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Gay fathers' pathways to parenthood: International perspectives¹

Die Pfade schwuler Väter zur Elternschaft – Internationale Perspektiven

Abstract:

How have gay men achieved parenthood? We studied pathways to parenthood among 102 gay fathers in predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States (i.e., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom) who responded to an internet survey. Fully 95% of men over 50, but only 53% of those under 50 years of age reported that they had fathered children in the context of heterosexual marriages. In contrast, only 5% of those over 50, but 47% of those under 50 years of age reported that they had become fathers via foster care, adoption, or other pathways outside of heterosexual marriage. The findings are consistent with earlier findings that suggest a generational shift in pathways to parenthood among gay men in the United States, and raise the possibility that the same shift may be underway among gay men in other predominantly English speaking countries.

Key words: gay, father, parent, sexual orientation

Zusammenfassung:

Wie sind schwule Männer zur Elternschaft gelangt? Wir haben die Pfade zur Elternschaft bei 102 schwulen Vätern in überwiegend englischsprachigen Ländern mit Ausnahme der USA (d.h. in Australien, Kanada, Neuseeland und im Vereinigten Königreich), die an einer Internet-basierten Befragung teilgenommen haben, untersucht. Nicht weniger als 95% der Männer über 50 Jahre, aber lediglich 53% derjenigen unter 50 Jahre berichteten, dass sie im Kontext einer heterosexuellen Ehe Kinder gezeugt hatten. Im Kontrast dazu gaben nur 5% der Über-50-Jährigen, aber 47% der Unter-50-Jährigen an, dass sie durch ein Pflegeverhältnis, Adoption oder auf anderen Wegen außerhalb einer heterosexuellen Ehe Vater geworden sind. Diese Ergebnisse stimmen mit den Daten früherer Untersuchungen überein, die einen intergenerationalen Wandel in den Pfaden zur Elternschaft unter schwulen Männern in den Vereinigten Staaten aufzeigen und nahelegen, dass sich gegenwärtig der gleiche Wandel unter schwulen Männer in anderen überwiegend englischsprachigen Ländern vollzieht.

Schlagwörter: schwul, Vater, Eltern, sexuelle Orientierung

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1. Introduction

How have gay fathers achieved parenthood? It has often been suggested that gay men become fathers because they marry women, have children, and only later come out as gay – perhaps in the context of a divorce (Barret/Robinson 1990; Barrett/Tasker 2001; Bigner 1999; Patterson, 2004). Other men come out at younger ages, however, and become parents in the context of pre-existing gay identities (Patterson 2004; Patterson/Riskind in press). Some authors have argued that there has been a shift among gay men in recent years, from the first to the second pathway to parenthood (e.g., Berkowitz 2007; Mallon 2004). Recent findings (Tornello/Patterson 2010) suggest that such a shift may be underway in the United States, and that it may have implications for gay men's life course development and family composition. In the current study, we draw on data from a sample of gay fathers living in predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States to ask whether they also show a shift in pathways to parenthood like the one observed among gay fathers in the United States.

The concepts of heterosexuality and of parenthood are so completely interconnected in the cultural imaginations of most English speaking countries that the mere idea of gay fatherhood can seem strange or exotic (Hicks 2006; Patterson 2004; van Reyk 2004). Early studies of gay fathers often assumed that gay men with children had fathered them in the context of heterosexual marriages (Barret/Robinson 1990; Barrett/Tasker 2001; Bigner 1999; Bigner/Jacobsen 1989, 1992; Bozett 1980, 1988). Research documented that, when men who had been married to women acknowledged gay identities, reconciling their pre-existing identities as fathers with their emerging identities as gay men became an important task for them (Bozett 1981a, 1981b). Especially because they were often non-residential parents, these men struggled to integrate their gay and paternal identities (Barret/Robinson, 1990; Bozett 1988). With few exceptions (e.g., Violi 2004), early studies focused on gay fathers in the United States.

