NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD

To Be a Parent: Issues in Family Formation among Gay and Lesbian Adults

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For many years, parenthood was considered to be the exclusive prerogative of heterosexual people. Today, gay men and lesbian women remain less likely than their heterosexual peers to have children, but increasing numbers of openly gay and lesbian adults are becoming parents. In this essay, we review social science research on the numbers of openly gay and lesbian parents, the ways in which their pathways to parenthood may be changing, and the extent to which childless gay and lesbian adolescents and young adults expect to become parents. We have much to learn about supports for and barriers to family formation as well as the impact of decisions about family formation among gay and lesbian populations. Directions for future research on sexual orientation and family formation are discussed.

KEYWORDS Parent, gay, lesbian, family formation

INTRODUCTION

Parenthood is one of the most universal and valued experiences of American adults. Recent data reveal that more than 90% of American women either have children or expect to have them in the future; only 6% are voluntarily childless (Chandra, Martinez, Mosher, Abma, & Jones, 2005). In another study based on the same national data set, 94% of adults agreed that the rewards of parenthood outweigh its costs (Martinez, Chandra, Abma, Jones & Mosher, 2006). It is clear that most people regard parenthood as an important part of life.

Parenthood was once considered to be the exclusive prerogative of heterosexual people. In the United States and many other cultures, young
adults were expected to meet and to marry opposite-sex partners and to rear biological children in the context of these marriages (Cherlin, 2009; Seltzer, 2004). Family formation outside such marriages was highly stigmatized; anyone who did not enter into a heterosexual marriage was expected to remain single and childless. By denying gay and lesbian adults the opportunity to form their own families, these expectations created an important form of discrimination against sexual minority individuals (Patterson, 2000, 2009).

Although significant social change has taken place in recent years, gay men and lesbian women are still much less likely than their heterosexual peers to be married or to be parents (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007). In the United States today, same-sex couples have access to legal marriage in a few states or to some other form of legal relationship recognition, e.g., domestic partnerships, in a handful of additional states. Same-sex couples can live openly, even without legal recognition, in many other parts of the country. Legal barriers to gay and lesbian parenthood, such as laws barring adoption and foster care, are increasingly rare (Joslin & Minter, 2009). Most gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults in the United States today, however, do not have the legal right to marry their same-sex partner. Similarly, while some gay and lesbian adults have become parents in recent years, many remain childless.

What can the results of social science research reveal about processes of family formation among sexual minorities and about the sequelae of these processes? This topic has received relatively little attention, and almost no research has explored family formation among bisexual or transgender individuals. For this reason, we focus in this essay on family formation among those who identify as gay or lesbian. It is important to bear in mind that not all adults want to become parents and that one person’s dismay about remaining childless may be another person’s joy in being free of the burdens imposed by parenthood. We make no argument about this issue; we support freedom of reproductive choice for all persons. We draw on existing social science research to address questions about (1) the extent to which lesbian women and gay men are parents in the United States today; (2) ways in which the pathways to parenthood may be changing over time; and (3) the extent to which non-heterosexual adolescents and young adults express the desire to become parents. We conclude that, although some data do exist, much remains to be learned, and we discuss some promising directions for future research.

HOW MANY GAY AND LESBIAN ADULTS ARE PARENTS?

It is difficult to estimate the numbers of gay and lesbian parents in the United States, and many reasons contribute to this fact (Patterson & Friel, 2000). Gay and lesbian adults have for many years and in many locales been reluctant
to disclose their identities to researchers, particularly if they were parents. In view of widely held prejudices and fearing the loss of child custody because of their sexual orientation, many gay and lesbian parents frequently made every effort to remain hidden. Now that attitudes, laws, and policies have changed in many jurisdictions and non-heterosexual parents have less to fear, many more gay fathers and lesbian mothers are willing to disclose their identities.

For the first time in the 2000 United States Census, two adults living in the same household were given the option of identifying themselves as an unmarried couple. It was, thus, possible for the first time to identify same-sex unmarried couples and to enumerate how many of these had children under the age of 18 living in their homes. When Gates and his colleagues calculated these numbers, they found that 27% of same-sex couples as compared with 43% of opposite-sex couples reported having children in their homes (Gates et al., 2007). Since the Census counted approximately 565,000 same-sex couples, this meant that more than 150,000 children were identified as living in the homes of same-sex couples.

