing the "heteronormative dichotomy between chosen and blood families" (Berkowitz, 2009, p. 127). This emphasis on biogenetic links

in kinship practices seems to be a departure from the findings of Weston's (1991) study of gay and lesbian kinship in the San Francisco Bay Area. This earlier work suggested that "[b]iological relatedness appeared to be a subsidiary option ranged alongside adoption, coparenting, and so on, within the dominant framework of choice that constituted families we create" (Weston, 1991, p. 189).

Gay Men and Surrogacy

Relatively few studies have examined the experiences of gay men pursuing surrogacy, with the notable exceptions of recent work by Dempsey (2013), Greenfeld and Seli (2011), Bergman et al. (2010), Tuazon-McCheyne (2010), Riggs and Due (2010), Mitchell and Green (2007), and Lev (2006), all of whom undertook research among gay men who had become parents through surrogacy. In addition, Dempsey (2010), Ryan and Berkowitz (2009), Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007), Lewin (2009), Mitchell and Green (2007), Stacey (2006), and Schacher et al. (2005) include surrogacy in their broader analysis of gay male parenthood.

Tuazon-McCheyne (2010) and Bergman et al. (2010) locate surrogacy as a technological development that has enabled gay men to become parents, thereby putting them on an equal footing with heterosexual couples and lesbian couples. Tuazon-McCheyne's (2010) Australian study described surrogacy as a new option that allows for the "intentional creation of gay-led families" (p. 312). Parenting through surrogacy led to the politicization of these men as gay fathers, because they were required to overcome a hostile legal and social environment. Bergman et al.'s (2010) study of clients of a surrogacy agency in Los Angeles found that for these gay men parenthood increased closeness with their families of origin and also "heightened self-esteem" (p. 135). These men were different from heterosexual parents in that they "rework traditional ideologies of being a father" (p. 135) and modeled a same-sex-headed family that includes biogenetic paternity.

Dempsey's (2013) study undertook an examination of some of the specific aspects of surrogacy, and in particular the meaning and management of biogenetic paternity among her Australian participants. She found that although there was some resistance to acknowledging the importance of biogenetic links within these families, biogenetic paternity remained an important resource to be managed in creating and maintaining relationships between male partners, and between parents and children. Similarly, Greenfeld and Seli's (2011) study of gay male couples seeking surrogacy and egg donation at a Connecticut fertility center examined decision making around biogenetic paternity. The choice of which partner would provide

sperm was based on older age, greater desire for biogenetic parenthood, and mutual decisions about which partner had "better genes" (p. 227). For those with equal desire for paternity, eggs were fertilized by sperm from both partners and one embryo from each was transferred to the surrogate. Mitchell and Green (2007) also examine the ways in which biogenetic links and the gestational role were conceptualized by intended parents and how couples in particular negotiate uncertainty about equal parental legitimacy. One way in which this was achieved was to choose an egg donor with physical similarities to one or both partners in the male couple. Riggs and Due's (2010) analysis of gestational surrogacy arrangements among gay men suggests this reifies genetic relationship as the most privileged form of kinship.

Theory: Consciousness and Choice

Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) coined the term *procreative consciousness* to conceptualize how men understand themselves as procreative beings. Such awareness is understood as emerging processually through sexual and romantic relations and direct experience with fertility-related events such as pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion, and birth. Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) subsequently explored how procreative consciousness emerges among gay men in the absence of a direct experience with fertility. Important factors in the development of such consciousness are institutions such as adoption agencies and fertility clinics that assume heterosexuality (Berkowitz, 2007) and a bureaucracy that mediates access to parenthood (Lewin, 2009).

