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"There Is No Perfect School": The Complexity of School Decision-Making Among Lesbian and Gay Adoptive Parents

Parents influence their children's educational experiences in part via school selection. This process is particularly complex for families with multiple minority, potentially stigmatized, statuses. This qualitative study examines middle-class lesbian and gay (LG) adoptive parents' school decision-making. Parents' economic resources provided the foundation for how parents weighed child/family identities (children's race, LG-parent family structure, child's special needs) and school-related concerns (e.g., academic rigor). For White gay male-headed families in affluent urban communities, financial resources muted racial and sexual orientation consciousness in favor of competitive academic environments. Lesbian mothers of modest economic means prioritized racial diversity more centrally. Racial diversity overrode gay-friendliness as a consideration in lesbian-mother families; gay-friendliness was prioritized over racial diversity among families in conservative communities; and special needs overrode all other child and family identity considerations. For LG adoptive parent families, school decision-making has the potential for greater tensions amidst multiple intersecting identities and fewer economic resources.

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Families in contemporary U.S. society are increasingly diverse and complex (Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011). The household norm of two heterosexual parents with biological children has been replaced by a wide array of family arrangements in part because of changing social and political landscapes (Lofquist, Lugaila, O'Connell, & Feliz, 2012). In the United States, lesbian and gay (LG) couples are increasingly becoming parents and are at least four times as likely as heterosexual couples to have adopted children (Gates, 2013). Adoptive families are often racially diverse: At least 40% of U.S. adoptions are transracial (i.e., parents adopt

children of a different race), and LG couples are more likely than heterosexual couples to adopt transracially (Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011). The unique combinations associated with sexual minority status, adoption, and racial diversity make these families vulnerable to multiple forms of marginalization.

Despite such increases in family complexity, U.S. society has continued to prize the standard North American family of a heterosexual married couple parenting biologically related children (Smith, 1993), which can lead to the marginalization of families that deviate from this family form (Allen & Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015). Societal systems (e.g., schools, the legal system) have been slow to acknowledge and adapt to changes in contemporary families. Schools may reflect the broader community and cultural context in which they are situated, thus perpetuating heteronormativity in policies and curricula, which centralize the experience of White, heterosexual, two-parent, biologically related families (Hopkins, Sorensen, & Taylor, 2013). Alternatively, schools can also actively disrupt and challenge heteronormativity, such as through their physical structures (e.g., trans-inclusive restrooms) and curricular and extracurricular offerings (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender [LGBT] history month, LGBT student groups; Russell, Day, Ioverno, & Toomey, 2016). Aware of the potential for both invisibility and scrutiny of their families within the school context, LG adoptive parents may be motivated to seek out schools they believe will be affirming (Goldberg, 2014).

This qualitative study examines the school decision-making of LG adoptive parents (primarily White and middle class) with young school-age children (mostly preschool or kindergarten age and of color) in the United States. We attend to the vulnerabilities and assets that these parents reveal as salient in their decision-making and the tensions that emerge as they navigate and juggle logistical, intersectional, and academic complexities.

Conceptual Framework

Intersectionality holds that social identities such as sexual orientation, gender, race, social class, and nationality do not operate as distinct categories but are lived conjointly (Crenshaw, 1989; Few-Demo, 2014; Veenstra, 2011). Parents' identities and those of their children interact to shape their experiences, opportunities, choices, and challenges in relation to schools (Grant & Zwier, 2012). By exploring the intersections of families' sexual minority, adoptive, and racial statuses, we can illuminate the complexity of lived experiences at the "crossroads" of these identities and within the broader institutional systems of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). Although parents in this study hold identities that are marginalized in U.S. society at large (i.e., sexual minority identity, adoptive family structure, multiracial family status), an intersectional approach highlights how parental social class, resulting from advantages linked to education and wealth (and among men, gender), also affords privileges that may shape their experiences in their communities and when navigating schools (Grant & Zwier, 2012). Parents with greater education are more likely to select private or alternative public schools (Goyette, 2014; Pugh, 2009) in that education level is an indicator of the value they place on education (Ogawa & Dutton, 1997), but also because education provides parents with access to networks of information, which shape knowledge and choice of schools (Goyette & Lareau, 2014). LG parents' middle-class status may impact the types of schools they can access, such as by affording them greater power to seek out "progressive" schools that will be positively inclined toward their family structure, and leading them to emphasize academic quality.

Parents' School Decision-Making and Selection

One of the most important ways in which parents are involved in children's education is through their choice of schools (Davies & Aurini, 2011)—although, notably, research on parents' school selection typically examines mothers only or does not explore how parent gender relates to school decision-making except to indicate that mothers in heterosexual couples typically have the "final say" (David, 2005) and may tend to value diversity in school settings more than fathers (Parcel, Hendrix, & Taylor, 2016). Historically, parents have chosen a school de facto, based on where they live (most children went to their neighborhood schools; Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). During the past few decades, parents have increasingly had greater choice in what school their child attends in part because of specific educational policies

that have broadened options to include magnet schools and charter schools (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). As school choice becomes more prevalent and private schools become more available and affordable (Stewart & Wolf, 2014), more attention has been paid to parents' school decision-making—although the degree to which they exercise any choice at all is shaped by financial and educational resources (Goldring & Philips, 2008; Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996). Families with higher incomes are more likely to have a choice in schooling (Davies & Aurini, 2011; Goyette & Lareau, 2014) and as parents' education and income increases, so do their options—and the tendency to select a private school (Goyette, 2008; Pugh, 2009). There is evidence, too, that private school enrollment tends to be higher among White students than students of color (including Asian, Black, and Hispanic), and private school enrollment among White families is highly correlated with the percentage of Black children in their communities, whereas private school enrollment among students of color does not fluctuate with community racial composition (Saporito, 2009).

Research on heterosexual parents' school selection shows that parents consider a range of factors, including practical (cost, location, convenience), quality-related (curriculum, academic reputation, class size), and, less often, value-related factors, such as the match between parents' and schools' values (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2011; Glenn-Applegate, Pentimonti, & Justice, 2011). Parents are ultimately most influenced by convenience and cost, leading them to often choose their local (public) school (Burgess et al., 2011; Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009). Working-class parents in particular tend to emphasize practical concerns in part due to constraints on choice in terms of money and time (Lareau, 2003). Middle-class parents may be more likely to emphasize school quality and academics (Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009; Goldring & Phillips, 2008), a difference that reflects differential resources, and values about education—as a "calculated decision that matches the values and attributes of the family…and child… to the best-fitting school" (Goyette, 2008, p. 117). Middle-class parents may be more drawn to private schools because of values that place a premium on social opportunity (Pugh, 2009) and a wish to have input into children's education (Goldring & Phillips, 2008).

