IN VISIBLE FAMILIES:
GAY FATHERHOOD AND THE POLITICS OF FAMILY CHANGE

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the gay men who shared their lives, homes, and community spaces in order to make this research possible. Thank you for your generosity.

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Abstract

Who counts as a gay father? The answer to this question reaches beyond demographics, encompassing histories of family inequality, LGBTQ identity, and social movements. Presentations of gay fathers in the media and scholarship are often skewed toward white, middle-class, coupled men who became parents via adoption or surrogacy. Yet the demographic majority of gay parents continue to have children in heterosexual unions. My dissertation research uses ethnographic and interview data to argue that contemporary narratives of gay fatherhood have prematurely dismissed gay parents who have children in heterosexual unions. The choice to exclude gay fathers via heterosexual unions can be attributed to emerging narratives of LGBTQ identity and political strategies of the marriage equality movement. The consequences of gay fathers' disproportionate visibility have led to a stratified system of access to gay parenting resources. By identifying the mechanisms that undermine gay fathers' diversity in the public imagination and in gay parenting community settings, my dissertation amplifies the voices of marginalized gay fathers and offers an intersectional approach to the study of LGBTQ families through a social movements framework.

In order to understand how contemporary definitions of gay fatherhood shape gay parents' lives, I conducted extensive ethnographic research over the course of 5 years with gay parenting groups in California, Texas, and Utah. Through these groups, I also recruited 58 gay fathers for in-depth interviews. My findings indicate that gay parenting groups tend to organize around adoption and surrogacy, leaving few community resources for gay fathers who come out later in life. When speaking to gay fathers whose children were born into heterosexual unions, I found that depression, suicidality, reparative therapy, and strained relationships with their families were common to their shared experience of gay parenting. Yet contemporary LGBTQ

families research has largely ignored this segment of the gay parenting community in an effort to produce data that satisfied legal efforts toward marriage equality, contributing to the construction of gay fathers via heterosexual unions as relics of the past. The legal and social gains of marriage equality offer limited benefits to men who come out later in life, further stratifying the landscape of LGBTQ families.

This dissertation research points to several mechanisms that perpetuate the marginalization of gay fathers via heterosexual unions. For example, the parenting practices and self-presentations of gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy are structured around an ethic of authenticity and hypervisibility, whereas in many cases, gay fathers via heterosexual unions are less open about their sexual identities across social contexts. The expense and hurdles to adoption and surrogacy also serve as agents of economic stratification for gay parents by pathway to parenthood. Furthermore, an emerging *Normal Gay Father* ideology of family normativity allows gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy to be embraced within specific social contexts, as they resemble many (though not all) dimensions of normative families. By comparing gay fathers across diverse social locations, my dissertation demonstrates that pathway to parenthood is key to the diversification of gay fathers' experiences in that it segregates gay parenting resources and creates family structures that consistently defy normative expectations.

Chapter 1: Family Politics and The *Normal Gay Father*

The 1950s nuclear family has always been a historical anomaly. Married, two-parent, middle-class, heterosexual families who perform distinct gender roles became prominent in the post-war era, bolstered by the economic conditions tied to the industrial revolution, family wages, and generous housing and education subsidies provided by the G.I. Bill (Coontz, 1992; Stacey, 1990). Families before and after the 1950s were more complex, as the economic and social conditions within pre-modern and postmodern Western societies created the need for extended households, mutual dependence, and less gender specialization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Coontz, 1992; Stacey, 1990).

Even though the idealized nuclear family was an ephemeral blip on the map of broader family change, it has a powerful influence over American media and politics. Romanticized images of white, heterosexual, middle-class, two-parent families reflect deeply-held values in the United States, creating a gold standard against which all other family forms are judged. Even scholars are split along methodological, ideological, disciplinary, and theoretical lines as they compete over divergent utopian visions of American families (Carrillo, 2012; Powell et al., 2010). While some see the fall of nuclear families as evidence of family “decline,” others see the family as an ideological, socially-constructed concept whose very definition is contingent on power relations in society (Popenoe, 1993; Stacey, 1993).