Despite the many strengths of the Census, there are, as Gates and his colleagues (2007) noted, a number of problems with use of Census data to estimate the numbers of gay and lesbian parents in the United States. Some same-sex couples no doubt failed to identify themselves as such; thus, the 2000 Census numbers almost certainly underestimated the number of same-sex couples in the United States. Furthermore, many gay and lesbian parents may not be involved in a same-sex-couple relationship, and, hence, would not have been identified. In addition, many gay and lesbian parents have children who are older than 18 years of age. For all these reasons among others, the 2000 Census data almost certainly provided a substantial under-count of gay and lesbian parents. These data were nevertheless valuable because they demonstrated that, even when undercounted, substantial numbers of gay and lesbian parents live in all parts of the United States (Gates et al., 2007).

The Census is not the only source of parenthood data collected by the United States federal government. The 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) is a nationally representative survey of fertility behavior and intentions among both men and women of childbearing age (i.e., 15 to 44 years of age). In this survey, 35% of self-identified lesbians reported that they had given birth to at least one child compared to 65% of same-aged heterosexual women (Gates et al., 2007). Only 16% of self-identified gay men had a biological or adoptive child compared to 48% of same-aged heterosexual men (Gates et al., 2007). Thus, although there are many gay and lesbian parents in the United States today, available data suggest that gay and lesbian adults are markedly less likely than heterosexual adults to have become parents (Gates et al., 2007; Patterson, 2004; Patterson & Friel, 2000).
Why are gay and lesbian adults less likely than others to become parents? Lesbians and gay men are much less likely than heterosexual men and women to experience unplanned pregnancy, but this is unlikely to be the sole cause of differences between them. Many other potential causes for the disparity, such as lower societal pressure or greater logistical barriers to parenthood, may be manifested in two ways: (1) lack of desire to become a parent, and (2) lack of intention to become a parent. Desires consist of what one wants or would like to do, while intentions consist of what one intends or expects to do. A desire to become a parent may or may not be accompanied by an intention to do so. For example, a person who harbors parenting desires but not parenting intentions might express this by saying, “I would like to have children, but I do not expect this to happen.” Lower incidence of parenting desires, parenting intentions, or both could result in lower fertility rates among sexual minority adults when compared to their heterosexual peers.

Previous research has demonstrated that many gay and lesbian individuals want to become parents. In the Gates et al. (2007) study of the 2002 NSFG data, 52% of childless gay men and 41% of childless lesbians expressed a desire to have children. Fully 46% of lesbians said that they had considered adopting a child. Corresponding figures for men were not available, because this question was not asked of men. The evidence we have, however, suggests that substantial percentages of gay and lesbian adults want to become parents. At the same time, these numbers are somewhat lower than those for heterosexual adults. In the 2002 NSFG, 53% of childless heterosexual women and 67% of childless heterosexual men expressed a desire for children (Gates et al., 2007). Overall, many gay and lesbian adults wish to become parents, but fewer gay or lesbian than heterosexual individuals express this desire. Thus, reduced desire for children may be responsible, at least in part, for lower parenthood rates among gay and lesbian adults.

Recent research has also found strong expectations of parenthood among gay and lesbian youths. In D’Augelli and his colleagues’ study of sexual minority youths in New York City, 86% of young men and 91% of young women reported that they saw themselves as likely to rear children some day (D’Augelli, Rendina, Sinclair & Grossman, 2006/2007). These rates are much closer to contemporary numbers for heterosexual women (90%; Chandra et al., 2005), suggesting that younger gay and lesbian individuals may be more inclined than their older peers to become parents.

For heterosexual couples, parenting intentions are strong and consistent predictors of parenthood. When a heterosexual adult expresses the intention to become a parent, it is highly likely that he or she will do so (Schoen, Astone, Kim, Nathanson, & Fields, 1999). Is this also true of non-heterosexual adults? Using data from the 2002 NSFG, Riskind and Patterson (2010) examined both parenting desires and intentions among childless gay, lesbian, and
heterosexual individuals. Replicating the finding reported by Gates and his colleagues (2007), Riskind and Patterson (2010) found that gay and lesbian individuals were less likely than matched heterosexual peers to express desires for parenthood. They also reported that this effect was not moderated by age or by race/ethnicity. Lower rates of parenthood among lesbians and gay men appear to be at least partially due to lower rates of parenting desires in these two groups.

