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# Reflections on the way we were raised: Socialization within a same-sex family

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Reflections on the Way We Were Raised: Socialization within a Same-Sex Family

by

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Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Sociology

Thesis Committee:

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November 30, 2015

Ypsilanti, Michigan

## Dedication

Thank you to my LGBTQ friends who have inspired me to conduct this research. I hope that this research will open the eyes of many people. I will always be an ally, and I hope others will as well. I would like to thank my parents, Robert and Kathleen, for supporting me throughout my educational career. You always told me to aim higher in everything that I do, and I have completed this research and everything I do with you in mind. I would like to thank my family and friends for always supporting me, especially throughout my educational career and during the duration of this research. I can always count on you to lend me an ear or go out on an adventure with me. Also, I would like to thank my beagle, Freckles, for keeping me company during long sessions of researching and writing. You have taught me many important lessons, such as enjoying life to its fullest and, in respect to this research, the importance of taking a break every so often. You have enriched my life in countless ways, and I am thankful for every moment that I have with you. My husky, Buddy, also deserves a thank you. Although you have not been with me very long, your smiling face and companionship is always appreciated. Lastly, I would like to thank my fiancé, Jesse, for always supporting me. You are my rock, and I would not have made it through this process without your unconditional love and support. You are my fellow gang member in our two-person gang, always sticking together, facing the obstacles and great joys of life. I can always count on you to have long discussions about life and the world around us whether through car rides or late-night discussions. You have enriched my life in many ways and I cannot wait to share in the adventures of life for many, many years to come.

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**Reflections on the Way We Were Raised:  
Socialization within a Same-Sex Family**

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November 30, 2015

**Abstract**

Previous research on same-sex couples with children acknowledges that their parenting issues are similar to and yet different from their heterosexual counterparts. The literature does not examine, in an in-depth fashion, the challenges that same-sex parents face and how such challenges affect the lives of their families and relationships. This research examines the extent that same-sex parents reflect “traditional” family norms and behaviors, and how they socialize their children within the debate surrounding same-sex relationships. The author conducted and analyzed in-depth qualitative interviews from seven same-sex couples with children under the age of eighteen in the Southeastern Michigan area. It was found that there were a number of challenges same-sex parents encountered in the process of raising their children. This research suggests the need of a broader awareness of the challenges encountered by same-sex parents, and the manner that they meet these challenges in a world different from their parents.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifty years, the family as an institution has grown and adapted to fit the ever-changing society that we live in. As a concept, the nuclear family is imperative to the understanding of family studies today. Under the historical notion of the nuclear family, there are two parents, a mother and a father, and typically two children in the household as well. The group lives in single-family housing, and the father is seen as the primary wage earner. The mother is considered to be the parent that stays home with the children and takes care of the household. She is also responsible for preparing meals and taking care of her husband. This is what America has perceived as the main family form that has existed in the society throughout much of the twentieth century. This family form served as the basis for some of the basic ideas related to families and the care of children. Without this concept, we would not have a basis of comparison to more complex and variegated family forms and ideals that contemporary society holds.

Over recent decades, liberal and progressive ideals have been embraced throughout much of American society. There has also been an increase in tolerance for gay and lesbian parent families. Today, in comparison to the conventional ideal of the nuclear family, gay and lesbian families are still viewed as deviant by some elements of American society. Many Americans still embrace the traditional nuclear family form as the core foundation of modern society. Because of this, many gay and lesbian parents face struggles as they try to live their lives as other ordinary families would.

This research seeks to understand how same-sex couples navigate a complex, variegated, and ever-changing normative order in society in their efforts to raise their own children. It also seeks to understand how the constraints that society places upon same-sex parents, ones that include stigmatization, lead to novel and adaptive responses as these

parents raise their own children. Specifically, I ask the following questions: What challenges do same-sex couples face in their efforts to begin a family and socialize their children? How do same-sex couples meet such challenges in a world very different from that of their parents? Social theorists that advanced modernity, such as Anthony Giddens (2000), argue that over recent years a global revolution has changed the way that we think about ourselves, and how we relate and connect to others. He added that the world is changing at a rapid pace, which is very difficult for society to keep up with and, in turn, demonstrates how complex some institutions, such as family, can be.

This research seeks to understand how the socialization of children whose families consist of same-sex parents compares to those who are raised in a nuclear family type home environment. This study highlights the experiences of same-sex parents and their children while at the same time, demonstrates that same-sex headed families are an emerging family structure that, upon close comparison, is similar to that of a family headed by heterosexual parents. Some of the challenges that same-sex parents have are unique to same-sex parents. However, a vast majority of parents, no matter what their sexual orientation, still face the same core challenges when raising children. One example of this could be getting their children to eat vegetables, or trying to set a good example for their children. Another example could be trying to stay positive in the face of adversity even when, on the inside, they may be falling apart or frustrated. This is the internal struggle based around faithfully trying to uphold a high standard of the image of the good parent that they always imagined they would one day be, while at the same time, trying to accept that they will not always be that perfect parent. This is universal among parents, no matter what sexual orientation, religion, or gender they are. This idea is key in aiding social scientists in exposing such a

concept to the world of academia and the general population as a whole. As American attitudes become more liberal, it is important to understand same-sex parent families. The same-sex parent family is a family form that is emerging and becoming more prevalent as homosexuality is becoming more tolerated in society. Because this family form is becoming more prevalent, it is imperative to understand the socialization process that occurs when same-sex parents socialize their children. Understanding such socialization processes may lead to changes in the way in which same-sex couples are viewed in American society.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### *The “Traditional” Family*

The concept of the “traditional” family has pervaded American society for many decades. It has adapted to fit the ever-changing society of the time period. Giddens (2000) presents three family eras in which families existed among society. The first era is the traditional era, which is marked by the pre-industrial, agrarian revolution where children were valued more for their ability to contribute economically to the family than they were for themselves (Giddens 2000). Productive activities were carried out by a wider set of family members during this time, including extended family members and children.

On the other hand, the nuclear family, which was conceptualized midcentury, depended on paid wage earning labor. “By midcentury a higher proportion of American children were growing up in stable, two-parent families than at any other time in American history” (Popenoe 1993:528). Hence, this type of family was the norm in American society during this particular moment in time. During this period, children were highly valued by their parents and by the culture that they lived in. Thus, Giddens (2000) viewed the 1950s nuclear family as a transitional form because there was no material foundation to achieve productive activity. Work moved from the homestead to outside of the home, and they relied on work outside of the home to earn wages. The 1950s ideal family era featured a traditional gendered division of labor, which still exists in some areas of society today. America, in the 1950s through the 1960s, was known for the peak of the “traditional nuclear family” (Popenoe 1993:528). The “traditional nuclear family” was heterosexual, monogamous, together for life, and there was a sharp division of labor where the female was a full-time housewife and the male was the primary wage earner as well as the head authority in the household (Popenoe 1993). According to Giddens, those who supported the notion of the

traditional family referred to a family type where the number of women who worked outside of the home was low, and women who went through a divorce faced a great deal of stigma (Giddens 2000).

By the twentieth century, children were seen as economic liability rather than assets. Scanzoni (2001) and Neuhaus (2010) both argue that this type of family was the standard in American society at the time. The third family era that Giddens (2000) discussed was the families of today which are couple-focused. In these families, the core of the modern family is the unmarried couple. Scanzoni (2001) argued that all families are gauged and measured in comparison to this notion of the “traditional” American family.

In *Runaway World*, Giddens (2000:72) argued that, “The ‘traditional family’ is very much a catch-all category. There have been many different types of family and kinship systems in different societies and cultures.” Moreover, he argued that the traditional family could be interpreted as an “economic unit” (Giddens 2000:72). It functions as a whole to provide economic stimulus to the economy while the economy is stimulating the family. This can be interpreted as a reciprocal relationship. Each member of the family has an economic function that contributed to the overall economic status of the household. In turn, each institution in society has its own unique purpose, which, when efforts combined, produces an overall purpose for the people of the society. The family can be seen as having a functional role in society, especially in American society.

The standard interpretation of the American family in the 1950s and 1960s is based upon stringent guidelines. Scanzoni (2001) discussed some of the father’s roles in the “typical” American family. For Scanzoni, the father’s main roles are to provide for the family and be the task leader. Tensions existed between ideal norms and the reality experienced in

people's lives. Americans are increasingly tolerant of homosexuality and gay marriage, which are ideal norms. However, do same-sex parents experience the reality? The shift from what is expected, ideal norms, and what happens in reality is one that is not as simple and clear as one would think. There is the "typical" 1950s interpretation of the American family, mentioned by Farrell et al. (2012), and there is the more fluid, realistic version of the "typical" American family that is more widely seen among American households today. As young children we are socialized that real families function with a "traditional" structure, yet in reality many families do not follow the "traditional" structure of the family to a tee.

Farrell et al (2012:284) described the traditional family form as the, "relationship between the male breadwinner and the female caretaker." This relationship is based on the status of legally married heterosexual couples, which, in turn, assumes a gendered division of labor in both public and private life. Giddens (2000) demonstrated that marriage signified that a couple has a stable relationship and the stability they have is encouraged, as marriage is a "public" announcement of a couple's commitment. American society places a significant emphasis on ones' relationship "status." Couples who are not married are often interpreted as not having as much power and status as married couples. Biological children are also a significant aspect of the "traditional nuclear" family model. Families were based on this ideal of the "typical" American family.

Bengston (2001:4) argued that the "traditional nuclear family" has an allocation of power, resources, and labor that declined with the postindustrial society." In addition, Bengston argued that Americans are becoming more concerned with caring for members of older generations. Such ties are more important than maintaining a "traditional nuclear family" model (Bengston 2001). The author argued that increased longevity has caused more

families to incorporate older generations into the household. However, Bengston criticized Popenoe's work from 1993. He argued that Popenoe's definition and interpretation of the family household does not take into account the function of multiple generations in a family. Bengston was particularly interested in the role of grandparents in socializing and supporting grandchildren. Stacey and Biblarz (2010:3) also criticized Popenoe's notion that, "Fathers and mothers differ, just as males and females differ." The authors argued that the idea that mothers and fathers parent in different ways, which are essential to the development of a child, was false as indicated by the results of their study. They argued that the gender of the parents had very little influence on children's psychological development and social success (Stacey and Biblarz 2010). This would argue against Popenoe's (1993) argument that same-sex parents produce serious social consequences for children, which ultimately leads to the decline of the family as an institution. Moreover, the literature on the "traditional nuclear family" does not include discussion of adopted children.

### *Alternative Families*

There are many variations of family forms. Those who do not fit the "traditional" model of the family are considered alternative families. Same-sex couples and parents, for example, have become the subject of many debates about alternative families in recent years. Webb (2005) argued that with the dramatic changes in families over the past twenty years, the notion of a "one size fits all" family mentality has lost significance. With the increase in liberal ideas and more cultural diversity, the idea of one and only one type of family has quickly lost its credibility. It is also argued that these modern families will involve relatives or parents that have a different sexual orientation in one way or another (Webb 2005). The increase in openly homosexual individuals in society has made it nearly impossible for many

people not to know someone who is gay or lesbian. However, because society has been fixated on the notion of the “traditional” family, wider institutions in society have reinforced assumptions and family relations on this idea. In turn, this has made it very difficult for alternative families to gain acceptance. The world around them stigmatizes them because many institutions in society fail to adapt to the ever-changing structure of family. According to Juel (1993:318), “The same-sex couple is perhaps perceived as the most threatening non-traditional family arrangement.” Juel argued that this has been a topic that has been debated in various books. It was also argued that there are significant religious and cultural bases for such viewpoints.