Recent years have been a period of rapid change around the world with regard to issues relevant to gay and lesbian family lives (D'Emilio 2002). The HIV/AIDS epidemic has moved through urban gay communities, requiring care for the sick, and resulting in unprecedented growth of gay and lesbian service organizations (Engel 2006; Holleran 2008). Continuing political battles over equal employment and marriage rights have brought gay and lesbian family issues increasingly into public attention (e.g., Moats 2004). In many countries, it has become more common for lesbian women to become mothers after coming out (Patterson 2000, 2009). As gay and lesbian individuals and their family members have become increasingly visible, attitudes toward homosexuality have shifted to some degree, in the United States if not also in other countries (Pew Research Center 2009). Research in the United States also suggests that gay youth have begun to come out at earlier ages than ever before (D'Augelli/Hershberger/Pilkington 1998; Floyd/Bakeman 2006).

As gay men have begun to come out earlier in life, some have begun to explore the possibilities of becoming parents in the context of already-established gay identities (Johnson/O'Connor 2002; Patterson 2004). These men seem to consider a wider variety of routes to parenthood than did older gay men (Hicks 2006; Mallon 2004). Some have explored the possibility of becoming parents via adoption or foster care arrangements.

Others have become fathers via surrogacy, in which a woman agrees to carry the child that will be reared by a gay man or couple. Others have undertaken parenthood jointly with lesbian women. These and other arrangements have enlarged the possibilities for gay men who wish to become parents (Barrett/Tasker 2001; Gates/Badgett/Macomber/Chambers 2007; Patterson 2004; Golombok/Tasker 2010).

These historical changes have led some (e.g., Berkowitz 2007; Mallon 2004) to suggest that a generational shift is underway. If this is correct, the divorced gay father might now be regarded as embodying an outdated phenomenon from an earlier time. This position would lead one to expect that all or almost all older gay fathers should report having become fathers in the context of heterosexual marriages. At the same time, if the idea of a generational shift is correct, few if any younger men should report having undertaken heterosexual marriage as a path to parenthood; most younger gay men who are fathers should report having achieved parenthood through other routes.

On the other hand, there are still many barriers to parenthood for openly gay men (Patterson 2004; Golombok/Tasker 2010). Unlike lesbian women, gay men cannot themselves bear children. At the time of this writing, adoptions by gay men are forbidden by law in some jurisdictions, both in the United States and throughout the English speaking world (Joslin/Minter 2009; Short/Riggs/Perlesz/Brown/Kane 2007). Moreover, discriminatory attitudes are still widespread, and they are stronger in some places than in others (Pew Research Center 2009). As a result, some gay men may feel pressure to marry women in order to conform to the expectations of people around them (Higgins 2004). Thus, even if an overall generational shift is taking place, the speed of change may vary in different parts of the world (Patterson 2009).

To examine these issues, it is necessary to distinguish a possible generational shift in pathways to parenthood from the influence of other factors. For instance, due to variations in law and policy, gay men who live in some countries have greater access to options such as adoption and surrogacy than do men who live in other parts of the world. There may be diversity associated with financial resources such that wealthier men, who can travel across greater distances, have access to more options. There may also be variability according to education and religious background. Research should take account of such variations, and evaluate the extent to which they are associated with any age-related changes in pathways to parenthood.

If, as the idea of a generational shift suggests, openly gay men are increasingly becoming parents after coming out, this may have implications for family composition (Gianino 2008; Mallon 2004). In the United States, most prospective adoptive parents identify as white or Caucasian, but many children needing foster care or awaiting adoption are from racial or ethnic minority groups (Brodzinsky/Pinderhughes 2002). This may be true in other English speaking countries, as well (Golombok/Tasker 2010). Gay men in the United States have been described as more open than most other prospective adoptive parents to transracial adoptions (Goldberg 2009), and also as more likely than heterosexual couples to have completed such adoptions (Farr/Patterson 2009). Gay fathers in predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States might also be more likely than heterosexual parents to live in interracial families. In short, if the use of adoption as a route to family formation is more common among younger than among older gay men, it could be associated with larger numbers of interracial households among younger gay fathers.