Riskind and Patterson (2010) also found that, of men who wanted to become parents, fewer gay men than heterosexual men reported that they intended to do so. In other words, they found a larger gap between parenting intentions and parenting desires among gay men than among heterosexual men. This effect of sexual orientation was not related to age, race, or ethnicity. Lower rates of both parenting desires and intentions among gay men may contribute to their lower rates of parenthood. Although further research is needed to identify specific pathways, it seems likely that both logistic barriers specific to male couples and lack of familiarity with alternate routes to parenthood could be involved.

While Riskind and Patterson (2010) found a gap between parenting desires and parenting intentions among gay men, they reported no evidence of such a gap among lesbians. In other words, lesbians who wanted to become parents were no more and no less likely than their heterosexual peers to intend to do so. Thus, lesbians’ parenting intentions do not seem to contribute to their lower rates of parenthood; for them, parenting desires are probably a more important factor.

Interestingly, both gay and lesbian adults endorsed the value of parenthood, and they did so just as strongly as did their heterosexual peers. Overall, gay and lesbian individuals agreed or strongly agreed that the benefits of parenthood outweigh its costs. This finding contradicts the stereotype that lesbians and gay men consider parenting to be unrewarding or overly costly (Badgett, 2001). It is intriguing that many gay and lesbian participants who did not desire parenthood nevertheless endorsed its value. Regardless of their own intentions and desires, lesbians and gay men expressed very positive attitudes toward parenthood (Riskind & Patterson, 2010).

The 2002 NSFG data, upon which both the Gates et al. (2007) and the Riskind and Patterson (2010) studies were based, have many strengths. The data set provided a rare opportunity to study a nationally representative sample of gay and lesbian individuals. Participants were extremely diverse in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, and geographic residence. Participants included many gay men and people of color, groups that have often been underrepresented in research on sexual orientation and parenthood. The NSFG was created and fielded by an experienced team of researchers and had many methodological strengths. For example, the audio computer-assisted self-interview (ACASI) method employed in the NSFG was designed to increase accuracy of responses by affording participants added privacy
when answering sensitive questions. These and other factors enhance the strength and likely generality of findings based on the NSFG data set.

On the other hand, the NSFG data also have limitations. Men and women were sometimes given different versions of the same questions, which made comparisons by gender difficult or impossible to make. Sample sizes for some subsidiary comparisons were small. Some measures of attitudes toward parenthood or childlessness consisted of single items. These and other issues limit the overall utility of this data set for the study of sexual orientation and pathways to parenthood.

Now that associations between sexual orientation, parenting desires, and parenting intentions have been established in the nationally representative NSFG sample, future research is needed to explore mechanisms underlying the findings. Specifically, studies are needed to identify specific barriers and supports mediating the relationship between sexual orientation, on the one hand, and parenting desires and intentions on the other. These might include perceptions of financial or other barriers to parenthood, internalized or felt sexual stigma, and/or lack of social support for parenthood, among others. Some promising beginnings have been made (see, for example, Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Rabun & Oswald, 2009), but much remains to be learned.

Overall, results of research in this area suggest that, although fewer gay or lesbian than heterosexual adults express desires for parenthood, many gay and lesbian people do hope to become parents. Gay and lesbian individuals’ lower desire for parenthood together with gay men’s lower intentions to parent may contribute to lower rates of parenthood among gay and lesbian populations. Recent historical trends that seem to favor both family formation and openness about sexual identity among gay and lesbian individuals may influence these decisions (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007).

PATHWAYS TO PARENTHOOD

How are gay and lesbian individuals becoming parents, and how might their pathways be changing over time? When social science research on gay fathers and lesbian mothers first appeared, researchers and readers generally assumed that participants had become parents in the context of heterosexual marriages (Barrett & Robinson, 1990; Bigner, 1999; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989a,b; Bozett, 1980, 1981a,b). When heterosexually married gay and women acknowledged gay and lesbian identities often in the context of divorce, they faced numerous challenges. For many, legal battles over child custody entailed debates about the degree to which non-heterosexual identities affected parents’ capacity to provide good homes for their children (e.g., Maggiore, 1992). For non-custodial parents, emerging identities as gay or lesbian individuals had to be reconciled with existing identities as parents (Bozett, 1981a,b). Particularly for non-custodial parents, the need to integrate
sexual identities with parental identities was frequently acute (Barrett & Robinson, 1990; Bozett, 1987, 1989).