However, according to Giddens (2000), attitudes toward homosexuality are in part influenced by tradition and culture. He argued that in anthropological surveys, homosexuality has been tolerated in many cultures. Western attitudes toward homosexuality tend to be more extreme than other societies. According to statistics in Burkholder and Burbank (2012:13), “about 1% of all households are headed by same-sex couples. Of this number, 19.4% reported having children.” This statistic was based on households in the United States. The number of households that are headed by same-sex couples may only represent one percent of the population, but this trend is increasing, as are liberal attitudes among U.S. citizens. With an increase in liberal attitudes, Americans are becoming more accepting of gay marriage. According to Burkholder and Burbank (2012:13), “47% of Americans favor gay marriage compared with 43% who are opposed.” However, even with an increase in acceptance, gay marriage is still a topic that can become heated for many Americans. Some scholars point out that there are religious and cultural bases that are influencing Americans to be against gay marriage (Juel 1993). And yet, for the first time, sexuality is something that

can be altered and formed, whereas during the 1950s your sexuality was thought of as biologically determined (Giddens 2000). What sex you were indicated your sexual orientation and your position in society.

In the article, “Taking the Roles of Multiple Others”, Norma Williams conducted research about role taking and role making among Mexican American women. It was found that a large portion of Mexican American women created new roles for themselves within the family and community. “...they were reshaping their more traditional roles within the context of new social circumstances” (Williams 2002: 77). The Mexican American women knew that the way in which they did things was different from how their mothers’ would do things. However, in some cases it was not feasible for women to remake their roles as they did not have the social resources or they faced significant constraints from their husbands or the community (Williams 2002). In the case of same-sex parents, the notion of role making and role taking can be applied as well. Same-sex parents try to change or reshape more traditional gender roles within the context of new social norms. They have attempted to reshape the traditional gender roles, but it hasn’t always been possible, as there were societal constraints like the lack of government support and inconsistency within the enforcement of laws that prevented or impeded same-sex parents from reshaping their role within their family and within the wider community. Scholars, such as Norma Williams, have examined the process of role making with respect to family and majority-minority relativity, particularly in the case of Mexican Americans.

Norma Williams (2002) discussed the notion of role making in respect to race and ethnicity; however, there are some connections that can be made in respect to same-sex parents as well. Symbolic interactionism assumes that within an interaction, one person

assumes that the person they are interacting with is similar to himself or herself. This would imply that gestures, phrases, and/or behaviors of the people that are interacting with one person could be interpreted in a similar fashion. The problem with such an interpretation is that interactions on a larger scale can make it difficult for others to assume the roles of another person (Williams 2002). For example, an interaction between men and women within a certain cultural setting would make it very difficult for one to assume the roles of another. However, if the same interaction occurred with lower-class men and women, it would be much easier for one to assume the roles of another. Attempting to assume roles across racial or gender borders would prove problematic as well, as everyone has a diverse interpretation of another's roles. Same-sex parents would have an interpretation of a heterosexual mother's roles that are more centered on equal caregiving versus a heterosexual father's roles. Heterosexual parents would have an interpretation that varies when assuming a parental role versus what homosexual parents would assume a parental role to be. With that being said, one can carry out a certain role with inner dialogue while, at the same time, evaluating and criticizing that role within one's own experiences (Williams 2002). There also may be a connection made with superiority, majority, and minority groups.

Williams discussed Blumer's (1958) interpretation of majority and minority groups in 2002. There is an assumption that the majority group is superior to those in a subordinate group. An assumption can be made that heterosexual people are a majority group while homosexual people are the subordinate group. Same-sex parents are defined as a subordinate group because of the power and position of the heterosexual parent dominate group. In other words, same-sex parents are considered subordinate because the majority defines them to be that way. The heterosexual people and or parents in society as a whole may create social

guidelines that separate and distance them from the homosexual community. Williams argued that social scientists must take majority/minority social patterns into consideration when examining such interactions.

According to Smith (2010:7), the battle for gay marriage rights brought about important implications for gay and lesbian parents: “Women’s interests have been at stake in a number of high profile cases on parenting and child custody. These cases have pitted lesbian same-sex partners against each other in custody and parenting conflicts; however, they have also sparked the re-emergence of custody problems for women in conflict with their male (former) partners.” In some cases, because a state does not recognize same-sex marriage, same-sex parents were denied custody of their children at certain times. In a case discussed by Smith, a lesbian parent was denied visitation rights because the woman could not have “unrelated” houseguests when the child was visiting (Smith 2010:7). Same-sex couples are often treated very poorly compared to heterosexual parents in the eyes of the law. In most cases, the biological parent had an advantage over the gay or lesbian parent. This is due to the societal perspectives the United States has toward same-sex couples.

#### *Resistance Toward Same-Sex Couples*

Much of the opposition that these couples faced has been from American law. Those who were politically conservative were the driving force behind the opposition that same-sex couples faced in American law. This opposition in the law then permeated to other areas of society. Biblarz and Stacey (2005) discussed the impact of gay marriage on children’s development. It was argued that sexual identity and gender impact children’s principles in a number of ways. However, there has been little research that examined the effects of gay marriage on children’s development. The legal acceptance of gay marriage would increase

the ability of social scientists to study the precise effects that sexual orientation and gender have on the family and the development of children. Moreover, allowing the freedom of gay marriage would reduce the amount of prejudice and discrimination that homosexual couples face within society. It would also promote social acceptance of homosexuality.

Adoption and foster care rights would also be increased with the legal recognition of gay marriage, which may reduce the number of foster care children in the foster system. Children would also have a much smaller chance of dealing with breakups because gay and lesbian couples would not be pressured to enter heterosexual marriages (Biblarz and Stacey 2005). Some argue that children in lesbian parent families will not have access to a “breadwinner” income, since they do not have a heterosexual father. However, with the legalization of gay marriage, social scientists can further study such questions. Additionally, there are questions about how race has affected the patterns of gay marriage (Biblarz and Stacey 2005). This question cannot be researched adequately until gay marriage is legalized. Hence, the struggle for same-sex couples to gain protection under the law is a heated debate today in American society.

#### *Family Dynamics*

Tasker and Granville (2011:189) mentioned that, “various studies have indicated that lesbian co-mothers, i.e., lesbian mothers who did not give birth to their child, are just as involved in child rearing as fathers in heterosexual families, if not more so.” Lesbian couples who did not give birth to their children are just as dedicated, or even more so, than heterosexual parents which suggests that childrearing responsibilities may be divided more equally. In addition, this indicated that same-sex couples are no different in comparison to their heterosexual parents in this aspect. Moreover, it was also argued by Tasker and

Granville (2011) that lesbian co-mothers were more involved in the daily caregiving of children than heterosexual fathers. The way in which one's life changes when they have a child changes for same-sex couples, just as it does for heterosexual couples. Parents and the families of the child still have to adjust to the child being brought into the family. In Tasker and Granville's study, children indicated that friends of their parents and even their own friends were considered members of their family in addition to their biological family members. In the case of a donor, the donor was considered a member of the family as well. A similar finding can be applied to heterosexual couples. Hence, same-sex couples and heterosexual couples are similar in family membership.

Sexual orientation has had a significant impact on parenting and families. Cohler (2005) argued that the disclosure of an alternative sexual identity is a situation that is highly charged and that can affect the way in which families connect with one another. In addition, the disclosure of an alternative sexual identity can impact the way future children are socialized about family, gender, religion, etc. In traditional socialization, older generations attempted to impart knowledge and customs on the younger generations in the hopes that they will also follow such customs (Cohler 2005). Younger generations are then also influenced by social change through their schooling and their peers. Younger generations, in turn, attempt to influence their older family members about varying aspects of social change that they learn from their education and peers through backward socialization. Backward socialization occurs with the hope that their older family members will follow such customs. Specifically, young people are teaching their older family members about gay and lesbian relationships, which in turn is helping "queer" the traditional family (Cohler 2005).

Stacey and Biblarz (2001) noted that there are some scholars who have opposed gay and lesbian parenting for many reasons. For example, some scholars have argued that gay and lesbian parents expose their children to the risk of being homosexual themselves, as well as making them more likely to suffer confusion over their gender and sexual identity (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Moreover, it has been argued that homosexual parents are more likely to, “Molest their own children and children in these types of families are more likely to lose a parent to AIDS, substance abuse, suicide, and suffer from higher levels of depression” (Stacey and Biblarz 2001:161). Same-sex couples are seen as being unstable and more likely to separate than heterosexual couples.

Nevertheless, one of the most powerful arguments that some scholars have made against homosexual parenting is the social stigma of having a same-sex parent “ostracizes children and hinders their relationships with peers” (Stacey and Biblarz 2001:161). The definition of family that is used to compare families to other families is based on the notion of heterosexuality and the social order. Nearly every family in the United States is compared to and judged against the conception of the “traditional” family, which is exclusively headed by heterosexual parents. Gay and lesbian parent families are often judged and compared to this standard as well. They do not fit this model of the family because of the parents’ homosexuality and as a result, they are looked down upon in society. However, with the ever-changing nature of American society, there are very few families that fit the model of the traditional family anymore.

In important ways, the manner in which we have described the “functioning” social order has impacted how we define adaptive or deviant individuals, responses, and more. One of the models of group relations is assimilation. In the case of same-sex parents and

homosexuality, the wider society culturally dominates same-sex parents as heterosexuality is the dominant practice. Full assimilation occurs when the new or once different members of society are indistinguishable from the dominant culture, whether the dominant and subordinate cultures choose to assimilate or not. In the case of same-sex parents, full assimilation to the dominant culture occurs when same-sex parenting is widely accepted socially and legally, whether the dominant culture wants same-sex parenting to become a dominant group practice or not. Once same-sex parents are accepted legally and socially, such parenting will become a norm or accepted practice among the dominant culture.

Gay and lesbian families are just one of many family types that have begun to increase in popularity amongst Americans. Some families have had perspectives that are different as to whom is considered a member of one's family in comparison to other families. Some families have had grandparents caring for younger children rather than their biological parents. Within these family forms, there is even more variation as family structures can vary by culture and geographic region. In the case of same-sex parent families, families have rapidly become more prevalent with the passing of legislation allowing same-sex couples to marry. Through the use of backward socialization, young people have been successful in "queering" the family (Cohler 2005). Backward socialization has had a significant impact on how gay and lesbian parents socialize their children about family life. Hence, there has been a decline in the prevalence of traditional families. With this being said, it could be possible that traditional families, as seen in the nineteen-fifties, will become the minority while non-traditional families, such as gay and lesbian headed families, become more popular.

Same-sex headed families have been constantly reminded of their gender identity in relation to the heterosexual headed family. These families constantly have had to choose

whether or not they will remain a gay or lesbian couple because of societal circumstances, such as not being able to provide adequate health insurance to their family. Simply put, sexual orientation has challenged the definition of what a family is and what persons can make up a family.

#### *Similar Research Methodology*

Berkowitz and Ryan (2011:334) used data from another researcher who conducted interviews with twenty-two gay fathers to learn about, “gay men’s father identities and how they decided to become fathers, the process of becoming fathers, and current fathering and family experiences.” The researcher of this study interviewed couples that raised children together. The methodology that Berkowitz and Ryan referenced allowed the researcher to see the facial expressions and body language of interviewees. Moreover, the referenced author was able to gain in-depth data that one would not be able to gather using a survey methodology. The narratives that were gathered were then coded line-by-line in order to recognize themes that were present. This author gathered participants by posting flyers in areas in Florida and New York that had a significant population of gay men (Berkowitz and Ryan 2011). Snowball sampling was then used to gain more participants and data. Berkowitz and Ryan argued that snowball sampling is best used for studies where the researcher is working with populations that are small or difficult to find (Berkowitz and Ryan 2011). The author that Berkowitz and Ryan referenced used a slightly different methodology, in that they focused on men.

However, this research and the researcher Berkowitz and Ryan (2011) mentioned have one element in common. These researchers focused their work on the experience of gay men becoming fathers and their experiences with raising children; including how they

approach the topic of gender with their children. The present research studied how stigmatization affects the way in which gay and lesbian parents socialize their children. Even though the research Berkowitz and Ryan referenced had a different goal, it can still be applicable to this research in numerous ways. Learning about the parenting and family experiences of gay and lesbian families could help scholars develop a deeper understanding of gender and sexual orientation. This, in turn, will help scholars learn how sexual orientation and stigmatization related to sexual orientation can affect the process in which children are socialized and raised. Hence, the methodology mentioned by Berkowitz and Ryan can be applied to gay and lesbian parents in the Southeastern Michigan area.