Anthony Giddens (1991) proposes that individuals in Western, neoliberal settings are encouraged "to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice" (p. 87). Governmentality theory provides a way of conceptualizing choice in that it focuses on the organized practices or technologies through which subjects are governed. Its logic is designed "to recognize [that] capacity for action and to adjust oneself to it" (Rose, 1999, p. 4). Since the mid-20th century, governmentality has arguably become the primary means by which medical and legal authorities understand and engage with people at a population level and also the way in which people have come to understand and produce narratives about themselves (Rose & Novas, 2004). This correspondence between power and its subjects explains why people in the name of health, well-being, and prosperity willingly submit to the principles or behaviors recommended by experts.

Additionally, the power of consumer culture to shape subjectivity has been exploited by market researchers, advertisers, and the like who base their calculations on psychological conceptions of humans and their desires.

Specifically in relation to parenthood the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1992) notes that human reproduction is no longer understood as related to fate or nature and is regulated through relations between doctors and aspiring parents. As Rose (1999) argues,

> Consumption technologies, together with other narrative forms such as soap operas, establish not only a "public habitat of images" for identification, but also a plurality of pedagogies for living a life that is both pleasurable and respectable, both personally unique and socially normal. They offer new ways for individuals to narrativize their lives, new ethics and techniques for living which do not set self-gratification and civility in opposition. (p. 86)

Actor-network theory, and in particular the work of Bruno Latour (2005), provides an innovative way of approaching the question of whether the desire for parenthood is something innate or something that is chosen. Latour proposes that all forms of subjectivity and personhood (such as citizens, or consumers) are provisional assemblages of entities or actors. He created a metaphor for conceptualizing the way in which these subjectivities are assembled—that of a "plug-in" (p. 207), which is analogous to a piece of computing software added to a larger application in order to provide it with specific attributes and capabilities. Social competencies are produced in specific locations and are achieved through subscribing to plug-ins in order to "render a situation interpretable" (p. 209). In this way the aspiration to have children could be recast as something that is neither wholly innate nor chosen but rather as something that is available so long as one subscribes to the requisite plug-ins. Latour's work offers an opportunity to analyze parenthood desires in a way that moves beyond a dichotomy of innate desire versus choice. Instead, like Marsiglio and Hutchinson's (2002) "procreative consciousness," it offers a context-specific way of thinking about parenthood aspirations as a competency made available through plug-ins such as the marketing and promotional activities of commercial surrogacy agencies, media, contact with peers, and entering into relationships with new partners.

Method

The data presented here are drawn from interviews with gay men who have become parents though surrogacy. Participants were recruited through advertisements (flyers and email lists of gay parenting organizations) and snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted between 2006 and 2009 in Australia and in southern California. Los Angeles is "a vanguard global Mecca for

sexual migrants" (Stacey, 2005, p. 1914) and is "the surrogacy capital of the gay globe" (Stacey, 2006, p. 31) with the world's first surrogacy agency specifically targeting international gay clients. It was decided to include men who lived in Los Angeles, where commercial surrogacy is a well-established practice, and men from Australia, most of who had travelled to California to pursue parenthood through surrogacy, which was not possible in the jurisdictions where they resided. The study was not specifically designed to explore differences between Australia and the United States.

The interview schedule covered the following areas: family description, desire for parenthood, reasons for pursuing surrogacy, legal and institutional arrangements and barriers to parenthood, decisions about biogenetic paternity, selection of egg donors and gestational surrogates. Men were interviewed either as individuals or as couples; however, no members of couples were interviewed separately. Where relevant, quotes from men interviewed as couples are indicated in the main body of the article. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The written transcriptions were cleaned to remove all identifying information such as the names of participants and their family members. These names were replaced by pseudonyms. The transcripts were thematically coded using NVivo software. A number of themes were predetermined by a review of the theoretical literature and relevant empirical research on surrogacy and gay parenting. Additional themes were generated through the identification of common issues across interviews. Approval for the study was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New South Wales, Australia.