The family lives of gay and lesbian individuals have changed rapidly in recent years (D’Emilio, 2002). As gay men and lesbians have begun to come out earlier in life (D’Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006), many have begun to undertake parenthood in the context of already established non-heterosexual identities (Golombok & Tasker, in press; Johnson & O’Connor, 2002; Patterson, 2004). Women as well as men consider a wider variety of routes to parenthood than did their older peers (Hicks, 2006; Lev, 2004; Mallon, 2004). Women have become parents through donor insemination (DI) with sperm from known and unknown donors as well as through sexual intercourse with men who are not their primary partners (Patterson, 2000). Both men and women have become parents through adoption or foster care arrangements (Mallon, 2004). Some gay men are becoming fathers through surrogacy, in which a woman agrees to become pregnant with a child who will be reared by a gay man or male couple (Lev, 2004). In other cases, gay men and lesbian women have undertaken parenthood jointly in the absence of a sexual relationship. These and other arrangements have opened up the possibilities for gay men and lesbians who wish to be parents (Barrett & Tasker, 2001; Golombok & Tasker, in press; Mallon, 2004; Patterson, 2000, 2009).

To what extent are we witnessing a generational shift in pathways to parenthood among gay men and lesbian women? Are divorced gay fathers and lesbian mothers figures from a previous era? If so, one would expect that gay and lesbian adults who have become parents in the context of heterosexual marriages would be older than those who became parents after coming out. One would further expect that most younger gay and lesbian parents would have achieved parenthood not through heterosexual marriage but via other pathways.

On the other hand, gay men and lesbians still face many barriers to parenthood (Patterson, 2004; Golombok & Tasker, in press). Discriminatory attitudes are still widespread, and they may be stronger in some locales than in others (Pew Research Center, 2009). In some contexts, non-heterosexual individuals may still feel pressure to marry a different-sex partner in order to conform to social expectations (Higgins, 2004). Moreover, legal barriers to adoption, foster care, and surrogacy for gay men and lesbians exist in a number of jurisdictions; these barriers may inhibit individuals who seek to become parents in the context of pre-existing non-heterosexual identities (Joslin & Minter, 2009). Thus, even if an overall generational shift is taking place, the speed of change may vary across contexts and locations (Patterson, 2009).

If, as the idea of a generational shift implies, gay men and lesbian women are increasingly likely to become parents, this may have important implications for family composition (Gianino, 2008; Mallon, 2004). Adoption
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is one of the routes that many gay and lesbian individuals consider taking to become parents (Goldberg, 2009). The majority of prospective adoptive parents identify as white or Caucasian, but many children awaiting adoption are members of racial or ethnic minority groups (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). Lesbians and gay men have been described as more open than other prospective adoptive parents to transracial adoptions (Goldberg, 2009). To the extent that gay and lesbian individuals and couples are adopting across racial lines, they should be more likely than heterosexual parents to be living in interracial families. Furthermore, data from the 2000 United States Census reveal that same-sex couples are more likely than male-female couples to be interracial in composition (Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005), and at least one recent study found that same-sex couples were more likely than male-female couples to have adopted across racial lines (Farr & Patterson, 2009). Thus, if adoption is an increasingly common route to family formation among openly gay and lesbian adults, this may well be associated with increasing numbers of interracial households.

To evaluate these possibilities among gay fathers, Tornello and Patterson (2010) recruited a large sample of gay fathers ($N = 879$) living in the United States. In an online survey, gay fathers were asked to explain how they had become fathers as well as to provide demographic information about themselves and about their children. In this way, the authors sought to explore any generational changes in pathways to parenthood among gay men and to evaluate the degree to which these might be associated with residence in interracial households.