This study examines the relationship between the politics of family change and gay fatherhood. I posit that gay fathers have become symbols of changing family forms in part because of their ability to represent diversity while limiting challenges to family normativity. Gay fathers are in an ideal position to perform this work as their gender gives visual cues of difference yet the circumstances under which they become parents create disproportionately

white and wealthy families that align with family normativity. An emerging ideology of *The Normal Gay Father* has accompanied increased access to marriage and family formation policies, yet inequalities among LGBTQ families remain unresolved.

Changing Family Forms

Demographic data shows significant change across many dimensions of family life, but cultural values have been slow to embrace family diversity. Marital status, race, class, kinship, gendered divisions of labor, and sexual orientation increasingly vary across family life, but families that do not fit conventional expectations often face hostile legislation and social stigma. For example, as of 2016, 32% of households with children were headed by a single parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Although many single-parent households thrive, in general they face challenges like limited financial resources, limited social support, social stigma, and constraints on time spent with their children (Coles, 2015; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Labor and wage norms continue to assume that families will have multiple incomes to provide for dependents, leaving single-parent families with limited power (Cohen, 2018).

Non-Hispanic Whites now represent a minority of births in the United States, and families of color account for 93% of population growth in the United States (Passel, Livingston, & Cohn, 2012). But even as the United States becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, ideologies of race and White supremacy continue to create substantial challenges for families of color. Black families, pigeonholed by legacies of the Moynihan report and the so-called “pathology of matriarchy,” continue to face controlling images of absent Black fathers and Black motherhood’s failures (Coles & Green, 2010; Collins, 1992). Similarly, cultural caricatures have suppressed the vast diversity of Asian and Latino families, leading many researchers and

policymakers to ignore the legal, political, and institutional structures that influence the family dynamics of both native and immigrant households (Baca Zinn & Wells, 2000; Ishii-Kuntz, 2010).

The idealized American family is also a class-specific image, painted with white picket fences, two cars in the driveway, a steadily paid mortgage, and generous Christmas mornings. State policies surrounding welfare, immigration, and child support have all exacerbated the reproduction of class inequality, despite their stated mission of assisting families in need. Oscar Lewis's "culture of poverty" theory states that pathological values and practices characterize the culture of poor communities, so deviant behaviors like laziness, apathy, and disregard for the law keep poor individuals from achieving mobility (Hays, 2003). This view has been woven through social policy and public opinion in many different forms over time, but it clearly ignores the structural causes of poverty and takes a blame-the-victim approach to analyzing class inequality (Hays, 2003). The "cycles of dependence" approach to class reproduction typically refers to social welfare policies like Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which many believe discourage work and ambition among poor families. Welfare "reform" was advanced under this logic, imposing strict time limits on families regardless of their need (Abramovitz, 2006; Hays, 2003).

Methods of family formation have diversified with the rising popularity of adoption and the development of reproductive technologies. These methods give more parents-to-be the opportunity to build their families, but they are also accompanied by financial and social challenges (Smock & Greenland, 2010). For example, adoptive families in the general population are faced with social stigma and misperceptions about children's dependency and adjustment, despite the fact that most adoptions have positive outcomes for all parties involved

(Fisher, 2003; Harris Interactive, 2002). Reproductive technologies, such as donor insemination and surrogacy, can be costly and legally complex, challenging taken-for-granted relationships between bodies, genetics, and parentage (Almeling, 2015).

Nostalgia for “traditional” gender roles often fails to acknowledge how stay-at-home parents were once enabled by industrialization and the Ford family wage system (Stacey, 1990; Coontz, 1992). Women began entering the paid workforce in larger numbers just as the family wage system began to decline (Stacey, 1990). Today, dual-earner families make up the majority of U.S. households, as few couples can sustain the needs of themselves and their children on a single wage (Stone, 2007). Women’s participation in the paid labor force and the increase in dual-earner families create opportunities for more egalitarian couples and family-oriented men. Unfortunately, for many, this revolution has been incomplete. Women’s ability to step out of their gender-delineated boxes has outpaced men’s ability to fully participate in “feminine” aspects of family life, such as raising children. One consequence of this asymmetry is known as the “second shift”: women in dual-earner couples often find themselves performing more labor than their spouses at home once they get off work (Hochschild, 1989). This can lead to women’s dissatisfaction in marriage, and women who are financially independent can exit bad marriages more easily, thus contributing to higher rates of divorce (Amato, 2010; Stacey, 1993).