Scholarship on school decision-making has often focused on White, middle-class parents, who tend to seek out schools with mostly White, middle-class student bodies (Goyette, 2008; Saporito & Lareau, 1999), viewing schools with large numbers of Black children as lower in quality (Goyette, 2014; Lareau, Evans, & Yee, 2016). White parents who claim to want diversity are generally averse to placing children in mostly Black schools (Lareau et al., 2016), suggesting a valuing of racial diversity only "in moderation" and when accompanied by key characteristics, such as high test scores (Butler, Carr, Toma, & Zimmer, 2013; Saporito, 2009). Research on families of color has tended to focus on low-income families, rendering other intersections between race and class understudied—with some exceptions (e.g., Lareau, 2003). Byrne and De Tona (2012) found that middle-class immigrant parents sought ethnically mixed schools, reflecting both a desire to avoid racism and an "effort to resist the racialised and classed categories into which they had been placed" (p. 32). Vincent, Rollock, Ball, and Gillborn (2012) found that middle-class Black families prioritized academic excellence amidst awareness of low expectations for Black children in school. In prioritizing high-quality (and often less racially diverse) schools, parents took on the responsibility of challenging the prejudice inherent in the White-dominated education system. Parents of children of color, then, face complex considerations related to racial diversity.

School decision-making is not simply a process of weighing valued factors against one another and considering these amidst structural constraints. The costs and benefits (or risks and resources) of various options are also debated, even agonized over (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011), a process that is further complicated when taking an intersectional perspective. For parents who are LG, adoptive, or have a child of color, such resources could represent racial diversity and family diversity—the presence of others who might mirror the child and create a sense of belonging (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Park, 2011). Indeed, the racial composition of children's social contexts, including school settings (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011), impacts racial identity development and well-being (Benner, Graham, & Mistry, 2008; Williams, Banerjee, Lozada-Smith, Lambouths, & Rowley, 2017). Yet, LG adoptive parents may weigh

the benefits of having same-race peers against the reality that schools that are mostly attended by children of color are often in poorer communities or co-occur with less-valued aspects of diversity (e.g., more families on state assistance; Billingham & Hunt, 2016). LG adoptive parents may feel that a racially heterogeneous school, although appealing, comes with "trade-offs" (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013). Even more complex decision-making is introduced if LG parents consider their child's membership in a stigmatized family structure with two same-gender parents. Parents may engage similar trade-offs as they weigh the costs and benefits of different schooling options (e.g., gay-friendly private school versus racially diverse public school) amidst practical and school-quality considerations.

School Decision-Making Among Sexual Minority Parents

When families or children belong to a "special group"—such as parents of children with special needs (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011) or parents of bilingual children (McClain, 2010)—parents may consider issues of inclusiveness and representation (e.g., who attends the school; who is acknowledged in curricula) in school decision-making. Yet despite representing minority groups for which inclusiveness considerations may loom large, only a few studies have examined sexual minority or adoptive parents' school considerations. Gartrell et al. (1999) interviewed 84 lesbian mother families with toddlers about child-care plans and found that 87% of mothers planned to enroll their children in programs that included children and teachers of different social classes, genders, ethnicities, and cultures. A recent quantitative study of LG and heterosexual parent families ($n = 105$) with young, adopted children assessed parents' considerations in choosing early-childhood education settings and found that LG parents were more likely to consider racial diversity than heterosexual parents, even when controlling for children's race (Goldberg & Smith, 2014). This study pointed to how aspects of their family structure may shape LG parents' school selection but did not address the nuances and complexity of school-related decisions (e.g., parents' process of weighing various considerations and how they decided on schools). Finally, a survey of 588 sexual minority parents in the United States found that 78% of school-age children attended public schools, lower than the national percentage (89%; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). The private schools that children attended were more likely to be independent (16%) than national percentages. Most parents said they chose the local school (59%) and that they chose it based on academic reputation (54%).

LG parents, particularly those who have adopted, are uniquely aware of issues of racial and family diversity that may impact their children's school experiences. It is likely that as their children progress through school, parents are increasingly sensitive to the potential for peer and teacher mistreatment based on their children's race or ethnicity, adoptive status, or LG parent status. LG parents may incorporate these concerns into their selection process—such as by seeking out specific communities and schools in an effort to dampen the possibility that their child encounters stigma. Such efforts may be pronounced among LG parents of children of color, who are vulnerable to mistreatment based on racial and family differences (Goldberg & Smith, 2016).

The Current Study

The study includes a sample in which privilege and marginalization uniquely comingle amidst broader systems of racial, economic, and sexual inequality. Specifically, the sample consists of mostly White, middle-class sexual minority parents who have adopted their children, most of whom are of color. Thus, parents in the sample tend to be privileged by the intersections of their own racial, educational, and financial advantages—yet the meaning and impact of these privileged statuses are transmuted at the juncture of sexual orientation, family building route, and child race.

Crozier et al. (2008) observed that in making choices about schooling, some middle-class parents find themselves "caught in a web of moral ambiguity, dilemmas and ambivalence, trying to perform 'the good/ethical self' while ensuring the 'best' for their children" (p. 261). Such parents may value public schools or racially diverse schools for their alignment with certain moral principles but weigh these benefits against the opportunities afforded by parents' class privilege and the self-advancement seemingly promised by private schools or less diverse but more academically reputable schools (Crozier et al.,

2008). Such tensions around the pursuit of what is "best" for children are likely multiplied and nuanced for middle-class LG parents of adopted children of color, who negotiate a complex array of intersecting social locations and identities in considering the "right" school for their families, and for whom what is "best" may thus seem murky and contradictory. Is it "best" for a child to be the only student of color at a prestigious school—or would the child do better at the racially diverse, less academically reputable school? Is it "best" for a child with LG parents to attend an inexpensive, religious, academically rigorous private school—or, a costly private school that claims to value diversity? In this study, we examine how parents consider and weigh children's racial, adoptive, and LG parent family statuses against one another and against school-quality factors and how broader contextual factors, such as race, class, and community context, interplay with school selection processes.

Method

Description of the Sample

Data come from 34 families (65 parents: both members of 15 lesbian couples, one member of two lesbian couples; both members of 16 gay couples, one member of one gay couple) who were interviewed about their experiences with children's schools 5 years after they adopted. (In two lesbian mother families, the parents were separated, and only one parent participated in the interview; in one gay father family, only one parent participated due to time constraints.) Parents were drawn from a larger longitudinal study of adoptive families across the life cycle, who were recruited during the transition to parenthood (Goldberg & Smith, 2009). See Table 1 for demographic data for the current sample. Family income differed by family type, $t(32) = 4.13$, $p < .001$. Gay father families were more affluent, with family incomes more than twice that of lesbian mother families, consistent with national data indicating that male same-sex couples earn more than female same-sex couples, reflecting the gender wage gap (Badgett & Schneebaum, 2015). Most parents were highly educated: 16% had a doctorate, 31% had a master's, 34% had a bachelor's, 11% had an associate's or some college, and 8% had a high school diploma or GED. Education did not differ by parent gender, highlighting the unique intersection between education and income in the sample, whereby gay men were more privileged financially but not educationally.