Cohen and Kovalanka (2011) also used a similar methodology that Berkowitz and Ryan mentioned in their article about gay fathers and their experiences being a father. Cohen and Kovalanka studied the sexual socialization of children with lesbian parents. The authors did qualitative interviews with ten partnered lesbian mothers to learn how these parents taught their children about topics related to sexuality. The goal of this research was to have a deeper understanding of the experiences that these lesbian mothers had as mothers. It also was important that Cohen and Kovalanka proposed ways in which future research could explore the topic of lesbian parents and how they socialize their children to topics related to sexuality. The women that were interviewed were self-identified as lesbian and between the ages of forty and forty-eight (Cohen and Kovalanka 2011). Most of the women interviewed also had graduate-level degrees. Moreover, most participants were parenting children from a previous heterosexual relationship. However, three out of the ten participants had children through artificial insemination, and one participant adopted a child from China (Cohen and Kovalanka 2011). In regard to sampling, the researchers used a purposeful targeting and

snowball sampling to gather interviewees. Information about the interviews was posted around LGBT organizations at a Midwestern university and a couple of local LGBT organizations in the area.

This research has similar goals as Cohen and Kuvallanka's (2011), as it aims to learn how stigmatization can also affect the way in which children are socialized. In addition, this research also strives to help the researcher gain a deep understanding of the experiences that same-sex parents have while raising their children. Even though the methodology that Cohen and Kuvallanka use focuses on lesbian mothers, it can still be applicable to the proposed research about both gay and lesbian parents. The snowball sampling that the authors used is similar to the sampling methods of the proposed research. The research explored the experiences of both gay and lesbian parents, which will put a unique perspective on the research that has been done with same-sex parents and the socialization of their children. As the researcher conducted the interviews, there were also opportunities to observe respondents verbal and non-verbal reactions to questions, which lead to a follow-up question. This aided in understanding how same-sex parents view the issues that are raised from their perspective. In addition, the researcher learned something new about how to modify and rethink some of what we generally know from the literature, while some information will reinforce what we know. Therefore, the methodology that Cohen and Kuvallanka use can be applied to the methodology of this research, which will examine how gay and lesbian parents socialize their children in relation to the stigmatization about same-sex couples in today's society.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

## METHODOLOGY USED

This study featured a voluntary participant interview that was aimed at gaining knowledge from same-sex parents about how they go about raising their children in today's modern society. Socialization processes, for the purposes of this research, were defined as the processes by which children were taught about the society around them and how they were to behave within that society. For instance, how will the stigmatization that gay and lesbian parents face aid in teaching their children about concepts of family, gender roles, and sexuality? Socialization included how children acquire a personal identity and how they learn the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to their position in society. The interview questions featured nineteen open-ended questions (see Appendix A).

The interviews were administered to seven same-sex parent couples that resided in Southeastern Michigan. The initial response rate goal was twenty couples; however, the researcher faced difficulty in securing interviews. Interviews were completed within a six-month period. The parents had to self-identify as gay or lesbian and have at least one child under the age of eighteen years old, whether through adoption, artificial insemination, or other means. The research looked for general patterns and responses of these parents and described some basic socialization processes regarding their children. Key decisions, dilemmas, and unique issues faced by the parents were identified as they discussed various aspects of the socialization process and how they confronted society, such as the mass media, school, church, family, friends, and public life.

The study population consisted of same-sex parents who had at least one child. Nonprobability purposive sampling methods were used to gather the population sample initially. There were two participants who were recruited with the flyer the researcher

produced. The remaining five participants were recruited using snowball sampling methods. The sampling frame focused on gay or lesbian parents in Southeastern Michigan. An initial email was sent out to the directors of the centers to introduce the researcher as well as a general overview of the research being conducted (see Appendix B). The directors were asked if they would be interested in having or even considering their community members participation in such research. If so, the researcher asked if they would be willing to circulate a recruitment flyer for this research throughout their organization. The flyer had key information such as the purpose of the research, who is eligible to participate, involvement of the participants, any risks of participating in this research, that participation is voluntary, and where and how the researcher can be contacted if they are interested in participating in the research (see Appendix C). Those who were interested contacted the researcher to indicate their participation. The participant and the researcher then arranged a time for the interview to occur, discuss the research, and answer any questions that the participant has.

Interviews took place at the home of the participant for confidentiality and to make the participant more comfortable. In addition, the researcher gained insight into the environment in which such families live. However, if participants did not want to be interviewed in their home, the researcher offered a private conference room at the Bruce T. Halle library at Eastern Michigan University. The researcher arrived at the home of the participant, and participants voluntarily signed a consent form to indicate that they understand the risks of the research and their involvement in the research. Participants also consented to be recorded using an audio recorder. It also was explained that if there are any children in the home, the interviewer was not to interview them as per Human Subjects review regulations (see Appendix D).

In regard to data collection, detailed notes were taken to collect valuable information that is pertinent to the study. The participant interviews took place and data was collected and recorded for further analyzing. Once the response rate of seven couples was reached, the responses from the interviews were compiled into a database and then analyzed. Responses that were open-ended were coded prior to analyzing the data. General patterns were identified in the responses from parents as well as any sub-themes that appeared. The theoretical framework of Goffman through Allan (2013), Blumer (1958), Giddens (2000), and other theorists were also used to analyze the responses from the interview. Data from open-ended questions were compiled and used to arrive at a deeper understanding of same-sex couple parenting.

Administering an interview with same-sex parents allowed the researcher to collect adequate data and develop a deep understanding of gay or lesbian parents. Moreover, a face-to-face interview allowed the researcher to gain more in-depth data than conducting a telephone interview. Hence, this research allowed the researcher to collect data from gay or lesbian parents in a way that can help the researcher gain much deeper and more valuable data than other social research methods. Body language and behavior were also observed in these interviews, which had further implications for the examination of family and sexual orientation.

Given the methodology of this research, there were a few strengths and limitations that may have affected the outcome of the study. As mentioned in some of the previous studies, since the sample was gathered using non-probability sampling methods, the researcher cannot generalize the findings to all gay or lesbian parents. Moreover, because the interview featured same-sex parents from Southeastern Michigan, the researcher cannot

overgeneralize the results. In addition, because of the nature of this research topic, some participants might not respond truthfully to face-to-face interview questions compared to a telephone interview. During interview research, there was a risk that the participant possibly would give responses that they thought the interviewer would want to hear versus what is truthful of the life or lifestyle. Lastly, a weakness of this study was that the researcher was not able to achieve the initial response goal of twenty participants, and thus, the sample of seven couples was not as representative of a sample as the initial goal sample would have been.

Even with such weaknesses, this interview research also had an abundance of strengths. First, interviews allowed the researcher to clarify a question if needed, whereas a survey methodology would not. Interviews used in this type of research are best used for subject matters that are exploratory or complex in their nature. Interview methodology was flexible, in that it allowed the researcher to probe for more information and follow up if needed. Guided interviews provided the interviewer with standard questions to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions in the same fashion. Interviews allowed the researcher to also study cues in body language or demeanor that could influence the data collected. Furthermore, interviews produced lower numbers of incomplete data, which was important in a study this complex.

Safety and confidentiality were very important in this research. No parent was forced to participate in the interview. If a participant chose to not participate, there were no consequences to the participant. In addition, this research did not harm or injure the families being studied. There were extra precautions taken to ensure that participants were not asked questions that would embarrass them, endanger their home lives, friendships, and jobs.

Participants were not harmed psychologically as there was great care taken to ensure that questions asked are not going to make the participants feel uncomfortable. If a participant did feel uncomfortable about certain question(s), they had the option to skip the question(s) with no consequences. Moreover, participants were informed of the possible risks of participating in the interview, and they were told about the goals of the research. To ensure the safety of the researcher, the researcher called thesis chair, Dr. Denise Reiling, before and after each interview, in addition to providing Dr. Reiling with the location of each interview. This was required from the institutional review board because there was an attack on a lesbian woman prior to the start of data collection for this project. A lesbian woman near the university was subject to a brutal beating that was later classified as a hate crime. The institutional review board felt that this was a risk to the researcher and did not want the researcher to get lured into an unsafe situation when interacting with participants of this study.

Participants did not give their name or any other identifiable information during any part of the interview, nor was the name of the recruiting organization divulged during the interview. The interview responses were recorded during the interview and those responses were kept anonymous. The interview did not ask questions about names or addresses, which prevented the responses from being connected to one specific respondent. In regard to confidentiality, interviews were conducted at the participant's home and a recruitment flyer was posted at the organizations, which enabled the participant to get in contact with the researcher to participate without having to expose their identity. There was no connection between the organization and the respondent's participation in this research. The recruiting organization was not informed of who did and did not participate in this research. Contact information for participants was not used in analyzing the data collected and was not used

publicly. Interviews were audio-recorded and were transcribed by the researcher. A code number was linked to each response to ensure confidentiality. Nicknames, phone numbers, or any other personal information were not connected to responses. Responses and consent forms were kept under lock and key and were kept separately from audio recordings. All documents and files related to this study were kept on a password-protected computer.

## Chapter 4: Results

## RESULTS

### *A General Note*

Participants described a variety of experiences in regard to how they were raised as children, the process of coming out, interacting with family members and the public, raising their own children, interacting with the media, and others. Major themes within the data focused on the family background of participants, the dynamics of coming out, relationships with friends and family, creating their family, the process of having a child, thoughts about raising their own children, thoughts from their experience within society, thoughts about the media, and a number of other thoughts participants wanted to share.

### *Family Background*

Most couples had a partner that grew up in a traditional family household with siblings and parents who were married. The other partner typically had parents that divorced during the course of the participant's childhood. Most couples were exposed to both a traditional and a non-traditional family background as they were growing up. Because most couples had this mixture of family backgrounds, the partner that had a traditional family background thought that their family reflected the dominant image of the traditional, nuclear family while the partner with the non-traditional background argued their family did not reflect the dominant image of the nuclear family. About half of the couples had families where their parents would switch roles in the household. For example, a mother may have worked full-time while the father cooked the meals, took the children to school, etc. Most couples also had at least one of their parents attend college. One couple argued that their family generally followed a traditional pattern but also possessed elements that were not as traditional:

It was really evident. For me, my mom was the stay at home mom and my dad was the breadwinner but what was interesting was that they would like switch tasks like cooking because my dad was a chef and would take over cooking dinner. Traditionally, or stereotypically that is the job of the mom. So we are traditional in that sense.

Another couple argued that their family was not traditional:

Not at all because my parents divorced when I was 6 and so there really wasn't, my mom was the breadwinner because I lived with my mom and I went to my dad's every other weekend. So it was just like one of those things. They both were the breadwinner when they were married.

Despite these differences in family form, family values were similar for both traditional, nuclear type families and for the non-traditional type of family. One of the values most prevalent in the research was the notion of spending time together as a family, such as having family dinners together. Working hard was another value participants shared that they were taught growing up. The research of Juel also found this to be true. Juel (1993:317) touched upon the value of family and its validity in non-traditional families, "This nation has always valued and encouraged the family because of the security it provides family members, and the stability it provides to society at large." Such a quote demonstrated how the family is a universal value that spans across many types of people. Juel also argued that those who do not live in a traditional family believed that non-traditional living arrangements could create and protect the same values that traditional family arrangements encourage.

Finally, it was interesting to note the educational backgrounds and occupational areas of the couples that participated in this study. Most participants had a master's degree, some had bachelor's degrees, and a few had some college or an associate's degree. In regard to occupation, couples held a variety of occupations. Most couples had careers in technology, education, and the business and or financial sector of the economy. Others were employed in advertising or they were a stay-at-home parent.