One of the most contentious features of “the American family” in contemporary U.S. politics is the assumption of heterosexuality. Although public opinion appears to be shifting in the direction of tolerance for same-sex couples, about 40% of survey respondents as of 2006 indicated that two women (or two men) with children did not count as a “family” (Powell et al., 2010). Opponents to same-sex marriage have been outspoken in their opinion that same-sex families represent a “threat” to the family as we know it, while some proponents of same-sex

families echo Judith Stacey (1993) in saying “good riddance.” Experts on gay and lesbian unions like M. V. Lee Badgett (2009) and George Chauncey (2004) point to historical shifts in marriage as a cause of gay and lesbian interest in forming legal unions, rather than a consequence as many marriage equality opponents contend. The right to choose one’s partner, the allocation of public and private benefits through marriage, and the loosening of gender roles are a few examples of recent changes in marriage that have lead to a push for same-sex legal unions (Chauncey, 2004). In *Perry v. Brown*, a prominent case in the political movement toward marriage equality, Judge Vaughn Walker based his decision on similar logic:

The evidence did not show any historical purpose for excluding same-sex couples from marriage, as states have never required spouses to have an ability or willingness to procreate in order to marry. Rather, the exclusion exists as an artifact of a time when the genders were seen as having distinct roles in society and in marriage. That time has passed. (Perry v. Brown, 2010, p. 115)

Framing Backlash Against Family Diversity

Dorothy Smith (1994) coined the term SNAF – Standard North American Family – to describe the ideological code shaping American perceptions of family diversity. SNAF shares characteristics with the idealized 1950s nuclear family: a legally married couple, sharing a household, with a male breadwinner and female homemaker. Smith (1994) describes how SNAF represents a basis against which more complex family forms are compared, thus reproducing inequalities – sometimes unintentionally. The ubiquity of SNAF in public policy, the public imagination, and scholarship marginalizes families whose gender arrangements or marital status fall outside the norm. Families of color (especially Black families) are especially prone to negative consequences as a result of SNAF’s powerful influence as an ideology (Smith, 1994).

The rise of gay parenting is especially threatening to the values embedded in SNAF. Same-sex families by definition challenge gender arrangements in the Standard North American

Family. Backlash against same-sex families has also targeted long-held stereotypes of sexual deviance among gay men (Stacey, 2011). Deviant sexualities – or those not centered on reproduction – are considered contaminating to children and families, and hysteria over gay and lesbian parents has often focused on a fictional Gay Agenda’s recruitment strategy of turning children gay (Walters, 2001).

Controlling images of gay families have amassed into an ideological construct that I call the *Reproductive Homosexual*. The Reproductive Homosexual is a product of the backlash against gay parents. Its characteristics and messaging are shaped by the values and stereotypes of a homophobic society that associates non-reproductive sexualities with sexual deviance. The Reproductive Homosexual is an evil, promiscuous, masculine figure hell-bent on destroying American values. He is unable to reproduce through sexual intercourse and therefore must recruit children to carry on his corrupt lifestyle. The Reproductive Homosexual is ideologically opposed to traditional family values, and must be feared, shunned, hated, and excluded from any legal sanctions or social approval in order to family values to survive.

The ideological construct of the Reproductive Homosexual has shaped backlash against same-sex family and marriage policies for decades. As a controlling image, the Reproductive Homosexual has forced advocates of gay and lesbian families to engage from a defensive position as they communicate the realities of queer family life. What the Reproductive Homosexual fails to acknowledge, as an ideology, is that gay and lesbian people have always been parents. The relationship between homophobia, LGBTQ+ identity discourses, and family formation options has shifted over time, creating important context to how the Reproductive Homosexual has been politically challenged.

History of LGBTQ+ Family Formation

Discourses of sexual identity have shifted dramatically over the past century. Early homophile movements promoted an understanding of homosexuality as a private, intimate relation, but the gay liberation movement propelled gay identities into the realm of public and political action (Ghaziani, Taylor, & Stone, 2016). Under the “stigmatized discourse” of the 1920s to 1970s, gay and lesbian people who excelled at passing as heterosexual were constructed as competently managing a stigmatized, discrediting status (Rosenfeld, 1999, p. 127). By contrast, under the “liberationist discourse” (Rosenfeld, 1999, p. 134), individuals committed to passing are vilified for betraying their authentic self, preventing their loved ones from understanding who they truly are, and harming the movement by refusing to come out. The Stonewall rebellion of 1969, which queer collective memory associates with the beginning of the LGBTQ rights movement (Armstrong & Cragg, 2006), marks the transition from the stigmatized era into the liberationist era (Ghaziani, Taylor, & Stone, 2016; Rosenfeld, 1999).