Study Participants

A total of 30 men were interviewed as part of the study—12 in California, 16 in Australia, and an Australian couple living in Europe. Most of the participants were in long-term relationships. Only two men were single at the time of interview. Two other men had been single when they started pursuing parenthood but they were both in relationships at the time of interview. The men came from a range of ethnic backgrounds—Anglo and other European, Chinese and other Asian, Mexican, and African American. Several men were in mixed-ethnic couples. The men ranged in age from mid 20s to mid 50s. Household incomes of participants averaged more than US$200,000 per year. In total, the participants had 31 children, with four current pregnancies at the time of interview. Among these children, 26 were born through surrogacy, and ranged from 1 month to 9 years of age. In almost all cases the surrogacy arrangement had been coordinated by an agency based in the United States.

Findings

Parenthood: From Within

Many participants in the study spoke about an innate desire to have children. Jeremy, one of the Australian participants recounted:

> Well I guess it's a, it's fulfillment of a dream come true. I always wanted to have children, always said I'd have children. Didn't know how I'd actually go about it, but it was always my intention in life.

The accounts provided by the study participants also included the selection of a partner who would support their goal of becoming parents. In most cases, participants spoke about establishing an agreement about having children early in the relationship and as something that was an important feature of the relationship's longevity. Judith Stacey (2006) also observed the importance of partner choice in her ethnographic research among gay men in southern California. Stacey developed a "passion for parenthood" continuum as a conceptual model that combined partner choice and desire for parenthood, which ranged from "predestined" parents on one end of the spectrum to "refuseniks" on the other. Most gay men occupied some intermediate position on this continuum. A small proportion of these men would form partnerships with men who had a strong desire for parenthood and would become parents by default, but the majority of them would remain childless. Some predestined parents would find partners with similar desires and would seek to become parents in any way possible. In the present study, one of the U.S. participants, Keith, described early conversations with his partner, Rick, in terms that suggested they were "predestined parents":

> We started talking about kids really early on. I don't even remember when we started but we both definitely wanted to have kids. In fact, I think it was one of the reasons why we ended up getting married. I mean I think because we had these sort of big life goals and ideas about what we wanted in life.

Although Stacey's (2006) model suggests that some men are fixed at specific points on the continuum, the positioning of the majority of men at an intermediate point on the continuum suggests, like Latour's (2005) plug-ins, that these desires are more situational. Additionally, Latour's concept provides a way of understanding how this desire is produced.

Many of the men in this study also described an awareness of parenthood desires prior to coming out as gay. For these men, being open about their homosexuality foregrounded this desire and also seemed to foreclose its very

possibility. One of the Australian participants, Ian, recounted: "I know myself I quite quickly recognized that I wouldn't be having kids, and got over that quite quickly and moved on with my life." For the majority of the men in the study who, like Ian, were more than 40 years of age, coming out as gay meant almost certain childlessness. Another Australian participant, Brian, recounted how it was not until being asked to co-parent with a lesbian couple that he and his partner, David, were able to conceive of being both a parent *and* a gay man: "We never really, hadn't given it a lot of thought because you don't, because you think, oh well, you'll never have kids, being gay men."

In addition to overcoming the conceptual link between homosexuality and childlessness, the men in this study also acknowledged other barriers to them becoming parents, such as legal recognition of same-sex relationships. This observation is also consistent with Berkowitz and Marsiglio's (2007) study in which men noted the social, structural, and institutional barriers to parenthood. Although state legislation varies, in Australia commercial surrogacy is effectively banned in all jurisdictions, so men who seek to have children in this way are required to pursue transnational surrogacy. At least two Australian jurisdictions have now also banned residents from pursuing extraterritorial commercial surrogacy. In the United States, only a small number of states explicitly allow surrogacy and enforce surrogacy contracts. Second parent adoption for gay male couples is also not possible in many Australian and U.S. jurisdictions.