To study pathways to parenthood among gay men in the United States, we recently recruited a large sample of gay fathers who were living in that country (Tornello/Patterson 2010). In an online survey, gay fathers were asked to describe how they had become fathers, as well as to provide demographic information (e.g., age, education, employment) about themselves and their children. Our findings were consistent with the notion that a generational shift is occurring in gay men's pathways to parenthood. While the great majority of older gay men described having become parents in the context of heterosexual marriages, many fewer younger gay men did so. These differences were not accounted for by demographic differences between older and younger gay fathers. We also found that younger gay fathers, who were most likely to have adopted children after coming out, were more likely than others to live in interracial households. Thus, if a generational shift in pathways to parenthood is underway among gay men in the United States, it apparently has implications for the composition of households and families there (Tornello/Patterson 2010).

In the current study, we ask whether a generational shift in pathways to parenthood for gay men is taking place among gay fathers in predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States. Using data collected from self-described gay fathers in an internet survey, we explored pathways to parenthood among older and younger gay men in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. We also compared these data with those we had collected from gay fathers in the United States. In this way, we were able to examine questions about whether a generational shift in gay men's pathways to parenthood that seems to be taking place in the United States might also be underway in other predominantly English speaking countries.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 102 self-described gay fathers recruited from four predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States (i.e., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom). Information about the study was circulated through websites, email lists, and newsletters of relevant organizations (e.g., gay father support groups) in these four countries. To be eligible for participation, a man had to identify himself as a gay father, had to report having at least one child of any age, and had to live in one of the four countries included in this study. Participants were eligible if they reported being single, dating, or having a male partner, but not if they reported having a female partner. Of the 102 respondents, 40 were from Canada, 30 were from Australia, 18 were from the United Kingdom, and 14 were from New Zealand. The data were collected in 2009. To maintain independence of data points, data for only one partner in each family were considered for this report. If two respondents indicated that they were a couple, the first man to contact us became our participant.

Demographic data from these gay fathers are presented in Table 1. Altogether, the 102 gay fathers reported having 222 children, for an average of slightly more than two children apiece. Of these, 77 were described as currently residing in the gay father's

home, and 145 as currently residing somewhere else. The average age of the gay fathers was 48 years of age (range, 27 to 74 years), and that of their children was 18 years of age (range, 1 to 46 years). Overall, 52.5% of the children were described as male.

Ninety-seven percent of the gay fathers described themselves as white or Caucasian, but only 88% described their children in this way. Fathers described themselves and their partners as well-educated, on average, and earning above-average incomes. Most described themselves as being involved in a coupled relationship, but about one in three reported dating or being single. About 44% of the men identified as Christian, about 43% reported no religious affiliation, and 13% described other religious affiliations (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of gay fathers from Canada, Australia, United Kingdom and New Zealand

	Canada <i>n</i> = 40		Australia <i>n</i> = 30		United Kingdom <i>n</i> = 18		New Zealand <i>n</i> = 14		<i>F</i> or χ^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age	48.43	9.77	44.93	9.48	46.83	8.61	53.00	9.91	<i>n. s.</i>
Relationship length	9.73	7.74	5.90	5.21	4.79	4.19	3.81	2.39	$F = 2.881^*$
Total income ^a	95,944	45,626	133,200	2.00	83,570	45,941	68,645	67,387	<i>n. s.</i>
Children currently in home	1.86	0.94	1.57	0.65	1.17	0.41	1.40	0.89	<i>n. s.</i>
Children currently out of home	2.04	0.91	2.21	1.44	2.08	1.19	2.45	1.21	<i>n. s.</i>
Total number of children	2.25	1.15	2.13	1.33	1.89	1.08	2.43	1.16	<i>n. s.</i>
Education level (%)									$\chi^2 = 14.810^*$
Highschool	2.5		26.7		11.1		0		
Two/four year degree	55.0		30.0		55.6		64.3		
Graduate school	42.5		43.3		33.3		35.8		
Ethnicity (%)									
White/ Caucasian	97.5		100		94.4		92.9		
Non-white/Caucasian	2.5		0		5.6		7.1		
Relationship status (%)									<i>n. s.</i>
Committed relationship	30		23.3		50.0		28.6		
Married/CU/DP (legal recognition)	45		26.7		16.7		21.4		
Single	25		43.3		33.3		50.0		
Dating	0		6.7		0		0		
Religion (%)									<i>n. s.</i>
Catholic	25.0		33.3		0		7.1		
Protestant	17.5		10.0		55.6		28.6		
Other affiliation	15.0		0		11.1		35.7		
No religious affiliation	42.5		56.7		33.3		28.6		
Gender of eldest child (%)									<i>n. s.</i>
Male	65		40		47.1		50		
Female	35		60		52.9		50		
Ethnicity of eldest child (%)									<i>n. s.</i>
White/ Caucasian	85.0		93.3		88.9		85.7		
Non-white/Caucasian	15.0		6.7		11.1		14.3		