Identity constructs among LGBTQ people have major implications for their family formation options. For gay fathers, there are 4 major pathways to parenthood: adoption, surrogacy, co-parenting, and having children in the context of heterosexual unions. During the stigmatized era, having a child in a heterosexual union was the principal method of family formation available to gay men and lesbians. Heterosexual marriage and families offered gay men and lesbian women a shield from the punishing consequences of societal homophobia and allowed them to conform to societal pressure that constructed family involvement an essential marker of psychological health (Rivers, 2013). Some openly gay men and lesbians also formed families by co-parenting children together (Rivers, 2013). As identity discourses shifted, legal and technological advances made adoption and reproductive technology more accessible to

openly gay men and lesbians (Baumle & Compton, 2015; Mamo, 2007). The transition between eras of gay parenting possibilities is most evident among elder gay fathers, who grew up thinking being gay meant being childless, whereas younger gay men have not perceived the same limitations (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007).

Normalizing LGBTQ+ Families

Just as discourses of LGBTQ identity have shifted, the political strategies of LGBTQ movements have changed over time in ways that affect queer families. In the early days of the movement, outness and visibility were embraced under a rubric of confrontational resistance to sexual normativity. Queer people staged demonstrations and drew attention to injustices through aggressive, direct action strategies borrowed from the civil rights movement (D'Emilio, 1983). Over time, LGBTQ activist organizations shifted their strategy toward a politics of respectability, presenting queer people in ways that emphasized their similarities to heterosexuals (Ward, 2008).

The movement to legalize same-sex marriage represents an especially pronounced symbol of this shift. Efforts to normalize LGBTQ people relied heavily on the presentation of families headed by same-sex couples, and activist organizations began to prioritize family rights such as marriage, reproductive services, and parental custody (Chauncey, 2004; Polikoff, 2008; Walters, 2001; Warner, 1999). Beginning in the late 1980's and early 1990's, presentations of gay families in media became especially prone to "selling sameness," simultaneously celebrating family diversity and muting difference (Gross, 2001; Walters, 2001, p. 215).

In response to the demand for LGBTQ families' civil rights, courts demanded evidence that sexual orientation had no detrimental impact on children (Stacey, 1996). Social scientists responded by narrowing their focus of LGBTQ families to parents via adoption or reproductive

technology in an effort to isolate the effects of sexual orientation on children's well-being. Research findings overwhelmingly emphasized no differences between children raised by heterosexual couples and those raised by same-sex couples (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Marriage equality and adoption rights expanded at a rapid pace, obtaining legal status nationally (with some complications) as of 2015 (Baumle & Compton, 2015).

Emergence of the *Normal Gay Father*

Patterns of respectability and sameness emerged in direct response to controlling images of the Reproductive Homosexual. Overall, this social movement strategy has successfully created a new, dominant narrative of LGBTQ families. Now institutionalized within existing frameworks of marriage and family, LGBTQ families have become part of a shared language that is both palatable to the rest of society and conducive to support systems previously unavailable to queer families (Herek, 2006; Ocobock, 2013; Walters, 2001). Yet some scholars have been critical of the selective nature of these benefits and their broader implications for family normativity.

For Duggan (2002) and Warner (1999), the push for legislation favoring issues pertaining to gay families, such as marriage equality, has been symbolic of a shift in queer politics that privileges heteronormative practices. Marriage itself has been found to offer limited benefits to marginalized members of society, namely poor people and people of color (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Randles & Avishai, 2018). For some, the push toward marriage equality has therefore symbolized stratification within the LGBTQ community along axes of race and class (Bernstein & Taylor, 2013; Polikoff, 2008). Duggan (2002) coined the term "homonormativity" to describe the presentation of gay and lesbian subjects as non-threatening to the social order.

