
SAMANTHA L. TORNELLO and CHARLOTTE J. PATTERSON
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

Many gay men have become parents in the context of heterosexual relationships; ultimately, some separate from female partners while others stay with them. In this study, we compared the experiences of 109 formerly married gay fathers who were currently in relationships with men, 44 formerly married gay fathers who were currently single, and 14 gay fathers who remained married to women. In an Internet survey, we examined relationship satisfaction, parenting stress, sexual orientation disclosure, and gay identity among these men, all of whom had become fathers in the context of heterosexual relationships. Results showed that gay fathers who were currently married to women reported lower relationship satisfaction, affection, consensus, and lower overall dyadic adjustment in their current relationships. Formerly married gay fathers who were currently single or currently in relationships with male partners reported greater openness about their sexual identities than did still-married gay fathers. The men who were currently in relationships, however, did not report differences in relationship cohesion, or parenting stress as a function of partners’ gender. In summary, self-identified gay men who were currently in relationships with women reported less openness about their sexual orientation and lower relationship satisfaction, but not more parenting stress than did formerly married gay fathers.

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Address correspondence to Samantha L. Tornello, Department of Psychology, University of Virginia, P.O. Box 400400 Gilmer Hall, Charlottesville, VA 22904, USA. E-mail: tornello@virginia.edu
“And so, my truth is that I am a gay American,” said former New Jersey Governor James McGreevey, in his 2004 resignation speech (“New Jersey,” 2004). As a man married to a woman, McGreevey shocked the world when he described himself as gay. The marriage of McGreevey and his wife was an example of a “mixed-orientation” marriage. Mixed-orientation relationships are those in which one partner experiences same-sex attractions and identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual while the other partner identifies as heterosexual with no same-sex attractions (Buxton, 2001). We know little about the experiences of men or women in mixed-orientation marriages. Governor McGreevey and his wife eventually divorced and he began a romantic relationship with a man. Men in this situation do not, however, always leave their marriages. They may make many different decisions, with different individual outcomes. Research has only begun to explore the experiences of those in mixed-orientation marriages. In the present study, we focus on experiences of gay men who became fathers in the context of mixed-orientation marriages.

Although actual numbers are difficult to obtain, it has been estimated that there are more than two million gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals currently in mixed-orientation marriages (Buxton, 1994). Ross (1989) estimated that about 10% to 20% of gay men have been married at one time in their lives, but the accuracy of such a figure is difficult to access. To begin to understand the development of relationships and decision making among gay men in mixed-orientation marriages, we review the available research literature.

Are gay men who marry women aware of their sexual orientation before marriage? In a sample of 18 participants studied by Bozett (1982), only 1 identified as a gay man before his marriage, but 15 were aware of their sexual attractions to other men before their marriages. Interestingly, the men who had same-sex sexual experiences before marriage reported having less difficulty than others in ultimately disclosing their sexual orientation. In a study of 32 married gay men, Wyers (1987) found that nearly 70% of the participants reported that they had suspected that they were gay at the time of marriage, but only 12% said that they had disclosed this information to their wives. In addition, Saghir and Robins (1973) found that 59% of their sample of 89 gay men reported that they had experienced some romantic attachment to one or more women at some point in their lives.

There have been some studies of the reasons that gay men have given for undertaking heterosexual marriages. Ross (1971) found that the most
common reasons given by gay men entering heterosexual marriages were desire for social acceptance, family/girlfriend pressure, and desire for children; similar results were also reported by Saghir and Robins (1973). Even 30 years later in semi-structured interviews with 20 gay men, Pearcey (2005) found similar results. Pearcey (2005) reported that the most common reasons gay and bisexual men gave for having entered into heterosexual marriages were “social and family pressure” and their desire to be “normal.” For many of these men, social pressures from family members were driving forces behind their decisions to marry women (see also Ortiz & Scott, 1994; Higgins, 2002).