### *Coming Out*

Most couples agreed that family dynamics had a significant impact on the process of coming out. For some, coming out was fairly easy whereas others had a difficult experience. For those who said coming out was easy, family and friends were supportive of their orientation. This research resonated with what was found to be true in the research conducted by Dunlap. Dunlap (2014) argued that the process of coming out was varied and was an individual experience. Family and friends accepted them with open arms. On the other hand, for those who said that coming out was very difficult, there were a number of factors that impacted the process of coming out. One of the most prevalent factors was that family members had a conservative ideology, which was challenging in the process of coming out. Participants also mentioned that parent's fear was another factor that made coming out difficult. There was fear in that parents did not want their child to face the stigma that was associated with being LGBTQ.

Parents also had expectations for their child in regard to how their life would progress. For example, getting married to someone of the opposite sex, having children, and settling down. were some of the expectations that parents had for their children. Expectations from parents made the process of coming out difficult, as some parents had a very difficult time knowing their child would not live the "life" that they had expected for them. This finding is supported with what was found to be true in the research conducted by Mallon. Mallon (2008) discussed some factors that could impact the process of disclosure of one's orientation. Religious influences were one of the main factors that Mallon mentioned. He argued that some families might have a strong religious background, which may openly condemn same-sex relationships (248).

In addition, cultural and emotional factors were also discussed. In the realm of cultural factors, race and ethnicity played an important factor in the process of coming out. For example, LGBTQ people of color who have experienced oppression based on skin color may have more difficulty in the process of coming out. Lastly, Mallon (2008) spoke briefly about emotional factors that could impact the process of coming out. LGBTQ individuals may confide in a close friend or family member to assist in the preparation of coming out. In addition, there were a wide variety of feelings that could arise with initial disclosure (250). Feelings ranged from shame, to guilt, to embarrassment, to disassociation, and to acceptance. Whether coming out was generally easy or difficult, most participants argued that their own personal acceptance of their sexual orientation was a challenge for them. Some participants felt nervous in the process of coming out as well. This can be attributed to participants not knowing how their parents, family, friends, co-workers, etc. will react to them coming out.

In the process of coming out, some participants indicated that relationships with family members improved. One participant argued, "My mom and I are closer than ever." Mallon (2008) discussed a quote by Rothberg and Weinstein (1996) about the process of coming out. Mallon discussed how there are a variety of responses from family members when another family member comes out. The range of acceptance is interpreted as a continuum, with one end of the spectrum being acceptance, but that in most cases, a coming-out brings about negative responses from family members ranging from some disapproval to complete disassociation (Mallon 2008:247). Participants faced a variety of outcomes in regard to their coming out. This finding resonated with what Mallon, as well as Rothberg and Weinstein, found to be true in their research. In addition, Mallon argued that after the initial disclosure, families who have had a member come out face a "crisis" mode (257). Family

members were forced to organize and internalize the announcement from their family member. After disclosure, family and friends learned that they had to become more educated about LGBTQ individuals and LGBTQ culture. Dunlap (2014) also agreed with Mallon in that education is important in the process of coming out. Most participants stated that they had lost connection with at least one of their family and or friends after coming out. Even with couples where coming out was easy, a connection with a long-lost relative, high school friend, etc. was lost. In addition, some participants indicated that their family relationships grew worse after the process of coming out. In one couple, there was a partner whose parents said that they wanted nothing to do with them or the family that they have created with their partner. Another couple had a partner where contact was lost with siblings after coming out. Such outcomes are supported by the argument that Mallon (2008) referenced in regards to outcomes of the coming out process.

In addition, participants indicated that they felt fearful in the process of coming out. Among participants, there was a fear from deviating from what was expected of them. For example, parents expected their children to get married to the opposite sex, have children and, settle down: “And then all of my family wanted me to go out and get married and have kids and everything.” This finding resonated with what was found to be true in the research conducted by Patterson and Riskind. Patterson and Riskind (2010:327) discussed the expectation that young adults in the United States and in other cultures were to, “Meet and to marry opposite-sex partners and to rear biological children in the context of these marriages.” Denes and Afifi (2014) compared the process of a child coming out to a parent to the stages of grief when one passes away. It was argued that parents felt grief, in that they had to say

goodbye to the idea of their children marrying someone of the opposite sex and raising children with that partner (Denes and Afifi 2014).

There was also a fear among participants about not knowing how family members would react. One participant shared, “Some of my friends and extended family, it was really scary. Yeah. I grew up in a really religious, conservative family and I, uh, didn’t fit at all.” Moreover, some had outcomes in interactions with family that were not what they expected. Mostly, these reactions were more positive than the participant originally believed. Denes and Afifi (2014) argued that if the participant was satisfied with how the reaction went with family or friends, then they might not try to come out another time. However, if the participant was not satisfied with the reaction, they may try to continually come out over time (Denes and Afifi 2014). This process helped with gradually pushing parents toward acceptance, “For individuals whose parents seem stuck in the denial phase, coming out again may aid in parents’ progression toward acceptance by forcing parents to acknowledge their GLBQ children’s identity”. Thus, coming out can be a difficult process for some. Dunlap argued that, “Supportive and understanding friends, coworkers, family members, church community, and significant others made important differences in the coming-out experiences of many of the subjects” (2014:326). The finding from Denes and Afifi was not only found to be true in this research but also found to be true in the research of Andy Dunlap. Such a quote placed importance on the support of friends, family members, co-workers and other social networks in the process of coming out.

#### *Relationships with Family and Friends*

Most couples indicated that there was no effect or a positive effect in regard to family relationships. One participant said, “They don’t look at. I don’t think that our family looks at

our relationship as this SAME-SEX relationship anymore.” Families began to treat them like they would treat any other couple. This was a finding that was also found to be true in the research conducted by Savin-Williams. Savin-Williams (2001) believed that some parents eventually arrive at a stage of acceptance. Savin-Williams said that, “The acceptance stage captures the idea that the child has a new negotiated place within the family with more honest and open lines of communication and understanding” (2001:46). Some said that there was a close relationship with family members and grandparents. Family members were often hands-on in interacting with the children. Moreover, some expressed that they felt that their family was close not because of their sexuality, but their family structure overall. Some described that their children had a unique type of connection with family members. It was something that was hard to explain according to participants:

Very, very, very different I think even...the depth of it. They don't understand their depth of love for our boys versus the other grandkids. I think that it even surprises and shocks them a little bit. They have even said, 'I don't know, there is just something about those boys; a deeper love than with other grandkids....

This is a finding that was found to be true in the research conducted by Meezan and Rauch. Meezan and Rauch (2005) argued that there are no differences in the cognitive abilities, behavior, or emotional development of children that were raised by same-sex parents versus heterosexual parents. However, it was also argued that in some cases there are differences. Differences that were found tended to favor children raised in lesbian headed families and that preschool children of lesbian mothers tend to be less aggressive than those raised by heterosexual mothers (Meezan and Rauch 2005:103).

In regard to social support, most couples said that they turned to co-workers and friends. Some indicated they turned to family members such as aunts, sisters, and parents for social support. In addition, most couples included both heterosexual and same-sex parents in

their social support circle. It was important for participants to find others that were going through the same life “phase” as them or have gone through that same “phase” of raising children. It was also made clear by some couples that their friends were limited because there were not very many other same-sex parents with children who went through the process of raising a child. Couples felt a sense of isolation in regard to having same-sex peers that could identify with facing the challenges of raising children as a same-sex couple.

One couple described how they felt isolated:

The dynamics are different because when you are heterosexual and you're pregnant, somebody else has been there. When you're gay and you're pregnant, nobody else has been there. So we were the first in this community that had a child. So when we went to pride, like I said, I was very social in my 20's so I knew like every person in the tri-county area. When we went to pride and everyone was like that's so cool and we were the first ones in our age group to have a child and we had no one to turn to. So the dynamics of our relationship are really interesting because I helped make him, but I didn't know anything about him. He was growing in her and I didn't have that support. With a father your like that's mine, he's growing in there for me and it's like I helped him get in there but I don't know anything. You know, and then when she was pregnant even though we went through it when I was pregnant, even though we had been through it before, she had never been on that side so she experienced that same separation because she was like your growing and your loving and you're doing all of the stuff and here I am I feel separated from you. So, there is no support in that way.

On the contrary, there were some that indicated that relationships with some family members became strained. Some grandparents and family members did not agree with their family. Religious perspectives got in the way of some families becoming close, some participants thought. Other couples said that family members were distant not because of their sexuality, but because some family members were distant in general. Family members in this sense were more distant with all of the children in the family. Also, some indicated that health problems and having to work also got in the way in regard to grandparents being close with grandchildren.

### *Creating Their Own Family*

Most couples specified that they met through mutual friends, whereas one couple met online. The couples had been together for a total of between four and seventeen and a half years. A few of the couples said that they had their own wedding and or commitment ceremony in order to signify their commitment to each other. Some couples commented that the progression of their relationship was very quick and they tended to laugh at themselves by using “lesbian jokes” to describe the progression of their relationship. Couples also shared thoughts in relation to what priorities they had to sort through before having a family. For example, one participant shared that they had to choose between continuing with education and having a family. The medical procedure needed to become pregnant through In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) was very expensive and they chose to put continuing education on hold so that they could start a family. One couple said:

I think about going back to school but I just don't know how I would pay for it and now with her, you know, it's like I mean the money and we had to create her. I could have finished school, you know what I mean, so it's something to where I have priorities I guess.

### *The Process of Having a Child*

Most couples used in vitro fertilization as an assisted reproductive technology (ART) to begin their family. The use of assisted reproductive technology among same-sex parents was a finding that was found to be true in the research of both Patterson and Riskind and Mallon. Patterson and Riskind (2010) argued that same-sex parents considered a variety of routes to becoming parents. One of the routes Patterson and Riskind discussed was the notion of donor insemination, “Women have become parents through donor insemination (DI) with sperm from known and unknown donors” (2010:332). They also added that adoption was another popular route in which parents became parents. Mallon added that artificial or donor

insemination was used among some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as a way to become parents (2008:280). To start the process, LGBTQ individuals had to obtain sperm from a male friend or anonymously through a sperm bank. Mallon also argued that such a route could be, “a cost-effective alternative to adoption” (2008:281). One couple chose to adopt a child in an effort to begin a family. Nearly all couples debated whether or not they would birth or adopt children. For those that decided to birth, the next decision was to decide who was going to carry the child. This decision went in a few directions for couples. Some chose not to carry because of their occupation or because they did not have the proper insurance coverage. Others decided that each partner would carry a child. For those who considered adoption, fear and experiences with their own mother’s child bearing influenced their decision to adopt. Couples indicated that it did not matter whether or not they had a girl or a boy, but a large majority of the couples did have boys. There were two couples that had a girl. Children ranged from six months to twelve years old, with most being between one and three years old. Families have been together with children from six months to ten years with most being together with children for two to three years.

### *Raising Children*

In regard to raising their own children, there were a number of thoughts that couples took into consideration from their own individual families or family of origin. One of the most frequently mentioned thoughts was the idea of spending time together as a family and or eating together as a family. Some felt that they did not have the time eating together as a family when they were growing up, and thus it was something that they wanted to share and experience with their children. Others did have the experience of eating together as a family when growing up and so in this sense, it was something that they enjoyed and wanted to

continue with their own children. Acceptance from family members was also another important thought that couples shared. They wanted their family to accept and love the family that they were going to create. Religious beliefs were also another frequently mentioned thought. Some debated how they wanted to orient their children to religion. In some cases, each parent grew up with varying religious backgrounds. On the other hand, some couples had similar religious perspectives, and in other couples, there was one partner who was religious and one that was not. For those who thought about religion, most couples tended to steer their children toward a perspective that emphasized doing what was right over the idea that they needed to do something because God required them to or else they would go to Hell. There were a few couples that wanted to steer their children toward a specific religious philosophy and or religious way of life.