This exploration of the gay men's narratives, in relation to the idea of procreative consciousness, suggests that many men experienced their aspiration for parenthood as emerging from innate desire. However, it seems likely that such desires were also socially informed. Evidence for this comes from the accounts of men who initially accepted the idea of childlessness as a result of exposure to external messages that denied—or at least discouraged the idea—that gay men can be fathers. I now turn to the notion of parenthood as emerging from without, which takes as its starting point that parenthood desires are not inherent but rather that they are enacted (Mol, 2002) through available discourses and resources. The discursive aspects of parenthood include the symbolic features of (American) kinship, notably biogenetic connectedness (Schneider, 1980 [1968], 1997).

Parenthood From Without

As noted above, several of the men in the study asserted that they had always wanted to have children. Although it is important to acknowledge the significance of this concept to the participants, I propose that thinking about parenthood from without may be more useful in conceptualizing kinship practices

among gay male parents and also contribute to the contemporary theorization of kinship more broadly. This approach is inspired by the work of Bruno Latour (2005), who suggests that particular social competencies—such as parenthood, or intended parenthood in this instance—are produced in specific locations. Such competencies are developed through subscribing to plug-ins including the marketing and promotional strategies of surrogacy agencies, conversations with other gay men who have become parents, popular cultural representations of surrogacy practices, and the advice of experts as disseminated through media, legislation, family court orders, and surrogacy contracts. These new situational competencies can be contrasted to participants' earlier exposure to outside messages that equated homosexuality with childlessness. These discourses set up expectations that being gay would prohibit them from becoming parents, as discussed above.

A recent influence on parenthood desires is advertising, in particular the web-based promotional materials published by commercial surrogacy agencies. These materials are intended to inspire potential users by constructing a particular image of surrogacy that affirms the aspirations of gay men to become parents. As the following excerpt from the homepage of the most well-known agency website outlines:

> Since 1996, Growing Generations has been a company passionately dedicated to the vision of creating life and, in the process, changing the world. Ground-breaking from the start, Growing Generations was the first surrogacy agency dedicated to serving the gay and lesbian community and the only agency to offer online donor videos. (Growing Generations, 2012)

The notion of "lives created, worlds changed" is a motif repeated constantly on the site's homepage and other pages for "intended parents." For example, "[E]ach day, the staff at Growing Generations goes home knowing that they are helping change the world," and "Imagine what the future would look like with Growing Generations as your partner in creating life and changing your world." Importantly, for gay men from outside the United States there is also a sense that clients would become part of a worldwide movement: "Our mission is simple—to build families of choice for communities around the globe."

Some of the men in this study had also attended information sessions that had featured representatives of surrogacy agencies as speakers. At these events, the agency representative provided a detailed account of the services available, including assistance with immigration for clients intending to take their children out of the United States. Information sessions typically also included the testimony of local gay clients of the agency. These sessions

clearly served as marketing opportunities, not only for individual agencies but also for surrogacy in general. Nick described the impact of attending an information session that included a presentation from a California-based surrogacy agency:

> After we came back from the info night, I was pro-surrogacy. For some reason, because, I don't know, probably it was more like a main goal for me, 'cause I always wanted to have a baby for myself. I did not want to share it with anyone. And then so I sort of like started searching that night on the internet about surrogacy.

Although Nick described a preexisting desire to become a parent without negotiating a coparenting arrangement ("I always wanted to have a baby *for myself*"), the information session presented this as a real possibility. Nick was suddenly able to envision possibilities that were previously unknown to him. These possibilities resonated for him because they connected with what he described as a preexisting desire to have children. However, my argument here is that the advertising strategies and linguistic choices of commercial surrogacy agencies have had a role in shaping this desire, particularly by promoting their services through information sessions, statements in the media, and on their own websites. These strategies and practices seem to have provided the necessary plug-in for men such as Nick to think about parenthood as a desirable and viable option. Promotional materials and events may be particularly significant because they were also occasions where the idea of gay men becoming parents was presented in a positive frame as opposed to the dominant negative representations of gay male parenting.