Some of these marriages were described by gay men as having been filled with unhappiness, but others were described in more positive terms. Disagreements and conflicts over sexuality were said to be common (Bozett, 1982; Wyer, 1987), and couples reported exploring various approaches to making their marriage work (Buxton, 2004a,b). Those with children may have been more likely to stay together than those who were childless, but ultimately, some decided to stay in their marriages to women, some decided to leave and begin new relationships with men, and some left but remained single. Little is known in any systematic way about the qualities of experiences among gay fathers who have chosen such different pathways.

In this study, we explore the experiences of those who stayed with their heterosexual female partners, those who separated from female partners and remained single, and those who separated and began relationships with men.

We expected gay fathers who were currently in relationships with wives to have lower relationship satisfaction than those who were currently in relationships with men. There was, however, no reason to expect differences regarding parenting relationship variables, such as cohesion or communication. In addition, we expected that gay fathers with female partners would be less open about their sexual orientation than gay men who were single or who were in a relationship with a male partner. We did not, however, expect systematic differences on the centrality of sexual identities in the men’s lives; it seemed clear that sexual identities would be important to all of the gay men who participated.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 167 self-described gay fathers recruited from 38 different states and the District of Columbia in the United States. Information about the study was circulated through Web sites, e-mail lists, and newsletters of relevant organizations (e.g., gay father support groups). To be eligible for participation, a man had to identify himself as a gay father, had to report having at least one biological child younger than 18 years of age, and had
to have become a parent in the context of a current or former heterosexual relationship. Participants could report being single or currently having a male or female partner.

The sample represented in the current study was drawn from participants in a larger project about United States gay fathers (Tornello & Patterson, 2010). Starting with the total sample ($N = 1,001$), we removed data for fathers who had children older than 18 years of age ($N = 412$), used any method of family formation other than a former heterosexual relationship ($N = 388$), and those who identified as bisexual ($N = 34$). Thus, the final sample consisted of 167 self-described gay fathers: 44 single gay fathers, 109 gay fathers with male partners, and 14 gay fathers with female partners.

In demographic terms, the majority of the gay fathers described themselves and their female partners as white or Caucasian (at least 90%), but only 78% of them described their male partners in this way (see Table 1). Fathers were well-educated and earned incomes above national averages. As expected, single gay fathers had lower household incomes than did those in couples. Fathers were, on average, 40 years of age. Altogether, the 167 gay fathers reported having 338 children, for an average of 2 children per family. As expected, men who were married to women reported having been with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1 Demographic Information of Gay Fathers Based on Relationship Status and Partner Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N = 109$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.37 (6.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income (K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (% white)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Race (% white)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (% college degree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Status (% full-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religious affiliation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Means that share a superscript are not significantly different from one another. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. 
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their partners longer ($M = 17.39$ years, $SD = 8.34$) than those who were currently in relationships with men ($M = 4.58$ years, $SD = 3.5$).

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 the current relationship, education, employment, income, and zip code. If a participant was currently in a relationship, he also answered demographic questions about his partner or spouse. In addition, participants were asked to report the total number of children in the family and to provide demographic information about the age, gender, and race/ethnicity of their child(ren). A summary of participants’ demographic information is provided in Table 1.

Pathways to Parenthood

For each of their first three children, participants were asked about their legal relationship to each child, and also about their partner’s legal relationship to the child, if applicable. Participants were asked a series of questions about how each child joined their family. These included questions about whether the child was from a current or former heterosexual relationship, questions about custody arrangements, and any additional information about the family system that the fathers offered.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) is a 32-item self-report survey designed to measure multiple dimensions of quality of relationships (Spanier, 1976). The items were presented via Likert scales. For example, some were scored on a 0 to 5 scale from 0 = never to 5 = more often or 5 = always agree to 0 = always disagree. The DAS consists of four subscales, all of which were utilized for this study: dyadic consensus (i.e., How much do you and your partner agree regarding aims, goals, and things believed important?), affectional expression (i.e., How much do you and your partner agree regarding demonstrations of affection?), dyadic satisfaction (i.e., How often do you and your partner quarrel?), and dyadic cohesion (i.e., How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate: have a stimulating exchange of ideas?). All the subscales had good reliability; dyadic consensus (13 items; alpha = .90), affectional expression (4 items; alpha = .74), dyadic satisfaction (10 items; alpha = .76), and dyadic cohesion (5 items;
alpha = .85). Total scores for each subscale ranged; dyadic consensus 0–6, affectional expression 0–12, dyadic satisfaction 0–50, and dyadic cohesion 0–24, with larger numbers representing more positive relationship adjustment.