In addition, there were several other thoughts that couples mentioned that were not as common throughout all of the interviews. Some argued that it was important to have children that are biologically related from the same sperm donor. The balance between having “fun” and having “age-appropriate” responsibility was also debated among some couples as well. Some other thoughts included parents wanting to play an active role in their children’s lives and teaching children about exposure to other peoples’ struggles and or experiences. They wanted their children to be aware of struggles that other people face and be sensitive to that in their interactions with others and the world around them.

There were also some thoughts shared about parent dynamics within a same-sex family. Couples indicated that there were different dynamics between same-sex parents than with a heterosexual couple. For example, there was a separation that was felt when one partner carried and one did not. This was a theme that has been found to also be true in

research by Booker and Dodd (2008). Booker and Dodd discussed how parents go from a two-person family to a three-person family, and how those change brought differences in parent dynamics, “When one mother is doing the bulk of the nurturing (perhaps staying at home or breastfeeding), the other parent may feel left out” (2008:191). It was further explained that there was a significant amount of support for heterosexual parents, but not as much for same-sex parents. Specifically, participants indicated that there were not nearly as many same-sex couples with children as there are heterosexual couples with children, and thus at times they can feel isolated.

### *Thoughts from Society*

In regard to thoughts from their experience in society, couples had a number of thoughts that they took into consideration when thinking about having children. Where to live was a theme that was the most common among couples. Some questioned whether or not living in a community that was a “bubble” would be realistic. When using the term “bubble” participants meant communities where there is open acceptance of those who are LGBTQ. In these “bubble” communities, most people in the community get along. Living in one of these communities can be compared to a reprieve from negativity of the world around them. Participants questioned if living in a “bubble” community would be beneficial for their children to grow up in,

Do we live in a bubble where everybody likes everybody and there are other same-sex couples raising kids? Or, do we live somewhere where we might be the token gay couple, family, and he might not see other families that look like him? You know because there are certain like things that we want in a community. But you’re not really sure how people are going to respond.

There was no guarantee on how others would respond to same-sex couples in a community. Some communities were very accepting while others were not accepting. Such a finding is

also found to be true in the research done by Juel, who discussed how, “The same-sex couple is perhaps perceived as the most threatening non-traditional family arrangement” (1993:318). He further added that there are a number of factors that could have influenced why some see LGBTQ couples as a threat to society, such as religious or cultural factors. On the other hand, same-sex couples are continuously gaining acceptance from society. Patterson and Riskind (2010) discussed how same-sex couples are continuously gaining rights and acceptance from society. They argued that with changed attitudes have come new policies and laws, which benefit those families that are non-heterosexual (Patterson and Riskind 2010:328). Thus, same-sex couples could be rejected or accepted by a community in which they lived. That was an obstacle that they faced when thinking about having children, and where those children should be raised. Couples faced the internal struggle of keeping children in a safe “bubble” like environment and exposing children to diversity. In respect to living environment, some discussed the idea of sacrificing living space for social culture. For example, participants mentioned living in a smaller home in order to live in a good neighborhood, etc. School districts were also discussed in the sense that participants questioned which school districts are deemed as “gay friendly.”

Additionally, in respect to raising their own children, couples indicated that their overall goal was to raise their children in the best possible environment. They wanted to expose their child (ren) to the best possible opportunities and raise them to the best of their ability as parents. Many also argued that they wanted to raise their children better than what their own parents did for them, or simply parent better overall. Couples indicated that they did not let the fear of rejection hinder their chance to create their own family. Creating a family was something that was very deliberate, and it took an abundance of hard work to

create the family that they had. For example, couples argued that with heterosexual couples, parents could have that “accidental” pregnancy without much thought. Surprise pregnancies happen and then society does not think anything of it. On the other hand, same-sex couples argued that they had to fight for their right to have a child. It was a very deliberate process. There were no surprises. It is a process that was planned and executed after much discussion and reflection.

Participants were asked about their sexual orientation in reference to their parenting style. Most couples indicated that their sexuality influenced them in being more open-minded as a parent. Being open-minded as a parent meant being open to whatever sexual orientation their child wants to adopt. Others indicated that being open-minded was important because they saw themselves as a minority group. Another important theme was the notion of “societal strikes.” Couples indicated that because their children had parents that were LGBTQ, they already had that stigma associated with them. They did not want their children to have more “societal strikes” than necessary. This finding is also found to be true in the research of Meezan and Rauch. Meezan and Rauch (2005) discussed how parents were concerned that their children were going to be teased. They argued that gay and lesbian parents do worry about their children being teased and children will try to control information about their parents by hiding it in order to avoid teasing (Meezan and Rauch 2005:103). Thus, they did everything in their power to ensure that they minimized those strikes. Some examples of other strikes include being a member of a racial minority group or being in a lower-class family.

Couples often sought out male relationships for their children as well. For couples that had males, they sought out positive male relationships that served the purpose of the

child(ren) having a good male role model. Male role models could be male doctors, dentists, family, and friends. Male role models provided support to male children by being available for questions about growing up as male, such as questions about bathroom habits, etc. Some couples felt that they were responsible for providing their male children with masculine experiences. Such a finding is also found to be true in the research done by Folger. Folger argued that, “When the issue of gender and role models is brought up, the questions and concerns are commonly about the lack of ‘male role models’ in childhood environment” (2008:136). Folger found that the topic of gender and role models was important to couples, in that they wanted to ensure that their children had adequate exposure to “male role models” (136). In addition, some couples said that they watched sports and or participated in other masculine activities in addition to providing them with male role models. However, some argued that they were frustrated with the notion of pink for females and blue for males in respect to purchasing toys, clothes, etc.

I really do want to get him, he loves when I sweep the floor, I want to get him his own little set of cleaning stuff but of course, you have to go to the girls toys. Which technically, I don't have a problem with but it drives me nuts that they don't make a male version of it and train boys to do those things too....

The participant also explains how she was given a hand-me-down car seat that was purple and her family continued to make comments about the car seat and its color.

#### *Thoughts About the Media*

In light of discussing child rearing, there were a number of thoughts that couples shared in regard to the media and their interpretation of the media. Most couples argued that the media was a difficult hurdle to challenge as a parent. Most admitted that they talked about the media more than heterosexual parents. Some of those that did say they discussed the media more argued that they discuss it simply because it affects them more than other

people. On the other hand, there were some that argued that they talk about negative media portrayals just as much as heterosexual couples, and then some that argued they don't talk about it as much as heterosexual couples. For those who said that they did not talk about it as often, there were a few thoughts that participants shared. One thought was that they wanted to appear as "normal" as possible and so they chose not to discuss media much with other people. Also, another thought that came up was that they did not want to know their friends and or peers true thoughts about the subject. For instance, being friends with a co-worker, interacting with them outside of work, and then learning that they do not support same-sex families would change their relationship.

However, some couples did mention that they had discussions with their children about media portrayals of the LGBTQ community and would still do so if they were a straight couple. Many argued that in the event of discussing negative media portrayals of the LGBTQ community with their children, there were a few thoughts that they would mention. Some argued that they were dreading having this type of conversation with their children and that they are avoiding the conversation as long as possible. Many said this as a result of fear or uncertainty about what they actually would say or how their child would react. Another one of the most prevalent ideas that couples discussed was talking to their children about the notion of family. They would explain that there are many different types of families and people in society, and that those different types are okay. In addition, parents said they would teach their children about tolerance and acceptance, as well as teach them about being self-confident with who they are and what they believe in. It was important for children to be prepared to defend themselves and be able to answer questions should they arise. Lastly, parents discussed the idea of normalizing gay behaviors so that such behaviors were

something that eventually would be normal to them. Hence, seeing a same-sex couple or family would not be something “out of the ordinary” to them.

A similar conversation, couples argued, would be had in regard to the same-sex marriage discussion that is taking place in society. To start such a conversation, parents urged that it was very important that they were very honest and up front with their children, as well as that they staged the conversation in an age-appropriate way. Some used children’s family books that have same-sex couples in them. They also claimed that they would have the discussion that society is slow to change and that change will come. They then supported this idea and explained how the same-sex marriage debate can be compared to the debates in United States history about interracial marriage, race, and women’s rights. They urged that things would get better with time. In the case of same-sex marriage, they urged their children to believe in something not because of someone else’s opinion, but because it is something that is right for you. In addition, some couples argued that if same-sex marriage were not legalized, they would be forced to move somewhere where the rights of their family were protected. They argued that they did not want to move but would if they had to. One participant argued,

The bottom line is as much as I don’t want to move away from our families, that was a big reason why we moved back because our families are here but, if we can’t be protected in the state then we are just going to have to move because it’s ridiculous to stay somewhere where there are so many other places that will protect our family.

Such a finding was found to be true in the research of both Juel and Flynn (2008). Juel argued that there were a series of privileges that same-sex couples were denied because their relationship was not protected under the law in the same way that married, heterosexual couples were protected. Juel argued that there were a plethora of privileges that are automatically available to those couples that are married and denied to same-sex couples.

Some of these included hospital and jail visitation, the ability to file joint tax returns, social security benefits, etc. (Juel 1993:321).

Additionally, Flynn discussed some of the other privileges that same-sex couples were denied because they were not legally recognized, specifically, in regard to illness and end of life legalities, “Many hospitals only allow patients to have visitors or people speaking on behalf of the patient who are ‘next of kin’. This term usually only includes biological ties and can refer to those who are tied together by legal marriage, thus excluding same-sex domestic partners” (2008:348). Flynn then discussed the notion of advanced directives and health care proxies, which must be sought out by the same-sex couple if the other partner is to have involvement in the other partner’s health matters and end of life planning.

Finally, it was stressed that, if same-sex marriage was not legalized, they would talk to their children about how a marriage certificate is a piece of paper. It does not change their love as a family. It does not change who they are as a family. One participant discussed the conversation that they would hypothetically have with their child if the topic of same-sex marriage came up:

I think that I would encourage them, I mean if it lasts long enough [same-sex marriage ban] for them to understand, you know. That is very unfortunate that people feel like that [about same-sex marriage] but that doesn’t change who we are as a family. That doesn’t change our structure, our love. It’s a piece of paper. I mean that is always what it has been to us, just a piece of paper...

Other thoughts were shared as well. There were some couples that believed that the media does not portray LGBTQ people in a negative way. In the case of television, there were a plethora of modern television sitcoms that brought same-sex families and their experiences to the public eye. In addition, it was argued by some that the media has benefited the LGBTQ community because news networks and other forms of media have been bringing the same-sex marriage debate to the public eye. People in society have become

more educated on the experiences and needs of the LGBTQ community, and thus, it has brought more acceptance and awareness. Couples shared that in regard to being classified in the media, they did not want to be categorized or “lumped” into a category. Most preferred the term “gay” to the term “lesbian” or “LGBTQ.” The term “gay” was used as a universal term for describing both the gay and lesbian population. Thus, same-sex couples have even benefitted from the media and prefer a universal term to refer to gay and lesbian individuals.

### *Other Thoughts*

Throughout the interview, participants shared other thoughts about their experience with being a same-sex parent in today’s society. Couples shared experiences regarding legal struggles that they faced as same-sex parents. Most couples talked about not being able to adopt the child that the other parent carried. For example, if one partner carried and the other did not, couples talked about the partner who did not carry being able to adopt the other child. Some moved to be able to adopt and some went through the process to gain legal guardianship. Not being able to adopt brought about fear among parents because if the other parent cannot adopt the child legally, then if something were to happen to the other parent, other family members would have legal rights over that child. In addition, some couples talked about the topic of power of attorney. If something were to happen to one of the partners, other family members would have the legal right to make end of life decisions. Thus, some couples went through the process to file legal paperwork to declare power of attorney.

Moreover, some couples discussed not being able to put their partner on their health insurance plan because they were not legally married. In regard to deciding who will carry a child, it was mostly determined by who had adequate health insurance coverage. One couple

indicated that their place of employment did offer same-sex partner benefits but, it was heavily taxed and thus unaffordable:

She could go on my health benefits because where I work, they give same-sex partner benefits but the state of [state1], taxes it so highly that it is unaffordable. It's like um, I would have to pay three or six hundred dollars a month in taxes just to have her on my health insurance even though I would have to pay fifty more dollars a month for her to be on my health insurance. But if we were married here, it would be free, no problem, right. So there are a lot of little ones [challenges] that people just don't understand. The financial burden....

