What Makes a Family:

Exploring the Coparenting Alliance Model in Diverse Households

by

Albert Tehoumey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Counseling Psychology & Psychotherapy

The American College of Greece

2023

THESIS APPROVAL

"What Makes a Family: Exploring the Coparenting Alliance Model in Diverse Households" a thesis

prepared by Albert Tehoumey in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science

degree in Counseling Psychology & Psychotherapy was presented on June 23rd, 2023, and was

approved and accepted by the thesis committee and the School of Graduate & Professional Studies.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

_____

Dr. Remos Armaos, Thesis Advisor

_____

Dr. Alexandros Maragakis, Committee member

_____

Dr. Lito Eleni Michalopoulou, Committee member

APPROVED BY:

_____

Dr. A. Krepapa
Dean, School of Graduate & Professional Education

Abstract

Due to a notable surge in diversity, the present era is experiencing the rise of novel family configurations. As household labels are being refashioned, the traditional family structure has been relegated to representing the minority of contemporary ménages. Yet, it is the different-sex, married, biparental household that continues to be regarded as the standard against which all other family forms are measured (Murry, 2018). This qualitative research seeks to delve into the lived experiences of five gay and lesbian parents, raising children in alliance with a non-romantic gay or heterosexual coparent, to better understand the interpersonal dynamics, the logistical organization, the challenges, and the required skills that either facilitated or hindered the formation of a core unit centered around the well-being of the children. Employing the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the analyzed data revealed a clustering of themes revolving around three distinct phases of the coparenting journey. The first domain encompassed themes related to the creation of an idealized family, exploring the emergence of the desire for parenthood and the challenges encountered along the way. The second domain explored themes associated with the process and the rules of engagement, including the commitment to preserving the coparenting model, the development of a coparenting agreement, the importance of effective communication, and the overarching principle of prioritizing the well-being of the children. The third and final domain pertained to the adoption of a new normal and the embrace of modern family life.

Keywords: coparenting, alliance, CAM, modern family, LGBT, diversity, IPA.

Curriculum Vitae

PERSONAL INFORMATION
Date of birth
Nationality

FIELDS OF INTEREST

Counseling, communication, media.

EDUCATION
10/2003 – 06/2006	Notre Dame University, Lebanon
	MA Media Studies & Advertising
10/1998 – 07/2002	American University of Beirut, Lebanon
	BA Psychology
10/1984 – 06/1998	Collège Saint Joseph, Lebanon
	Baccalaureate, Philosophy

WORK EXPERIENCE
2009 – present	MTV Lebanon
	TV host of a daily awareness segment (2010 – present)
	TV host of the live morning show (2009 – 2021)
	Head of the promotion department (2009 – 2012)
2015 – 2021	FB&E, Lebanon
	Assistant GM
2012 – 2015	Caiman Films
	Managing Partner & Executive Producer

SKILLS
Languages	French, English, Arabic (advanced)
	Spanish, Greek (basic)
Technical	Excel, Keynote, Microsoft Dynamics NAV, Adobe Premiere
Professional	Public speaking, TV and theatre production, financial management

AFFILIATIONS
2022 – present	Psychoanalyst
	Member of the Société de Psychanalyse Freudienne, Paris.

Table of Contents

Literature review

With the diversity explosion, this new century is witnessing a growing change in the understanding of family, as classic norms are being challenged by new practices, especially with the normalization of gender and sexual orientation fluidity, and subsequent life choices away from traditional institutions. Over the past few decades, family structures have expanded, allowing the emergence of several new family profiles. Defining the structure of a household is a growing challenge, as it tackles several characteristics. For the United States Census Bureau, a family household has at least two members related by birth, marriage, or adoption, with one of whom being the householder (Vespa, 2013). Murry and Lippold (2018) listed members' biological relatedness to one another, parents' marital status, as well as parents' gender identities and sexual orientations as central factors. But they also emphasized living arrangements as determining features: resident versus nonresident parents, presence and/or absence of extended kin, and transition patterns (constant family model versus changing situation due to life events, such as separation or death).

Recent studies focusing on American families whose children were in adolescence have observed a sharp increase in numbers of nonmarital couples, single parenting, cohabitation, same-sex parenting, multi-partner fertility, and grandparental custody. The high incidence of such occurrences has largely reshaped the traditional concept of a nuclear family (Pearce et al, 2018). Several censuses and a plethora of research have highlighted the diverse family profiles currently in place in First World countries, highlighting interpersonal dynamics and other factors affecting the quality of life of members of said families, most notably the children.

Typical families

According to Coontz (1997), the "ideal" family model consists of a different-sex (heterosexual) biparental couple, in a first-marriage arrangement, residing with genetic or adopted children. There is extensive research highlighting the weakening influence of matrimony and the traditional family model among different-sex couples experiencing childbearing. Levingston asserts

that less than 50% of American children live in traditional families (Levington, 2014). Between 1950

and 2000, births occurring outside of wedlock have multiplied by six (Ventura, 2000). More

specifically, between 2008 and 2013, 41% of births in the United States were nonmarital (Solomon-

Fears, 2014). And while a significant portion of unmarried couples is cohabiting during the birth of a

first child, 66% of them will separate within five years (Carlson, 2008).

Single-parent families

The single-parent household has gained ground, knowing that in 2013, 20,500,000 American

children were raised by single parents (Statista, 2020), versus the 54,650,000 American children

raised in heterosexual biparental households, as per the United States Census Bureau.

Monoparental families are as old as humanity. According to Psychology Today (ND), at least 25% of

minors in the United States live in single-parent households, due to a parent's state of being

unmarried, widowed, or divorced and not remarried. The ratio is 3 to 1 in favor of single mothers

versus men (Psychology Today, ND). The Pew Research Center (Kramer, 2019) confirmed this figure,

further stating that the incidence of single-parent households in the United Stated was almost

quadruple the world average (7%). Growing incidence of single-parent families can be justified by

the elevated divorce and separation rates among marital and nonmarital relationships respectively.

In seventy years, the rate of births attributed to unmarried women has increased from 4% to 41%

(Curtin, 2014). In the United States of 2009, 18% of men and 44% of women divorced within the

previous 12 months, were residing with minors (Elliott, 2011), producing 1,100,000 children

experiencing a parental separation and unavoidable change to their living situation. Unmarried,

coresident parents seems particularly fragile as a model, leading more often than not to having

absent fathers from households, for some or all their children's adolescence (Pearce, 2018). It would

be noteworthy to mention that, also according to Pearce (2018), 8% of children have a non-residing

mother, while 4% reside primarily with their fathers.

The statistics do not differentiate between single parents who have separated or those,

especially women, who have become single parents by choice. It is here hypothesized that single

parents by choice constitute a small if not negligent percentage of the overall category. Finally, most surveys do not investigate the single parent's sexual orientation, creating a conundrum in terms of categorization and labeling. Studies of lesbian mothers tend to differentiate between two segments: women who became mothers while in a heterosexual relationship, later becoming a single gay mother, and those who formed a single-mother household as independent gay women (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). In most cases of single-parents, irrelevant of gender and orientation, households are statistically poorer, which negatively correlates with parenting quality (Murry, 2001).

Same-sex families

In 2000, the Netherlands provided the first law extending marital rights to same-sex couples. Over the following two decades, several countries similarly expanded legislatures and recognition of same-sex marriage, granting same-sex couples the privileges that were traditionally associated with marriage, including adoption and parenting rights (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Same-sex families englobe members of the LGBT+ community that have become parents through either adoption, foster care, donor insemination, in-vitro fertilization, or surrogacies. In some instances, same-sex parenting also refers to households where at least one of the parents identify as LGBT+ (Fond, 2011), after a separation. In other words, and as stated earlier, the single-parent and same-sex parent categories can easily overlap.

Same-sex family occurrences are increasing, with same-sex couples evolving into legal marriage arrangements and displaying higher childbearing rates compared to other family settings (Goldberg, 2018). As a result of which, these atypical families are growing in numbers, especially visible today in kindergartens and preschools of First World cities worldwide, due to the recent laws that have been passed. Interestingly, adoptive children among same-sex households are in proportional upsurge compared to biological children (Pearce, 2018). In 2013, Vespa, Lewis, and Kreider uncovered that 16% of American same-sex cohabiting or married couples have biological, adoptive, or stepchildren under age 18 living with them, which is an increase from the 13% rate in the 1990's. In 2013, the National Health Interview Survey estimated that 19% of the 690,000 same-

sex couples in the United States were raising children under the age of 18 (Gates, 2014). The fear of

retribution hinders censuses' ability to accurately identify the number of children living with one

LGBT+ parent and/or two same-sex parents, as it is believed that many parents from the category

improperly state their sexual orientation on surveys (Patterson, 1992). We hope that this issue has

diminished in recent surveys but in their 2013 report, the Pew Research Center observed that 42% of

Americans opposed same-sex marriage, and 35% of the population thought that same-sex parents

raising children was a bad thing (PRC, 2013). Despite the progress made in terms of legislature and

public perception, many LGBT+ parents fear the removal of custody of the children. And in many

cases, upon divorce of a heterosexual couple with children, one parent may then identify as a

member of the LGBT+ community. Consequently, defining and identifying families having same-sex

parents is a puzzle.

Other families

Adding to the complexity of accurately profiling families and moving away from the

traditional "ideal" model, a notable trend is emerging where adults are having children with multiple

partners, often due to separation from their initial partner or widowhood. This phenomenon, known

as multi-partner fertility, accounted for approximately 10% of births in 2014 (Monte, 2017). When

considering all available comparative statistics, it is increasingly common for children to find

themselves living in various family structures, including single-parent households, households with

stepparents, or even households without a biological parent. Additionally, children may also be part

of households with stepsiblings or half-siblings. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that 2%

of American children are growing up in households without any parents and are instead being raised

by their grandparents (Pearce, 2018).

Recent newspaper headlines provide us with a glimpse into the potential challenges to

traditional norms and understandings that we may encounter in the near future. In 2007, the world

witnessed a groundbreaking event when the first "pregnant man" gave birth to his child. Thomas

Beatie, who was assigned female at birth but later transitioned to male while retaining his

reproductive organs, went on to bear three consecutive children (Biblarz and Savci, 2010; Wikipedia, 2022). Beatie was married to a woman, creating a different-sex couple where the husband gave birth, marking an unprecedented situation. Transgender men and women are becoming increasingly visible in the media, with individuals from these communities openly expressing their gender identity and requesting that family members use their new name, pronouns, and treat them in accordance with their affirmed gender (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Some parents may perceive this transition as a loss or even the death of their former child, highlighting the societal significance placed on gender identity (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Gendering a child begins from the moment parents become aware of its existence (Kane, 2006). As young transgender individuals grow into adulthood, they establish or redefine relationships and seek to form their own families. In 2022, 2% of young American adults identified as transgender and 3% identified as non-binary (Brown, 2022); these proportions are expected to increase in the coming years. The parenting experiences of transgender individuals remain understudied, but it is anticipated that they will challenge and reshape family norms and conventional labels, as they face even greater stigma compared to LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) groups.

Challenges faced by the various family structures

Divorce and remarriage are now common. In the UK, the 2021 census has observed a divorce rate reaching an unprecedented 42% (ONS, 2023). It has become customary to witness the dissolution of an initial family model before constituting a new one, to merge little households into one blended family, to raise children outside of wedlock, or even to choose the single-parenting option from the start. Now that the LGBT+ community is more vocally expressing parenthood desires, which are being facilitated through natural processes, adoptions, or surrogacies, it is going to be difficult to identify clear labels for each type of household. A further issue around sexual orientation and subsequent accurate labeling of family profiles is that separated partners and single parents may then prone altered sexual identities and orientations, rarely addressed by the censuses.

It is important at this stage to clarify that the family formation in and of itself alone neither determines the outcome or effects on members nor defines said members' expectations of life experiences. However, the circumstances of that formation and transitional factors do have tangible consequences on the family members' daily lives, potentially affecting how parents for example manage, organize, and socialize their children (Murry, 2018).

Following parental divorce, more than a million child in the United States will experience new custodial arrangements every year. Such transitions are associated with increased hardship, stress, anxiety, insecurities, and general adjustment challenges to family members, especially minors. Separation and divorce are associated with parental stress and harsher parenting in mothers (Beck, 2010) with the main risk according to Amato (2004) lying in the disruption of parent–child relationships which highly affects children in negative ways. Studies conducted in North America and several European countries have been consistently pinpointing the similar and significant hazards of divorce on minors (Amato, 2004). The list includes academic failure, misconduct, depression, and low self-esteem, as well as various social difficulties. Compared with children living in biparental households, one main factor behind the negative impact of divorce is the regressing quality of the parent-child relationship (Amato, 2004). It has been found for example that most divorced fathers' priority when having custody of the children, is to make sure the kids are having a good time (Amato, 2004). As such, the father-children activities focus on leisure such as dining out, watching movies, and playtime, with less engaging in authoritative practices, such as homework, or emotional regulation, such as heart-to-heart talks. Amato also found that non-residing fathers are generally more permissive and overall indulgent in disciplinary measures with visiting children, as a misconstrued way of safeguarding affection. Luckily, not all children going through a divorce will suffer bad grades and loss of healthy parent-child dynamics. Generalizing would be untrue and unfair; but without parents' emotional maturity and sensitivity to their children's needs, the difficulties are real.