The average age of the children was 5.84 years ($SD = 1.47$); age did not differ by LG family type. Most children were adopted via private domestic adoption (70.6%), and adoption type did not differ by family type. Of the couples, 47% adopted boys, 38% adopted girls, 12% adopted boy and girl siblings, and 3% adopted girl siblings. A chi-square test revealed a significant difference in child gender by family type, $\chi^2(3, N = 34) = 9.77$, $p = .020$, such that gay men were more likely to adopt boys and lesbians were more likely to adopt girls. Parents were mostly White ($n = 55$; 84.6%), and children were mostly of color ($n = 28$; 82.4%). Gay men were more likely to be of color than lesbians, $\chi^2(1, N = 65) = 4.04$, $p = .040$, whereas distributions of child race did not differ by family type. In all but one couple where a parent was of color, the child was also of color.

Most children were in preschool ($n = 16$; 47.1%) or kindergarten ($n = 12$, 35.3%); the remainder ($n = 6$) were in Grades 1 to 4. Of the children, 62% attended public schools ($n = 21$ families; nine lesbian, 12 gay) and 38% attended private schools ($n = 13$; eight lesbian, five gay). Neither school type nor grade differed by family type. Neither income nor education differed between parents of children in private schools and parents of children in public schools. A chi-square test showed an association between school type and grade (preschool or kindergarten vs. Grades 1–4), $\chi^2(1, N = 34) = 4.51$, $p = .034$: Younger children were more likely to attend private school.

Turning to the specific intersections among school type, grade, and family type, among the 21 public school families, six had a preschool-aged child, nine had a kindergartener, and six had a child in Grades 1 to 4. In two cases, the public school was selected via school choice; in two cases it was a public international baccalaureate school; and in one case it was a magnet school. Among the 13 private-school families, 10 had a preschool-aged child and three had a kindergarten-aged child. Nine were Montessori (seven lesbian, two gay); the remainder were Catholic (one gay father family), Reggio Emilio (one gay father family), language immersion (one gay father family), and private preparatory (one lesbian mother family).

Table 1. *Demographic Data by Family Type*

Demographic variables	Lesbians, $n = 32$	Gay men, $n = 33$	Total sample, $n = 65$
Parent race, n (%)			
White	30 (93.8)	25 (75.8)	55 (84.6)
Latino	0 (0)	5 (15.2)	5 (7.7)
Biracial, Latino and White	0 (0)	1 (3.0)	1 (1.5)
Native American	1 (3.1)	0 (0)	1 (1.5)
African American	1 (3.1)	1 (3.0)	2 (3.0)
Asian American	0 (0)	1 (3.0)	1 (1.5)
Education, M (*SD*)	4.78 (1.90)	4.69 (1.09)	4.73 (1.54)
	Lesbian families, $n = 17$	Gay families, $n = 17$	Total sample, $n = 34$ families
Family income, M (*SD*)	$110,823 ($63,605)	$235,705 ($107,191)	$173,264 ($107,468)
Child age, M (*SD*)	5.78 (1.43)	5.92 (1.60)	5.84 (1.47)
Child race, n (%)			
Biracial/multiracial	9 (52.9)	7 (41.1)	16 (47.1)
Latino	2 (11.8)	6 (35.3)	8 (23.5)
White	4 (23.5)	2 (11.8)	6 (17.6)
Black	1 (5.9)	1 (5.9)	2 (5.9)
Asian	1 (5.9)	1 (5.9)	2 (5.9)
Boys, n (%)	4 (23.5)	12 (70.6)	16 (47.1)
Girls, n (%)	10 (58.8)	3 (17.6)	13 (38.2)
Siblings, n (%)	3 (17.6)	2 (11.8)	5 (14.7)
Type of adoption, n (%)			
Private domestic	12 (70.6)	12 (70.6)	24 (70.6)
International	2 (11.8)	3 (17.6)	5 (14.7)
Public domestic, child welfare	3 (17.6)	2 (11.8)	5 (14.7)
Child grade, n (%)			
Preschool	8 (47.1)	8 (47.1)	16 (47.1)
Kindergarten	6 (35.3)	6 (35.3)	12 (35.3)
1st grade	1 (5.9)	2 (11.8)	3 (8.8)
3rd grade	1 (5.9)	0 (0)	1 (2.9)
4th grade	1 (5.9)	1 (5.9)	2 (5.9)
Type of school, n (%)			
Public school	9 (52.9)	12 (70.6)	21 (61.8)
Private school	8 (47.1)	5 (29.4)	13 (38.2)
Region, n (%)			
Northeast	6 (35.3)	3 (17.6)	9 (26.5)
West	5 (29.4)	9 (52.9)	14 (41.2)
Midwest	2 (11.8)	4 (23.5)	6 (17.6)
South	4 (23.5)	1 (5.9)	5 (14.7)
Type of community, n (%)			
Urbanized area, >50,000 residents	11 (64.7)	12 (70.6)	23 (67.6)
Urbanized cluster, 2,500–49,999 residents	6 (35.3)	5 (29.4)	11 (32.4)
County political environment, n (%)			
Liberal, county voted Democrat	15 (88.2)	15 (88.2)	30 (88.2)
Conservative, county voted Republican	2 (11.8)	2 (11.8)	4 (11.8)

A total of 26.5% of the families resided in the Northeast region of the United States, 41.2% lived on the West Coast, 17.6% lived in the Midwest, and 14.7% lived in the South. Of the families, 68% lived in urbanized, metropolitan areas (50,000 or more residents, such as Chicago, IL); 32% of families lived in urbanized clusters of smaller cities or towns (2,500–49,999 residents, such as Takoma Park, MD); and no families lived in rural areas (fewer than 2,500 residents;

U.S. Census, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Neither region nor urbanicity differed by family type. Most families ($n = 30$) lived in counties where the majority voted Democrat in the 2016 presidential election; four families lived in counties where the majority voted Republican (Politico, 2016).

Procedure

Participants in this study were assessed 5 years after becoming first-time parents via adoption. Inclusion criteria for the original study were that both partners must be first-time parents and adopting for the first time. Parents were originally recruited from adoption agencies and LGBT organizations in the United States to participate in a study of the transition to adoptive parenthood. These adoption agencies were chosen because they were open to working with same-sex couples; LGBT organizations were chosen because they reached a large number of individuals. Parents were recontacted 5 years postadoption for a follow-up. All parents were invited to complete a series of questionnaires. From this larger group of parents, a subsample was invited to be interviewed about their experiences with children's schools, with both partners participating in individual interviews in most of these families. In identifying invitees, effort was made to ensure diversity in participant profiles (e.g., in child race, geographic region). Selecting a subset of participants from a larger data set can facilitate a richer, more focused exploration of themes and is a useful method of conserving researcher time and resources (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015).