As expected on the basis of the generational change hypothesis, gay fathers who were over 50 years of age were more likely than younger gay fathers to report that their eldest child had been born in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship. A small number of older gay men did report family formation via adoption or foster care, but older fathers were very unlikely to report conception via sperm donation, donor insemination, or surrogacy. Younger fathers, in contrast, most often reported family formation through adoption, and a few mentioned surrogacy. Only a minority of gay fathers under 50 years of age described their eldest child as having been born in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship. Thus, results were strongly consistent with the generational change hypothesis. Demographic variables such as income, education, and region of the country did not account for age-related differences (Tornello & Patterson, 2010).

Another set of findings from this study concerned associations of paternal age with the racial/ethnic composition of gay fathers' families (Tornello & Patterson, 2010). Interracial families were reported more often by younger than by older gay fathers. About 75% of fathers over 60 years of age, but only about half of fathers under 40 years of age, reported that all family members were of the same race/ethnicity. The difference between older and younger gay fathers in this regard was related to modes of family
formation. The majority of families formed via adoption or foster care, but only about one in five families formed in the context of heterosexual relationships were described by fathers as interracial. Thus, pathways to parenthood were associated with family composition (Tornello & Patterson, 2010).

Results of this Internet survey of gay fathers were consistent with the notions that a generational shift in pathways to parenthood is taking place and that this shift may have implications for family composition. It is important to recognize, however, that the Tornello and Patterson (2010) sample, though large and diverse in many ways, was also relatively homogeneous in other ways. Participants lived in many parts of the United States and became fathers in various ways, but they were predominantly white, well-educated, and financially comfortable. It is unclear whether the findings would apply to members of other racial and ethnic groups or to those in different economic strata of society.

Tornello and Patterson's (2010) findings are consistent with the idea that a generational shift in gay fathers’ pathways to parenthood may be underway, but they do not address similar questions about lesbian women. Are lesbian women experiencing similar changes? Much has been made of the concept of a “lesbian baby boom” (e.g., Johnson & O'Connor, 2002), but data to evaluate this notion have, for the most part, been lacking. One notable exception is a large-scale survey of lesbian women published by Morris, Balsam, and Rothblum (2002). Data for this study were collected in 1995, whereas those for the Tornello and Patterson (2010) study were collected in 2009, almost 15 years later. Despite the fact that the two data sets were not assembled at the same time, the Morris and colleagues (2002) study provides information about similar issues in family formation among lesbian women.

Morris and her colleagues (2002) recruited a sample of more than 2,000 lesbian and bisexual women for a “Lesbian Wellness Survey.” Of this group, some women reported that they had become mothers before coming out, and others reported that they had become mothers after coming out. Consistent with the generational shift hypothesis, 96% of lesbian and bisexual mothers at least 60 years of age (but only 59% of those 30 to 40 years of age) reported that they had become parents in the context of a heterosexual relationship, before coming out. Although these findings are consistent with the notion of a generational shift, it is notable that in this 1995 survey most younger women reported becoming parents in the context of a pre-existing heterosexual relationship. This stands in contrast to the Tornello and Patterson (2010) study in which only a minority of younger gay fathers reported having children in the context of a heterosexual relationship. Despite specific variations, findings from the research of Morris and her colleagues (2002) suggest the possibility that a generational shift in pathways to parenthood may be taking place among lesbian women as well as among gay men.
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In our review of findings about sexual orientation and family formation, we have established that many gay and lesbian adults are parents, that many childless gay and lesbian adults report desires, expectations, and intentions for parenthood, and that there could be a generational shift in gay and lesbian pathways to parenthood. These are first glimpses of a large and as yet relatively unexplored territory. In this section, we consider additional research, outline new areas of concern that are implicated by this work, and propose directions for future research on sexual orientation and pathways to parenthood.

What obstacles might block gay and lesbian adults’ pathways to parenthood, and how have current gay and lesbian parents negotiated such barriers? Preliminary research has begun to explore some barriers to parenthood. Lack of access to reproductive health care such as assisted reproductive technology may be significant for many gay men and lesbians (Goldberg, 2009). Similarly, discriminatory policies and practices in adoption and foster care may prevent some gay and lesbian adults from becoming parents (Patterson, 2009). On the other hand, supportive individuals, groups, and agencies may encourage reproductive health and possibilities for parenthood for lesbian women (Lev, 2004; Ross, Steele, & Epstein, 2006). Much remains to be learned about barriers and supports for lesbians and gay men who seek to become parents.