^aIn Euros

* $p < .05$

2.2 Procedure

Advertisements for a “Gay Dads Study” were sent in emails, placed on websites, and published in newsletters of relevant organizations, such as gay fathers’ support groups, that were based in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, or the United Kingdom. The ads described our study and its eligibility criteria, and gave a researcher’s email address. To express interest in participation, prospective participants were asked to contact the researcher via email.

After a man expressed interest in the study, a researcher contacted him via email to describe the study and review the eligibility criteria. If the man was eligible and willing to participate, the researcher provided a link and password that allowed him to access our online survey. Each link included a code that identified an individual participant. Follow-up emails to encourage participation were sent to potential participants who did not respond within one month of the initial contact.

When a man visited the study’s website, he was asked to read a consent form and indicate his agreement with its conditions before taking the survey. Participation was completely voluntary, and no financial incentives were offered. On average, the survey took about 30 minutes to complete. After completing the survey, participants were shown a debriefing page that provided information about how to contact the researcher and how to access gay-friendly resources. This research was approved by the University of Virginia Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences.

2.3 Materials

Demographic information. Participants were asked to provide demographic information about themselves, including age, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, relationship status, length of current relationship, education, employment, income, and country of residence. If a participant was currently in a relationship, he also answered demographic questions about his partner, but these are not considered in this report. In addition, participants were asked to provide demographic information about the age, gender, and race/ethnicity of their child(ren).

Pathways to parenthood. For each of their first three children, participants were asked about their legal relationship to the child, and also about their partner’s legal relationship to the child, if applicable. The current report is based upon information about the first (i.e., eldest) child reported by each participant. Participants were asked a series of questions about how each child joined their family. These included questions about whether the participant and/or the partner were biologically related to the child, whether the child was adopted (with no biological relationship), or whether the child came to the family from the foster care system.

Based on responses to questions about family formation, participants were directed to a second set of questions relevant to that particular approach to family formation. If the child was biologically related to the participant or the partner, the participant was asked to specify if the child joined the family in the context of the current relationship, of a former heterosexual relationship, of a former gay relationship, in a single parent situation, or in

some other context. Additional questions requested further information, such as whether the child was conceived in a previous heterosexual relationship, with co-parent(s), with a surrogate mother, or with a known or anonymous donor. If none of the options applied, participants were prompted to describe their particular situation in their own words.

If the child joined the family via adoption or foster care, participants were asked a series of questions regarding the placement. They were asked if the child joined the family during a current or past relationship (i.e., a former heterosexual or gay relationship, current heterosexual or gay relationship, or single parent). They were also asked to provide further information about adoption or foster placement, such as the age of the child when joining the family, and the type of agency through which the child had been placed.