Data are drawn from these 5-year postadoption interviews, which lasted 1 to 1.5 hours on average, and occurred between 2010 and 2015. Given that the research team was located in Worcester, MA, and participants resided across the United States, telephone interviews were used. The principal investigator and trained doctoral students in clinical and developmental psychology conducted the interviews. Participants' open-ended responses to the following items were used in our analysis: (a) Tell me about the schools [child] has attended; (b) tell me about your decision-making process in choosing a school for [child]; (c) what challenges did you encounter in deciding upon a school for [child]; (d) tell me about your experiences with [child's] teachers; (e) how connected do you feel to the school; (f) to what extent do you feel your child's school experience has been shaped by where you live?

Data Coding and Analysis

We conducted a thematic analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) of the transcribed data. Initially, we were informed by sensitizing concepts drawn from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989) and the relevant literature. That is, we attended to how parents navigated their family's minority statuses (i.e., racial, gendered, sexual orientation, adoptive) in the context of structural discrimination and practical worries and constraints as well as personal and ideological factors in selecting their children's schools. We also attended to possible intersections (e.g., among parent gender and child race) in our analysis. It quickly became clear that our initial sensitizing concepts reflected an oversimplified expectation of how parents might make decisions about schools. We found a much more complex interplay among race, class, gender, and sexual orientation than we had anticipated.

In the initial coding stage, four of the five authors independently coded the data. This process ensured that multiple interpretations were considered, enhancing the credibility of the analysis (Patton, 2002). We authors, who constitute a diverse group (e.g., regarding sexual orientation and parenting statuses), discussed our social positioning and the possible influence of our biases throughout the coding process. We engaged in an iterative process of coding that involved a continual back and forth between the data and our analysis. Each author read each transcript multiple times. We initially wrote memos on all participants, which aimed to distill key themes related to school experiences. We met weekly to discuss emerging codes, which led to the creation of a tentative coding scheme. Over time, codes were integrated, eliminated, and added.

Once we had formed clearly articulated codes, we applied focused coding, using the most significant codes to sort the data. Focused coding, which can be understood as more conceptual and selective, yielded the identification of categories or higher level groupings that contained subcodes (Charmaz, 2006). For example, as indicated in Table 2, subsumed within practical resource considerations are several subcodes—finances and location. At

Table 2. *Primary Considerations in Choosing Schools*

Themes	Gay	Lesbian	Total, by school type	Total
Practical resources				
Economic constraints	4 (Pu), 3 (Pr)	8 (Pu), 3 (Pr)	12 (Pu), 6 (Pr)	18
Geographic constraints	6 (Pu), 5 (Pr)	3 (Pu), 3 (Pr)	9 (Pu), 8 (Pr)	17
Children's intersecting identities				
Racial diversity	2 (Pu), 3 (Pr)	5 (Pu), 4 (Pr)	7 (Pu), 8 (Pr)	14
Over LG inclusion	0 (Pu), 1 (Pr)	3 (Pu), 4 (Pr)	3 (Pu), 5 (Pr)	8
Racial diversity, incidental	4 (Pu), 1 (Pr)	3 (Pu), 0 (Pr)	7 (Pu), 1 (Pr)	8
Gay-friendliness and inclusion	2 (Pu), 3 (Pr)	2 (Pu), 2 (Pr)	4 (Pu), 5 (Pr)	9
Gay-friendliness, incidental	3 (Pu), 1 (Pr)	3 (Pu), 2 (Pr)	6 (Pu), 3 (Pr)	9
Special needs accommodations	1 (Pu), 2 (Pr)	3 (Pu), 2 (Pr)	4 (Pu), 4 (Pr)	8
School quality				
Curricular offerings	3 (Pu), 0 (Pr)	5 (Pu), 2 (Pr)	8 (Pu), 2 (Pr)	10
Educational philosophy	2 (Pu), 1 (Pr)	2 (Pu), 7 (Pr)	4 (Pu), 8 (Pr)	12
Academic rigor	3 (Pu), 3 (Pr)	0	3 (Pu), 3 (Pr)	6

Pu = public, Pr = private.

this stage, analytic links among categories were explored, and categories and subcodes were examined in relation to various family characteristics (e.g., school type, parent gender, child race; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This yielded a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the patterns in the data and enabled us to sharpen and refine our coding scheme. We then returned to the transcripts and reapplied this scheme to all of the data to ensure that parents' experiences were captured by the scheme. We discussed coding disagreements at weekly meetings and used our discussions to refine the scheme. The final scheme was established once the four primary coders had verified agreement among all of the independently coded data. At this stage, the second author read a subsample (one fifth) of the transcripts to help verify and further refine the coding scheme. Table 2 presents our primary themes and subthemes surrounding parents' primary considerations in choosing schools.

Of note is that although both partners were interviewed, our analysis led us to report their data as a unit, rather than to highlight differences between the partners. During the process of coding, we observed few discrepancies in parents' reports within families; indeed, parents tended to be unified in their narration of school-related decisions and considerations—although we have no way of knowing whether partners were indeed truly unified in their private discussions and negotiations. Thus, we present the data by the 34 families, not by the individual parents.

Results

All parents described school choice as a challenging process of juggling and deliberating among three main areas to choose the "right" school for their children—a process that was particularly complicated when tensions emerged between children's marginalized identities (e.g., being a child of color, having special needs) and parents' preferences or values. Finding a school that was a "perfect fit" often seemed impossible, and thus parents tried "to figure out how to prioritize" and accommodate (a) practical resources, (b) children's and family's intersecting identities, and (c) school-quality factors. We explored how parents navigated and deliberated among these three considerations by weighing the trade-offs in order to yield the best possible educational scenario for their child and their family.

Practical Resources

The foundational level of decision-making involved consideration of the family's practical resources—namely, financial constraints and geographic constraints—in accessing the best school. These practicalities were prominent considerations for parents, with affordability regarding money and time forming the

"bottom line" as they approached school decision-making.

Financial constraints. How much money parents made framed how they thought about and managed the actual and potential costs of various options. A total of 18 families (11 lesbian mother [LM], seven gay father [GF]) identified financial constraints as playing a key role in their school decision-making. In 12 of these 18 families (eight LM, four GF), parents asserted that they chose public schools mainly because they could not afford or were unwilling to make the financial sacrifices necessary for private school. Six families (three LM, three GF) chose private schools, and parents described financial considerations as constraining their choice in that they chose one of the less costly private schools in their area. Arianna, a White human resources director in an urbanized cluster of the Midwest, considered the affordability and location of various options before placing her multiracial (African American, Latino, White) son in a private Montessori school that was less costly than other local private schools: "The best possibility… we couldn't even fathom affording it. It is like $18,000! Even Montessori is steep … but it's not *that*." Thus, the concept of affordability varied among these six families and depended on income, location, and relative expense of local schools (Bosetti, 2004).