Another challenge lies in the labels themselves. Even when same-sex couples express a desire to marry and be accepted as a household, they face resistance (Moore, 2013). It is widely accepted that children are influenced by peer perception, especially in their primary socialization environments, educational institutions, and that can have a lasting impact on their social lives and on their school performance. In England and Wales, the Home Office reported a constant yearly rise in hate crimes against people based on their sexual orientation, from 2016 to 2021. The report is not referring to microaggressions, rather describing about 47 daily acts of aggravated homophobic violence, versus only 23 some seven years ago (Home Office, 2021). Two decades earlier, in 1995, future Prime Minister Boris Johnson had written a column describing children raised by single mothers as "ill-raised, ignorant, aggressive and illegitimate" (Johnson, 1995). Bias and the ability to act violently upon it, are everywhere, deeply-rooted in conservative communities but also in those of supposedly First World states. Despite growing acceptance of diversity, the potential to experience stigma and discrimination is significant (Gates, 2015). The family structure has been found to be a vector for increased discrimination, which affects family relations, employment, housing among others; and elevated stress, which triggers physiological and psychological illnesses (Murry, 2018). Minors raised by same-sex parents are more likely to have been teased or belittled because of their families, by peers, adults, and even by schoolteachers (Moore 2013). Surveyed minors from the category reported feelings of hurt, anger, and embarrassment. The influence of stigma and societal norms on diverse households has not been properly researched. Nevertheless, highly stigmatized households, such as stepfamilies and same-sex families, have the additional parental responsibility to shed awareness on norms, helping children understand and interpret their experiences in a society where they are often looked down upon or devalued (Murry, 2018). In such families facing perceived and real stigma, it is the parent(s)' priority to help the children build a positive sense of self and of the family, but also help the children understand societal values and insecurities, while building resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity (Pearce, 2018). On top of creating strategies to confront discrimination and teaching their children how to talk about

their families, many same-sex households' members bond with each other's, creating social support networks with similarly structured or otherwise diverse family models, providing a safe and tolerant environment for the children, but also material and psychological support that help counteract the negative effects of discrimination (Moore, 2013). Eventually, according to Moore (2013), children from such households will develop their own coping skills and techniques in the face of stigma.

Single parents have long been libeled for being overworked, stressed, financially challenged, and unable to fulfil a child's emotional and cognitive needs, even though recent research has also been adamant at correcting this misperception. Conversely, and while children living with single fathers perform similarly to children living with single mothers, both groups are outperformed by biparental families (Downey, 1994). Habitually, adults require jobs, and with the only parent working, children will spend a lot of time alone or under someone else's care. This entails frequent emotional unavailability or physical inaccessibility; whereas in biparental families, even when both parents hold steady jobs, children end up with more cumulative parental presence at home. On top of missing caring adult presence in the home, single motherhood may cause a reduction in children's access to male role models, affecting their sons' successful socialization (Murry, 2018).

In the case of same-sex parenting, numerous studies relying on standardized surveys and semi-structured interviews yielded little if any difference between children raised by different-sex and same-sex parents. These studies covered milestone achievements in child development, sexual orientation and identity, cognitive functioning, social skills, and some other aspects of societal performance, and the results were coherent (Fond, 2011). We should however note that most research was based on limited samples.

One of the arguments that are often heard in public debates around LGBT+ rights, is the concern for the children's well-being. Whether through inuendo or at face value, rises the pervasive misconception that is at the heart of most homophobic attitudes: the ability for LGBT+ individuals to corrupt society and spread their "gayness", which is a given if/when they become parents. Looking at this from a psychoanalytical perspective, it is no secret that psychoanalytic theories place parent-

child relations during childhood at the core of the formation of both sexual identities and sexual orientations (Golombok and Tasker, 1996). According to Bailey et al (1995), elevated incidence of same-sex attraction can be expected from children of gay and lesbian parents, based on three environmental transmission predictions. Firstly, these children might acquire the orientation by imitating their parents and adopting the love-object favored by the parent whom they identify with. This argument falls flat of course, knowing that most LGBT+ children have heterosexual parents. Secondly, socialization, by which parents might inadvertently reinforce and/or fail to discourage pro-gay attitudes and behaviors, could influence the children to become gay. And thirdly, the de-stigmatization of homosexuality encourages those who are predisposed, to fully embrace their rainbow identities. However, these predictions could never be proven, since Bailey et al's research (1995) found those environmental influences to be minimal on the sexual orientation of gay fathers' sons. Furthermore, in the same study, the large majority of male children to gay fathers was heterosexual. Similarly, Golombok and Tasker (1996) found no significant differences in incidence of same-sex attraction between children raised in lesbian families and those raised by single heterosexual mothers. To sum this up and address the whole transmission of same-sex orientation from parents to children, there is no absolute and determining factor but rather a variety of influences, starting with prenatal period onward (Golombok and Tasker, 1996). The only finding in that research worth mentioning, was that the level of tolerance towards homosexuality within a family could affect children's willingness to experiment sexually, without changing their orientation.

The misconstrued transmission of homosexuality englobes however another aspect: the transmission of well-defined norms of masculinity to the male children. Most parents, from heterosexual mothers to same-sex parents, feel that they are accountable to society for imparting normative conceptions of masculinity, and for educating their sons to internalize these norms (Kane, 2006). This pressure is felt stronger by gay fathers. Kane uncovered that most parents try to abide by an ideal of masculinity, usually defined by restricted emotionality, activity rather than passivity, and rejection of markers of femininity. Contemporary parents are growingly aware of the need to display

more tolerance vis-à-vis gendering, yet despite a growing openness to nonconformity with children of both genders, when it comes to boys, the openness is limited to tolerating domestic skills, attitudes of nurturance, and empathy (Kane, 2006). This debate around gender nonconformity and ideals of masculinity is, at the end of the day, nothing but a ripple effect of societal homophobia.

Beyond structures, models, and labels, what is needed is a deep understanding of a given domestic configuration, in order to recommend adapted parenting skills in a counseling framework. While taking the above challenges into consideration, we can safely assume that the chief threats to family structures lie in the high incidence of a transition processes, quality of parental involvement, and perceived stigma. On the other hand, several factors play a role in any family's ability to offer a positive environment with sound interpersonal dynamics, allowing all its members to strive.

Assessing parental quality is a complex process whereby parents and children fill in questionnaires, are interviewed separately, and are observed in 5-minute video-recorded tasks (McConnachie et al, 2021). One significant vector of healthy childcare is the parental involvement in educational and leisure activities. Involvement in child doings outside of classrooms have significant positive effect on grades (Khajehpour, 2011). Supervision, emotional attendance, and availability are essential parenting skills that are not affected by gender or sexual orientation yet make a difference in a child's life. LGBT+ members actively raising children have often surmounted incredible challenges, mental and/or societal, before making the family choice, which demonstrates a level of commitment, and that is often translated by proper involvement. Whereas most heteronormal couples find themselves rearing children as a natural course of action following marriage, without necessarily processing the consequences and responsibilities of parenting. To this day, childbearing is pursued by some as a way to safeguard a frail relationship.

According to Amato (2004), children require support and control. Physical presence, affection, motivation, transmission of skills, and everyday assistance represent the supportive aspect, which will convey trust, security, competence, self-worth, and self-esteem. Discipline and organization are under the control umbrella, allowing the conveying of social boundaries. Parental

authority is neither a totalitarian rule nor harsh punishment. It is about holding on to rules when necessary, explaining them repeatedly, so that children evolve with a moral compass and become able to engage in self-regulation.

The new normal

Family structures today have indeed changed and shifted from traditional to reconstructed (adaptive separations, stepfamilies, or multi-family households), and even modern families, a term used to refer to both same-sex households, and households where alliances are formed between heterosexual partners and/or between LGBT+ and heterosexual partners, for the sole purpose of raising children in a joint-custody setup, outside the conventional romantic bond between the different-sex parents. With the explosion of diversity and the emergence of various family structures, one would argue that modern families are the new normal.

Yet here lies the main challenge: "traditional", "normal", "typical" and "ideal" families are no longer the standard in family profiles. While household labels are being refashioned, the once-perceived-as-perfect family structure has been relegated to representing the minority of contemporary households. And although "modern", "alternative", "atypical", and "not ideal" structures are gaining ground, it is the different-sex, married, nuclear, biparental household that is held as the benchmark family structure, by which all other family forms are compared (Murry, 2018). As laid out by Amato (2005), in sociology, two-biological-parent households are perceived as the optimal form for an effective socialization of the kids in modern society, while any other structure will fail to compete or fare as well in comparison. American sociologist Judith Stacey (1996) goes as far as stating that "the belief that married couple families are superior is probably the most pervasive prejudice in the Western world". One interpretation of that statement is that when we compare families, we assume that patterns and processes in any new family model should match those occurring in an outdated, non-referential benchmark model, without highlighting the impact of novel and adaptive mechanisms taking place, that can potentially allow the children to fare as well, if not better, than the control group. Lewin (2006) asserts that marriage as we know it is

"evolving out of existence", slowly "replaced by cohabitation or other domestic configurations" that can better adapt to societal challenges.

The rising visibility of same-sex households is stirring widespread expectations, hopes, and fears that public acceptance of homosexuality will cause this atypical constellation of family models to multiply (Stacey, 2006). Up to the new millennium, members of the LGB community became parents through heterosexual contact, commonly before assuming their rainbow identity. During the past two decades, sociopolitical acceptance of same-sex couples have encouraged gay individuals to seek parenthood within a same-sex couple or as single-parents, through donor insemination, surrogacy, and/or adoption (Moore, 2013). These intentional families are referred to as "planned families" (Biblarz and Savci, 2010).

Gone is the family model involving a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. According to Stacey (2006), the widespread availability of contraceptive methods, the progressive abortion laws, and the innovative reproductive technologies have irreversibly unhinged the links between heterosexuality, marriage, and procreation. The right for parents to raise their own children is a fundamental one. And yet for years, courts have denied child custody to women and men based on their sexual orientation, citing mental health concerns, or even accusing them of vice such as an ability to molest their children (Bailey et al, 1995). It has been quite a journey for gay men to accept that they could be both gay and fathers, despite the prejudicial thoughts and accusations of being pedophiles, or transmitting the gay identity to their children (Biblarz and Savci, 2010).

It would be noteworthy to mention that for gay men specifically, the pursuit of parenthood can be quite the challenge: these men have little access to biological, cultural, institutional, or legal means (Stacey, 2006). Upon analyzing the various paths leading to fatherhood among gay men living in Los Angeles, Stacey produced a "passion-for-parenthood" continuum and saw that most gay men fell between the poles of ''predestined fathers'' and ''parental refuseniks''. She goes on to explain that the former category included men who reported feeling "compelled by a potent, irrepressible longing" to become dads, always aware of that fatherhood wish and ready to move a mountain to

achieve it. In some cases, parenthood is pursued at the cost of separation from a partner who is unwilling to become a parent. For men in the latter category, parenthood "holds less than no appeal", even perceiving freedom from parenthood pressure as one of the main perks of their sexual identity (Stacey, 2006).

In their assessment of families headed by people who identify as gay or lesbian, Johnson and O'Connor (2002) found that gay co-fathers who became parents as such were the most open about their families to teachers, coaches, and schoolfriends' parents. These fathers also rely significantly more than others on positive discipline techniques, and significantly less on physical punishment such as spanking, scoring notably better than heterosexual couples and lesbian coparents (Johnson and O'Connor, 2002). Biblarz and Savci (2010) attribute gay co-fathers' relative parenting strengths to their perseverance throughout challenges, and their willingness to overcome the successive psychological, logistical, and financial obstacles to having a very wanted child.

Children raised by same-sex parents generally enjoy high levels of psychological welfare and social adjustment (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Interestingly, in concordance with previous research findings, Goldberg (2007) found that children of LGB parents demonstrated more tolerance, flexibility, and open-mindedness than their peers. As Alice Miller (2013) beautifully lays it out, from the very beginning of her life, "the child has a primary need to be regarded and respected as the person she really is at any given time". At the end of the day, "children who are respected learn respect. Children who are cared for, learn to care for those weaker than themselves. And children who are loved for what they are cannot learn intolerance. In an environment such as this, they will develop their own ideals, which can be nothing other than humane since they grew out of the experience of love".