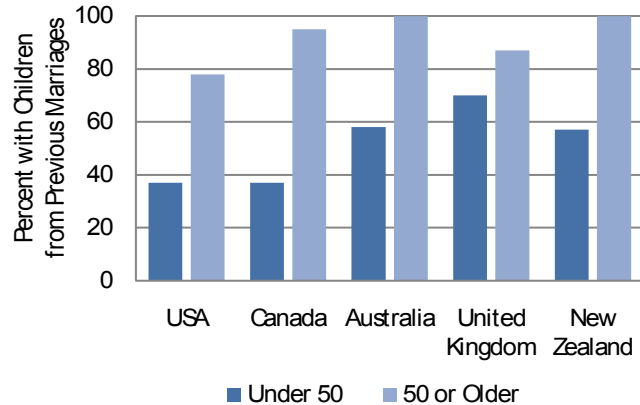
3. Results

We present the results under three major headings. First, we examine associations of gay fathers' ages with pathways to parenthood. Next, we evaluate possible alternative explanations for the associations we observed between age and pathways to parenthood. Finally, we examine associations between gay fathers' age, family formation, and likelihood of living in an interracial family.

3.1 Pathways to parenthood among gay fathers of different ages

To examine the possible association of paternal age and pathways to parenthood, participants were categorized into one of two groups, based on their age at the time of testing. The age groups were: under 50 years of age (N= 60), and 50 years of age or older (N=42). The family formation method used for each participant's first (i.e., eldest) child was also classified into one of two categories: a child from a former heterosexual relationship (N=72), a child conceived or adopted in some other way (N = 30). The results for each of the four countries are depicted in Figure 1, where they are also compared with results from our study of gay fathers in the United States (Tornello/Patterson 2010).

Figure 1. Percent of older versus younger gay fathers who reported having children from former heterosexual marriages in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Data for the United States are drawn from Tornello and Patterson (2010).



As expected, we found that older fathers in every country were more likely than younger ones to report having had children from former heterosexual relationships. In contrast, younger fathers in every country were more likely than older ones to report having become fathers through some other pathway. A chi-square test revealed that the association between gay fathers' age and pathways to parenthood was significant, X^2 ($df=1$ $n=102$) = 20.90, $p < .001$. As can be seen in Figure 1, men who were 50 years of age or older generally did not report achieving parenthood via surrogacy, adoption or foster care. In contrast, these were important pathways to parenthood among younger men. These results are consistent with the notion that a generational change in pathways to parenthood is taking place among gay men in predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States.

3.2 Evaluation of alternative explanations

It is possible that what appear to be age-related changes in pathways to parenthood among gay men could be attributable to adventitious features of the sample. For instance, if younger participants were more affluent than older ones, and if wealthier gay men were more likely to become parents via adoption or surrogacy, then this might provide an alternative explanation for the results described above. For this reason, we evaluated possible alternative explanations based on income, education, and religious affiliation.

We calculated average age, years of education, and annual income for both older and younger fathers; we also compared religious affiliations for the two groups. Results of t-tests and chi-square tests showed that older and younger gay fathers did not differ on the demographic variables we assessed here (see Table 2). Specifically, older and younger gay fathers did not differ on levels of education, income, or religious background. There were also no differences in age as a function of country of residence. Thus, the age-related differences described above cannot be attributed to differences in demographic variables.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of gay fathers younger or older than 50 years of age

	Participants younger than 50 years of age <i>n</i> = 60		Participants 50 years of age or older <i>n</i> = 42		<i>F</i> or χ^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age	40.98	4.78	57.40	6.08	$F = 3.238^{***}$
Relationship length	7.0	5.89	7.33	7.55	<i>n. s.</i>
Total income ^a	113,668	1.16	81,153	49,801	<i>n. s.</i>
Children currently in home	1.56	0.74	1.91	1.04	<i>n. s.</i>
Children currently out of home	1.97	0.95	2.33	1.31	<i>n. s.</i>
Total number of children	1.95	1.13	2.50	1.21	$F = 1.457^*$
Education level (%)					<i>n. s.</i>
Highschool	11.7		9.5		
Two/four year degree	45.0		54.7		
Graduate school	43.3		35.8		
Ethnicity (%)					<i>n. s.</i>
White/ Caucasian	96.7		97.6		
Non-white/Caucasian	3.3		2.4		
Relationship status (%)					<i>n. s.</i>
Committed relationship	30		38		
Married/CU/DP (legal recognition)	40		19.1		
Single	26.7		38.1		
Dating	3.3		4.8		
Religion (%)					<i>n. s.</i>
Catholic	20.0		21.4		
Protestant	18.3		31.0		
Other affiliation	11.7		14.3		
No religious affiliation	50.0		33.3		
Gender of eldest child (%)					$\chi^2 = 5.806^{**}$
Male	42.4		66.7		
Female	57.6		33.3		
Ethnicity of eldest child (%)					<i>n. s.</i>
White/ Caucasian	83.3		95.2		
Non-white/Caucasian	16.7		4.8		