Geographic constraints. Where parents lived, which was closely linked to their finances, also shaped and constrained their schooling options. A total of 17 families (six LM, 11 GF; nine public, eight private) shared that they carefully considered the location or proximity of the school to their home; six of them also emphasized finances, indicating how various practical considerations may co-occur. Notably, considerations related to location varied distinctly by gender. Gay men typically stressed the significance of location in that they endured lengthy commutes to work and wanted to minimize the inconvenience and stress of travel to school, or they worked nearby and wished to avoid "traveling in the other direction." Thus, gay fathers ruled out schools that they perceived as incurring burdens on travel and time. Conversely, lesbian mothers emphasized location by detailing a preference for forming relationships with neighbors and establishing

community connections. In addition to reflecting logistical concerns (e.g., ease of getting the child to school; Bosetti, 2004), their preference for a neighborhood school seemed to reflect beliefs about the importance of building local community and developing ties to neighbors (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Pugh, 2009). Heather, a White administrative director in a Northeastern urbanized cluster, shared that she and her wife, also White, liked the idea of their Latina daughter attending school "within walking distance" of their home. Heather also hoped that this close proximity would enable her to be "more involved at school." Whereas gay fathers invoked location in the context of a desire to minimize time and commuting demands and to maximize ease, lesbian mothers were unique in citing the relational and community benefits of local schooling, underscoring intersections among parents' gender, practical constraints, and parental values.

Tensions in juggling money and community. Consideration of finances and location intersected in complex ways and presented unique trade-offs for families living in less progressive areas, wherein most of the private schools in their area were religiously affiliated and unlikely to be accepting of their LG parent family structure. Insomuch as parents came to "rule out" these local private schools by default (parents assumed they would be a poor fit) or after a visit that left a "bad impression," parents saw themselves as having limited choices. For example, parents felt forced to choose between two private schools more than an hour away, presenting financial and time trade-offs or between the "crappy public school" and the "very expensive" private school in town. Those who chose private schools sometimes incurred a major commute or found themselves "outside of [their] budget," warranting "cutbacks" in other areas, and those who chose public schools described this as the most cost-efficient and geographically feasible—but less desirable—option. Heidi, a White nonprofit director living in a Southern urbanized cluster with her White partner and Latina daughter, May, considered public school ("they're not bad") but felt that May would do better in a smaller class setting. Heidi said,

> We were very upset about the lack of good choices that we had. [Local religious private schools] teach

in the Bible that homosexuality is a sin, so, we went to Montessori because it was the most middle of the road and they accept [partner] and I as partners.

Within a broader community context that denigrated their family structure based on parental sexual orientation, Heidi and her partner's options were constrained by the few secular (and thus more tolerant) private schools—but facilitated by their class status. Heidi and her partner therefore selected a school they hoped would accept their family and provide May with the individual attention they valued, albeit one that was "more costly" than the nearby religious private schools.

Children's Intersecting Identities and Family Contexts

Children's personal characteristics and identities—as children of color, children with sexual-minority parents, or children with special needs—were the second main source of parental deliberation about schools. Parents described the process of weighing each of these identities against one another and against other valued school characteristics and practical constraints. Their children's multiple minority statuses presented unique considerations in terms of their sense of belonging and vulnerability to marginalization within various school settings. The centrality of the schools' racial diversity, gay friendliness, and special-needs accommodations to parents' decision-making varied depending on the specific intersections of children's identities, amidst other social locations. For example, racial diversity overrode gay friendliness as a consideration in lesbian-mother families; gay friendliness was prioritized over racial diversity in families living in the South; and special needs typically overrode all other child and family identity considerations.

Racial diversity. For 14 families (eight LM, four GF)—all parents of children of color, eight of whom chose private schools—racial diversity, and specifically the presence of other children of color, was emphasized as a priority. Most of these parents were women, echoing prior indications that heterosexual mothers value racially diverse schools more than heterosexual fathers

(Parcel et al., 2016) and lesbian adoptive mothers may be more purposeful than gay adoptive fathers in their approach to racial socialization (Goldberg, Sweeney, Black, & Moyer, 2016). These parents recognized the significance of racial and ethnic representation in the school in that they or their partners did not share their child's race and felt obligated to select schools that would support children's emerging racial identity development. Parents thus relied on the school and peer context for racial socialization (Park, 2011; Samuels, 2009). Lisa, a White therapist in an urban area in the Midwest and a mother of a Latina daughter, said,

> Race had a lot of effect on our school choice. As White parents we can't give our daughter racial identity. … We knew that this particular school is very diverse racially and culturally and that there would be a lot of kids who would look like her.

Consistent with prior work on transracial adoption, parents grounded their emphasis on racial diversity in a desire to promote positive racial identity development, whereby children would see themselves mirrored by peers in ways that were not possible in their own White-parent families (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Park, 2011; Samuels, 2009). By extension, these parents differed from the heterosexual parents in the sample of middle-class Black families in Vincent et al. (2012), who recognized that their own families were sites of racial and cultural socialization even if their children's high-status, mostly White schools were not.

Some families articulated difficult tensions and trade-offs as they considered school options amidst a prioritization of racial diversity. Elise, a White nurse in an urban area of the Northeast, wanted her African American daughter to be around "other brown skinned children." With her partner, who was also White, Elise settled on a public school that had a "lot of diversity but also a lot of poverty," prompting questions about whether their family would stay there for the "long term," especially given that there were "too few teachers."

Eight of these 14 families (seven LM, one GF) explicitly noted that racial diversity was more important in their decision-making than LG parent family structure. These (mostly lesbian) parents' racial consciousness led them to imagine racial representation as more crucial

than LG family representation. Indeed, parents' prioritization of racial diversity may reflect their awareness that although their sexual orientation represented a marginalized identity that poses a threat to social integration, their children's race was a more salient characteristic that held greater implications for a child's self-concept and self-categorization (Park, 2011). Marie, a White project manager in a West Coast urban area, recounted how, when touring a school, she asked about diversity, insomuch as her daughter was biracial, and the school looked "primarily White. The [guide] said it was very diverse. When I asked her how, she said, 'Well, we have lots of lesbian and gay families.' That was nice, but ultimately it was just a very White school, so we ruled it out." The one man in this group, Bob, a White paralegal living in a West Coast urban area with his partner, who was also White, and their Latino son, concurred:

> Race and ethnicity was definitely by far the biggest driver [in choosing a school]. To a lesser extent, I think, same-sex parents. … We didn't really think so much about the adoptive thing, although in this city the adoptive thing and same-sex kind of go hand-in-hand. Part of the reason why we chose this school is that we felt it would be a built-in place [for racial socialization], helping to make that happen.

Bob's comment reveals how, although he claimed not to have considered LG family structure as much as race in his decision-making, this was ultimately because there were clearly LG parent families in his community. This shows how economic and geographic forms of privilege may operate invisibly to shape parents' considerations in school decision-making. Perhaps, in certain progressive, urban environments, the presence of other queer individuals and families may be taken for granted (Gorman-Murray, Waitt, & Gibson, 2008) and thus not explicitly considered.