Lebanese have a proverb about births: they are always accompanied by good fortune. The Lebanese word al-rezqa (الرزقة), just like its approximate translation "fortune", refers to a materialistic gain, stemming from the historic need for larger families to sustain a decent living. While it is fair to say that this belief was shared for centuries across cultures and continents, today's

societies are facing the opposite: the high costs of living, of education, and of medical services are negatively influencing birth rates. Nowadays, a child represents substantial economic and social liabilities; it is no longer associated with free labor or as a source of social security. As Stacey (2006) puts it, there must be some sort of emotional rather than economic incentive governing the pursuit of parenthood. "The men and women who decide to have children today", as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, p.105) point out, "certainly do not do so because they expect any material advantages. Other motives closely linked with the emotional needs of the parents play a significant role". In their book, the sociologists attributed a "psychological utility" to the children. We live in cold and turbulent times; amid the ongoing crises and insecurities, children represent hope, offering anticipant parents an opportunity for meaning and connection (Stacey, 2006). Stacey further clarifies that it is the promise of intimate bonding that primarily motivates contemporary adults to seek parenthood, as this bond is perceived as being more reliable than a spouse or a lover's commitment, fulfilling a yearning for durable love, intimacy, and kinship.

The coparenting alliance model

Following a synthesis of the various parenting requirements and challenges in raising children, and the increasingly vocal desire of men and women from diverse identities to build their own families, it is no surprise that we are witnessing the development of a new household model from the modern family spectrum: a non-romantic, non-resident alliance between gay males and gay or heterosexual women. The model falls under the umbrella of coparenting, with distinctive properties and unique interpersonal dynamics. Coparenting was defined by McHale and Lindahl (2011) as an "enterprise undertaken by parents who together take on the socialization, care, and upbringing of children for whom they share equal responsibility". The main difference between this model and other intimate relationships, biparental same-sex or different-sex, is that the alliance focuses entirely on the children.

Coparenting has traditionally been coined in reference to the act of assuming shared children custody after falling out of a relationship. Following separation, coparenting refers to

parents' ability to cooperate effectively in bringing up of their children. It also defines best practices

for a healthy family life among unmarried parents (Goldberg & Carlson, 2015). In the context of

same-sex biparental households, coparenting refers neutrally to co-fathers or co-mothers. On a

philosophical level, coparenting is often used in different-sex biparental households to refer to the

fathers' engagement in the upbringing with his children, along with his female partner. As Van

Egeren (2001) points out, unless facing unusual circumstances, the mother will always assume a

primary caregiver role. The coparenting dynamic may occur on two determining conditions: the first

being the father's availability and willingness to be a father, with perception of the fatherhood

experience as a positive and personally gratifying one, and the second called maternal gatekeeping

(De Luccie, 1995). This concept refers to the degree of facilitation or discouragement of paternal

activity on the mother part, when instincts are protecting the maternal territory (Van Egeren, 2001

and De Luccie, 1995). After all, despite the shift in attitudes over the past decades, with fathers

assuming more equalitarian responsibilities in the household, fathers remain generally less

susceptible to spend time with children without the mother, and as such, are slightly less exposed

and experienced in caring for their children (Van Egeren, 2001). Furthermore, self-esteem,

motherhood expectations, and maternal instincts of protection are believed to be at the center of

their capacity to offer their male spouses autonomy with the newborn children (Van Egeren, 2001).

Coparenting is essential when parents live apart. Only by communicating effectively in the

coordination of children's care and various activities, and by being supportive of each other's, can

effective coparenting take place, shielding the children from the negative effects of divorce

(Goldberg & Carlson, 2015) or any other difficult circumstance. The harmony and consistency in the

coparenting interactions strengthens children's internalization of social norms and moral values,

enhancing interpersonal skills and conflict resolution through cooperation and conciliation, which

will positively influence children's own relationships (Amato, 2005). Furthermore, when properly

involved in their children's lives, non-residing parents, usually fathers, have a positively significant

impact, materialized in higher academic performance, better social conduct, and less emotional

conflicts (Amato, 2005).

The coparenting alliance model (CAM) stems from a shared desire to start a family. It entails

a commitment to finding a custom structure evolving around the children. Segal-Engelchin et al

(2005) labeled one relatively new configuration as the hetero-gay family. It is a household headed by

two birthparents, a gay father and a lesbian or heterosexual mother, who agree to conceive and

raise children together while residing separately. The model is similar to the configuration of

divorced parents from traditional families, with the main difference that the parental relationship

was never romantic nor intimate. In the hetero-gay model, parental and financial responsibilities are

shared equally, even though the children typically reside with the mother, at least during the early

years. Unlike divorced families, parents in such alliances are less likely to have legal conflicts

regarding custody and logistical aspects of their parental involvement, as these issues have been

negotiated and included in a shared parenthood agreement before any child's birth.

Although not in a romantic and/or intimate relationship, coparents form a team.

Researchers have put forth various theories to account for the increased likelihood of cognitive,

social, and emotional challenges among children raised by single parents. Many of these theories

point to either the economic and parental resources accessible to children or the demanding events

and circumstances that children in such situations must navigate and adapt to (Amato, 2005). In the

common case of divorce, we can now ascertain that the children are at risk of forming weaker

emotional bonds with mothers and fathers (Amato, 2005). Extensive research suggests that, when

all factors are considered, children generally benefit from the presence of two compatible parents

compared to single parents, and these advantages hold true regardless of parental gender, marital

status, sexual identity, or biogenetic status (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010). In her book, then-First Lady

Hillary Clinton describes the shared responsibility for properly raising children under the insightful

title: "It takes a village" (Clinton, 1996). Coparents in alliance settings have identified and borrowed

the chief characteristic behind the traditional family model's viability: the parental dyad.

While research is insufficient, it is hypothesized that children raised in CAMs should develop similarly, if not better, than children raised in divorced families. The enhanced outcome is attributed to the stable and predictable environment, and to the fact that both parents are consistently involved in the upbringing of the children, which is not often the case in divorced families (Segal-Engelchin et al, 2005). From the day they are born, children of the alliance model are aware of having a non-residing parent, usually the father. They do not go through any separation, transition, or dissolution of an initial model. But it does not stop here: the academic discussion on gay and lesbian parenting has progressively challenged previous assumptions regarding the presumed advantages of being raised in biologically-intact, two-parent heterosexual households (Regnerus, 2012). The limited research studying children raised by same-sex parents yielded little differences so far when said children were compared to peers raised by typical heterosexual family. Nowadays, the "no difference" perspective is undergoing a shift towards asserting distinctions, suggesting that same-sex parents actually demonstrate greater competence compared to heterosexual parents (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010). More specifically, "no differences" apply to the domains of cognitive development, psychological adjustment, school performance, gender identity, and gender orientation. But in terms of bonding, same-sex parents seem to nurture better relationships with their children than heterosexual parents do (Crowl et al, 2008).

In psychoanalytical theory, it is believed that when a child reaches the phallic stage, the parental relationship evolves from dual to triangular. The initial Freudian scenario describes children developing loving feelings to the opposite-sex parent and hostile feelings to the same-sex parent, until the child identifies with aspects of the same-sex parent within a process of building a sexual identity. The classic theory relies on the typical family model to explain how children develop their sexual identities. This argument has been used against atypical families, even single-parent families, as a way to discredit them for creating "confused" children, whereas contemporary psychoanalysts stress on the fact that even in LGBT+ households and with same-sex parents, triangulation will still take place without jeopardizing, nor influencing children's development of a gender identity and

sexual orientation. Triangulation refers to a transition, from pre-Oedipal to post-Oedipal, whereby a self-centered child who identifies its mother or primary caregiver as the main object of desire, displaying possessive behaviors, will come to recognize a parental couple (Heineman, 2004). Carneiro and Vila-Real (2019), researched triangulation dynamics of children in lesbian families and observed two characteristics. Firstly, triangulation highlights generational boundaries and the exclusion of sexual intercourse across them. Secondly, the terms "feminine" and "masculine" represent opposite ends of a spectrum with numerous variations in between, both of which are integrated by men and women, implying that a child can identify with aspects of both masculinity and femininity in either mothers or fathers. In the context of coparenting alliances, and in the absence of intimacy between the parents, the child is still able to perceive his caregivers as partners in their own relationship (Heineman, 2004). As his egocentric worldview diminishes, the child starts to grasp the idea that his parents share a special bond that excludes him. Previously, the child believed he occupied the center of the universe, assuming that all emotional interactions involved him. Now, he must comprehend that there are exclusive exchanges of love and intimate communication between those he cares about. His parents inhabit the realm of adults; as a child, he is neither a desirable nor a capable sexual partner to either. Alongside the blow to his self-worth, he must also come to terms with the unchanging nature of generational roles—he will always be a child in relation to his parents (Heineman, 2004). Consequently, the CAM satisfies the requirements of psychoanalytic theory regarding the parental dyad, enabling the development of the children's sense of self.

On the legal front, establishing a coparenting alliance does not significantly conflict with prevailing public policies, as it is the case with same-sex households who require the adoption by their respective governments of a legal framework for marriage and parenthood rights (Segal-Engelchin et al, 2005). These families can easily blend in a society, without raising an eyebrow, since they appear like any happily-divorced household! As Segal-Engelchin et al (2005) eloquently stated: "Being less visible, they do not evoke controversy among professionals, academicians, or the public

at large". Pragmatically, this characteristic helps diminish stigmatization and its related discriminatory effects.

In their research, Segal-Engelchin et al (2005) explored the factors driving gay men and single heterosexual women to consider such a family configuration. For women, natural factors played their part. Upon reaching their mid to late thirties, choices became limited for single women wishing to start a family. Many female research participants stated valuing the traditional biparental model for raising children, yet they started looking at marriage and motherhood as separate paradigms: they could rush into a convenience marriage, they could become a single-parent by choice, or they could abandon their motherhood aspirations all-together. Until the CAM offered a fourth and worthwhile alternative. For men, inability or difficulty adopting was a recurring reason. Not having a partner or not sharing the child desire with the partner was another possible explanation. Similarly to their female counterparts, the coparenting model offered the interviewed gay fathers a viable scenario, allowing them to alternate smoothly between their personal lifestyle and their desire for children. It is noteworthy that the choice of parenthood with a woman is very particular for a gay man. It indicates the possible internalization of more traditional family views, compared to the general gay population, and the underlying belief that motherhood is essential for a child's development, irrelevant of living arrangements. For these men, intimate partnerships and parenthood are not mutually exclusive and perfectly complementary.

Erera and Segal-Engelchin (2014) further explored the hetero-gay family model and found that gay fathers tend to recreate the dynamics of traditional families while defying heteronormativity. They challenge the single-dad, the emotionally-distant father, and the masculine man-of-the-house stereotypes: they are simply "creating a new understanding of what it means to be a gay man" in general, and a gay father specifically (Erera and Segal-Engelchin, 2014). As liberated gay men, they choose to become nurturing fathers, unaffected by social expectations of a father's role, freely engaging in degendered parenting (Berkowitz, 2011). Many men, including gay men, regard fatherhood as a natural transition: it is not about sexual identity nor orientation, but about

maturity (Berkowitz, 2011). Interestingly, in her research, Berkowitz (2011) highlighted the recurring theme of "maternal instinct" when interviewing gay men, both with and without children. Some even used the "ticking biological clock" expression.

Seeking out parenthood with a heterosexual women seem to accomplish both partners' wishes and desires, in line with internalized values. Some of the gay men interviewed by Erera and Segal-Engelchin (2014) reported apprehensions regarding a configuration with a lesbian woman, or a lesbian couple. This reluctance was interpreted as a fear of being "pushed out" or losing control as a father. The hetero-gay family configuration, by definition, focuses on a biparental household, featuring a gay man with a heterosexual woman, while the CAM is more flexible in terms of parenthood figures and sexual orientations: the model could feature a gay male with a lesbian couple, or a gay couple with a heterosexual or gay woman, which would entail having a household headed by three parents. In the case of a gay couple coparenting with a lesbian couple, the household is managed by four parental figures. Depending on the expected level on involvement as a parent, these configurations may be challenging or comforting. There is however very little literature review on the matter and coparenting alliances should be explored more extensively.

Coparenting alliances seem like the next best thing to traditional families: parents fulfill their desire for children, they work as a team with their coparenting partners, they often maintain their autonomy, they are different-sex yet represent diversity and non-traditionalism, they are often biparental, and most importantly they revolve around children who have been strongly desired. Coparenting alliances are based on the assumption that without romance and intimacy between the partners, there can be no drama, thus no transitional factors that will dampen the household dynamics. The nonresident-parent structure remains a constant throughout the family experience. Based on the parents' expressive desire to have children, parental involvement is a given, even under special custodial arrangements. And while most parents choosing this model belong to diverse heterosexual and LGBT+ groups, children often end up identifying with standard parental figures: a father, a mother, and possibly a third and fourth addition when the parents' partners are involved,

with labels ranging from social mother/father, stepmother/father, to any customized appellation. The balance between a gay and straight parent, or a gay and lesbian parent, is expected to play a positive role, in relation to the difficulties faced by same-sex parents and/or gay single parents. As per the socialization theory, by having two parents engaged in practices that help the children internalize values, attitudes, and behavioral standards, minors have a better chance of developing emotional security, helping them becoming productive members of society (Murry, 2018).