This is a finding that was also found to be true in the research conducted by Juel (1993) and in the research conducted by Flynn (2008). Juel found that health insurance benefits for same-sex couples, if available, were unaffordable. Same-sex couples were found to pay much more than heterosexual couples, "A married employee whose partner is covered under an employer's health insurance plan essentially is paid more than a similarly situated gay or lesbian employee whose partner is not covered by the same employer's health insurance plan on grounds that he or she is not legally that employee's spouse" (Juel 1993:320). Such a quote demonstrates some of the disparity between heterosexual and same-sex couples in regard to employment benefits. Flynn found that, "Many insurance companies do not provide domestic partner coverage or benefits and fail to provide reimbursement for procedures and treatment which are specifically pertinent to the LGBT community" (2008:335). Couples then were required to pay more for their health needs than heterosexual couples. These are some of the many legal struggles that couples shared. Hence, there are a plethora of legal struggles that same-sex parents face that impact their lives and their children's lives.

Additionally, there were other thoughts that participants shared during interviews. Some argued that the only difference between heterosexual couples and same-sex couples is their orientation. Same-sex parents still have the same values, goals, and fears for their children. Couples also felt that they had to push themselves more than heterosexual couples. There was pressure felt to be better than how the media portrayed them and they felt like they

had to prove themselves worthy as same-sex parents. One couple discussed the notion of society focusing heavily on gender, race, and income distinctions rather than focusing on what is really important, love and relationships. Society's fascination with being able to categorize people by socially constructed distinctions was something that was frustrating to some.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

## DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to better understand the experiences of same-sex couples that were raising children under the age of eighteen. More specifically, this study examined the extent to which same-sex couples with children adopt or reflect the norms and behaviors of what is commonly referred to as the “traditional” or “nuclear” family. In my research, I found that a number of similarities in regards to parenting and family behaviors of same-sex couples and parenting and family behaviors typically associated with a family that is headed by heterosexual parents. However, there were also a number of findings that demonstrated how the experience of same-sex parent headed families are unique and describes the way in which those experiences influence parenting and family behaviors.

### *Family Background*

Exposure to “traditional” and “non-traditional” family behaviors can have an impact on the development of each couple’s own conceptualization of parenting and family behaviors, and how that conceptualization is acted upon through interactions with children, family members, and others. One can apply Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical approach through Allan (2013) to the conceptualization of parenting and family behaviors among same-sex couples with children. In essence, social interactions, both large and small scale, are analyzed through the use of the analogy of the stage, as if it were a theatrical performance (Allan 2013). People are seen as performers who are concerned with how they present themselves to an audience. People in social interactions change or manipulate social cues around them in an effort to control how they communicate their “self” to others (Allan 2013:61). In turn, the audience, or society internalizes such a performance or presentation of self and makes judgments based on how the actor, or person in society, performs or carries

him or herself. Allan (2013) refers to Goffman's phenomenon as impression management, which is applicable to same-sex parents. Growing up, children watch and internalize the behaviors of their parents, which can be interpreted through dramaturgy as a performance. As children are watching such a performance they make decisions and judgments about their parents "character," as one would when watching a theatrical performance. Children grow up with an internalized perspective of their parent's behaviors and this, in turn, is carried throughout adulthood. They can then make their own decisions about norms and values based on their parent's performance. This is also a process that occurs not only in same-sex families, but also in other family forms, including traditional heterosexual couple families and even in other areas of society. Norms and values are rejected and or accepted based on performances from parents and the performances of others around them.

In addition, each person has a different performance or role for various social situations. For example, same-sex parents would give a performance that could be different when they are at work with co-workers, than a performance with their own children. Peers or coworkers can also choose to accept or reject the performance of others. They can choose to reject or accept norms and values that others present in their performances. When couples were asked if they felt their parents reflected the "traditional" conception of the family, they reflected on the performances of their parents over the course of their lifetime. In their own family, same-sex couples reflect on the performance of their parents and then how as parents themselves, they adjust their own behaviors or performance for their own children. Simply, parents influence children; children learn those ideas which are then solidified as an adult, which then are reinforced when those adults have children. This cycle then continues with their own children making judgments on their performance as same-sex parents. As family

forms change and adapt to the society around them, and vice versa, there will be new norms and values created, and norms and values that are molded to fit the needs of their family.

The family as we know it today is in a state of transition from the notion of one family form to a social world with many different family forms. This is also true in regard to the values and norms that families accept or reject. With the development of different family forms will come the molding and reshaping of previous norms and values to create a continuum of norms rather than a stringent set of norms and values.

Norma Williams (2002) also had a discussion of role taking and making in her article, "Taking the Roles of Multiple Others". The women who participated in Williams's study took roles that were more "traditional" and shaped them to fit their lives and families. In the case of same-sex parents, the notion of role making and role taking can be applied as well. Same-sex parents try to change or reshape more traditional gender roles within the context of new social norms. They try to reshape the traditional gender roles, but it isn't always possible as there may be societal constraints, such as the lack of government support or inconsistency within the enforcement of laws that prevent or impede same-sex parents' ability to reshape their role within their family and within the wider community. For example, same-sex couples may take the role of mother or father and reshape it into the context of their same-sex family. Perhaps one could think of a female same-sex headed family reshaping the role of a father to fit their family with two mothers instead of one. There could be varying degrees to which a female partner may fit the role of a father or other masculine role model. One partner may take the role of the mother and shape and/or re-invent that role in order to fit their family's needs and lifestyle, or a partner could create a new role that is beneficial or is

important to their family. In turn, this can effect which roles parents teach to their children, which are then passed down.

For each family, the extent that they follow certain roles can vary. Needs for certain family roles vary with each individual family. One family may feel that they do not need to replicate a certain role fully in order for their family to be fully functional, while other families may feel differently. Within each family form, there are certain roles that are needed and even within each family form, there can be variation to the extent that they recreate the needed roles. Each family form can be interpreted as its own continuum within a larger continuum of families.

Moreover, same-sex parents can take the behaviors and norms from their parent's performance and mold them to fit their family. This research sought to understand the extent to which same-sex families reflect the norms and behaviors of the "traditional" conceptions of family, but when examining norms and behaviors and how they are continuously molded and shaped across different family structures, is it accurate to say that there are norms that are clearly followed by nuclear or "traditional" families and norms that are followed by "non-traditional" families? In my research I found that it is not accurate to make such a statement. Rather, family norms and behaviors are absorbed by children through parents and are continuously adapted with growing up. As adults, parents mold and shape the norms and behaviors from their parents to best fit their lifestyle and create their own conceptualization of parenting and family behaviors. Such behaviors are continuously molded and reshaped across time and space through different family structures.

As parents perform in their role, there are a variety of ideas that are not spoken. These could include values, beliefs, and attitudes that are important to them. Among couples

interviewed, there were a number of values that they identified as most important to themselves and their family. These values were similar regardless of whether or not couples had a “traditional” or “non-traditional” family exposure. As Juel (1993) would argue, non-traditional families can craft and maintain the same values that “traditional” families would value. The presence of similar values in both families headed by heterosexual parents and families headed by same-sex parents demonstrates that such values are a universal phenomenon across various family structures. They are not values present in heterosexual or nuclear families only. Families can take on various forms, and understanding how parenting and family values are molded and reshaped to fit the needs of diverse family structures is important in understanding the unique experiences of same-sex headed families.

#### *Creating a Family*

Responses from participant interviews indicate that there are a number of factors that influence a couple’s family planning. One couple indicated that due to one of the partner’s mother’s experience with childbirth, they did not want to put themselves at risk and so they decided against IVF and chose adoption instead:

My mom got really sick during my birth and almost died. So I was really, first of all, I was really not wanting to get pregnant and I was pretty clear that I also did not want her to get pregnant. I have all of these fears about, you could die and here I would be with a newborn. So we knew right away, once we decided to have children that we were going to go through adoption.

This participant indicated that there were fears that inspired them to adopt rather than carry their own child. The experience that the participant’s mother had with childbirth influenced how the child perceived childbirth, and thus impacted the way that child began their own family. Past experiences with birth and children that their own parents encountered had a significant influence on the family planning process for the couples. Some couples also argued that one or both of the partner’s occupation had an influence on family planning

decisions, “She, with her work and stuff it would be really hard. Um, she used to want to carry and then she kind of went away from that. She’s back and forth. I was all about it. I enjoyed being pregnant.” This particular participant enjoyed being pregnant, which influences their own interpretation of how they perceive their own family and the process of beginning a family. This participant’s interpretation will then influence the way in which their child is taught about family formation. One partner’s occupation can also affect family planning processes. For example, if one or both partners have an occupation where it would be dangerous to be carrying a child or carrying a child would have a severe negative effect on job performance, then that may influence parents to choose adoption or another method over a method such as IVF. Lastly, cost could have an impact on family planning decisions for same-sex couples. AI is generally significantly less expensive, depending on how many inseminations are needed to conceive, than adopting a child (Mallon 2008).

Mallon (2008) discussed some of the challenges that LGBT people face when considering becoming a parent. Some question their own ability to be a parent because they are gay. Mallon argued that could be attributed to the homophobia that same-sex parents are exposed to over the course of their lifetime (278). Exposure to such homophobia over a period of time can cause same-sex parents to reconsider their own parenting abilities. These abilities later influence how their children perceive childrearing and how they interpret socialization. The cycle of socialization then continues to their children, and later, to their children’s children. In addition, Mallon argued that same-sex parents are often influenced by their experiences of their own parents (279). For example, some same-sex parent’s desire to become a parent stemmed from their own positive experiences within their own family or vice versa. This can be reflected onto their own children and later influence those children’s

experience with parenting. These are only some of the factors that same-sex parents are exposed to in their decision to become parents.

Being able to understand some of the factors that influence a couple's family planning methods can help us understand other aspects of family and parenting behaviors. Hence, the process by which couples use to create a family is not always their first choice or ideal choice. There are often times other factors have a role in family planning processes. Factors could be physical, psychological, or even social, just to mention a few. In regard to parenting outcomes, such factors influence how a family is created, which in turn effects how same-sex parents enact on the values and or ideals that they wanted to instill in their own family. For example, a same-sex family with children that is not accepted by the parent's family of origin may socialize their children in a way that is different than that of a same-sex headed family with children where the families of origin openly accept them and are involved in family processes and parenting behaviors. This then influenced how the children are socialized and how those children will later interpret how families function. When examining same-sex families with children, we must be able to understand the origin of the family they have created in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how same-sex family behaviors and socialization function over time and how same-sex headed family members become active members of the society around them.

Herbert Blumer's (1958) theoretical ideas of the creation and development of the self can be applied to the socialization process within families. In the development of self, there are stages that humans tend to follow. Blumer's student, George H. Mead is discussed in Allan (2013), originally conceptualized these stages. As young children we are taking in verbal and non-verbal cues from our parents, and these cues are enacted on in what Mead

would call the “play stage” (Allan 2013:44). During the play stage we take the role or assume the perspective of significant others. Significant others are defined as, “those upon whom we depend for emotional and often material support” (Allan 2013:44). Significant others could be parents, siblings, other family members, teachers, friends, etc. During the play stage, children have to play the role of someone significant in their lives in order to see themselves (Allan 2013). When children are young, they do not have the ability to think abstractly, so they have to act out the role in order to understand the perspective. They have to get out of themselves and their role and assume the role of a significant other to understand themselves, their position relative to their significant others and the world around them.

In regard to same-sex couples, children of same-sex couples may have or will go through the play stage of development, just as any other child would in other family forms. As they are taking in cues from their parents and other significant people in their lives, they play out those roles of those who are significant in their lives in order to gain an understanding of themselves and their role in relation to the significant other. The way in which a family is formed can impact how the children see themselves and how they understand the dynamics of their family and the world around them. As argued previously, such processes occur in all children, regardless of what type of family they are raised in. In regard to same-sex couples being similar, families that are created through same-sex parents may feel slightly different about certain norms and values, given their experiences with their own upbringing. That can be reflected in their behaviors, which are later absorbed by the children through the play stage, and later the children will make their own decision on their view of those norms and values their parents carried. In turn, they will pick and choose which

norms and values they find important and which they would like to alter to fit their family or even get rid of altogether.