Notably, two of these 14 families were affluent gay father families (i.e., with family incomes of more than $150,000) who had moved to more racially diverse areas in part to access racially diverse (but not high-ranking) public schools, revealing how the possession of resources does not necessarily mean that these will be deployed to attend the "best" schools (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Dave, a White stay-at-home father raising his Latina daughter with his White partner in an urban area of the West Coast, explained

how "coming from an economic standpoint, we could have bought a house in one of the better school zones, but chose not to." Rather, they chose their home in part based on "the town statistics for diversity, … We're very conscious of all the factors that play into her feeling 'othered.' We didn't want her to be the only kid that wasn't White."

Some parents of children of color ($n = 8$; five GF, three LM), all but one of whom attended public school, asserted that they had not prioritized racial diversity but found that the schools their children attended were at least somewhat racially diverse, which they appreciated. In this way, racial diversity was regarded as a bonus, but not essential. Ronnie, a White engineer in an East Coast urbanized cluster, whose partner was also White, had been most concerned about school quality and gay friendliness, but said that he was glad to see that his son was "not the only Asian child or the only child whose skin is a different color."

Gay friendliness and inclusiveness. Nine families (four LM, five GF; five sent their children to private school) said they prioritized gay friendliness and inclusiveness in choosing a school. All but one had children of color—and although racial diversity was sometimes noted as a consideration, it was not deemed as important as identifying a school that would be supportive, or at least not explicitly stigmatizing, of their LG parent family structure. What these families had in common is that none lived in "gay meccas" or described their areas as "gay friendly." Most families lived in the South, several in working-class areas—places where, they noted, LG parent families were not visible or widely embraced (Gorman-Murray et al., 2008). They often implicitly and sometimes explicitly voiced concerns about how schools might reflect their community's attitudes and focused on schools' values about sexuality and families in their school selection. Tasha, a White program manager living in a Southern urbanized cluster with her White partner and their Latina daughter, said that in "school shopping," she "asked the diversity questions from a gay standpoint."

> We visited most of the Christian schools in the area and then the two Montessori schools. One school, when I asked what they would be teaching the children about homosexuality, … they were like,

"Well that her parents are going to hell." OK, we can end this now, we can stop (*laugh*). … Another one actually mentioned that they didn't agree with interracial marriages or homosexuality. And I'm, like, OK, we'll cross that one off the list (*laugh*).

Two of the five gay-father families had moved in the past few years, in part, they said, to access more progressive, gay-friendly communities. Evan, a White marketing manager and father to an Asian son, described how he and his partner had leveraged their financial and geographic resources to move to a nearby suburb that Evan hoped would be more receptive to their gay-father family. Specifically, the family had moved from a Northeastern city "with terrible schools" to a "liberal, gay-friendly area … with a highly rated elementary school," which Evan expected to be reflected in the philosophy of the local school and the type of families who attended it.

Similar to those families who stated that they had not explicitly prioritized racial diversity but ultimately found that their children's schools were racially diverse, some families shared that although they had not emphasized gay friendliness in their search for a school, their children's schools ultimately scored high marks in this category. Specifically, nine families (five LM, four GF) noted that their children's schools (six of which were public) seemed to emphasize diversity and tolerance, and they had not "run into any problems." These parents often remarked that their children's schools somewhat mirrored the progressive attitudes and makeup of the larger community. Allie, a White chemist who was raising her White son with her White partner in a Northeast urbanized cluster, said, "Thankfully we're in a … liberal place, so it's not like we felt like we had to worry too much about the gay thing." Living in urban, progressive settings, then, released some parents from having to anticipate or seek to circumvent intolerance of their families, enabling a focus on other school considerations (Wilkins, 2011).

Special education needs. Eight families (five LM, three GF) identified their children's special needs—including behavioral, developmental, and learning difficulties, which parents sometimes attributed to children's adverse early life conditions (e.g., parental neglect)—as impacting their choice of a school. Some parents noted that their children's difficulties (e.g., sensory integration disorder, developmental delays)—or, in one case, giftedness—had recently become more salient, warranting focused consideration of how well a given school's services and supports would meet their child's unique challenges, abilities, and needs. Ultimately, half of the parents whose children had special needs chose public schools, and half chose private schools.

Significantly, children's special education needs overrode all other considerations for these eight families. That is, although these families often mentioned considering other child-centered (e.g., race, family structure) and academic factors, their children's special needs were typically the most salient, and parents conveyed an unwillingness to compromise on their needs accommodations. Tara, a White volunteer coordinator in an urban area of the West Coast, said that after touring a variety of public and private schools, she and her wife, also White, decided to send their biracial (Latina and White) daughter, Anna, to the local public school because it had resources to address her special needs. Anna's challenges had led Tara to "stop prioritizing [schools being gay friendly] and begin prioritizing what was going to be best for Anna." Thus, Tara shifted away from centralizing their position as a lesbian-parent family in the decision-making process to treating it as marginal to Anna's requirements for accommodations, which took center stage (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011). Notable too is that Tara's possession of some financial resources enabled her family to consider various schooling options, including private school, before determining that public school, which accommodated Anna's special needs, was the best fit.

Eric and Sean, both White and employed as an administrator and massage therapist, respectively, in an urban area of the West Coast, had chosen a private school for their Latino son, who had recently been diagnosed with a sensory integration disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Both men viewed the resources for supporting their son at public school as "limited," deeming the small private school their son attended a better "fit" because of its size and teacher availability. In light of his son's behavioral issues, Eric worried that his son would "get labeled as the brown troublemaker kid in public school," whereas private school would be better able to accommodate his

needs. Eric's comment reveals how race, gender, and special-needs status, all axes of potential vulnerability and marginalization, intersected to create unique considerations for some parents (Veenstra, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012). Yet it also reveals how financial resources may have provided Eric with the means and agency to minimize (at least theoretically, based on assumptions about differing racialized experiences in public vs. private school settings) the prospect of an inferior schooling experience for his son.

Tensions in juggling among children's intersecting identities. As noted, the parents often weighed racial diversity, family structure diversity, and special-needs accommodations against each other, resulting in tensions, conflicts, and trade-offs. Many parents acknowledged guilt and uncertainty about what they had sacrificed (e.g., racial diversity) in the service of accessing certain valued characteristics (e.g., special-needs services). For example, Tara—who was quoted earlier as ultimately prioritizing special-needs resources—described feeling conflicted as she resigned herself to sacrificing other valued key considerations, such as the school's gay friendliness. Indeed, Tara was somewhat reluctant to move on from her daughter's private preschool, which had "amazing teachers," and where her family was "treated like all the other families."

Moira, a White writer living in an urban area of the West Coast with her White partner and biracial (African American and White) daughter, also shared how difficult it was to "figure out how to prioritize—how to choose a diverse school that also welcomes queer, adoptive, multiracial families. I'm actually not sure that school exists. Add in our daughter's sensory challenges and fetal alcohol effects and it gets even trickier." Further, Jen, a White education consultant, who lived in an urban area of the West Coast with her partner and son, both African American, said,

> You're pulled in a lot of different directions. … Racial diversity … was extremely important to us as we started out. People who are sensitive or understood adoption was important to us. Finding an environment where they got what it means to be a diverse family structure was important. As we found, it's kind of impossible to find the perfect fit, at least for us, in [city], where [there isn't] a huge African American population.