While there is always a legal framework organizing the duties and responsibilities associated with rearing children into a society, coparenting alliances might benefit from some advantages; even exploit loopholes in the system. Based on this author's personal experience, it is hypothesized that adults embarking on a coparenting alliance, will preplan and draft a road map for the journey, a coparenting agreement, similarly to a divorce settlement, except without the wedding! It is expected that the partners are friends, or have friends in common, or have met through a common denominator; having probably evolved in the same social circles. There is a high probability that they live nearby to one another. They will bond over sharing a common vision for the family they wish to build. They will organize the most suitable way to become parents and imagine custodial arrangements for the early years. Most coparenting alliances will favor biological children while sexual intercourse is expected to be the least favorite option, because sexual intimacy is not on the table, it is actually perceived as a threat to the parental relationship. They will discuss common values and decide which will be transmitted to the children, and by whom. They will take decisions on how to educate the children and agree on parental roles and responsibilities. They will socialize, interact with respective families, friends, other parents, and present themselves in a specific way. No matter how detailed their plan is, in reality, they will face situations that will shake their model. Ongoing circumstances will pour sunshine and rain on their modern family. From stress, to exhaustion, to communication challenges between the parents, without omitting the children themselves, their health, their characters, their needs, their insecurities, all of it and much more will form an exponential array of threatful possibilities. Some call it simply: life!

So, what makes a family? Marriage in its traditional meaning is losing its prestige, if not evolving out of existence, being replaced by new domestic configurations, to better cope with and adapt to contemporary challenges (Lewin, 2006). As Murry (2018) states, at the end of the day, it is the parental relationship quality that makes the difference, safeguarding children's well-being. This research aimed at exploring the practices and experiences of coparenting alliances in diverse households, for the purpose of understanding how the model works, its impact on the family development, and summarized the real challenges faced, and the coping skills required to address them. This qualitative research hoped to gather the lived experiences of people in coparenting alliances, so as to synthesize a list of prerequisites for the model to function and withstand the storms ahead.

What makes a modern family: exploring the CAM

This research aimed at studying coparenting practices among unmarried partners from diverse sexual identities and orientations, who have embarked in the process of rearing children without romantic bonds linking the parents, in the hope of understanding interpersonal dynamics, logistical organization, challenges, and coping mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the formation of a nucleus around the children: a modern family model of sorts. This model is a favorite option among single women, gay men, and lesbian or gay couples.

This researcher hoped to explore the specific configurations of a sample of families structured under the CAM, focusing on their living arrangements, the coparenting agreement and distribution of responsibilities, the provision for changes and their eventual consequence should a single parent become partnered, or a couple become separated. It was instructive to understand how urgent decisions are taken and how conflicts are resolved, especially if children typically reside with one parent. Another point of focus was the way in which a non-residing parent was able to bond with the children, and whether they felt like the family they craved was indeed accomplished. In summary, this research wished to explore the daily practices and experiences, in addition to the quality of the parental alliance and its effect on the family model.

Methodology

Analytic strategy

The research aimed at exploring family arrangements, practices, and experiences within the CAM. The focus was on relational and logistical aspects that defined the structure, and their impact on the members' well-being. What makes a family when the parents are not bound by traditional vows of love and affection, of support and intimacy, when living through better or worse?

The selected participants were invited to answer a series of questions and reflected on their coparenting journeys, sharing insights, tricks, and skills that have allowed them to strive as a modern family, and deal with the challenges of bearing and raising children.

Recruitment of participants

Finding participants for the study was our main challenge. An Information Sheet (Appendix A) was shared with friends, contacts, mental health networks, and most importantly, select meeting sites (online forums) specializing in coparenting. Pride Angel, a popular online platform that helps LGBT+ members to find a matching coparent, have agreed to display our Information Sheet on their blog and on their social media accounts. The selection criteria were as follows: we are looking for adults who have entered coparenting alliances and are presently raising children under this model. This includes eight possible sub combinations under the CAM: heterosexual or gay men with lesbian women or lesbian couples, heterosexual women with gay men or gay couples, as well as gay couples with lesbian women or lesbian couples.

It was imperative that the structure has been the same from the time the children were born to the present day. Heterosexual men and women who are coparenting yet have never been into a romantic relationship were excluded, as they do not represent alliance models among sexually diverse groups. Individuals who have transitioned into the model after the children were born were also excluded. For the sake of exploring the CAM in its consistent state, we have excluded participants whose gender identity and/or sexual orientation was changed after the children were born. Same-sex couples raising children by themselves were not concerned with the scope of this

research. Finally, it is worthy to note that we only interviewed the coparents who identify as gay and lesbian, excluding the heterosexual coparents. On the other hand, further inclusion criteria included ability to understand and articulate English and French language, and of course willingness to talk about their personal experiences.

The five selected participants formed 4 distinct families, since two interviewed coparents were part of the same family. Diagrams of all participants' families can be found in Appendix B.

Interview procedure

Following the vetting procedure and upon final confirmation, participants were briefed again on the research purpose and interview dates were set. All participants showed high interest in the research and were extremely cooperative in the process. They were invited to read and sign the Informed Consent (Appendix C) and the Audiovisual Release (Appendix D) forms, mailing them back before their respective interview dates. All interviews took place online as participants were residing in foreign cities. Participants' identities were fully protected, through the assignment of pseudonyms to all interviewees. Most participants suggested their own pseudonyms and those of their family members. Cities of residence are disclosed as all are large European and American cities. No identifying information can be found in the transcripts.

IPA methodology recommends the use of semi-structured interviews to collect data (Smith and Osborn, 2008). The questions were expansive, open-ended, and non-leading to facilitate both the discussion and exploration of themes. The interviews lasted 60 minutes on average. Upon completion and as per IPA methodology, this researcher produced a few personal notes about every interviewing experience. A comprehensive personal reflection is included in the thesis, following the analysis process.

Interview schedule

The session started with a couple of ice-breaking questions in the line of: "How are you doing? How are the kids?" after which participants were invited to draw a family diagram for us to better understand who the members of the family are and how do they refer to one another. From

that point on, and through a semi-structured interview, the research explored the subjects'

experiences by going through the interview schedule. The line of questioning was centered around

the process of choosing the coparent, the bonding process, the distribution of tasks and

responsibilities, and the challenges faced during the coparenting journey. Participants were allowed

space to express feelings and share an honest, spontaneous, and heartfelt testimonial of their lived

experience.

The full interview schedule may be found in Appendix E.

Data extraction

The recorded interview data was fully transcribed verbatim as recommended for IPA (Smith

and Osborn, 2008), including every spoken word, silence, pause, laughter, and significant

hesitations. French interviews were translated but the analysis of those transcripts was done in both

languages to make sure that the intended meaning of a phrase was properly conveyed. Lines were

numbered in all transcripts, to facilitate referencing. Following repeat transcript reading and analysis

of the data, every significant information and every insight on the coparenting dynamics was

highlighted. Descriptive words were assigned to those phrases, similarly to labels, yet soon evolving

into standard keywords which would be assigned repeatedly throughout the transcripts, to similar

ideas. Several keywords could be assigned to one sentence. Once we were satisfied with the proper

consignment of keywords to all highlighted phrases in all five transcripts, a table was created. The

first column was reserved for the selected phrases while the second column included the assigned

keyword. For practicality reasons, additional columns were reserved for identification of the

participants and the corresponding line numbers in the transcript. Upon the appearance of

similitude among keywords, a theme was identified, and that theme was placed in a subsequent

column. At this stage, it was important to keep the cited phrase at hand, to make sure that the

chosen theme was faithful to the meaning, but it was also imperative to constantly return to the full

transcript, so that context was respected. Manipulating the table, sorting the data by keywords and

by themes, helped identify patterns and similarities. As such, wider categories were considered,

labelled in a final column whereby themes were merged, offering readers specific and targeted domains that best illustrate the content analysis.

In the end, a second table was produced summarizing all recurrent themes, clustered into their respective domains. Results showcase every theme and domain; they are presented here-after along with selected transcript extracts. A discussion will follow.

Data analysis and validity

Research quality will be guaranteed upon abiding by Yardley's (2000) characteristics of good qualitative research.

On the sensitivity to context level, a relevant literature review is featured along with empirical data. During the interview, participants' perspective will be respected, a proper sociocultural context will be conveyed to the reader, and the final analysis will be faithful to the data obtained. The researcher's conduct with the participants and during data analysis will abide by the highest ethical standards.

On the commitment and rigor levels, the researcher hereby commits his time and energy for an in-depth engagement with the topic, respecting the methodology and professional guidelines.

On the transparency and coherence levels, the researcher will detail his process step by step, and reflect honestly on all findings.

Finally, on the impact and importance levels, the researcher has found very little literature review covering the CAM. This topic deserves further exploration, based on the popularity of the model in the LGBT+ community, as well as among women over 35 who have not found a partner yet yearn for motherhood. While medical facilities are openly offering services such as egg-freezing and anonymous sperm donors, and while forums are putting individuals from across the globe in contact to explore single-parenting with a donor and/or the formation of an alliance model, this researcher believes that some understanding of the situation, its challenges, and opportunities, warrants a deeper consideration of factors involved, if only for the ability to offer more adapted interventions to parties seeking our professional assistance as therapists and family counselors.

Ethical considerations

Even though this paper ultimately explored the components of successful coparenting among modern families, implying the bonding of adults for the aim of offering an optimal environment for raising children, it was decided early on that no minor would be interviewed. And while children's developmental and mental statuses, along with school performance, could generally offer insight into the parenting skills they were exposed to, this research opted to focus on the relational quality between the parents, and their respective partners, if any.

LGBT+ rights remain limited in many countries. Our attitude was respectful of personal choices and our research did not cause any discrimination to any participant. Even though all members of the modern families we interviewed evolve in cities and countries where their domestic arrangements are protected by laws in place, no personal information allowing the identification of participants was disclosed.

Personal reflection

As the father of four-year-old twins in a happy coparenting gay-straight alliance, along with being in a separate intimate long-term relationship (Appendix F), I was aware that my opinions and experience were prone to influence this research. Furthermore, growing up in a Levantine country, yet within an open-minded family, I have experienced countless internal conflicts between the assimilation of conservative societal norms and my personal quest for liberation and self-fulfillment. Through personal growth, maturity, cultural exchanges, travel, studies in Europe, and a solid social network, I have surmounted numerous challenges.

My introduction to the mother of my children was facilitated by a mutual friend who recognized our shared desire for parenthood. We embraced the roles of "maman" and "papa" approximately two years later. My husband wholeheartedly supported this journey, although parenthood was not something he personally sought. I believe that our circumstances unfolded as they were meant to, as I am uncertain whether I would have thrived in a different model. She has made me a better father, and she remains an integral part of my life. This thesis is dedicated to her.

Beyond my profound love and pride for the family I am a part of, I have developed a scientific curiosity about this model. We discussed parenthood and shared custody without being aware of the term "coparents". We established a roadmap and logistical arrangements without labeling it a "coparenting agreement". We created a new normal for ourselves, and our families have supported us every step of the way. Our recipe combines fortunate circumstances, harmonious dynamics, and diligent relational efforts. How is everyone else doing it? I have always grappled with the dilemma of not knowing what truly works. The arrangement my coparent and I have forged works for us, but I was unsure if our approach could be universally applied. This motivated me to delve into researching the topic, reach out to similar alliances, and explore their own practices.

I have conducted interviews with participants, listening to their stories, without exerting influence. Subsequently, I have analyzed the content of their narratives without making assumptions. I hold no desire to influence or change people's minds about modern families, nor convince anyone about the CAM's validity. While it was my wish to conduct research on coparenting alliances in order to shed light on an underrepresented topic, I have had the chance to work with a thesis committee that offered me guidance and perspective, helping me address potential biases in this academic endeavor. I aspire to pursue this line of research in the future, fully aware of the responsibility to properly represent LGBT+ experiences and of the impact of such work on the community. Beyond my personal commitment to maintaining utmost objectivity, I affirm that, through supervision with members of my committee, I have undertaken this thesis research with the highest work ethics and to the best of my abilities.

Results

Analysis overview

The analyzed data showed a concentration of themes that orbited around three successive phases of the coparenting adventure: the utopic dream, the rules of engagement, and the adoption of a new normal. All five participants have almost equally contributed to every domain. And while every theme's recurrence has been counted in the table below, it is important to note that low-

frequency recurrences do not imply low importance of said theme. To better understand the journey

into coparenting alliances, readers are invited to put themselves in the shoes of a member of the

LGBT+ community who is simultaneously a coparenting candidate.