OUTNESS INVENTORY

The Outness Inventory (OI) is an 11-item self-report survey designed to assess the degree to which participants are currently open about their sexual orientation (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). The items were scored on a 1 to 7 scale, where 1 meant “this person definitely does not know about your sexual orientation status” and 7 meant “this person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is openly talked about.” The scale contains three major dimensions: out to family (i.e., mother, father, siblings), out to world (i.e., coworkers, friends), and out to religion (i.e., members of the religious community). Average scores for each subscale can range from 1 to 7, with 7 representing the greatest level of disclosure. All the subscales and the total score showed acceptable reliability; family (4 items; alpha = .77), world (5 items; alpha = .90), religion (2 items; alpha = .97), and total score (11 items; alpha = .91).

LGB IDENTITY

The LGB Identity Scale Revised (LGBIS-R) is a 28-item self-report survey designed to measure multiple dimensions of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity (Kendra & Mohr, 2008; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). The items were scored on a 1 to 7 scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Five subscales were utilized for this study: difficult process (i.e., “Admitting to myself that I’m an LGB person has been a very slow process”), identity centrality (i.e., “Being an LGB person is a very important aspect of my life”), identity uncertainty (i.e., “I keep changing my mind about my sexual orientation”), stigma sensitivity (i.e., “I often wonder whether others judge me for my sexual orientation”), and concealment motivation (i.e., “My sexual orientation is a very personal and private matter”). All but one of the subscales had acceptable reliability; difficult process (4 items; alpha = .78), identity centrality (4 items; alpha = .67), identity uncertainty (4 items; alpha = .75), stigma sensitivity (4 items; alpha = .81), and concealment motivation (4 items; alpha = .79). Average scores for each subscale range from 1 to 7, with higher scores representing a more negative LGB identity.

PARENTING STRESS

The Parenting Stress Index–Short Form (PSI–SF; Abidin, 1995) is a 36-item self-report survey designed to measure the amount of stress parents feel in
their roles as parents and in the parent-child relationship. The scale consists of three subscales; difficult child, parenting distress, and parent-child dysfunctional interaction. A total parenting stress score can be calculated by summing scores from all three subscales. Thirty-three items were scored on a 1 to 7 scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* (i.e., “My child is not able to do as much as I expected”) and three items were scored numerically (i.e., “count the number of things which your child does that bother you. For example: dawdles, refuses to listen, overactive, cries, interrupts, fights, whines, etc.”). A total PSI–SF score of 90 and above is indicative of clinical levels of parenting stress (Abidin, 1995). For this sample, Cronbach’s alpha for total parenting stress was .93.

**PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT**

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a 12-item self-report survey designed to assess the degree to which participants perceive adequate social support from individuals in their lives (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). The items were scored on a 1 to 7 scale, from 1 = *very strongly disagree* to 7 = *very strongly agree*. The scale is compared to an overall perceived social support score (i.e., “My family really tries to help me”; “I can talk about my problems with my friends”; “There is a special person who is around when I am in need”). Mean scores can range from 1 to 7, with 7 representing the greatest level of social support. Cronbach’s alpha was .93 for overall perceived social support in this sample.

**Procedure**

Advertisements for a “Gay Dads Study” were sent in e-mails, placed on Web sites, and published in newsletters of relevant organizations such as gay fathers’ support groups from January 2009 until August 2009. The ads described the study and its eligibility criteria, and gave a researcher’s e-mail address. Prospective participants contacted the researcher via e-mail to express interest in participation. They were also invited to pass the announcement along to other gay fathers who might be interested in participation. Thus, recruitment was accomplished through a combination of responses to advertisements (72.6% of participants), through snowball sampling techniques (23.5% of participants), and other techniques (3.9% of participants).