The next stage in the development of the self is what Mead would call the “game stage.” During this stage in the development of the self, a child can “take the perspective of several others and can take into account the rules (sets of responses that different attitudes bring out) of society” (Allan 2013:44). In the game stage, a child can take on the roles of several people at once, but they all remain individuals. In the game stage, children can take on roles with several others and are concerned about the social rules that go along with the roles. With children of same-sex couples, they have or will go through a game stage of development of the self, which also can be influenced by how a family is created. For example, a child of a same-sex headed family may role-play with other children and they may pretend to be a family raising children. How that child portrays and understands the role of their parent(s) in a family is influenced by their interactions with the other children who may not have same-sex parents.

Their portrayal of their own parent is influenced by the family behaviors of their own family and their own parent’s parenting behaviors. This portrayal is then compared to their interpretation of the general rules of society regarding that role they are role taking. Children’s own understanding and observation of their own family plus their general understanding of the rules of the society and how families are supposed to work is solidified when they role play with their peers. It is in this stage that values and norms are solidified and then reflected back in their own interactions with their peers and others around them. Values and norms that are solidified in the play stage can then be similar to other family

forms. These similarities then aid in the development of norms and values that are more generalized, shared, abstract and applicable to families of all forms.

The last stage of the development of the self is what Mead would call the “generalized other” (Allan 2013:44). The generalized other refers to the general attitude or perspective of a community. With the notion of the generalized other, an individual applies those attitudes or perspectives toward themselves. The community has control over how individual members of a society conduct themselves. At this stage, children are able to apply such attitudes toward themselves and others. In regard to same-sex families with children, as their parents socialize them, they develop an understanding of the world around them and in particular, they develop an understanding of their own family workings, plus a general understanding of how families function generally. They are able to distinguish the general perspective or attitude that a community has in comparison to their own personal interpretation of the world around them, in addition to the interpretations that their family has. It is at this stage that they can enforce or reject the norms and values that they are presented with from society and this is then reflected in interactions with peers. Peers then can make the decision to reject or accept the norms and values they get from others around them.

In regard to families, new family forms are created when values and norms are altered or changed in order to meet the needs or beliefs of a population. Same-sex families, as well as other family forms, may accept or agree with certain norms and values while rejecting other norms and values; hence, creating a new sub-culture within a larger, encompassing culture or in other words, with families, creating a new family form within the larger spectrum of family forms. One can interpret family forms as a continuum with varying

degrees of conformity to the heterosexual couple headed family that still has an influence in today's society.

### *Being Parents*

There are a number of thoughts that couples had as they were preparing to raise their children. One of the most important thoughts shared by couples was deciding where to live. Some were looking for areas to live with an abundance of diversity, racially and socially, so that their children would be exposed to various types of people. Some also placed importance on finding an area to live where there were other same-sex families that they could relate to and go to the same school with:

Actually, we have been having conversations about where to live. You know, do we live in a bubble where everybody likes everybody and there are other same-sex couples raising kids or do we live somewhere where we might be the token gay couple, family and he might not see other families that look like him? You know, because there are certain like things that we want in a community. But you're not really sure how people are going to respond.

Another couple discussed the importance on finding an area to live in:

We were together for a long time before we had children and so we talked about where we were going to live. We bought this house with the intention of this is where we would start a family because of the friendly neighborhood. It really limits us in itself in some ways because we love [city2], but we would like to live in a larger home but we are sacrificing a social culture for space. And those are the things; we kind of involved ourselves in a certain neighborhood. Those are definitely things that were factored in.

In these quotes, couples talked about having to sacrifice more living space for a smaller living space in order to live in a culture that is more accepting of same-sex families. Where a couple decides to raise their family can affect how that family interacts with the society around them, and in turn affect the socialization process of the children in the household. Those living in a culture that is more liberal will socialize their children in a way that will be representative of that in comparison to those who live in a culture that is conservative or not

same-sex family friendly. Nevertheless, deciding where to start their families was an important thought to consider before creating their families.

Some couples also discussed the thought of having a positive male role model for their children to look up to in the absence of a male figure in the household. Female couples providing their male children with a male role model do so not only for the male child to have someone to relate to, but it could also be due to the socialization of gender norms that such couples are subjected to as young children. As young children, we are often taught through the media, peers, and, at times, family that girls are to do feminine things while boys are to engage in activities that are masculine. If a girl or boy engages in an activity that is deemed for the opposite gender, then we are looked down upon. Thus, we are socialized as children that boys that engage in girl activities are “weak,” and so that belief is something that is ingrained within us throughout our whole lives, whether we are conscious of it or not. As a female same-sex couple, this thought could still be ingrained in their minds when considering raising male children. This thought could later influence how their own children view gender socialization, which will impact how they participate in gender socialization as an adult and ultimately impact how their own children perceive and act upon gender socialization.

Anthony Giddens (2000) uses the term “practical consciousness” to describe such a phenomenon. Practical consciousness refers to “The knowledge that we have about how to exist and behave socially” (Allan 2013:319). This knowledge that we have is not something that we can explain. Social situations and behaviors are based on intuition and we know how to behave but we can’t rationalize why we are to behave that way. In regard to gender socialization, we are taught about gendered behaviors at a very young age and throughout our

lives we have this knowledge as a part of our practical consciousness. It is knowledge that is used to guide us in social behaviors and interactions with others. This knowledge also plays a significant role in the formation of norms and values by influencing the choices we make in the process of creating such values and norms that are more generalized, shared, and abstract among all families, regardless of form. In the case of same-sex couples, this gendered knowledge is a part of practical consciousness and when raising a male child or children, female couples may feel obligated to provide their son with a male role model in order for them to achieve proper gender socialization according to the common societal belief that male children need a male role model. Same-sex couples cannot explain why they might feel that way because it is a part of their practical consciousness and it influenced the process of creating norms and values for their families, which occurs in all families, regardless of form. This practical consciousness could then be passed along to their children through socialization, which will impact their own children's practical consciousness.

As mentioned previously, there are a number of legal and societal challenges that same-sex couples face today (e.g.s. Smith 2010; Juel 1993; Mallon 2008). Some of these challenges include challenges that they face within their child's school. Some argued that they were fearful of how their child's school would respond to their family form. In socialization processes, a child's school is influential in molding and shaping their pupils in regard to different family forms, and if a school portrays same-sex families in a positive light, the child will most likely hold a positive portrayal of same-sex families. If the school portrays same-sex families in a negative way, then that can be passed onto children and later to their peers and family through social interaction. How the child is socialized to different family forms can influence how they interact with their own families and how they perceive

family forms as an adult. Fedewa and Clark (2009) argue that same-sex parents often fear negative consequences for both themselves and their child and were not sure how their child's teacher would react (316).

Fedewa and Clark also argue that same-sex families sometimes face school environments that are not sensitive to family diversity. School curricula are heavily based on the notion of the nuclear family and are a challenge for same-sex parents today (Fedewa and Clark 2009). One couple decided to approach such a challenge by making sure that both partners had the same last name. That way, there would be no challenges getting a child out of school because the two parents had different last names. As children, we are socialized to the idea that children should have a mother and a father, married and with the same last name, and this is reflected throughout the institutions of society, such as education. Through education, we see this reflected in the curriculum and it is something that is taught to children. When a same-sex couple enrolls their child at a school, they are unaware as to how their family will be perceived since they are not the nuclear, heterosexual family. Having the same last name gives same-sex couples more protection against rejection from their children's school and is less likely to be questioned versus being a same-sex couple with different last names. Thus, the notion of the nuclear family still lurks within modern society despite changes in family structure types.

Lastly, there was a plethora of thoughts that couples shared that they hoped to teach their own children about life. One of the major thoughts that couples wanted to instill was the idea of diversity, tolerance, and acceptance. Most couples interviewed wanted to teach their children about diversity and being aware that there are many types of people and families in the world that we live in. They wanted to teach their children to tolerate differences in others

and to get to know someone before making judgments. It was also important that their children were accepting of others. Some also wanted to make sure that their children were aware of the media and question those who enforce the culture of the media. Couples wanted their children to be true to themselves even if that means going against the popular culture:

The basic general, you know, you don't need to judge people based on the ways that they might be different. Also, something about what matters. Like just appreciating, I don't know, love and appreciating each other, just appreciating others for who they are. Go through life aware, just question ways in which people enforce the culture of media like someone is less than or someone is weird. It is important to be true to yourself. Even if it means breaking some kind of rules. It takes courage but it is worth it if you can be who you really are and not have to pretend to be someone that you are not.

The thoughts that this participant shared could be found in other family forms as well. These are thoughts that were found in many of the interviews with participants. In regard to this research, same-sex couples with children possess values and norms that can be found in other family structures as well. The data demonstrated that there is an emergence of more generalized, shared, and abstract norms and values that all families can share, regardless of their form. This reality is newly emerging and is in transition as families adapt to the surrounding society and the surrounding society adapts to changing family forms. These unique experiences need to be brought to the public eye so that society and the institutions in society can understand another way in which family, the core institution in a society, can function in a different way yet serve the same function or purpose.

### *Limitations*

This research does contribute to the body of literature that exists for same-sex parents and children; however, one must take into account a number of limitations prior to synthesizing results. To begin this research involved a very small sample size of seven couples. Such a sample size cannot be representative of the same-sex parent population as a

whole. The researcher cannot overgeneralize the results to be applicable to the entire same-sex parent population. It was very difficult to find a number of couples to participate in the interview process. A greater number of interviews would have provided more in-depth data. More interviews would aid in supporting the present findings of this research and would have provided more data to aid in arriving at additional findings. Cohen and Kivalanka (2011) were also limited to a small sample size in their research of the socialization of children in same-sex families. Moreover, the composition of the sample size is limited to female couples with children. The principal investigator was not able to collect data from male couples with children. Having additional data from male couples would have been interesting in regard to comparing and contrasting the experience of male same-sex couples to female same-sex couples. This research also did not collect data from heterosexual couples with children. Collecting data from both same-sex and heterosexual couples would have provided a more comprehensive look at same-sex couples and heterosexual couples with children.

These limitations could be avoided in future research. Additionally, there could be more measures taken in future research to reach out to a wider population of LGBTQ parents. Perhaps that could be through a wider geographic area or reaching out to a variety of organizations that cater to the LGBTQ population. Doing so would also help create a greater diversity within the participant pool in regard to finding male, same-sex couples. Future research could also interview a number of heterosexual couples as well, in order to achieve a more rounded and thorough pool of interview data.

#### *Future Directions*

In regard to recommendations for future research, there are a number of directions one could take. It would be interesting to interview the same couples after a period of time to

see how their responses to the interview questions have changed with the recent legalization of same-sex marriage. It would be thought provoking to ask the same questions to same-sex parents of color and compare and contrast the responses to the data in this research. Black same-sex parents are not discussed extensively in the literature and with the intersectionality that they have, given their multiple layers of identity, it would be interesting to note how intersectionality affects their experience as same-sex parents. Nevertheless, further research needs to be done in order to substantiate these findings and to provide more insight into the family as an institution.

## Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Families are one of the most influential institutions in society. Over the past few decades, the structure of the “traditional” family has changed in response to our ever-changing society. In order to understand the significance of family, and same-sex families specifically, it is necessary for one to examine the nuclear family model, which has been used as a comparison for other families for many years. This family form served as the basis for some of the basic ideas related to families and the care of children even to this day in modern society. Without this concept, we would not have a basis of comparison to today’s family forms and ideals that contemporary society holds.