Table 1
Constituent themes, grouped into domains

Domains and themes	Recurrence
Once upon a time: a utopic scenario	
1. The impossible dream	29
2. Surmounting challenges	21
3. A convenient model	8
4. The weight of homophobia	6
The rules of engagement	
1. Swearing allegiance	40
2. Engaging in open and transparent communication	21
3. Setting up boundaries	20
4. The coparenting agreement	15
5. The golden rule: children first	15
Adopting a new normal	
1. Integrating heteronormativity	40
2. Realizing that we are bound for life	16
3. Balancing parental roles	11
4. Children's assumption of normality	6

Once upon a time: a utopic scenario

This domain refers to the build-up of the parenthood project, starting with the expression of

your wish to assume motherhood or fatherhood in an environment that recently started facilitating

rights for LGBT+ people to start their families. You are in your late thirties / early forties, having

grown up in societies that were more homophobic and discriminative. You have internalized some

typical feelings of shame and guilt because constructing a proud identity is a lengthy process, when

you have been exposed to labels such as "abnormal, dirty, and disgusting" (McDermot et al, 2008).

Theme 1: the impossible dream. You might recall a dislike of children, which your later

attributed to the perceived interdiction of starting a family. Until recently, you have assumed that

children are the forbidden fruit of LGBT+ experiences; the price to pay for adhering to your queer

lifestyle. The wish for children might have also expressed itself naturally, as an intrinsic longing for a

fulfilling human experience.

> "I never thought about having my own family. I never thought it was an option".
>
> (Vera, 9-10).
>
> "In my opinion gay couples don't bother them, but gay couples with children, I think
>
> that's a challenge". (Rita, 331-332).
>
> "Because the hedonistic gay life, Berlin, Tel Aviv, Beirut sometimes, uhm... all that...
>
> it's not going to last. And there is a moment when it will be less fun, it will be less
>
> profitable, it will be less easy. And they are right. You have to think about the second
>
> part of your life". (Géo, 25-28).
>
> "A terrible feeling of poverty began to appear in me. The word, the word I... that I
>
> felt was a poverty in me, poverty of not transmitting, poverty of not having
>
> children". (Philippe, 37-39).

Theme 2: surmounting challenges. Once you have allowed yourself to consider fulfilling that

desire for children, the journey for finding your coparent starts. Whether through identifying a

friend/couple for the project, or through networking via online platforms dedicated for that

purpose, or even through the emergence of centers dedicated to putting potential coparents in

contact, you will need to identify a matching coparent and consider solutions to successive

challenges, from costs associated with assisted reproduction to logistical aspects of your alliance:

where are you living, what are the legal implications, what are the cultural considerations, how

much compromise would you go through to make this alliance work; and the list goes on.

> "A lot of people don't talk about how expensive and how discriminatory the IVF
>
> process is within families like ours". (Vera, 317).
>
> "I would also assess, you know, how financially able are they to live together or
>
> elsewhere. I would assess their immigration status. I would address if they're not
>
> from here, like "What is your country of origin?" Is it, you know, Saudi, Lebanon,

Iraq? All of those are different. Do you have family in America or back home? Do you

want to go back and forth between borders? How would that look like?". (Vera, 342-

347).

"We had already done a lot of meetings before I started PMA (FR: assisted

reproduction). With guys for that purpose, but it didn't work because we didn't

agree, or it was, you know? There was something that didn't fit in the personality of

us and him". (Rita, 96-99).

Theme 3: a convenient model. As a coparent, you are not expected to spend every second of

every day with your children. You will come up with a model that is convenient to your coparent and

to yourself. You will enjoy the parenthood experience and still have me-time. You are not trapped in

an unhappy marriage. You are not faking heterosexuality. You are in congruence.

"I consider myself very privileged. Because I was, I was able… the situation that was

presented to me, the situation in which I could… I chose to have my son, is a very

rare and privileged situation and uhm… I am very aware of that, like I… it's just… I

didn't look for it, it just happened. It probably happened the best possible

conditions". (Tom, 478-481).

"The good thing about coparenting, in my case, was not to be all the time with the

other parent". (Géo, 315-316).

Theme 4: the weight of homophobia. A recent survey of the press shows that discrimination

and violence are not being curbed by more inclusive and equalitarian laws. Homophobic attacks in

France rose 30% in a year (France24, 2023) but an alarming pattern of anti-LGBT+ violence is

witnessed throughout Europe, Central Asia (ILGA Europe, 2023), West Africa (Cullinan, 2023), and

even Israel (Bagno/Maariv, 2023). The world is not necessarily a safer place for you in 2023.

"Someone can go get drunk and like knocked up, that's fine. But when we are

intentional about having a family, there's all these layers that are added as

burdens". (Vera, 337-338).

"I did my coming out when I was 15 and never had any problems like, my mom was

the most amazing, open, person, like none of my family, none of my friends, nobody

has… never made fun of me being gay. So I, I'm very lucky in that department. And…

even though… I experienced all that, I still have these pre molded ideas that

sometimes make me uncertain about stuff, you know. Uhm… yeah, so that's kind of

a…yeah, there's kind of a reality that kinda hit me a little bit like, oh, wow. And also,

because you are reminded like, even though everybody that I met and talked about

it, about my situation, everybody was positive about it, but you still have this small

remarks or even just dumb questions.". (Tom 316-324).

"Like I had people who were homophobic follow me on the train. Actually, one time

when I was pregnant, it was horrifying, and... you know, I've had also people not

believe I'm pregnant, so they wouldn't give me the seat because I just looked like a,

kind of fat butch person. So, like, a lot of things like this were definitely felt in living,

navigating here". (Vera, 281-285).

The rules of engagement

Once the pregnancy is confirmed, you will start fantasizing about your future family. You

have had the chance to discuss a shared vision of the family-to-be with your coparent, but things are

now happening for real. With practice, theories will be put to the test. You will discover new aspects

of your coparent's character. You will face a logistical organization, a child getting a cold, a need to

be clear, tolerant, flexible, and you will realize that your alliance is a relationship that requires an

emotional investment.

Theme 1: swearing allegiance. Your tribe is your new priority and that could even happen at

the expense of your romantic relationships. You will do what it takes to preserve the model and

accommodate every member's needs. This will require dedication, flexibility, and commitment. As a

non-residing coparent, you will make up for your absence by spending quality time with your

children and by being emotionally involved.

"There's a whole process to follow and which obliges you maybe, even more so to, of course, think about what you're doing and, and, you know, action and consequence and, and, so you have time to reflect about certain things that maybe I don't know that, unlike maybe straight couples who just like find out they're pregnant". (Tom, 50-54).

"Simply, it is an alternative that is complicated, that is at the same time, in my opinion, very beautiful, but complicated". (Philippe 104-105).

"We definitely have rotation schedules, just because it's almost impossible to have a life if we don't have a schedule. And so, we have monthly schedules. We try to do it two months in advance or something (…) He knows far in advance, like next Thursday he's off, let's say at night, he can go out. You know? I know far in advance that if I wanted to also go out, I have that option. And so, it feels super-efficient in that way. Like a lot of the stress and anxiety about, like "Can I, can I, can I?" That goes away. And we're flexible about it. Like if something comes up, we can talk about it and adjust". (Vera, 189-199).

"Flexibility, flexibility. I don't know. For instance, on Tuesday, normally I have my kids, and I'm on a business trip, and I really need to spend the night somewhere in France, for instance. And if I can't do that, I lose my... the contract, so I lose money. "Claudine, can you take them on Tuesday night?" And... it's "Of course", it's 100% positive, and I'm flexible too when she needs to travel for some reason. So, we always try to make the other one's life kind of easy". (Geo, 282-287).

"I'll have less of my son but when I have him, I'll only take care of him. Quality time if you will". (Philippe, 266-267).

"When my son goes to his father's house, it's not a harmless thing, you know? Because it's not... it's not that I was in love with him, and I separated from him and I know how he is. I don't actually know him. Very well. In fact, when you know a guy,

and you're friends with him and you go to clubs and everything, everything is fine, you know? But when he has your son, it's not the same". (Rita, 283-287).

Theme 2: engaging in open and transparent communication. The stereotypical staple of any successful relationship. Except that this relationship is an alliance that does not include pillow-talk and make-up sex. You will need to apply the 10-second breathing rule before reacting. You will need to be clear about your plans and your schedule, offering as much flexibility as possible. You will need to communicate with your coparent about your children's state, health, and any new development that affects them. You will also be honest about your model with your children, so as not to instill shame or weirdness in them.

"We send pictures every day. There's not a day when we don't communicate, not a day, not a day, not a day. It's something very, very... to talk about us too sometimes, to talk about Guillaume etc. But there is not a day when we don't communicate". (Philippe, 338-341).

"I came out. Literally, I came out by... I was telling a story... which was kinda gay-oriented story for kids, and I came out like... two years ago. And asked them, "So what about Mommy? What about Papa? Do you think Papa likes women or men?" Because that was more or less the topic of the book. And same for... the mother. And they answered... wrong. Like, they said I would prefer women, and that the mother would prefer men, which was kinda funny. But still, I came out and I tried to speak as freely as possible about that. As real as possible". (Géo, 217-223).

"I think if, as long as you stay honest and open about stuff that's already a lot, uhm… and I say those words quite easily but it's not that easy to be honest with each other. I don't think I'm 100% honest with Louise. I think some of the stuff that I just told you now, I don't think I've ever mentioned it to her. So, it's small stuff but, you know. I think, at least when it comes down to our child, we try to be as honest as

possible. And even if we're not, we have now a six-year-old that is being honest in our… in our place". (Tom, 371-377)

"Having these terms, it allows us to give a framework to things, and responsibilities to each and every one, you know? But... but afterwards, of course, it's a matter of discussion, you know?". (Rita, 191-193).

Theme 3: setting up boundaries. One of the pillar characteristics of intended coparenting alliances is the absence of sexual intimacy between the coparents. Your relationship with your coparent is based on respect and good faith. You are committed yet autonomous. You are in this model because of personal choices you have made. You are a parental figure to your child and a partner to your coparent; not a friend, certainly not a lover.

"She had a major breakup, like she really, really suffered a lot. And then she realized she wanted a baby, and she needed to separate love life and family life. And she made the work". (Géo, 356-358).

"Between us, well between us, we are not too... we are not very tactile anyway Rita, me, Amira, we are not very tactile". (Philippe, 391-392).

"I think both of us are quite prude Louise and I, so we've always expected… respected, even before… uhm, I don't think I've ever seen Louise naked for example, like we've always kind of respected that part of each other". (Tom, 156-158)

"She's the mother of my son before everything else. Before being my friend, before whatever. She's my son's mother. So yes, that person, that mother of my child is, I'm very protective of, more so than… of Louise basically. Interviewer: "What happened to your friend Louise?". Tom: "Oh! I guess she'd died in labor (laughing)". (Tom, 433-438).

Theme 4: the coparenting agreement. A very important thing to finalize at this stage, if you haven't already, is your coparenting agreement. Coparents typically start discussing their shared vision as soon as they start considering an alliance. These ideas form a preliminary agreement, which

will then be notarized according to laws in vigor in every country. In countries that do not have a specific legal frame for coparenting alliances, a typical custodial agreement can be made, similarly to heterosexual divorced parents or heterosexual non-married parents. For practicality purposes, be as specific as you can, keeping in mind that said agreements can be upgraded with time, upon coparents' approval, especially that the reality often differs from the initially-negotiated theoretical model. The coparenting agreement has a significant impact on the decision-making process, particularly in emergencies and/or in the absence of one of the coparents. It covers dramatic turns of events such as unforeseen deaths. Additionally, it establishes the fundamental basis for the working relationship between coparents, encompassing aspects such as living arrangements and potential modifications to them at different stages of the child's development. Financial arrangements are also addressed within. Some countries offer extra provisions for the inclusion of a third official caregiver, a social parent, should you or your ally be in a serious relationship, and whereby the romantic partner regularly assumes caregiving responsibilities for your children.

> "And then through just kind of trial and error, one of my professors recommended we see something called the Peace Institute, and they help people facilitate family issues and conversations or anything. And so, from that, we created an agreement between me and him, about certain things, you know? Like how do we decide together for the kids? How do we do rotations? Some of the financial stuff, and all those things were finally drafted". (Vera, 166-171).

> "We talked a lot before making the child. There were things that were prohibitive, that is to say that we, from the beginning, you know? We had nothing to lose, so we went up to "Do we circumcise or not?" you know? All the way to those questions. And in fact, from the beginning, we put our limits, you know? We told him "Circumcision is not negotiable. He lives with us, it's not negotiable". And from there, we started to discuss things. So, at the beginning it was every other weekend, then after... so the father said "Listen, it would be nice to have a regularity with him.