Some other men reported that seeing or knowing other gay men with a child awakened their interest in parenthood. As Phillip described, having gay male friends who had been through the experience of having children created the idea for him and his partner, Patrick, that it was possible:

> It's hard to imagine that we would have done it if we hadn't seen that it was possible for another couple to do it. You know, I don't, we might have but, just, yeah, I just can't imagine us suddenly thinking, "Hey, we should try to find a way to have children."

For Australian men, the awareness of other gay men becoming parents through surrogacy was even more important because of concerns about the possible legal and immigration barriers to pursuing surrogacy, given that commercial surrogacy was not legal in Australian jurisdictions. Ian described

how a chance reading of an article in a gay magazine opened up the idea of surrogacy, which had not previously been considered:

> And it was only about 7 or 8 years ago, that both Terry and I started to talk about the fact that we could possibly have children. And then we started to look at some of the ways that we could create our family. Through that we went through foster care and adoption and possible co-parenting scenarios. And a friend brought back an article from America, a gay magazine, about surrogacy, and at the same time an article appeared in the weekend magazine from one of the main papers.

Responsibility

A governmentality approach is useful in making sense of the way in which many men describe not only their preexisting desire to have children but also the steps they have taken to pursue these goals. As described by Nick earlier, this involved attendance at an information session, which was then supplemented with additional online research. For one of the U.S. participants, Joe, a dinner with the family of a business partner was the moment that he and his partner started to pursue parenthood. As Joe described it, an acknowledgement by his partner of Joe's desire to have children moved swiftly to a methodical analysis of the ways in which this could be achieved:

> He was a lawyer and an MBA so he had a kind of an analytical background, so he spent the whole night going through the different ways we could have children, adoption, surrogacy, foster parenting and the pros and cons of each and made a, flow chart of it and when I woke up in the morning we went through the flow chart and said, "this is it, we want to do surrogacy."

It is evident that a great deal of work was invested in the means by which they would have children. Having a legal, business, and "analytical" background was an important characteristic in Joe's description of his partner, as was the presentation of this analysis in terms of "pros and cons" and a flow chart. The pursuit of parenthood was presented as a succession of deliberate and enterprising choices.

Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) suggest that the intention and planning inherent in same-sex parented families can lead to a distancing between such families and "other familial arrangements and practices that are generally formed through less privileged and structured means" (p. 377). They also note that such discourses have the potential to elevate same-sex-parented families to an idealized paragon of "responsibility and choice" (p. 377). The sense of heightened responsibility was also evident in the accounts of men in

the current study. As already described, a great deal of planning was involved in the decision to have children through surrogacy. The following quote by Rick suggests that although there was a range of parenting models to draw on, including nonheterosexual models, there was also pressure to parent in ways that are in the best interests of the child, that is, those that conform to acceptable—presumably heteronormative—models of family:

> I mean there's so many different parenting models these days that it's just, it's just another one. But—and I also think because it's so hard to have a child that you're—like you don't just happen to have an accident, so you're much more committed to doing it, but in the right way.

Rick was emphasizing the fact that gay male parenthood and parenting is a very deliberate act—"you don't just happen to have an accident"—so this in itself was evidence of a kind of "higher quality" parenting than might be expected from heterosexual couples. Although this assumption that gay men are more invested in having children and are "more committed to doing it" is untested, this suggests that these men think of themselves as deliberately resisting particular roles and demanding inclusion of same-sex parenting as a valid "parenting model." Although parenthood for the participants in this study was related to choice, it was also closely associated with a resistance to dominant ideas that equated homosexuality with childlessness and therefore as a justification for their exclusion from normative social institutions such as marriage.