Liberal ideas in America have caused an increase in acceptance of same-sex families and those who are LGBTQ. Even though a great portion of Americans approve of gay marriage, gay and lesbian families are still typically seen as deviant by the standards of American society in comparison to the nuclear family model from the 1950s and 1960s. Some Americans still hold the traditional nuclear family form as the core of modern society. Because of this, many gay and lesbian parents are facing struggles as they are trying to live their lives as just an average family. This research sought to help scholars understand how same-sex couples cope with stigmatization in respect to raising their children, whether they are biological children or not. It also sought to bring about the experiences that same-sex parents had to the public eye and thus, educate others about same-sex families. Perhaps such education would help readers understand how same-sex families are similar to other families yet complex in their overall nature. Through participant interviews, there were a variety of findings that demonstrated how same-sex parents are similar to heterosexual parents in family behavior and parenting.

It was found through participant interviews that for most couples, family values were similar for both those that thought that their family followed a traditional family model and those who thought that their family did not fit into the traditional family model. Such a finding could indicate the level to which the traditional family model has permeated throughout society and through the family as an institution, specifically. Moreover, it was found that most couples in this research used In vitro fertilization (IVF) to create their families. There are a number of factors that couples shared in regard to how they came to the decision to use IVF or adopt. One of the most shared factors was related to family experiences with birth and raising children. Cost could also have an impact as adoption is found to be more expensive than IVF, depending on if it is private adoption versus public adoption. These were only a couple of the many factors that couples considered when creating their own families. Parents shared a number of thoughts related to their experience as a same-sex family raising children.

One of the most prevalent thoughts shared through participant interviews was related to determining where to live. Some other thoughts included female couples having a male role model for male children, and the concept of societal strikes and how it impacted parent's decisions related to family planning. Couples also shared their experiences related to their interactions with the wider society. Some shared challenges related to obtaining health insurance, child custody and estate planning, and interactions regarding the media. Lastly, participants shared a number of thoughts that they hoped to teach their children. Most of these thoughts were related to being aware of diversity, tolerating differences in others, and embracing differences in others. Finally, some shared that they want their children to be able to question those that are enforcing the rules in society. The data collected from participants

demonstrated how same-sex couples with children may follow traditional family patterns in some areas of their family behaviors, such as with family values and lessons for their children, while at the same time bringing to light the unique challenges that they face as a same-sex family today, such as with interactions with their children's school. These experiences support the notion that same-sex families are similar and distinct in comparison to more traditional heterosexual couples, and that there is an emergence of more generalized, shared, and abstract norms and values that all families can share, regardless of their family form. These norms and values are fluid and are changing with the changing family forms that are emerging.

From examining the traditional nuclear model of the family, we gained an understanding of where and how traditional family ideals developed. This, in combination with the contemporary family studies today, can provide us with an insight into the future of family. When examining same-sex couples specifically, scholars gain an insight into the beliefs that Americans have regarding same-sex couples and raising children. Additionally, scholars gain insight as to how same-sex couples meet such challenges in a world very different from that of their parents. Moreover, in the case of gay and lesbian parents, the way in which American society portrays same-sex parenting can greatly affect how children of gay or lesbian parents are socialized. This, in turn, can affect how these children grow up and function in society as an adult. Because LGBTQ individuals are gaining acceptance in American society, the number of gay or lesbian parents is also increasing. As these parents become more and more prevalent in American society, it is imperative that such families be studied so that scholars are able to gain a deeper understanding of the family and its

implications for the future of family studies. This can then point to change in society and identify alternative futures.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Would each of you describe to me the structure of your family when you were a child? For example, did you live with both of your parents? What were their occupations and levels of education? How many siblings did you have, and of what gender? Do your parents or any of your siblings identify as LGBT?
2. In terms of family dynamics, to what extent did your family reflect the dominant image of the father as breadwinner and the mother as homemaker?
3. What would you say were the dominant family values taught by your parents?
4. How did these dynamics affect the process of your coming out? Would you please describe that process?
5. How did your coming out affect your relationship with family members, both nuclear and extended?
6. How does your sexuality affect the quality of your family relationships today?
7. Let's shift now to discuss the two of you. How did you come to be a couple? For example, how did you meet? How long have you known each other? How long have you been together and how long have you lived together as a couple?
8. How many children do you have, and what are their genders and ages?
9. How did you and your children come together as a family, and how long have you lived as a family with your children?
10. Whether your children existed before you came together as a couple or did not arrive until after you were a couple, would you please share what thoughts about your family of origin occurred to you as you considered raising children as an LGBT couple?
11. What other thoughts reflected from your experience within society in general? What did you take into consideration?
12. How does your sexuality affect the quality of your relationships with your family of origin today? To what extent are they accepting of the family you have created? What is the quality of their relationships with your children, specifically as it may be influenced by your sexuality?
13. Let's shift once again to discuss how you are raising your own children. Are there ways in which you believe your sexuality influences your parenting? To what extent does being LGBT in today's oftentimes hostile environment enlighten you to issues, values, or rights that you might not otherwise see or think to discuss, if any?

14. Given the oftentimes negative media portrayals and news reporting about LGBT issues, do you think you discuss media portrayals and news reporting more than heterosexual parents?
15. What do you say to your children (or plan to say if your children are very young) about negative media portrayals and news reports of prejudice and discrimination against people who identify as LGBT?
16. Specifically, how do you handle the fact that gay marriage is still illegal in most states? What do you say to your children about society's response to their family form?
17. In raising your children, to whom do you turn for social support, besides each other? For example, are you a member of an LGBT organization? If you identify with an organized religion, have you found an accepting religious family?
18. What lessons has being LGBT taught you about life that you hope to teach your children?
19. Other than a couple of demographic questions, that is all of the questions that I have for you. Do you have any thoughts you would like to share that I have not covered?
20. May I ask your level of education?
21. May I ask your occupation?

## Appendix B: Email for Directors

Hello,

My name is Allison Jendry. I am a Master's student at Eastern Michigan University studying Sociology with a focus on families/ women and gender studies. I am currently working on my Master's thesis. I am researching same-sex parents and how they socialize their children about topics such as family, sexual orientation, relationships, etc. through the lens of the norms and values that surround such topics today. As a part of my research for my thesis I need to conduct one-on-one interviews with same-sex parents about their parenting styles. With this being said, I was wondering if your organization would be able and willing to help me circulate a flyer in your organization that would advertise the need for participants for my research. I would be more than happy to meet with you in person or talk to you over the telephone to discuss my research opportunity as well if you would like. My study is supervised by Dr. Denise Reiling, Professor of Sociology, Eastern Michigan University and she can be contacted at [dreiling@emich.edu](mailto:dreiling@emich.edu) if you would like to speak with her about this opportunity as well. Thank you for your time!

Thanks Again,

Allison Jendry

## Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer



# Volunteers Needed for Research Study



**Purpose:** My name is Allison Jendry, and I am a Sociology graduate student at Eastern Michigan University. I am conducting research for my Master's thesis to gain a deeper understanding of the socialization and parenting practices used by same-sex parents and how their own childhood experiences have influenced how they parent. I am also interested in learning how same-sex parents talk to their children about society's lingering stigmatization of same-sex families.

**Eligibility:** To be eligible for this study, you must be part of a Gay or Lesbian couple that is living in the same household with children under the age of 18.

**Participation:** You and your partner will be asked to grant an interview, which should last approximately one hour. I will not request to interview your children. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your identity and all other identifying information will be kept strictly confidential.

**Benefits:** Unfortunately, I am not able to offer you financial compensation, but you may benefit from knowing that your willing to share your experiences will help sociologists develop deeper understandings about families with same-sex parents.

**Contact:** If you would like to participate in this study or have questions about the study, please contact me, at [ajendry@emich.edu](mailto:ajendry@emich.edu) or (810)-569-5003.

\*\*This study is supervised by Dr. Denise Reiling, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology at Eastern Michigan University.

\*\*This study has been approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Board.

Same-Sex Family  
Socialization  
Allison Jendry  
[ajendry@emich.edu](mailto:ajendry@emich.edu)  
810-569-5003

Same-Sex Family  
Socialization  
Allison Jendry  
[ajendry@emich.edu](mailto:ajendry@emich.edu)

## Appendix D: Informed Consent

### Informed Consent

Project Title: Reflections on the Way We Were Raised: Socialization within a Same-Sex Family

Investigator: Allison Jendry, Eastern Michigan University

Co-Investigator(s): Dr. Denise Reiling, Professor of Sociology, Eastern Michigan University; Dr. Robert Orrange, Professor of Sociology, Eastern Michigan University

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the relationships between sexual orientation and family attitudes. We seek to understand how same-sex parents teach their children about the world around them in light of the norm and value structure that exists in society today.

**Procedure:** The principal investigator will explain the study to you, answer any questions you may have, and witness your signature to this consent form. You must self-identify as LGBT, and have at least one child 18 years old and younger to take part in this study. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions in an interview with the principal investigator. You will be asked to answer open-ended questions regarding your parenting style and the ways in which you teach your child(ren) about the world around them. You will also be asked a few demographic questions as well as questions about your attitudes toward families today and families of yesterday. Lastly, you will be asked about your own family growing up.

Upon completion of the interview, you will be given a duplicate copy of this informed consent, which includes follow-up contact information, if needed. The approximate total time to complete the interview is about 1 hour.

**Confidentiality:** Only a code number will identify your interview responses. Interview responses will be stored separately from this consent form, which includes your name. At no time will your name be associated with your responses to the interview. All related materials will be kept in locked file cabinets in the researcher's office, and electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer that the principal investigator only has access to. The recruiting organization will not be informed of who does or does not participate in this research nor will the name of the recruiting organization be divulged during the interview or when presenting the study findings. There is no connection between the recruiting organization and participation in this research. Moreover, all results will be kept completely confidential and code numbers will be linked to responses in order to protect identity.

**Expected Risks:** One possible risk for participating in this study is that you may feel uncomfortable about answering specific questions. If, at any time, you feel uncomfortable about answering a question(s) you may choose to skip those questions. You may withdraw participation at any time without negative consequences if you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview. Furthermore, if you feel that you would like to speak with a mental health professional after participating in this interview, you can contact the Eastern Michigan University Psychology Clinic at (734) 487-4987 or you can contact the Ann Arbor Center for the Family at (734) 995-5181.

**Expected Benefits:** There will be no direct personal benefit to you, but your participation will contribute to our understanding of same-sex parenting and family processes overall.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without negative consequences.

**Use of Research Results:** Results will be mostly presented in aggregate (group) form. No names or individually identifying information will be revealed. However, individual quotes from the interview may be used but, your identity will not be revealed; instead fake names will be used. Results may be presented at research meetings and conferences, in scientific publications, and as part of a master's thesis being conducted by the principal investigator.

**Future Questions:** If you have any questions concerning your participation in this study now or in the future, you can contact the principal investigator, Allison Jendry, at 810-569-5003 or via e-mail [ajendry@emich.edu](mailto:ajendry@emich.edu). My thesis chair is Dr. Denise Reiling, Ph.D. and she can also be contacted at [dreiling@emich.edu](mailto:dreiling@emich.edu) should you have any questions. Dr. Robert Orrange, Ph.D. is also on my committee and can be reached at [rorange@emich.edu](mailto:rorange@emich.edu) if you have any questions.

This research protocol and informed consent document has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee for use from

8/15/2014 to 8/14/2015. If you have questions about the approval process, please contact the Director of the Graduate School (734.487.0042, [human.subjects@emich.edu](mailto:human.subjects@emich.edu)).

**Consent to Participate:** I have read or had read to me all of the above information about this research study, including the research procedures, possible risks, side effects, and the likelihood of any benefit to me. The content and meaning of this information has been explained and I understand. All my questions, at this time, have been answered. I hereby consent and do voluntarily offer to follow the study requirements and take part in the study.

PRINT NAME:

Signatures:

Participant (signature) Date

Investigator (signature) Date

It would be very helpful to my learning to be able to tape-record this interview. If you agree to be tape-recorded, please sign below. All recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study.

PRINT NAME

SIGNATURE

DATE

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