After a man expressed interest, a researcher contacted him 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 the online survey. Each link included a code that identified an individual participant and also members of couples.
When a man visited the study’s Web site, 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.

RESULTS

We present the analysis under five major headings. First, to assess possible demographic differences and similarities among respondents who were involved in relationships with women, with men, or were currently single, we analyzed demographic data. Second, we compared dimensions of relationship satisfaction between those currently in relationships with women versus men. Third, we examined the total amount of identity disclosure to family, friends, and other acquaintances. Fourth, we explored different aspects of gay fathers’ identities in relation to relationship status and partner gender. Finally, we explored the amount of social support and level of parenting stress reported by gay fathers in each of the three groups.

Demographic Variables

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of all three groups: gay fathers who were currently in relationships with women, with men, or who were currently single. There were no significant differences among groups for fathers’ age, education, race/ethnicity, work status, number of children, or religious affiliation. There was a significant difference between the groups regarding annual household income, $F(2, 154) = 5.16, p < .01$, with single respondents having significantly lower household income. Partner age and race/ethnicity did not differ across groups. There were, however, differences in length of relationship as a function of partners’ gender, $t(1, 121) = 21.76, p < .001$. Gay men who currently had a female partner reported having been in their current relationship significantly longer than respondents in a relationship with a male partner.

Relationship Satisfaction

Comparison of scores for overall dyadic adjustment revealed that gay fathers with male partners reported more relationship satisfaction than did those
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with female partners, \( t(92) = 3.38, p < .01 \). We also examined each sub-

scale of the measure: affection, consensus, cohesion, and satisfaction. We

found that gay men who were currently involved with female partners re-

ported less affection, \( t(92) = -10.52, p < .05 \), less consensus, \( t(92) = 2.22, \)

\( p < .05 \), and less satisfaction, \( t(92) = 3.69, p < .05 \), than did gay fathers

who were currently in relationships with male partners. Gay men with male

partners reported more satisfaction with their relationships and higher levels

of affection in their current relationships. In contrast, the amount of relation-

ship cohesion, \( t(92) = < 1 \), n.s., was not significantly different between the

groups. In summary, groups differed on their overall relationship function-

ing, specifically on satisfaction, consensus, and expression of affection, but

reported the same amount of cohesion with their current partners, regardless

of partners’ gender (see Table 2).

Disclosure

How open about their sexual identities were these gay fathers? We examined

sexual identity disclosure as a function of partner status and gender. The

level of overall openness about sexual orientation differed among the three

groups, \( F(2, 146) = 7.78, p < .01 \). Formerly married gay fathers who were

currently in relationships with men and those who were currently single

reported greater disclosure of their sexual identities than did those in current

relationships with women (see Table 3). Similarly, disclosure to family, \( F(2, 145) = 5.73, p < .01 \), and other important individuals, \( F(2, 146) = 10.52, \)

\( p < .001 \), was significantly different among the groups. Disclosure to family

and other individuals was higher for men who were single or currently

in relationships with men than for those who were in relationships with

women. Disclosure to religious communities was not significantly different

TABLE 2 Relationship Satisfaction Scores of Gay Fathers with Female versus Male Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Functioning</th>
<th>Gender of Partner</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>( t )-test (( df ))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male ( N = 84 )</td>
<td>Female ( N = 10 )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment</td>
<td>112.25 (16.71)</td>
<td>93.31 (16.91)</td>
<td>3.38 (92)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale Total Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>50.67 (7.04)</td>
<td>45.40 (7.41)</td>
<td>2.22 (92)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>8.90 (2.48)</td>
<td>5.80 (3.01)</td>
<td>3.69 (92)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>38.01 (6.46)</td>
<td>28.81 (8.70)</td>
<td>4.10 (92)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>14.66 (5.88)</td>
<td>13.30 (4.97)</td>
<td>&lt;1 (92), n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
TABLE 3 Disclosure of Sexual Orientation of Gay Fathers Based on Relationship Status and Partner Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>No Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 97</td>
<td>N = 12</td>
<td>N = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure Total</td>
<td>5.37 (1.32)</td>
<td>3.76 (1.50)</td>
<td>4.99 (1.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure to World</td>
<td>5.20 (1.54)</td>
<td>3.08 (1.36)</td>
<td>4.48 (1.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure to Family</td>
<td>5.61 (1.26)</td>
<td>4.30 (1.69)</td>
<td>5.38 (1.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure to Religion</td>
<td>5.19 (2.07)</td>
<td>3.56 (2.54)</td>
<td>5.03 (2.44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F (df) = 7.87 (2, 146) **