Biogenetic Relatedness

Berkowitz (2009) argues that although gay men and lesbians now have the opportunity to make choices "regarding the design of their families" (p. 126) they do so based on the cultural prescriptions that privilege biogenetic and legal forms of kinship. Although most of the participants in this study downplayed the significance of biogenetic relatedness, their practices suggested the symbolic importance of such links. This was seen by these men as an important advantage of surrogacy over other forms of achieving parenthood. As described by Mitchell and Green (2007), surrogacy is unique in that it allows these men to have a child that is biogenetically related with only brief contact with the egg donor and gestational surrogate. Joe, who had twin sons via surrogacy during a previous gay relationship, described the desire for biogenetically related children as "more of a process of vanity." He went on to say: "You want to reproduce so that your whole, so that you, your line kind of goes on. We thought, well, you know, these genes need to keep going."

Andrew, who was a single gay father with two children, went into greater detail about the perceived naturalness of a biogenetic connection with children:

> I guess a lot of parents probably would deny this, but I think that for a lot of people there's a biological imperative to reproduce and I don't know if it's to do with ego or what, but to almost, to almost see themselves in their children. . . . I think with an adoptive child, maybe, of course you'd love them, but maybe there's not that actual, it's an animal kind of thing, that animal connectedness with them.

Andrew's account relied on a belief in both the naturalness of biogenetically based kinship connections and the naturalness of a desire to procreate. He also reaffirmed the idea that a biogenetic link creates a natural connection between a parent and child. The need for people to "see themselves in their children" is a mirroring that creates natural connectedness, which is in turn reinforced through resemblance.

The men who were in ongoing relationships (which were the majority of participants) had a complicated relationship to biogenetic notions of kinship. Decisions about which partner's sperm would be used to fertilize the donor's egg created somewhat of a conundrum for these male couples. For this reason, many men went to great lengths to obscure the biogenetic connections. It was evident that biogenetic kinship posed a particular problem for nonbiogenetic parents because it privileges the connections between the child and one parent, and so both men actively sought to resolve this potential problem. A number of tactics were employed to deal with this dilemma.

The first strategy was "turn taking" in which one partner would provide sperm to procreate the first child(ren) and the other partner would provide sperm for the following pregnancy attempt. In most cases there was also a preference for using eggs from the same donor so that the children could also be genetically related to each other. Paulo, one of the Australian interviewees, who was interviewed with his partner, Basil, described their intention to follow this path:

> Because if nothing else, you want the boys to be biologically linked together, which, you know, if either of us has one biologically, let's say, then you want a link, and the mother is the link.

There were three main criteria that couples used to decide which partner would "go first" as the sperm provider. The first was age (with the older partner taking precedence), the second was based on which partner was considered to be the initiator of the parenthood project, and the third was to create

strategic connections with one partner in the couple. For Basil and Paulo, the former suggested that Paulo be the sperm provider because the couple was already close to Basil's family and having a child using Basil's sperm would have enhanced this connection. In Basil's words, "If they were my biologic kids, primarily, it could be an awkward situation where Paulo might have felt left out. So it was really my suggestion in the situation that Paulo go first."

The second strategy for deciding which partner would be the biogenetic father I call "intentional unknowing". In previous decades this was sometimes practiced by mixing the sperm of two or more men. In Berkowitz and Marsiglio's (2007) study, for example, one male couple mixed sperm prior to fertilization of the egg. More recently "intentional unknowing" has been pursued by fertilizing eggs with the sperm of both partners and then transferring multiple embryos to the surrogate. As Rick's partner Kevin described, "They take a certain number of eggs [fertilized with] one guy's sperm and the other eggs with the other guy's sperm . . . it's only in embryos . . . so it's actually not physically mixing it up."

For Michael and his partner Dino, who had twins via surrogacy, it was important—as with many other couples in the study—not to know which one of them was biogenetically related to the children. Like several other participants they obscured this fact by fertilizing eggs from the sperm of each partner. As Michael described in the interview, this was not necessarily the most efficient way of achieving a pregnancy as the embryos from eggs fertilized by one of them were deemed more suitable for transferring than the others in terms of their likely success.

