



Research Studies: To Participate or Not to Participate? That is NOT the Only Question... Tips for COLAGErS deciding whether or not to volunteer for research studies

As the child of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) parent(s), you may be invited to participate in a range of research studies aimed to understand the experiences, perspectives, and functioning of youth with LGBTQ parents. These studies may be conducted by high school students, college students, graduate students, or PhD (doctoral) level researchers and scholars, and may be helpful for advancing understanding and knowledge of our families. However, before deciding whether you wish to participate in such studies, it is worth asking the researcher the following questions:

1. **What is your personal motivation for conducting this study? Do you have any ties to the LGBTQ community yourself/Are you a COLAGEr?** As a potential research participant, you have the right to inquire about the researcher's reasons for conducting this study, what initially interested them in the topic, what their beliefs are regarding LGBTQ parenting, and so on. Depending on the researcher's response, you may feel more or less comfortable with participating. For example, if the researcher is a COLAGEr themselves, this suggests that they have some insider knowledge about what they are studying, and are probably motivated by a desire to better understand and share the experiences of other COLAGErS.
2. **What are your major research questions? What are you hoping to find out with this study?** You may wish to inquire about the topic(s) that the researcher is studying, and what questions the researcher will be asking you if you participate, in order to determine whether you feel comfortable with the types of questions that you would be asked. If any of their responses make you uncomfortable for any reason, you have the right to tell them.
3. **What is your affiliation? (Who do you work for, if anyone?)** It is a good idea to find out what school, organization, or university the researcher is affiliated with. This way, you can "google" (or research) both the individual and their institution to ensure that neither have taken an explicitly negative or anti-affirming stance with regard to LGBTQ parenting.
4. **How will the information I provide be used?** It is a good idea to find out how, if at all, the information that you provide will be used. That is, does the researcher plan to present the information or "data" that they gather to a wider audience? (e.g., students, researchers, etc.) Do they plan to publish the information in a journal article or book format? There are benefits to working with a researcher who intends to publish their material. For example, it means that the information you provide may be communicated to a larger audience with the goal of educating and informing that audience about the realities of LGBTQ-parent families and the children in these families. However, if the information that you provide will be shared with a broader audience, it is important to ensure that the information that you provide will be de-identified; that is, that identifying details (your name, and other details that could potentially identify you) will be changed in final publications and reports. If they are doing their research at an undergraduate level, it is not likely that the research will have a broad impact, although it may educate the student themselves and potentially their teacher/s and or classmates.
5. **What are my rights in the research process?** As described above, it is important to find out whether your information will remain confidential—that is, you should ensure that your name and other identifying details will not be linked to the information you provide in

any way. Additionally, it is important to make sure that the research that you will participate in has been approved by the researcher's institution's Institutional Review Board. It is the job of Institutional Review Boards (or IRBs, as they are sometimes called) to review the studies that are being conducted by the students, faculty, and employees of the institution to ensure that the rights of study participants (i.e., you) are protected. **Do not** participate in any study that does not have IRB approval. If the researcher has IRB approval, and you decide to participate in the researcher's study, you should receive something (which you will be requested to sign) called an "Informed Consent" form. This form details your rights in the research process, and also provides you with the telephone number of the IRB should you have questions or concerns about the research in which you participated, or your rights in the research process.

6. **Will you be sharing your findings with research participants? Can I get a copy of the final paper/report/etc.?** You may wish to ask the researcher whether they will be sharing the findings of their study with the people who participated in it. Likewise, you may wish to find out whether they are willing to mail or email participants copies of final papers, published reports, or any research summaries that they compile.

After asking the researcher the above questions, or any others you may have, you should only participate if you feel comfortable. Research studies are completely voluntary, which means you should not feel pressured to participate. You may also end your participation at any time once you start. If you start an interview or a survey but do not feel comfortable answering the questions or for other reasons no longer wish to participate, that is your decision.

You can also turn to COLAGE for help or advice regarding your participation in research studies. If you have any questions about a research study before, during, or after you participate, feel free to contact a member of the COLAGE staff or the COLAGE Research Review Committee.

You should know that if you hear about a research study through COLAGE, the COLAGE Research Review Committee at research@colage.org has at least checked to make sure the researcher has received IRB approval from their institution. We also give researchers suggestions for improving their studies so that they are sensitive to the realities of COLAGErs lives and family situations. However, although COLAGE has communicated with the researchers before we share information about their studies, you should still ask the researchers any questions you may have. Only YOU know what's important and feels comfortable to YOU!