^a In Euros

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

We also examined this issue by conducting a backwards stepwise logistic regression analysis which involved education, household income, and length of current relationship as well as paternal age as predictors of pathways to parenthood (i.e., via heterosexual marriage versus all other pathways). Consistent with the findings reported above, results of this analysis showed that age and length of relationship were significant predictors of the likelihood of having children from a former heterosexual relationship ($\chi^2 = 40.124$ (4), $p < .001$; Nagelkerke's $R^2 = .65$). As expected, older men were more likely to report having had children in the context of a previous heterosexual marriage. Thus, whether age was treated as a continuous or as a categorical variable, older gay men were more likely to report having become fathers in the context of heterosexual marriages before coming out, and younger gay men were more likely to report having become fathers in some other way after coming out. The fact that men who had children in the context of previous heterosexual marriages reported having same-sex relationships of shorter duration than did

other gay fathers was consistent with our main finding that many older gay fathers reported having spent large portions of their adult lives in heterosexual marriages.

3.3 Associations of gay fathers' age and their likelihood of living in interracial families

If younger gay men are increasingly becoming fathers through foster care and adoption, then they may be fostering and adopting children who come from racial or ethnic groups different from their own. To evaluate this possibility, we examined the data to determine how many children came from racial or ethnic groups different from those with which their fathers identified.

The sample contained 22 interracial families (22% of the overall sample). There was, however, no evidence of a generational shift. Interracial families were no more common among families with younger rather than older gay fathers, with 13 of 60 (22%) of younger and 9 of 42 (22%) of older gay fathers reporting that they lived in interracial families. The age difference was not significant, $X^2 < 1$. In this sample, younger gay fathers were no more likely than older ones to report that they lived in interracial families.

3.4 Summary of results

In summary, results from gay fathers in predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States were consistent with the idea that a generational shift in pathways to parenthood is taking place. Whereas older gay fathers reported having children mostly in the context of heterosexual marriages, many younger ones reported taking other pathways to parenthood, such as foster care, adoption, and surrogacy. In contrast to findings from the United States, however, these expanded pathways were not described by gay fathers as creating more interracial families.

4. Discussion

Has there been a generational shift in pathways to parenthood among gay fathers in English speaking countries outside the United States? Findings from the current sample of gay fathers of different ages from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom are consistent with the claim that such a shift is taking place. Whereas 95% of fathers over fifty years of age reported having had children in the context of heterosexual marriages before coming out, only 53% of gay fathers under fifty years of age reported having taken this path. In contrast, 47% of gay fathers under fifty reported having children via adoption, foster care, or surrogacy, whereas only 5% of gay fathers over fifty reported having done this. Thus, while most older gay men in this sample reported marrying women, becoming fathers, and only later coming out, more younger men reported coming out first, and only later becoming fathers in the context of their pre-existing gay identities (Berkowitz 2007; Mallon 2004).

Why might such a shift be taking place? To address this question, one might begin by noting that gay fathers under fifty years of age were born in 1960 or later. Those born in 1960 came of age in 1981, just as the HIV epidemic was beginning to emerge around the world. Among the consequences of the HIV epidemic has been increased discussion of issues related to sexual orientation in the media and in other public venues (Engel 2006). The HIV epidemic also resulted in unprecedented mobilization of the gay community in support of those who fell ill and were in need of care (Holleran 2008). These and other aspects of the epidemic's impact have transformed life in gay communities throughout the world (D'Emilio 2002; Engel 2006). Might these historic events have played a role in the shift described by our current findings? In other words, might the emergence of HIV and the "safer sex" campaigns it engendered have created conditions in which more gay men found it possible to come out, stay healthy, and become parents in the context of their identities as openly gay men? However they may have happened, historical changes over these years have clearly made it possible for at least some gay men today to become fathers via some pathways that had not been regarded as available to older gay men (Golombok/Tasker 2010; Patterson 2004; Rabun/Oswald 2009; Short et al. 2007).