Jack, one of the U.S. participants, arranged for embryos fertilized by both he and his partner Adrian to be transferred to the surrogate. They chose not to know which partner was the biogenetic parent of their son:

> And as of right now we still don't know. What we did is we told the doctor, you know, get some embryos, some with mine, some with his, and then like each time when we implanted say four embryos, two were mine, two were his and we have no idea whose took. Of course now since he's born, it's everyone's first question: "God, he looks like you," or "he has your nose". And we're like "yeah, whatever," you know, it's interesting to look and see who he's going to look like, but it's not important, you know.

Jack denied having any particular interest in knowing who the biogenetic parent was, although he described it as "interesting" to observe physical features. When asked if they would ever seek to find out who the biogenetic parent was at any time in the future, he explained that such information would only ever be sought out for medical reasons.

The third and final strategy employed by participants was that of total secrecy. In this case couples would decline to disclose which partner was the biogenetic parent to outsiders. Joe and Rupert recounted how they dealt with questions from other people. Joe said, "Oh, people comment all the time, 'oh, who's the real father?' We tell them that we're both the real fathers. You know, genetics doesn't make a father." This claim to both being the "real" father was particularly interesting because in fact neither were biogenetically related to the children, as the sperm provider had been Joe's ex-partner.

Participants in the study tended to explain the secrecy around biogenetic parenthood in terms of protecting the family unit. They believed that if others, for example, grandparents, knew who had provided the sperm to fertilize the donor's eggs, this would possibly create the assumption of an asymmetrical bond between the partners and the children. As Michael noted, "It's very novel for everyone outside the gay world. So we felt it was really important for everyone to realize these are our children, it's not like one is mine and one is his." Ian also described how he and his partner, Terry, refused to respond to inquiries about who was biogenetically related to their two children:

> We don't talk like that, we certainly recognize each other as equal, equal fathers, equal parents, and we do not reveal whose sperm was used or biologically who's connected to our children. Because it is irrelevant, we guarantee you of 5 years of raising our son that it makes no difference whatsoever who, who genetically is linked or not. And more importantly in the most public context, we don't allow people to pigeonhole us. So we don't want people thinking "oh right, you're the real father" and "no, you're not." We're both equal fathers, we want to be recognized that way, and we want our kids to know that, know that they have two fathers in every way as well.

Ian went on to describe how among the network of gay parents, "we all talk about biology as an issue around surrogacy, but we actually don't talk to each other about who the bio-dad is, even within that close circle." So, in the Australian city where he lived, among this small group of couples "that we're quite intimate with," in most cases, "we do not know whose sperm was used." This privacy was maintained, notwithstanding the speculation that was often engaged in within the group about these links.

The men in this study sought out resemblance to confirm kinship links, and in particular to confirm the notion of equal contribution from both partners. For Kevin and Rick, whose daughter was conceived via egg donation by Rick's sister, recognizing themselves in their child was confirmation of the link they both had with her. As Kevin noted, "She truly is a, you know, genetic mixture of the two of us which is special and we can see both of us in her I

think." The idea that Rick's sister could stand in for the genetic contribution of Rick also reflects the cultural understanding of bilateral genetic inheritance in that Rick and his sister were genetically similar because they both inherited their genes from the same parents.

Ethnically-mixed couples in the study generally undertook creative strategies to select and use reproductive material with the intention of creating families that shared phenotypic characteristics—between both male parents and the children as well as between siblings. Two of these couples (Robert and James; and Steve and Lleyton) chose two egg donors—one each from the same ethnic background of the nonbiogenetic parent. One other couple, Keith and Sebastian, adopted a different strategy in that they used one egg donor only, although they selected a Eurasian donor so the child might resemble both male partners. Only one couple who were from a mix of Caucasian and Asian backgrounds, Damon and Nick, did not follow this strategy.