School Quality

Third, parents considered components of school quality in their school decision-making—curriculum, educational philosophy, and academic rigor, and reputation. Curriculum was noted as a "plus," but only by parents who sent their children to public school. Educational philosophy was described as important (e.g., in terms of one's values) by lesbian women in particular and especially those who sent their children to private school. Academic reputation was emphasized as one of the most important considerations in choosing a school among affluent gay fathers specifically. Thus, as suggested by an intersectional perspective, all three of these school-quality considerations emerged as salient but to differing degrees and by different types of parents.

Curriculum. Aspects of the academic curriculum (e.g., arts, sports, gardening) were named as significant for some families ("the curriculum was a huge sell"), often because parents perceived them as a good "fit" with children's interests and talents ($n = 10$; seven LM, three GF; eight sent their children to public school). Karen, a White teacher living in a Northeastern urbanized cluster with her wife, also White, and their Latina daughter, said the public school their family opted for "has a fabulous music program, and she loves music; [they] do it 4 times a week. … It's perfect for her." That most parents who named curricular offerings as a consideration were parents who sent their children to public school and who described themselves as constrained by finances or location suggests that these may have been viewed more as "bonuses" or added features of a school rather than central, value-driven considerations in their decision-making process.

Educational philosophy. Parents were often drawn to schools because of their educational philosophy ($n = 12$; nine LM, three GM; eight sent their children to private school). These parents considered the fit between their child's learning style and personality and a school's pedagogical orientation (e.g., student centered, emphasis on experiential learning, critical-thinking focus). Lesbian mothers in particular named "collaborative problem solving" and consideration of "the whole child" as valued aspects of Montessori schools specifically. Certain core characteristics of a Montessori

education (e.g., valuing cooperation over competition, appreciation of diversity; Powell, 2008) may have been especially appealing to the lesbian mothers in the study, highlighting how values and concerns related to schooling may reflect the intersection of social class and racial privilege with gendered consciousness.

Academic rigor and reputation. In six gay father-headed families (three sent their children to private school), parents stressed the competitive academic status of the school in their decision-making, often describing how they perused rankings, ratings, and test scores to determine a school's academic status. For example, Marcus, a Latino therapist from a wealthy Northeastern urbanized cluster with a Latino partner and biracial (African American and White) daughter, said the "competitive academics" at her school was a driving force in their decision to move and send her to kindergarten there: "It's a highly ranked school. We wanted her to be at the best of the best."

In fact, four of the six gay-father families who emphasized rigorous academics as important described having moved in the past year or two, in advance of or concurrent with their school decision-making process. Moving allowed them to maximize their goal of accessing a "highly rated school" in a "good school district" while minimizing costs. Thus, relocating to access top-quality public schools was viewed as a fiscally responsible decision that enabled them to opt out of the need to consider private schools—albeit one that required existing financial, geographic, and career mobility and resources. Overall, that these gay fathers emphasized test scores and "stellar academics" may reflect the intersection of their gender and financial status, which led to an emphasis on middle-class ideals of competitive schooling, academic advancement, and maintaining privilege (Crozier et al., 2008; Lareau, 2003; Vincent et al., 2012).

Tensions in juggling among school-quality factors and racial diversity. Several affluent gay-father families described the challenge of trying to balance seemingly competing priorities in choosing a "good quality school" that was also racially diverse. For example, Jon (a Latino consultant) and Todd (a White teacher), who lived in an urban area of the West Coast

and whose son was multiracial (African American, Latino, White), chose a private school that offered an "excellent curriculum" (Jon), informed by an educational philosophy that emphasized critical thinking. Yet both men felt that they had compromised racial diversity to access desirable school qualities. Todd said,

> There are only two or three children out of 100 children at the school with African American heritage. That's a little tough. It hurt me to make that decision but I want him to have access to a good education.

For Todd and several others, financial resources afforded the freedom to value academic rigor even if racial diversity was compromised to some degree.

Discussion

Extending the limited work on how LG parents plan for (Gartrell et al., 1999) or navigate (Goldberg & Smith, 2014) school selection, these LG parents are engaged in a complex, back-and-forth, and fluid decision-making process that reflects their particular constellation of identities. As our intersectional approach and the unique nature of our sample reveal, no single social location—race, sexuality, gender, or class—emerges as singularly important in shaping parents' decision-making. The meaning and significance of these and other social locations are deeply intertwined and shift in complex ways depending on the specific constellation of personal, family, and contextual circumstances at play (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Warner & Shields, 2013).

Consistent with prior work on school decision-making (Davies & Aurini, 2011; Goyette, 2008), financial resources profoundly influenced how much choice parents actually had in selecting a school. In the context of high financial capital, parents could afford to send their children to private school or to move to a more progressive area with better school districts. Gay men often leveraged their financial (and, implicitly, their gender and race) privilege to access competitive private schools or to move to areas with highly ranked public schools, revealing how their intersecting privileges enabled them to achieve their goal of securing academically rich environments for their children. In this way, the intersection of

several privileged statuses led to an advantaged experience for an otherwise marginalized group (sexual minorities; Veenstra, 2011), such that gay dads were able to minimize the likelihood of exclusionary schooling experiences while maximizing access to a good education (Zwier & Grant, 2014). As intersectionality theory suggests, those with the most privileges are often the least aware of their abundant resources. In turn, gay men's financial resources seemed to mute racial and sexual orientation consciousness in favor of focusing on competitive academic environments—even the case among participants of color who nevertheless prioritized school quality over racial representation, who may have worried about what diversity would "cost" them in terms of school quality (Crozier et al., 2008). For a few families, though, the association between resources and choice was "queered"—that is, resisted, disrupted, and revisioned (Oswald, Kuvalanka, Blume, & Berkowitz, 2009)—such as when parents chose racially diverse schools even when they had the capital to move to "nicer districts," which can be viewed as a type of resistance to fully engaging their race and class privilege to access the "best" schools.

The lesbian mothers in the sample were also predominantly White and middle class. However, they did not possess nearly the same level of wealth as their male counterparts and were more likely to describe themselves as constrained by finances in their school decision-making. At the same time, lesbian mothers did not necessarily choose their local schools by default. Thus, a certain degree of expendable income as well as their middle-class values (Crozier et al., 2008) sometimes led women to select private schools, albeit "cheaper" ones. Yet lesbian mothers also tended to endorse a different set of values than gay fathers, which shaped their approach to schooling. Lesbian mothers prioritized building relationships with schools, the experiential aspects of schools (e.g., the skills and values that their children would gain), and, among mothers of children of color, a racially diverse environment that would enhance their child's racial identity and self-esteem. Thus, although gay fathers were more achievement oriented—emphasizing academic rigor and prestige (and, implicitly, the social mobility that children would gain; Lareau, 2003; Pugh, 2009), lesbian mothers

focused more on their child's socioemotional functioning.