F (df) = 10.52 (2, 146) ***

F (df) = 5.73 (2, 145) **

Notes. Measures are all on a 1 to 7 scale; higher numbers indicate higher levels of disclosure. Means that share a superscript are not significantly different from one another.

**p < .01. ***p < .001.

among groups. Overall, men who continued to stay in marriages with female partners reported less openness about their sexual identities.

Gay Identity

We administered five subscales from the LGBIS-R. Each subscale was examined separately to explore correlates of different facets of fathers’ gay identities. We found that there were no differences among groups in scores on four of the subscales: difficulty, stigma sensitivity, uncertainty, and centrality. Regardless of relationship status and gender of their partners, gay identities were equally central to all the fathers. The men were all equally certain about their sexual identities, and they described themselves as experiencing moderate levels of both stigma sensitivity and difficulty with the process of acknowledging a gay identity.

The groups also differed in certain respects on our assessment of gay identity. There was a significant difference between the three groups regarding level of concealment of their gay identities, F (2, 147) = 8.30, p < .001. Still-married gay fathers reported greater identity concealment than did formerly married gay fathers currently in relationships with men and than those who were currently single. Overall, despite the still-married men’s greater concealment of their gay identities, there were also many similarities among all three groups of gay fathers (see Table 4).

Parenting Stress and Social Support

To evaluate alternative explanations regarding differences in relationship satisfaction and level of disclosure, we examined the level of social support and parenting stress reported by the fathers in the three groups. Results showed that average levels of parenting stress for gay fathers in the sample
TABLE 4 Gay Fathers’ Experiences of Sexual Identity As a Function of Relationship Status and Partner Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Partner</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>No Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 97</td>
<td>N = 12</td>
<td>N = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Measure</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrality</td>
<td>4.81 (1.34)</td>
<td>5.33 (1.14)</td>
<td>4.64 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty</td>
<td>3.94 (1.46)</td>
<td>4.41 (1.40)</td>
<td>4.13 (1.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma Sensitivity</td>
<td>3.25 (1.33)</td>
<td>4.21 (1.48)</td>
<td>3.22 (1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>1.53 (0.79)</td>
<td>1.85 (0.91)</td>
<td>1.56 (0.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment</td>
<td>3.64 (1.27)</td>
<td>4.94 (1.42)a</td>
<td>4.40 (1.45)a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Measures are all on a 1 to 7 scale; higher numbers indicate higher levels of negative gay identity. Means that share a superscript are not significantly different from one another. 
***p < .001.

were below clinical levels (men currently in a relationship with women, with men, and single, respectively, $M = 68.58$, $SD = 16.15$; $M = 77.05$, $SD = 22.74$; $M = 66.71$, $SD = 20.73$). The amount of perceived social support also did not differ significantly among the groups, $F (2, 148) = < 1$, n.s.; perceived social support was unrelated to relationship status or gender of fathers’ current partners. Similarly, the level of parenting stress reported by the fathers did not differ as a function of relationship status or gender of partners, $F (2, 148) = 1.54$, n.s. In summary, all three groups of gay fathers reported similar levels of perceived social support and parenting stress.

DISCUSSION

The current study is the first to compare the experiences of gay fathers who stay in heterosexual marriages, separate and remain single, or separate and begin new relationships with male partners. We studied these men’s relationship functioning, gay identity, level of disclosure, social support, and parental stress. The results revealed that, while gay fathers in all three groups were similar in many respects, there were also some key differences among the experiences of men in the three groups.

