



Suggestions for Researchers Studying Children of LGBT Parents

COLAGE receives hundreds of requests each year from teachers, professors, scholars, and other academic professionals, as well as secondary, undergraduate, and graduate students conducting research about different aspects of LGBT families. Many of these are folks wishing to do interviews or surveys with children of LGBT parents. While research is not a primary focus of COLAGE's work, we recognize the importance of objective and useful studies about our families and offer resources for researchers whenever possible.

As children of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people, our relationships to research and researchers are complex. COLAGE recognizes the role that research has played in securing rights for LGBT individuals, families and communities. Major institutions including the Supreme Court, state and federal legislatures, regional and district courts, schools, and professional associations have relied on research findings to counter commonly held biases and stereotypes. At the same time, COLAGE recognizes that some researchers are themselves homophobic and conduct research attempting to verify commonly held biases and stereotypes. Finally, although we applaud and welcome the expertise, support and validation of LGBT-friendly researchers and scholars, COLAGE also feels strongly that we, as children and adults with LGBT parents, are the ultimate authorities and experts on our own lives.

To address some of these complexities, COLAGE has created "Suggestions for Researchers Studying Children of LGBT Parents." We hope this brief guide will strengthen not only your individual research project, but the state of research overall as it relates to our lives and families.

We ask folks considering research projects about children of LGBT parents to keep in mind the following:

1. **Understand Our Language.** Some children of LGBT parents will use "COLAGEr" or "queerspawn" to refer to themselves and other children of LGBT parents. Do not assume, however, that all children of LGBT parents use this terminology, like it, or are even aware of it.
2. **Move Beyond "How We Turn Out."** COLAGErs are used to the feeling that they are being watched, studied, or otherwise treated as poster children of the LGBT movement. Alternately we are acutely aware that we represent the greatest fears of opposition to LGBT equality, because we stand to either dispute or reinforce homophobic assumptions about LGBT families. The underlying goal of research often seems to be to determine how we as children of LGBT parents "turn out" which then is supposed to somehow resolve the debate about whether LGBT people are capable of raising children. When planning your project think about how you can move away from this problematic trend of treating children of LGBT parents as mere specimen. We neither need nor deserve the pressure of proving through our lives and personalities whether or not our parents should have raised us – this is not pressure usually faced by kids of straight parents.
3. **Plan ahead.** Please keep in mind that the members of our staff and Speak Out program have full time school or work schedules. We often hear from students who are on extremely tight deadlines wanting immediate interviews or assistance from COLAGE. The more flexible you are, the more likely it is that someone will be willing and able to work with you on your report or project.
4. **Our Sexuality is...Our Own.** The most common question asked about those of us with LGBT parents is: what is *your* sexual orientation? Unless this information is directly related to the research you are conducting, leave this question out of your interview. Keep in mind that many

young people just don't know yet. Also, many folks find this an intrusion, and many are offended (or just "put on the spot") because there is an assumption that if someone is straight, then it's not so bad that their parent is gay, but if they are gay, then it reflects poorly not only on their parents, but on LGBT families in general. Whether the person is gay, straight, bi, or something else entirely, their sexuality is their own – it's demeaning to have this aspect of self turned into a piece of evidence for or against your family. Unless your research is specifically looking at the sexual orientation and gender identity of individuals with an LGBT parent, you probably do not need to know or ask.

5. **Reinforcing Homophobia Won't End Homophobia.** Additionally, think about the underlying assumptions that might be embedded in your research questions. COLAGErS have expressed the feeling that academics' questions are not really about the whole picture of how we turn out, but rather, they focus on homophobic fears and assumptions. These questions have to do with what genders we would consider having sex with, what type of gender roles we were exposed to as children, and if we are meeting societal standards of what it means to be a "man" or a "woman." Often, the hope is that our answers will show us to be "the same as" children of straight parents. Instead of assuming that being "the same as" is the best outcome, consider exploring how the unique qualities of our families might benefit us as children, or what skills, ideas, and resources LGBT-parented families and children might have to offer straight-parented families and children.
6. **Anonymity, Confidentiality, and Privacy.** Many LGBT families are concerned about privacy. And for good reason: homophobia and transphobia, social ostracism, being fired, being evicted, being attacked, etc. are all common results when bigots find out about our families. However, don't assume that we'll want to be anonymous- you'll find tons of kids who are proudly outspoken about their families. But also be understanding and accommodating if and when youth with LGBT parents request anonymity.
7. **Respect COLAGEr-only Spaces.** Do not expect or ask to observe one of the groups or activities run by COLAGE. Unless you have an LGBT parent yourself, you are not able to join or observe any of the groups COLAGE offers for people with LGBT parents, including those we offer on the Internet. These groups are safe spaces for folks with LGBT parents that we keep confidential and private. If you have an LGBT parent and are participating in a COLAGE group, feel free to post or announce invitations to participate in research projects – but please do not collect information from online or in-person discussions without receiving permission from everyone present. If in doubt, check in with your group leader or list moderator before proceeding.
8. **Our Families Come in All Shapes and Sizes.** There are many ways in which our families are complex- several parents co-parenting children together, closeted parents, divorced and blended families, single parents, transgender parents or guardians, and multi-racial families just to name a few examples. We are often told by members of academia that "so and so's story is SO interesting, but it's just too complicated." By telling the lesser-known ways in which LGBT parents create and sustain families, you help counter the idea that there is only one successful model for parenting or growing up. Plus, you would be doing a great justice to the thousands of kids represented by these families!

If you already have a research project or question you are working on, we hope these suggestions will help you carry out your project with maximum respect for us and our families and maximum impact on homophobia in our society. If you are interested in research but have yet to design a specific study or question for exploration, check out our "Ideas for Further Research Relating to Children with LGBT Parents"!

We value your feedback! Please direct all questions and comments to colage@colage.org.

COLAGE is a national organization representing millions of children, youth, and adults with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents. We promote respect, equality, and justice for all children and families.

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