It is important to consider alternative explanations for the results observed here. One such alternative could be that problems with our sampling techniques resulted in the recruitment of gay fathers who differed systematically on other variables associated with age, and that these "third variables" were the causal elements. Our sample was, in fact, primarily white, well-educated, and economically well-off. It should be noted, however, that older and younger samples of gay fathers were recruited using exactly the same procedures, and that the two groups reported demographically similar characteristics. In other words, younger gay fathers were no more likely than older gay fathers to be well educated, affluent, or affiliated with any particular religious group. Differences between countries do not account for our findings. The results suggest that differences between older and younger gay fathers are not the result of any methodological artifacts, but instead represent a real generational shift.

While our findings are consistent with the notion of a generational shift, they cannot be taken to suggest that any such shift has been completed. Many more older than younger gay fathers reported having become fathers in the context of heterosexual marriages. At the same time, however, substantial numbers of younger men also reported having taken this route to parenthood. Fully 53% of those under 50 years of age reported having become fathers in the context of heterosexual marriages. This figure is larger than that for gay fathers in the United States, but more than 1/3 of younger gay fathers in that country also reported having become fathers in the context of heterosexual marriages (Tornello/Patterson 2010). Thus, to the extent that our findings suggest the existence of a generational shift in the United States or in English speaking countries outside the United States, it is still underway.

In the United States, our data suggested that the apparent generational shift had implications for family composition. This did not, however, prove to be the case in predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States. Among these gay fathers in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, pathways to parenthood outside of heterosexual marriages were not especially likely to result in interracial families. Whether this result was due to characteristics of adoptable children in different countries or to other factors cannot be determined on the basis of data collected here.

This study had a number of strengths that increase our confidence in the findings. First, our findings were drawn from a diverse sample of gay fathers, who came from four different countries, and represented many different religious traditions. They ranged in age from 27 to 74 years of age. Some described themselves as coupled; others reported being single. The diversity of this sample helped us to examine the possible roles of many different factors in gay men's pathways to parenthood.

Our study also had limitations. First, although participants were drawn from four different countries, the overall size of our sample was not large. The gay fathers who participated in this study were also, on average, relatively well educated and financially comfortable, and most described themselves as non-Hispanic white or Caucasian men. If the study were to be repeated with a larger, less affluent, less well educated, more racially diverse sample, would the same results emerge? Even if one agrees that historical factors are influential, they may not affect all gay men in equal measure. For example, even though many adoption agencies may be open to gay prospective adoptive parents in some parts of the world (e.g., United States and Canada), adoption by gay men is still not legally recognized in other countries (e.g., Australia). In the current study, we collected quantitative information about the fathers who took part, but we were not able to collect more detailed qualitative information. Future research that combines rich qualitative detail with quantitative data from a larger, more diverse sample seems likely to enlarge our understanding of changes in gay fatherhood over time.

In summary, consistent with views advanced by Berkowitz (2007) and by Mallon (2004), and consistent with our findings from the United States (Tornello/Patterson 2010), our findings suggest that a generational shift is underway in pathways to parenthood among gay men who live in predominantly English speaking countries outside the United States. Our data suggest that gay men once became fathers primarily by marrying women and conceiving children in the context of their heterosexual marriages. While this pathway is still followed by some gay men, our findings suggest that it is chosen less frequently today than it was in the past. Depending upon the legal and policy contexts in which they are living, many gay men are becoming fathers through one or more of a diverse set of pathways that may involve adoption, foster care, surrogacy, and/or co-parenting with lesbian women (Golombok/Tasker 2010; Patterson 2004; Patterson/Riskind in press). Our present findings suggest that this shift is occurring not only in the United States, but also in other predominantly English speaking countries around the world.

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