The groups did not differ with respect to the amount of cohesion that they reported in their relationships. Even for gay fathers who stayed in relationships with their wives, there was considerable determination to work together. Men described their relationships with wives as characterized by good teamwork, especially in regard to parenting roles. For those who stayed in marriages, relationship cohesion was not different than it was for those who were now in newer relationships with male partners.

All three groups of gay fathers were also similar in terms of many aspects of their gay identities. At the time of data collection, men in all three
groups reported moderate levels of identity uncertainty and difficulty, and
dis this not associated with relationship status or partners' gender. Men in
all three groups also reported moderate to high identity centrality; being gay
was an important aspect of all the men's identities. Men in all three groups
also reported moderate levels of stigma sensitivity; they all worried to some
degree about the impact of sexual stigma on their lives. Overall, then, gay
fathers in all three groups were similar in recognizing the centrality of their
gay identities and of sexual stigma in their lives, and also in acknowledging
the difficulty of accepting gay identities in a world that stigmatizes them.

Yet another way in which gay fathers in all three groups were similar
was in terms of their reports of parenting stress. Men who had stayed in
heterosexual marriages did not report more parenting stress than did other
gay fathers. The same was true of social support. Men in all three groups also
reported similar amounts of social support from friends and family members.
Thus, there were many similarities in experience among all three groups of
gay fathers.

There were, however, also some notable ways in which the experiences
of gay fathers in the three groups diverged. For example, men who stayed
with their wives reported less agreement about affectional expression, less
consensus, and less satisfaction overall than did those currently in relations-
ships with male partners. Thus, although gay men who stayed in marriages
reported many strengths in their relationships, these seemed to have been
achieved at a real cost.

The results also revealed that gay men currently in relationships with
female partners were less likely to report disclosing their sexual orientation
and had higher levels of motivation to conceal their gay identities than did
other gay fathers. Buxton (2004b) found that many individuals in mixed-
orientation marriages identified as heterosexual in public, and our results
seem consistent with this view. Because men who have stayed with their
wives are seen by the world as being heterosexual, it would appear to
be easier for them than for other gay fathers to maintain this pose. Men
who have remained in their marriages may also view such concealment as
beneficial for their wives and children. On the other hand, concealment also
carries with it costs and real stresses. Gay fathers who had left their marriages
reported being less concerned about concealing their gay identities.

Our study had a number of strengths. Due to our use of the Internet
methodology, we were able to collect data from a wide array of gay fathers,
living in many parts of the United States. The participants come from a
wide range of ages and backgrounds. We were also able to use a variety
of standardized instruments to collect data on many aspects of these men's
experiences.

This study also had some limitations which should be acknowledged.
Although we were successful in recruiting a diverse sample, the study was
cross-sectional in design and did not provide information about these gay
fathers’ experiences over time. It would be valuable to learn more about the reasons why some gay men remain with their wives while others do not. It would also be valuable to learn more about the experiences of other family members, such as these men’s wives, partners, and children. This is a new area of research and the current study is only a beginning.

In conclusion, this study provided some initial information about the experiences of men who choose to stay in their heterosexual marriages and those who do not. Our results show that there are many similarities in the experiences of gay men who stayed with their wives and of those who left these marriages. On the other hand, there are also real differences—most notably in their ability to be open about sexual identities. Whether gay fathers decide, as did Governor McGreevey, to leave their wives and begin new relationships with male partners, to leave their wives and remain single, or to stay in their marriages, our results suggest that they will have experiences that are similar in many respects, particularly in the areas of parenting and social support. However, there are also some ways in which the experiences of gay fathers who remain married seemed to diverge from those of men who did not, especially in terms of the extent to which they were open about their attractions to men. Regardless of the choices that they made, one may hope that, like Jim McGreevey, these gay fathers felt that their lives have “ended up in a good place” (Barrett, 2006).

REFERENCES


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