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## My Big Fat Queer Jewish Family

By [David Shneer](#)



One baby, many parents.

When I told people that my husband and I were expecting a child, eyebrows often rose in response. I could see these friends and colleagues struggling to figure out how this was biologically possible.

I usually let them squirm for a moment before telling them the story behind our three- parent, two-house, one-home family. I told them about the moment when, after deciding we wanted to become parents, Gregg and I, in a shocking moment of clarity, took our friend Caryn up on her visionary proposal to create a new kind of extended family. I told them about that March morning when Caryn appeared at our doorstep at 8 am with a pink stick in her hand, smiling and doing a little happy dance that she'd gotten pregnant in just two months of trying.

When I finished the story about how our happy family came into being, the litany of curious questions would begin. But the most often asked question, hands down, has always been, "So which one of you is the father?"

### Figuring Out Who's the Daddy

I never understood the power of biology quite so starkly as when I began the process of building my family. I've always encouraged others to think about family in new ways and to emphasize that family members are the people who care for one another, who create webs of mutual interdependence upon which the others rely. At first when people would ask, "Which one of you is the real father?" I'd play dumb, pretending that I didn't really understand the question. "We're both the dads, of course." But the inevitable "clarification" would follow. "I mean, which one of you is the real dad, the biological dad?"

I had to do everything possible not to get bent out of shape that the world into which I was bringing a child was still so dominated by the idea that a sperm and an egg make a family. So, I would usually tell people that it was none of their business.

When Caryn, Gregg, and I embarked on the road of co-parenting, we knew that we were going to be put under the microscope by the people around us who were curious about what we were doing. I love curious people. That's why I became a professor. Curiosity is what sparks creativity and the advancement of knowledge. Curiosity can be harnessed to create social change. Curiosity is what builds intimacy.

### How We Made a Family

So I've been caught between my own beliefs and my actual feelings. I want people to ask probing questions about my family, to feel comfortable enough to explore my life and the social change that we're engaged in. And yet, I don't want people butting into my private life as freely as people seem to do. Do people ask us overly personal questions because of who we are and what we're doing? Because we're all very social and open people? Or are we merely an object of curiosity, doing something relatively unique?



My favorite line of question, however, is when people ask, "How?" Caryn jokes that it was an accident. I call it the immaculate conception. I know that as they ask the question, the list of possible options—sex, doctor's office, something else?—is running through their heads. "Well, you've heard of the turkey baster, right? Well, that's a male fantasy. Trust me, no guy can fill up a turkey baster. We know from experience. Get it?"

If they are interested, I tell them about the syringe, the fact that we did it at home, that no doctors were involved, and that this child was conceived with as much love as the most loving couples that actually had sex to produce a child. Ok, maybe I don't say it so crudely, but that's what I'm thinking. Instead, I tell them that we conceived "traditionally"—with a syringe, a glass, and porn, and then tell them to use their imagination.

And at the end of the conversation, I know that most people are still burning to ask the same question that opened the conversation, “Which one of you is the father?” I guess the burden is on us to encourage a societal shift from the nagging question “which one of you is the father” to the thing most parents want to hear when sharing news about an impending birth, “what a lucky little kid to have three thoughtful parents.”

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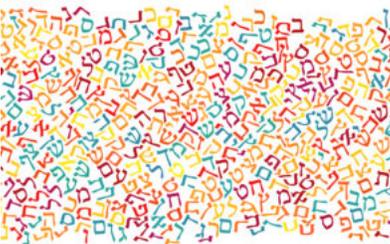
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