I don't want him to live with me, but, you know? Maybe one night a week to create

a regularity in addition to every other weekend". So, there you have it, we adopted

all these things, but it was a two-year discussion, you know?" (Rita, 142-151)

"I knew that there were charters, and I mixed a French charter, I think it was on the

APGL website, Parents Gays et Lesbiens (FR: Gay and Lesbian Parents) which is very

legal. And I found an American charter, I don't know how, more legal, but also

more... the values, why did you choose each other? What is important to you? A

little bit more coaching, it seemed. And we mixed the two because I found that...

legal... France was really about money and custody time. The Americans... in the

American charter, there was something broader. And we mixed the two, and very

quickly we met once a week to fill out the charter. That is, we would fill it out

together". (Géo, 98-106)

"So today, legally, there are two biological parents, me and Philippe, because there

is a father who recognizes the child. And Amira has... it was done with the family

judge, Amira has a shared parental authority, what we call a social parent. That's the

legal side only. (…) Because today, as there is a father, Amira is not the second legal

parent. But to compensate for this legal part in case of daily need, there is this step

of applying for a social parent. This can happen in straight couples too. When it's the

mom who manages the child a lot with the step-dad and the dad is not very present,

which is a bit like our situation, you know? At that moment, there is a sharing of

parental authority that you can ask to the family judge in France and if it is

approved, the social parent has rights on all decisions related to the child". (Rita, 35-

47).

   Theme 5: the golden rule: children first. Whatever happens, remember that your alliance is

based on a parenthood project. As such, children always come first. Whether you are in the middle

of an argument with your coparent or trying to accommodate some personal leisure and/or

professional time, you will make sure that you children's well-being is at the center of any decision-making process.

> "In the end, we always agree, because we have only one, only one common interest, and that is Guillaume". (Philippe, 3666-367).

> "First, the babies. First, the kids". (Géo, 397).

> "Our first interest is always Roman and if that means that we hurt each other that's… that's not a priority". (Tom, 411-412).

Adopting a new normal

Becoming a parent changes your life. You have succeeded in making the impossible dream come true. You have worked on a relational framework with your coparent. Now you are being put to the test, as a parent. As a father, will you be authoritative to fit some expectations of the male figure? Will you fall into the toxic masculinity trap? It is no coincidence that you have chosen a model that imitates heteronormal families. As a man, you might have wanted your children to experience the love of a mother. As a woman, you might have wanted your child to enjoy a father figure. And vice-versa. Whether motivated by convenience or unconscious hints of conservatism, from this point on, you are making this model your own. Some of the familial traditions you enjoyed as a child could be reproduced. Some of the dynamics you have witnessed in your own family could be replicated. And some new traditions could be put into place, such as double-Christmas, or tribe holidays.

Theme 1: integrating heteronormativity. Upon seeing a man and a woman dropping a child in kindergarten, will you assume that they are in a coparenting alliance or a married couple? Upon striking a conversation with this seemingly nice couple, you will learn that they do not reside together, but the child is theirs. Will you assume that they are in a coparenting alliance, or will you classify them as a divorced couple? What will it take for you to finally guess that they are in a coparenting alliance, the father's mannerism or the mother's butchness? Remember, you are in the shoes of an LGBT+ individual seeking a coparent, and still prone to making false assumptions based

on stereotypical ideas; and that is the magic of the model. Unlike most divorced couples, your

coparent and you are in such good terms, that you plan extended family gatherings and joint

holidays together.

> "I'm invisible. I mean, I come out whenever I want. Like... because for people, we are
>
> divorced parents. So, sometimes we feel the need to tell about our situation,
>
> because we feel more comfortable, because we get more intimate with people.
>
> Especially... sometimes I'm with parents, when we really start to get along well, with
>
> some parents of our... kids' friends. And we need to say it, because we feel more
>
> comfortable, but otherwise it doesn't come across (laughing). And there is no way
>
> for people to... to understand the situation". (Géo, 229-235).
>
> "Well, I say that it's not a model... I say that it's not a model, but that it's a story".
>
> (Philippe, 636).
>
> "Yeah, especially that we really cared about having biological family involved, like
>
> Teta (AR: grandma) and Jeddo (AR: grandpa) and our heritage... and stuff. And so
>
> that worked for our favor". (Vera, 232-234).
>
> "This is a weekend when he's normally with Philippe and Joseph, they offered us to
>
> come with them to Morocco, you know? There's also this side, but it wasn't like that
>
> at the beginning. At the beginning it was much more like a real divorced couple, you
>
> know?". (Rita, 193-196).

   Theme 2: realizing that we are bound for life. Surprisingly, this came as a revelation to most

participants. It happened after the birth, whereby you realize that the coparent and you are in it for

a very long time. What starts as a custodial arrangement is quickly assimilated as the parenting of

children through health, education, discipline, play, bonding, and the expression of love. Well, yes,

exactly: this is going to be a long-term commitment.

> "Like, I have no doubt in my mind, even though he can annoy me so much, is that
>
> he's more my family than my own biological family". (Vera, 245-246).

"If I die, for instance, she will be the one who will empty my house". (Géo, 387-388).

"We plan holidays together. What happens, usually, for example last summer, I would go with, with… with my son and my partner, uhm… we were in Portugal, we, we did two weeks the three of us, and then the last week his mom joined us. So then there was the four of us in the house. Uhm… and that's, that's how we usually try to go with things, is that we… we make sure that each of us has their time with our son and then we always do an overlap or… so we'd have some family time together. Uhm… Christmas is the same thing. He… he would come to my mom and, and Louise would come with us… I mean… we would both go with the other one to their respective families. So, my son has a lot of Christmas parties (laughing)". (Tom, 207-214).

"The day Guillaume was born, I realized that I will be bound for life with Rita". (Philippe, 644-645).

Theme 3: balancing parental roles. In coparenting alliances, the father-mother dyad is preserved. Even when living arrangements are in favor of one of the parties, the responsibility and involvement are fully shared. You are expected to become the parent you were influenced to be. You will go through dyadic adjustment and find balance (or create it) based on the specific needs of your family. But one of the greatest advantages of the model is that you now form a team with your coparent, and as such, you will be complementary to one another.

"I'm much stricter with him so he knows that certain things just don't work with me". (Tom, 248-249).

"I would consider that the mother protects the child, if we had to theorize, and the father shows the world to the child. And I think that both are needed. I think it's important to have both I think it's important to have both, so I think he'll find himself a little bit there". (Philippe, 468-470)

Theme 4: children's assumption of normality. The model in which children are born and evolve in, becomes their benchmark for normality. Upon growing up and through socialization, children will be exposed to variations and differences; at which point, they will start asking questions. Your answer will either provide comfort or incongruence. It is only weird if you make it weird!

> "We had a friend come over and like, do a play date. She's... she's gay as well, and she has a daughter and they're two moms. And they were I think, the kids were like three years old. And my kids were playing, they're like, "Oh, this is Mama, and this is Baba". So, this friend, who's also three years old, looks at them, she's like, "But where's your other Mama?". My kids were like, unbothered, continued playing. I was like: "This is exactly how, you know, kids are so resilient", it's like, there's no need to justify anything, because we're just being us. And now, you know, from being lucky and living in New York, it's like: "Oh, there are two Mamas sometimes, two Babas. We have Mama and Baba", you know? (Vera, 257-266).
>
> "A child only takes what you give him, you know? So, for him, it's normal". (Rita, 368).

Discussion

It is evident that same-sex couples have been and will continue to successfully nurture children (Ragnerus, 2012). Yet for some members of the LGBT+ community, the CAM offers a plethora of advantages compared to other options, ranging from parental convenience to enhanced well-being for the children. The effectiveness of this model heavily depends on the chemistry between the coparents. Therefore, finding a compatible and complementary ally is a challenging task. Instead of using a checklist to interview potential coparents, it is reasonable to assume that the main indicators of a successful partnership lie in a shared motivation to raise children, prioritizing their well-being, alignment of values, and effective communication skills. By establishing a coparenting partnership, prospective parents are not only preparing for the inclusion of a child into

their life but also committing to actively engage with a coparent throughout the process. In our

research, the combination of maturity of age among our participants, and their advanced education,

enhanced their ability to effectively navigate the intricacies of coparenting, a point that was duly

highlighted by Goldberg & Carlson (2015).

The dynamic between openness and establishment of boundaries characterizes the delicate

interaction within a coparenting relationship. A memorandum of understanding, commonly known

as a coparenting agreement, plays a vital role. It not only establishes legal matters, duties, and

responsibilities, safeguarding all parties in case of conflicts or unfortunate events, but also facilitates

collaborative brainstorming and the formation of a shared vision for the new family among future

coparents and allies. While it is impossible to anticipate every probable outcome in an agreement,

any parent would acknowledge that their initial conceptions of parenthood often differed

significantly from the practical and situational realities. Nonetheless, the fundamental aspects of

that vision can be expanded and developed over time, either through organic growth or mutual

agreement, to better address the needs of the family.

Each family structure offers unique benefits and challenges for the kids. Children of married

heterosexual parents may enjoy social acceptance and certain privileges, although paternal

involvement may be comparatively lower. Co-mothers, on the other hand, provide an abundance of

caregiving, communication, and closeness. Co-fathers have received less research attention, but

their challenging paths to parenthood are likely to translate into strengths rather than limitations

(Biblarz and Stacey, 2010). At the end of the day, irrespective of the model and of living

arrangements, it is the quality of parenting that stands as the most reliable indicator of children's

emotional and social well-being (Amato, 2005).

Within the CAM, the majority of challenges are internal, stemming from the quality of the

relationship between the allies. While families in this arrangement may blend in and face less

adversity, they still navigate prejudiced societies. Bias, similarly to phobia, is fundamentally

irrational. During my upbringing, the limited television debates addressing homosexuality in post-

civil war Lebanon (late 1990s) often pitted conservative religious figures against gay militants

concealed by masks and voice alterations, for fear of retribution. Society was left to ponder:

between the absurdity of masked individuals with robotic voices awkwardly advocating for sexual

freedom and the conservatively-dressed authoritarian figures delivering dark verdicts, who would be

perceived as the true villain? These shows were watched by many Arabic countries who at the time,

did not produce attractive or popular TV formats, and who could not present such "groundbreaking"

content in the first place. These sterile debates on homosexuality resurface periodically; the LGBT+

voices became clearer, the masks have fallen, but the divine ambassadors are still the same. "We

oppose the concert of a popular rock band because the singer is gay." "Homosexuals corrupt

society." "They are dangerous to children." In my region, ordinary individuals with ordinary desires

are influenced and led astray by bigots. It is important to note that this context cannot be equated

to that of First World countries, where significant progress has been made in terms of regulations

and public perception. However, whether in small remote communities or large European capitals,

acts of microaggressions, derogatory language, and violence against LGBT+ populations continue to

present everyday challenges.

     All interviewed coparents have reported commonalities in their paths to parenthood: they

have all resorted to assisted reproduction methods to conceive their children, they have established

a balanced relationship with their coparents for the well-being of their children, and they are

satisfied that their desire for parenthood has been fulfilled. On the other hand, two significant

observations stand out: one family has opted for joint living arrangements while preserving intimacy

boundaries. Although Vera did not provide specific reasons for this decision, this author speculates

that living in an expensive city like New York may have influenced her choice. The second

noteworthy comment comes from Rita, a lesbian coparent who is in a relationship and had

previously attempted to have children with her wife without success. Eventually, she embraced the

coparenting alliance and introduced a father into her family configuration. Following the child's

birth, Rita's wife was legally recognized as a "social parent". While Rita has no regrets about her

decision, she now believes that her initial motivation was driven by concerns for her child's happiness, feeling the need to provide a father figure. Her current stance is that any dyad, including two mothers, can fulfill the parenting roles. As such, Rita and her wife may consider a second child as co-mothers. These examples subtly hint at underlying internalized homophobia, where individuals may, at certain points in their lives, make rational and convenient choices that are actually motivated by self-doubt and mistrust of society. Yet, one may argue that this hidden thread runs through every coparenting alliance.

Coparenting alliances promote shared parenting responsibilities stemming from diverse perspectives. They challenge traditional notions and have the potential to provide children with a nurturing environment of love, stability, and belonging. Beyond convenience, compatibility, and teamwork, there is an unexplored aspect of the equation: the search for a mother or a father among candidates for coparenting models. While never truly addressed, this concept presents a fascinating scope for further exploration.

Implications for counselors

Research on the CAM has several implications for counselors working with LGBT+ families or individuals from these communities wishing to pursue such a project. By offering a deeper understanding of the model and the parental dynamics that make or break it, counselors can better evaluate the areas of concern or those requiring further improvement for an effective alliance. Furthermore, such research helps counselors develop culturally-sensitive practices when working with LGBT+ parents. This specific research sheds light on the unique challenges and strengths of these families and provides practices and recommendations that address particular hurdles.

Counselors are generally expected to create a safe and accepting space for their clients. When working with individuals from LGBT+ communities, and hearing about their wish to start a family based on the CAM, counselors should be even more understanding and tolerant, identifying and addressing their own biases and stereotypes about gay parenting. It is recommended to educate oneself on the multitude of modern family models before offering counseling around it. A common

pitfall is the assumption that one type of family structure is inherently superior to another: we should approach each model with an open mind and recognize the diversity of parenting styles and dynamics. Successful coparenting is not exclusive to sexual orientation, but rather depends on various factors such as communication, collaboration, mutual respect, and shared parenting values. As such, counselors are invited to view coparenting as a universal skill that can be developed by parents regardless of their sexual identities.