These couples were playing strategically with phenotype to create kinship through what they understood to be a visually coherent family unit. The child was able to pass as the offspring of either male partner, or more interestingly also appearing as if it might be the offspring of both partners. Robert and James, for example, described the steps they followed in choosing two separate egg donors:

> **Robert:** Well we wanted, we wanted a Eurasian child, because obviously only one of us is going to be the father unless we got twins and was one of each, so we wanted a Eurasian child so we chose an Asian egg donor and a Caucasian egg donor and [transferred] two eggs or two embryos and actually one has taken.
>
> **James:** Yeah, and you, you'll be with the Asian girl and I'll be with . . .
>
> **Robert:** . . . the Caucasian, yep. So whatever comes out is going to be Eurasian, which is what we wanted.

Steve and Lleyton followed the same strategy in that both partners also provided sperm after choosing two separate egg donors. Having Eurasian children made it possible that they would be presumed to be related to the Chinese grandparents—even though this was not the case—and therefore also be able to pass as Chinese when visiting China. As Steve described:

> So in that sort of sense as well, we've decided that's good, that we'll go with the original plan, that all of our children will be Eurasian. So the truth of the matter is I know everyone will assume instantly that they're Leyton's kids. That doesn't worry us, you know. At the end of the day it doesn't worry me at all. And probably more importantly, it's, when we go back to China, that's where it's more important,

that they actually really see it as his child. So there's no risk involved whatsoever that, you know, Josh and his siblings, whatever they might be, will not be seen to be Leyton's children.

These examples illustrate how resemblance is sought out to enact or confirm kinship. The practices analyzed in this section correspond with Jennifer Mason's (2008) kinship concepts of negotiated and ethereal affinity. In particular, for male couples resemblance can enact kinship where biogenetic links are uncertain or even absent. By selecting egg donors that share similar ethnic backgrounds to the nonbiogenetic parent, true biogenetic links can be obscured and the children can share physical characteristics with both parents, which in turn maximizes equality between male partners. Charis Thompson (2005) uses the term *flexible choreography* to characterize this interplay between biogenetic and social factors. Through her ethnography of IVF clinics, she demonstrated that scientific understandings of procreation may determine kinship relations, but that recognition of kinship is sometimes much more complex and that people involved in egg donation and gestational surrogacy can transform biology by coding it back to socioeconomic or cultural influences.

Conclusion

Gay men are increasingly becoming involved in reproduction despite significant barriers limiting their access to reproductive technologies or legal parentage in many jurisdictions. This analysis explored how gay men understand their desire to become parents and what frames their experiences. Unlike many heterosexual men, most of the gay men in this study did not develop a "procreative consciousness" as a result of sexual and fertility-related events. The majority initially accepted or acknowledged the notion that equated homosexuality with childlessness.

The logic and language of choice is widespread in contemporary understandings and debates about gay parenthood and family formation. The works of Bruno Latour as well as the governmentality theorists provide a way for thinking about the production of these desires as discourses through which these men are encouraged to understand themselves as responsibilized citizens who seek to express themselves through choice. For most men, awareness of the possibilities for parenthood emerged over time—through the promotional activities of surrogacy agencies as well as through media, peers, and relationship partners. Exposure to messages that promoted rather than prohibited parenthood enabled the development of social competencies that

had previously been unavailable to them—in this case the possibility of gay male parenthood.

Biogenetic kinship was a concern for gay male couples in the study because it privileges the connections between the child and one parent. Men actively sought to resolve this potential problem by creatively playing with some of the symbols of kinship to negotiate and obscure which partner was biogenetically related to their children. The strategies that were engaged in were turn-taking, intentional unknowing, and silence. In addition, the men in the study sought out resemblance with children to confirm kinship links, and in particular to confirm the notion of equal contribution from both partners where biogenetic links were uncertain.

In the context of a resurgent movement in support of the social justice rights of nonheterosexual citizens, the accounts of these men offer a timely set of insights into the ways in which gay men narrate their expectations and experiences of becoming parents.

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