Regarding parents' consideration of racial diversity, White parents—especially women—with children of color often prioritized racial diversity in seeking educational settings, although sometimes this emphasis was considered alongside other valued considerations that would potentially be lost, such as a gay-friendly school or a "top scoring" school. That women were more likely to prioritize racial diversity is consistent with prior work (Parcel et al., 2016), including a study that indicated that lesbian adoptive mothers may assume a more purposeful approach to racial socialization than gay adoptive fathers (Goldberg et al., 2016), suggesting that gender may intersect with sexual orientation to shape awareness of marginalized statuses. As White parents of children of color, these parents often appeared aware of their limited ability to provide racial socialization, thus relying in part on the school community of peers and teachers to do so (Park, 2011; Samuels, 2009), unlike middle-class Black parents who can "make up" for needed racial socialization at home (Vincent et al., 2012). Parents' emphasis on racial diversity often appeared to reflect attunement to the psychosocial benefits of exposure to other children of color and a desire to promote positive racial identity development via peer interactions (Williams et al., 2017).

Beyond parental gender, the geographic context of where a family lived—including region and community politics—was salient in shaping parents' decision-making by muting or heightening concerns about their LG family status, sometimes leading them to activate existing resources—when such resources were present. Residing in a progressive community—which is itself often linked to economic privilege, whereby parents with financial and educational forms of mobility can afford to move to and/or live in liberal enclaves (Gorman-Murray et al., 2008)—enabled parents to "opt out" of centralizing the presence of other LG parent families in their decision-making in that they could expect a school climate that was at least tolerant of their family structure. Thus, parents' class background operated as a powerful, but rarely acknowledged, factor in their decision-making process. In contrast, families who resided in communities that were inhospitable to LG parent families, often in the South, experienced

their sexual orientation as a more salient factor in their decision-making. In this way, contexts that were perceived as the most threatening to their sexual and family identities prompted the most active, calculated resistance to and avoidance of heteronormative schooling choices (e.g., conservative religious schools) via the deployment of financial capital to ensure that children were in tolerant settings. This phenomenon illustrates how confrontation with stigma and hostility may prompt queering processes (Oswald et al., 2009), although such queering was facilitated by a certain amount of economic and educational privilege, which enabled parents some choice in their school-selection process.

The nature, number, and salience of children's intersecting identities dictated the relative ease or difficulty in balancing various school considerations. For example, when children had special needs, parents' options were severely curtailed (Good, 2016), and although parents often valued family structure diversity and racial diversity, these considerations were deprioritized in the search for a perfect—or good enough—school. On the other hand, when children were White or parents did not view racial diversity as very important, parents were released from considering racial diversity, reducing the challenges that might arise in evaluating different school options.

Ultimately, families who juggled fewer intersecting identities and who also faced fewer practical constraints experienced fewer tensions within and across the different components (practical, child identities, school quality) and could prioritize school-quality factors, such as good test scores and an appealing educational philosophy more easily. For example, a wealthy gay-father family who lived in a progressive, affluent area and who had a White child with no special needs experienced far less tension in choosing a school than a moderate-income lesbian-mother family who resided in a less progressive area and who had an African American child with special needs. Indeed, lesbian mothers more often agonized over the various trade-offs they made in choosing a school, as they were less likely than gay men to be able to "buy their way" into ideal circumstances. Still, all parents juggled and deliberated amidst consideration of both privileged and marginalized statuses, requiring them to exert great effort in the decision-making process.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, we examined parents' decision-making retrospectively, rather than before or during the school-selection process. Parents may have been motivated to tell the interviewer a cohesive narrative about their school-selection process and were also likely aware of how the factors they identified as salient versus unimportant would be viewed by the research team and would ultimately affirm versus undermine the identity they valued and hoped to project. The sample itself was largely homogenous: Parents were mostly White, middle class, and well educated. The experiences of non-White, lower income parents may reflect different hierarchies of choice; they may prioritize different factors than more affluent parents who could afford to place their children in private schools if public schools did not meet their standards. And, as with much research, this is a self-selected sample: Participants volunteered to participate and thus are likely not representative of LG adoptive parents as a whole. Also, our thematic analysis, although in-depth and conducted by multiple researchers, was fundamentally shaped by our theoretical frameworks, research questions, and our own social locations and identity matrices (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Other scholars may have reached other conclusions.

Our findings point to many areas for future research. First, more than half of our families chose public schools, and the children in private schools were primarily preschoolers who may ultimately transition to public elementary schools (a common trajectory; Davis & Bauman, 2013). Future work can build on our findings to explore the process of evaluating elementary school options among middle-class LG parents, with attention to how their constraints, concerns, and ideals may shift during this developmental stage. Second, in contrast to parents' overt discussions of their children's race, parents generally did not discuss their own race, and no parent mentioned how their own White race privilege intersected with their child's race. Future research can explicitly probe for parents' understanding of race to better understand how different constructions of race (e.g., as an identity or a broader system of power) relate to their values and behaviors related to racial socialization (e.g., via school selection).

Conclusions

LG parents and their children possess multiple, intertwining identities that influence families' access to power and resources and expose them to visible and invisible forms of oppression and privilege within their broader social context. Privileged by their class but parenting children with multiple stigmatized identities, the LG parents in this study navigated complex decisions around schooling that will likely need to be revisited and renegotiated as their children grow. Indeed, gay men are, by virtue of their sexual orientation, members of a subordinate group, yet they possessed privileges and resources (i.e., related to education, finances, race, and gender) that placed them in a relatively powerful position in terms of imagining and enacting school choice. Lesbian mothers also possessed financial resources—but fewer than gay men—and often seemed to operate from a different set of values and concerns (e.g., related to racial diversity and community orientation). Tensions and ambivalence were most likely to emerge when parents' educational values, children's identities, and practical constraints such as cost and location were in conflict with one another—such as in the case of a racially conscious, Montessori-leaning, red-state-residing lesbian mom whose Latina daughter was diagnosed with a learning disability.

Our study, then, portrays the nuanced ways in which LG families juggle parental and child-intersecting identities in the process of school decision-making. In that a growing number of lesbian and gay adoptive families, many of whom are multiracial, are looking for the "right school," there is an increasing need for school structures to recognize the ways in which they "privilege and enforce heterosexuality, patriarchy, White supremacy, and class advantage" (Lugg, 2003, p. 103). In turn, schools can "queer" the educational experience for lesbian and gay adoptive families by acknowledging and honoring the diversity of their families in their informational materials, curricula, and school environment. By reducing the potential for stigma surrounding their family structure or multiracial status, for example, schools can alleviate some of LG parents' central concerns—and possible costs and trade-offs—surrounding their children's educational experience, thus facilitating a school decision-making process that is less fraught with tension and more attuned to the needs of diverse families.

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