As counselors, we may come to assist parents, both gay and heterosexual, in developing coparenting skills by providing guidance on active listening, emphasizing the importance of empathy, conflict resolution, compromise, and shared decision-making. Above all, we should help coparents focus on the well-being of their children as a top priority. Counselors are invited to involve both parents in any therapeutic process to facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach, which to some extent, could be compared to couple's therapy.

Finally, it is essential that counselors remain up-to-date with societal changes and developments, getting exposed to such research and to revised professional guidelines, in order to provide better support to families. Counselors can exert influence in important fields such as education and healthcare, which allows them to advocate for the implementation of programs that either promote healthy coparenting alliances or facilitate dealing with such families, which improves outcome on families, and on society as a whole.

Limitations

It is crucial to emphasize that the present research participants reside in countries where their family arrangements are legally recognized. Therefore, our research findings can only be applied within such environments. Not all countries have the same legal framework, as certain nations, like Uganda for example, have just recently imposed capital punishment on LGBT+ communities (Reuters, 2023). Moreover, many countries, regardless of their geographical location, possess cultural or religious customs that stigmatize or disapprove of raising children outside of wedlock. Consequently, individuals contemplating coparenting partnerships must carefully consider

the existing laws in vigor and implicit societal norms before pursuing a model that may face

challenges or discrimination.

Our research investigated the coparenting alliance from the perspective of gay or lesbian

coparents. It would be necessary to conduct further interviews that encompass a wider range of

rainbow orientations and include heterosexual coparents as well. These additional interviews should

be analyzed and compared before generalizing the findings to all members of the coparenting

alliance. Most importantly, this study interviewed coparents with an average age of forty-two and a

half years, raising children who have an average age of five and a half years. While the CAM is

believed to have been present in some form throughout history, the coparents who have chosen this

model in the past decade, following changes in regulations, can be considered the first wave. On

average, our research participants were thirty-seven years old when they had their children. It is

expected that lesbian women will now engage in coparenting alliances at a younger age, benefiting

from reduced obstacles and enhanced legal frameworks, while heterosexual women are likely to

adhere to a more conventional family approach first, before considering the alliance as the next best

thing, hence maintaining the upper age bracket. The age of the male coparents will typically align

with that of the mothers. It would be intriguing to compare the values and beliefs of current and

future coparents with those of the first-wave to track changes and variations. Will the CAM maintain

its child-centered approach and high level of commitment, or will it gradually adopt characteristics

of heterosexual families as it becomes more normalized?

Conclusion

A successful coparenting alliance is built upon key factors such as communication, respect,

flexibility, and a shared commitment to prioritizing the well-being of the children involved. While the

specific dynamics may differ in diverse households, the foundations for success remain similar

regardless of the parents' sexual orientations. Effective coparenting relies on open lines of

communication between all parents involved. This includes discussing important decisions, sharing

information about custody arrangements and the children's welfare, and maintaining a respectful

attitude towards each other's perspectives and parenting styles. Acceptance of each other's roles as parents is crucial in creating a harmonious alliance. Recognizing and appreciating the unique contributions that each parent brings fosters a positive and inclusive environment. Coparenting requires flexibility and adaptability to accommodate the needs of the children and the changing circumstances of the parents' lives. Being open to adjusting schedules, making compromises, and being responsive to each other's requests helps maintain a spirit of general harmony in the family. Legal and financial considerations need to be addressed, depending on the jurisdiction and specific circumstances. It is essential to establish clear legal agreements or arrangements that outline parental rights, responsibilities, and financial obligations to avoid potential conflicts. Developing a supportive network of family, friends, or professionals who understand and respect the CAM can provide additional assistance, guidance, emotional support, practical advice, and resources to help navigate any challenges that may arise. Ultimately, a successful coparenting alliance between gay and lesbian or gay and heterosexual parents is rooted in a shared commitment to the children.

A recently-married, heterosexual acquaintance once told me: "Happy wife, happy life". Although the expression bothered me at first, it somehow holds true today. One is expected to take a leap of faith and invest emotionally in a person, prioritizing this relationship with a coparent above other obligations and commitments. Through openness, love, and compromise, this partnership becomes the most influential relationship in one's life, when the ultimate goal is to become a parent.

References

Amato, P. R. (2004). Parenting through family transitions. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 23(12), 31-44. DOI: 10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00065.x

Amato, P. R. (2005). The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *The Future of Children*, 75-96. DOI: 10.1353/foc.2005.0012

Bagno/Maariv, Y. (2023). Israel sees record number of anti-LGBTQ+ incidents in 2022 – report. *The Jerusalem Post,* 19 March 2023. https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-734812

Bailey, J. M., Bobrow, D., Wolfe, M., & Mikach, S. (1995). Sexual orientation of adult sons of gay fathers. *Developmental Psychology, 31*(1), 124–129. DOI: 10.1037/0012-1649.31.1.124

Beck, A. N., Cooper, C. E., McLanahan, S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2010). Partnership transitions and maternal parenting. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(2), 219-233. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00695.x

Beck, U., & Beck-Gersheim, E. (1995). *The normal chaos of love*. Polity Press.

Berkowitz, D. (2011). Maternal instincts, biological clocks, and soccer moms: Gay men's parenting and family narratives. *Symbolic Interaction*, 34(4), 514-535. DOI: 10.1525/si.2011.34.4.514

Biblarz, T. J., & Savci, E. (2010). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 480-497. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00714.x

Biblarz, T. J., & Stacey, J. (2010). How does the gender of parents matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(1), 3-22. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00678.x

Brown, A. (2022). About 5% of young adults in the U.S. say their gender is different from their sex assigned at birth. *Pew Research Center*, 7 June 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/06/07/about-5-of-young-adults-in-the-u-s-say-their-gender-is-different-from-their-sex-assigned-at-birth/

Carneiro, F. A., & Vila-Real, Â. (2019). Having two mothers: the triangulation dynamics of children in lesbian led families. *Tempo Psicanalitico*, 51(1), 96-112.

Carone, N., & Lingiardi, V. (2022). Untangling Caregiving Role from Parent Gender in Coparenting

　　　Research: Insights from Gay Two-Father Families. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16 March 2022,

　　　13:863050. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.863050

Clinton, H. R. (1996). *It takes a village: and other lessons children teach us*. New York, Simon &

　　　Schuster.

Crowl, A., Ahn, S., & Baker, J. (2008). A meta-analysis of developmental outcomes for children of

　　　same-sex and heterosexual parents. *Journal of GLBT family studies*, 4(3), 385-407. DOI:

　　　10.1080/15504280802177615

Coontz, S. (1997). *The way we really are: Coming to terms with America's changing families*. New

　　　York, NY: Basic Books.

Cullinan, K. (2023). Sharp Rise in Homophobia in East Africa Sparks Fear of Violence. *Health Policy*

　　　Watch, 03 March 2023. https://healthpolicy-watch.news/sharp-rise-in-homophobia-in-east-

　　　africa/

Curtin, S. C., Ventura, S. J., & Martinez, G. M. (2014). Recent declines in nonmarital childbearing in

　　　the United States. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

　　　https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db162.pdf

De Luccie, M. F. (1995). Mothers as gatekeepers: A model of maternal mediators of father

　　　involvement. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 156, 115-131. DOI:

　　　10.1080/00221325.1995.9914811

Downey, D. B. (1994). The school performance of children from single-mother and single-father

　　　families: economic or interpersonal deprivation? *Journal of Family Issues*, 15(1), 129–147. DOI:

　　　10.1177/019251394015001006

Elliott, D. B., & Simmons, T. (2011). Marital events of Americans: 2009. Washington, DC: U.S. Census

　　　Bureau. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2011/acs/acs-13.pdf

Erera, P. I., & Segal-Engelchin, D. (2014). Gay men choosing to co-parent with heterosexual

　　　women. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 10(5), 449-474. DOI: 10.1080/1550428X.2013.858611

Fond, G., Franc. N., & Purper-Ouakil, D. (2011). Homoparentalité et développement de l'enfant: données actuelles [Homosexual parenthood and child development: present data]. *Encéphale*, 38(1):10-5. French. DOI: 10.1016/j.encep.2011.05.005

France24 (2023). Homophobic attacks in France rose almost 30 percent last year, LGBTQ group says, 16 May 2023. https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230516-homophobic-attacks-in-france-rose-almost-30-percent-last-year-lgbtq-group-says

Gates, G. J. (2014). LGB Families and Relationships: Analyses of the 2013 National Health Interview Survey. UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgb-families-and-relationships/

Goldberg, A. E. (2007). (How) does it make a difference? Perspectives of adults with lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 77, 550 – 562. DOI: 10.1037/0002-9432.77.4.550

Goldberg, J.S., & Carlson, M.J. (2015). Patterns and predictors of coparenting after unmarried parents part. *Journal of Family Psychology,* 29(3), 416-26. DOI: 10.1037/fam0000078

Goldberg, S.K., & Conron, K.J. (2018). How many same-sex couples in the US are raising children. UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/same-sex-parents-us/

Golombok, S., & Tasker, F. (1996). Do parents influence the sexual orientation of their children? Findings from a longitudinal study of lesbian families. *Developmental psychology*, 32(1), 3. DOI: 10.1037/0012-1649.32.1.3

Heineman, T. V. (2004). A Boy and Two Mothers: New Variations on an Old Theme or a New Story of Triangulation? Beginning Thoughts on the Psychosexual Development of Children in Nontraditional Families. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 21(1), 99. DOI: 10.1037/0736-9735.21.1.99

Home Office (2021). Hate crime, England and Wales, 2020 to 2021. Official Statistics, 12 October

2021. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2020-to-

2021/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2020-to-2021

HRDY, S. B. (1999). Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection. New York,

Pantheon Books.

ILGA Europe (2023). Annual Review 2023. https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2023/

Johnson, B. (1995). The male sex is to blame for the appalling proliferation of single mothers. *The

Spectator*, 19 August 1995. http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/19th-august-1995/6/politics

Johnson, S., & O'Connor, E. (2002). *The gay baby boom: The psychology of gay parenthood*. NYU

Press.

Kane, E. W. (2006). "No way my boys are going to be like that!" Parents' responses to children's

gender nonconformity. *Gender and Society*, 20(2), 149-176. DOI: 10.1177/0891243205284276

Khajehpour, M., & Ghazvini, S.D. (2011). The role of parental involvement affect in children's

academic performance. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 1204-1208. DOI:

10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.03.263

Kramer, S. (2019). U.S. has world's highest rate of children living in single-parent households. *Pew

Research Center*, 12 December 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-

reads/2019/12/12/u-s-children-more-likely-than-children-in-other-countries-to-live-with-just-

one-parent/

Livingston, G. (2014). Fewer than half of U.S. kids today live in a 'traditional' family. Pew Research

Centre. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/22/less-than-half-of-u-s-kids-

today-live-in-a-traditional-family/

Lamb, M. E., Pleck, J. H., Charnov, E. L., & Levine, J. A. (1987). A biosocial perspective on paternal

behavior and involvement. In J. B. Lancaster, J. Altmann, A. S. Rossi, and L. R. Sherrod

(Eds.), *Parenting across the life span: Biosocial dimensions* (pp. 111–142). Aldine Publishing Co.

Lewin, E. (2004). Does marriage have a future? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1000-1006. DOI:

    10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00071.x

McConnachie, A. L., Ayed, N., Foley, S., Lamb, M. E., Jadva, V., Tasker, F., & Golombok, S. (2021).

    Adoptive gay father families: A longitudinal study of children's adjustment at early

    adolescence. *Child development*, 92(1), 425-443. DOI: 10.1111/cdev.13442

McDermott, E., Roen, K., & Scourfield, J. (2008). Avoiding shame: Young LGBT people, homophobia,

    and self-destructive behaviors. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 10(8), 815-829. DOI:

    10.1080/13691050802380974

McHale, J. P., & Lindahl, K. M. (Eds.). (2011). *Coparenting: A conceptual and clinical examination of*

    family systems. American Psychological Association. DOI: 10.1037/12328-000

Miller, A. (2013). *Le drame de l'enfant doué*. Quadrige, second edition.

Monte, L. M. (2017). Multiple partner fertility research brief. U.S. Census Bureau.

    https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2017/demo/p70br-146.html

Moore, M. R., & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, M. (2013). LGBT sexuality and families at the start of the

    twenty-first century. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 39, 491-507. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-soc-

    071312-145643

Murry, V. M., Bynum, M. S., Brody, G. H., Willert, A., & Stephens, D. (2001). African American single

    mothers and children in context: A review of studies of risk and resilience. *Clinical Child and*

    Family Psychology Review, 4, 133–155. DOI: 10.1023/A1011381114782

Murry, V. M., & Lippold, M. A. (2018). Parenting practices in diverse family structures: Examination

    of adolescents' development and adjustment. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 28(3), 650-

    664. DOI: 10.1111/jora.12390

Office for National Statistics (2023). Marriage and civil partnership status in England and Wales:

    Census 2021.

    https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriag

ecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/articles/marriageandcivilpartnershipstatusenglandandwale

scensus2021/2023-02-22

Patterson, C. J. (1992). Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents. *Child Development*, *63*(5), 1025–1042.