As increasing numbers of gay and lesbian adults become parents, perinatal and post-adoption issues may also require attention. For example, due to contextual factors and also to the added investment that many lesbian women have made in achieving pregnancy, the pain of pregnancy loss among lesbian women may be amplified, relative to that among heterosexual women (Peel, 2010). Due to pre-existing conditions as well as current social conditions, the risk of postpartum depression may be greater in lesbian than heterosexual women (Ross, 2005; Ross, Steele, Goldfinger, & Strike, 2007; Trettin, Moses-Kolko, & Wisner, 2005). Results of one study suggested that the risk of postpartum depression was greater among lesbian birthmothers than among their female partners (Ross et al., 2007); this finding brings the interaction of biological and social contextual factors to the attention of researchers. Similarly, increasing numbers of infant adoptions by gay and lesbian adults also raise issues about the kinds of post-adoption services that may be helpful to families. For instance, those who adopt children with special needs or who adopt across racial lines may be especially likely to benefit from specialized post-adoption services (Goldberg, 2009; Mallon, 2004). Thus, gay and lesbian parenthood brings a new perspective to the study of familiar questions both in reproductive health and in child welfare.

The existence of gay and lesbian parents also raises some altogether new questions that deserve attention. For example, when a same-sex couple
plans to have children together, how do they reach a decision about which member of the couple, if either, should be the genetic parent of their child? How does a same-sex couple go about making this type of decision and with what consequences for each member of the couple? What might be the consequences for the child who will be born? Some information has been collected on such decisions (e.g., Goldberg, 2006; Johnson & O’Connor, 2002), and about some of their ramifications (Patterson, 1998) among lesbian couples and their children, but much remains to be learned.

In addition to studies of couple-headed gay and lesbian parent families, research should also consider a greater variety of family structures. Some gay and lesbian parents have conceived children with the help of opposite-sex friends with whom they are not romantically involved (Lev, 2004). For instance, a lesbian woman might conceive a child with donor sperm from a gay friend; after the birth of a child conceived in this way, the donor might or might not be considered part of the child’s family. Similarly, a woman who agrees to serve as a surrogate for a gay couple might or might not take on familial relationships with the couple or with the child thus conceived. Many gay and lesbian adults become single parents, outside the context of a relationship, and they may face different types of challenges than do couples (Patterson, 2000). In short, family structures that emerge in the context of gay and lesbian family formation may be unfamiliar to family scholars; their functioning and the processes involved in setting and maintaining their boundaries may be relatively unstudied. There is much room for new scholarship focused on these issues.

Not least among the topics in need of study is the impact of parenthood upon those gay and lesbian adults who undertake it. Parenthood has long been seen as a formative aspect of adult development, and this is increasingly the case for gay and lesbian as well as heterosexual adults. As gay and lesbian parents increasingly gather at children’s soccer games and school plays rather than at bars and clubs, it is entirely possible that their health-related behaviors will be affected. In a recent Internet survey, gay and lesbian parents reported finding greater meaning in life than did non-parents (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010). Research with heterosexual populations has shown that men and women who were “childless by circumstances” have elevated levels of depression compared to those who are “childfree by choice” (Connidis & McMullin, 2002). Gay men may be less able than lesbian women to fulfill their parenting desires, consistent with being “childless by circumstances” (Riskind & Patterson, 2010). Thus, gay men with unfulfilled parenting desires may be at higher risk for depressive symptoms than those whose intentions for parenthood match their desires (Riskind & Patterson, 2010). At the same time, some aspects of parenthood may be less positive in their overall effects. For example, one study found that lesbian couples reported increased conflict and decreased love for their partners in the months immediately after they
became parents (Goldberg & Sayer, 2006). The implications of decisions about parenthood on the lives of gay and lesbian adults are in need of greater study.

As we begin to broaden our understanding of family formation issues to include non-heterosexual as well as heterosexual people, many directions for research become apparent. We need to learn more about barriers to parenthood as well as supports for gay and lesbian adults who wish to become parents. For all those who are involved, we need to learn more about the reasons why non-heterosexual adults select different pathways to parenthood and about the consequences of selecting each route. In sum, the study of sexual orientation and family formation can enrich our understanding of families and also of gay and lesbian lives.

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