DOI: 10.2307/1131517

Pearce, L. D., Hayward, G. M., Chassin, L., & Curran, P.J. (2018). The Increasing Diversity and

Complexity of Family Structures for Adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, Sep;

28(3):591-608. DOI: 10.1111/jora.12391.

Pew Research Center (2013). A Survey of LGBT Americans, 13 June 2013.

https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans/#same-

sex-marriage

Pleck, E. H., & Pleck, J. H. (1997). Fatherhood ideals in the United States: Historical dimensions. In M.

E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (pp. 33–48). John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Psychology Today (ND). The single-parent family.

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/family-dynamics/single-parent-family

Regnerus, M. (2012). How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex

relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study. *Social Science Research*, 41(4),

752-770. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.03.009

Reuters (2023). Uganda enacts harsh anti-LGBTQ law including death penalty, 29 May 2023.

https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ugandas-museveni-approves-anti-gay-law-parliament-

speaker-says-2023-05-29/

Segal-Engelchin, D., Erera, P. I., & Cwikel, J. (2005). The hetero-gay family: An emergent family

configuration. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 1(3), 85-104. DOI: 10.1300/J461v01n03_04

Stacey, J. (1996). *In the name of the family: Rethinking family values in the postmodern age*. Boston,

MA: Beacon Press.

Stacey, J. (2006). Gay parenthood and the decline of paternity as we knew it. *Sexualities*, 9(1), 27-55.

DOI: 10.1177/1363460706060687

Statista Research Information (2020). Number of children living with a single mother or a single

father in the U.S. from 1970 to 2020. https://www.statista.com/statistics/252847/number-of-

children-living-with-a-single-mother-or-single-father/

Solomon-Fears, C. (2014). Nonmarital births: An overview. *Congressional Research Service*, 30 July

2014. https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R43667.pdf

Symons, D. (1979). The Evolution of Human Sexuality. New York: Oxford University Press. U.S.

Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/topics/families/families-and-

households/data/tables.2013.html

Van Egeren, L. A. (2001). Le rôle du père au sein du partenariat parental. *Santé mentale au*

Québec, 26(1), 134-159. French. DOI: 10.7202/014515ar

Van Egeren, L. A., & Hawkins, D. P. (2004). Coming to terms with coparenting: Implications of

definition and measurement. *Journal of Adult Development*, 11(3), 165-178. DOI:

10.1023/B:JADE.0000035625.74672.0b

Ventura, S. J., & Bachrach, C.A. (2000). Nonmarital childbearing in the United States, 1940-99.

National Vital Statistic Report, 18 October 2000, 48(16), 1-40.

Vespa, J., Lewis, J. M., & Kreider, R. M. (2013). America's families and living arrangements: 2012. U.S.

Census Bureau.

https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2013/demo/p20-570.pdf

Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology and Health*, 15(2), 215–228.

DOI: 10.1080/08870440008400302

Wikipedia (2022). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Beatie

Appendix A: Information Sheet

For the purpose of a thesis research paper exploring **the coparenting alliance model**, we are looking for volunteers who would be willing to talk to us. As a participant, you will be asked to answer a few questions around your experience as a coparent, over an online session not exceeding 90 minutes. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, it is reasonable to expect that the results may provide information of value for the field of counseling.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential.

Criteria of selection (all must apply):

- Coparent of children raised under any of the below structures:

    o Heterosexual or gay men with lesbian women or lesbian couples.

    o Heterosexual women with gay men or gay couples

    o Gay couples with lesbian women or lesbian couples.

- The household structure has been constant since the children were born.

- English or French speaker.

Same-sex couples and heterosexual non-romantic partnerships are not concerned. Participants may be residents of countries outside of Greece.

Upon interest in participating, kindly contact: a.tehoumey@acg.edu
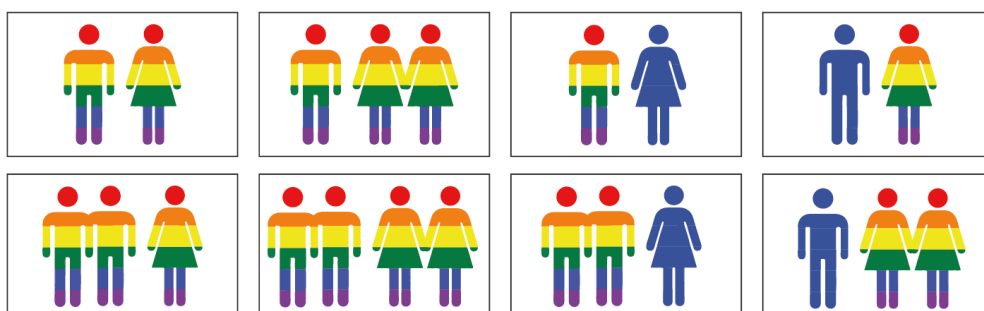
Appendix B: Research Participants

Géo's Family

PARIS

Met for coparenting purpose in 2014

Géo
"Papa"
Father
1972

Valentin
Son
2015

Martin
Son
2017

Claudine
"Maman"
Mother
1979

Philippe's & Rita's Family

PARIS

| 2011 | Friendship since 2017 | 2007 |

Joseph
1985
"Jaji"
Partner

Philippe
1984
"Papa"
Father

Guillaume
2020

Son

Rita
1979
"Maman"
Mother

Amira
1985
"Mama"
Legal parent

Tom's Family

BRUSSELS

| 2019 | Friendship since 2006 | 2022 |

Léo
1985
"Léo"
Boyfriend

Tom
1979
"Papa"
Father

Roman
2016

Son

Louise
1977
"Maman"
Mother

Unknown
ND

Boyfriend

NEW YORK
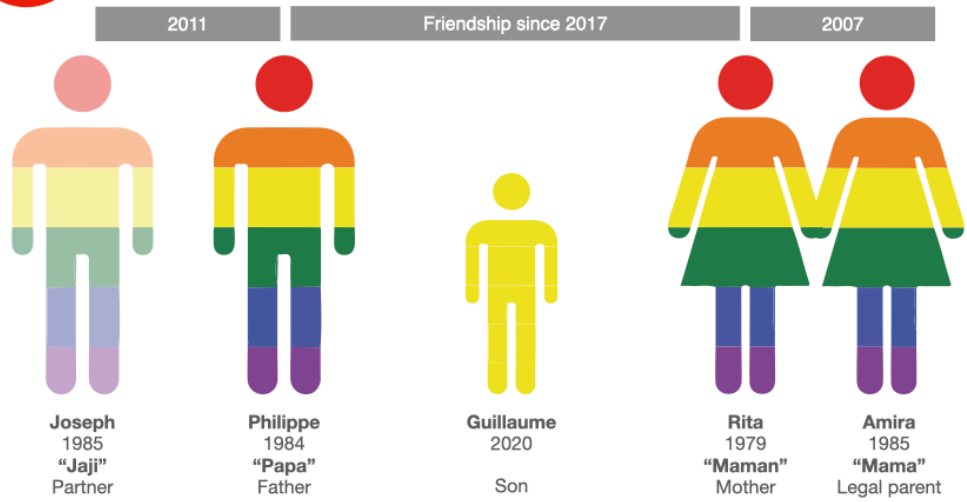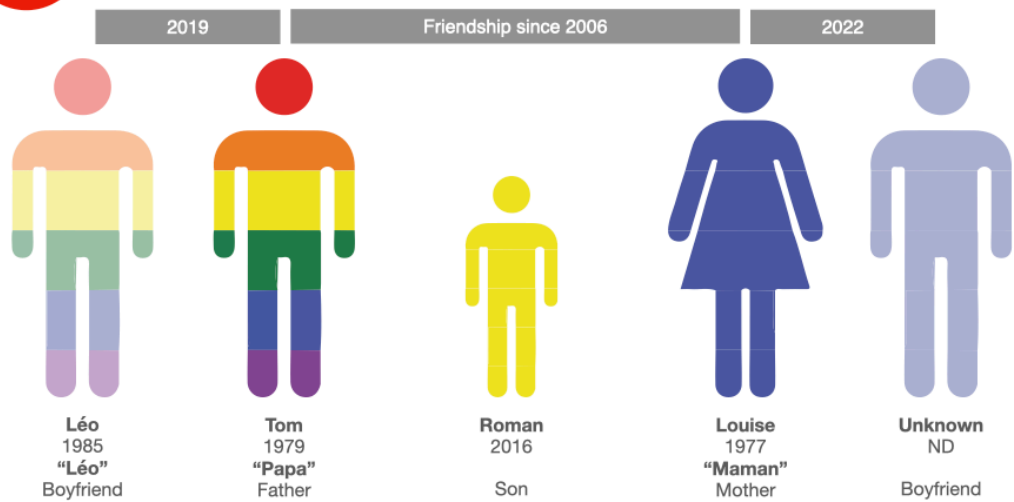
Vera's Family

Friendship since 2013

Rafiq
1965
"Baba"
Father

R***
2017

SoN

N***
2017

Son

Vera
1988
"Mama"
Mother

Appendix C: Informed Consent

The American College of Greece

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study exploring **the coparenting alliance model**, conducted by Albert Tehoumey (investigator), as part of his thesis within the MS program in Counseling Psychology and Psychotherapy. This project will be supervised by Dr. Remos Armaos PhD and the University thesis committee. The purpose of the research is to explore individual choices, practices, outcomes, and challenges encountered during the process, in the hope of offering insight to both counselors and clients.

As a participant, you will be asked to answer a few questions around your experience as a coparent. The session will be held online, at a mutually agreed upon date, between February and March 2023. The interview duration should not exceed 90 minutes (about 1 and a half hours). While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, it is reasonable to expect that the results may provide information of value for the field of counseling.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name will not be included in any forms, questionnaires, etc. Consent forms are the only documents identifying participants in this study; they will be stored securely on the researcher's personal computer in Greece, password-protected, available only to the investigator and the supervisor. Data collected will be destroyed by July 31st 2023. Results will be reported in a scientific research paper. If you are interested in seeing these results, or have questions about the research, you may contact the investigator (a.tehoumey@acg.edu) or supervisor (rarmaos@acg.edu).

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Refusal to participate (or wish to discontinue participation) will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You have fully read the above text and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures of this study. Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

_____   _____

PARTICIPANT NAME (in print letters)   Date and Signature

_____   _____

INVESTIGATOR NAME (in print letters)   Date and Signature

Appendix D: Audiovisual Release Form

The American College of Greece

Audiovisual Release Form

       I voluntarily agree to be videotaped / audio recorded during the research interview being conducted by Albert Tehoumey in the scope of a research around **the coparenting alliance model**. I understand that the recordings will be only used for the research analysis, accessed by the investigator and one supervisor. These files will be stored securely and destroyed by July 31st, 2023.

For approval:

_____   _____

PARTICIPANT NAME (in print letters)   Date and Signature

_____   _____

INVESTIGATOR NAME (in print letters)   Date and Signature

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

- Ice breaking question: How are you doing?

    o Prompt: And how are the kids; are they currently under your care?

    o Follow up: How old are they now?

- When you reflect on the reasons behind your wish to become a parent, what can you think

    of?

- How did the coparenting idea come up and why did you go for it?

- How was the coparent selected?

- What are the terms of your alliance?

- Could you help me draw your family structure? (Family members / DoB / duration of

    relationships)

    o Prompt: Who are the legal parents?

    o Prompt: How do you refer to one another?

- As coparents, you might have significant others in your respective lives. How do you address

    that?

    o Prompt in case of significant others: What is their relationship to the children?

- What are the terms of your alliance and how did you come to such terms? (Coparenting

    agreement).

    o Prompt: Where are each one of you living?

    o Prompt: How did you come up with living & custody arrangements?

    o Prompt: How do you share living expenses?

    o Prompt: What is the decision-making process for healthcare, education, and other

        critical issues?

- How do you deal with situations that require intimacy and what are the boundaries? (birth /

    breastfeeding / kissing)

- What are your family dynamics?

    o Prompt: Do you make plans together? (weekends / holidays / Christmas)

    o Prompt: How does the non-residing parent bond with the child / children?

- What do you think are the advantages of your family model?

    o Prompt: What challenges have you faced and how did you address them?

- How do you deal with the children's questions about your arrangement?

- Prompt: Do you interact with families who have similar arrangements?

- How do you manage the public perceptions / queries?

    o Prompt: Are you subject to discrimination or negative responses from society?

- What are your recommendations for people considering similar coparenting arrangements?

Appendix F: Author's Family

Author's Family

ATHENS

| Since 2000 | Met for coparenting purpose in 2017 |

R**
1980
"R***"
Partner

AT
1980
"Papa"
Father

A**
2019
Son

N**
2019
Daughter

S**
1979
"Maman"
Mother