Seidman (2002, p. 14) similarly argued that media representations of the “normal gay” helped justify social integration for LGBTQ people but ultimately does not challenge heterosexual dominance. The result is a moral and social divide among LGBTQ people in which some are living lives “beyond the closet,” whereas others who fail to conform to dominant social norms – namely to be “gender conventional, link sex to love and a marriage-like relationship, defend family values, personify economic individualism, and display national pride” – are constructed as less deserving of respect and integration (Seidman, 2002, p. 133). The experience of the closet itself hinges on gender, race, class, region, religion, and other factors that intersect with sexual orientation, varying the social patterns of negotiating one’s sexual identity in public spaces (Collins, 2005; Seidman, 2002).

Critical analyses of LGBTQ social movements have argued that their strategies actively reproduce inequalities. Existing status hierarchies are rewritten into the frameworks that LGBTQ social movements create, leaving their most vulnerable constituents without representation or advocacy. Critics like Seidman (2002), Duggan (2002), and Warner (1999) often refer to marriage equality as symptomatic of LGBTQ social movements’ pursuit of legal and social recognition at the expense of its most marginalized members. But there have been limited efforts to apply these insights directly to the lives of same-sex parents. Gay and lesbian parents carry much weight as symbols of LGBTQ movements’ priorities, but important questions remain about how their symbolic influence is distributed and how gay parents themselves have been constrained by homonormative discourses.

Building on Seidman’s (2002) concept of the “normal gay,” I suggest that the term *Normal Gay Father* can be appropriately applied to gay family contexts. The Normal Gay Father is an ideological construct that was built in response to the Reproductive Homosexual. He is

white, married, monogamous, middle-to-upper class, and non-threatening. He had children with a partner through adoption or surrogacy, earning the badge of a “modern family,” yet presenting few challenges to “traditional” family values.

The Normal Gay Father is a symbolic representation of LGBTQ families that has been constructed to combat widespread homophobia, and it has been granted visibility through a wide variety of mediums. The Normal Gay Father appears in media: the popular sitcom *Modern Family* features a married, white, middle-class gay couple raising their adopted daughter. Smiling, white, married, middle-class gay fathers have also appeared in advertising. A 2014 commercial for graham crackers featuring two gay fathers was called “stunningly moving” by *Slate* magazine (Stern, 2014), and a similar cheerios ad was called “one of the sweetest ads ever” by *Adweek* (Castillo, 2014).

The Normal Gay Father is also associated with research on LGBTQ families. Photos of white, married men posing with their children often headlines when a new study is released describing no differences between children raised by LGBTQ parents and heterosexual parents. One such stock photo of the Normal Gay Father appeared in an online LGBTQ publication, *PinkNews* (Salisbury, 2018; see Figure 1). The headline referred to results from the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (Gartrell, Bos, & Koh, 2018). No gay fathers were included in this study, but the stock photo of gay fathers was chosen by *PinkNews* to represent LGBTQ

Figure 1. A stock photo of gay fathers accompanied a headline about LGBTQ family research in *PinkNews*, 2018. The study included only lesbian mothers. [Screenshot]

families more broadly. The Normal Gay Father is therefore a visible representation of all LGBTQ families that has powerful symbolic influence over ideas about who LGBTQ parents are. This symbolic power is amplified in a political climate in which family rights have taken priority in LGBTQ politics, creating opportunities for the Normal Gay Father to stand in as a representative of all LGBTQ people.

Problematizing the Normal Gay Father

In many ways, the Normal Gay Father is a reality of LGBTQ family life. There are many gay fathers who are white, married, monogamous, middle-to-upper class, and raising children via adoption and surrogacy. But the Normal Gay Father, as an ideological construct, creates a specific set of constraints that marginalize LGBTQ families. First, it overemphasizes the successes of families that are built through adoption and reproductive technology. It renders the social conditions that surround these families invisible, thus failing to address the inequalities that make such families difficult to build and maintain. Second, it underemphasizes the prevalence of LGBTQ families that do not fit homonormative expectations. Gay parents of color, economically disadvantages gay parents, and gay parents who had children in heterosexual unions are rendered invisible by the symbolic power of the Normal Gay Father, leaving their unique needs unaddressed. I elaborate on each of these points below.

First, the Normal Gay Father obscures how difficult it is for gay and lesbian people to achieve parenthood through adoption or reproductive technology, and how difficult it is for them to navigate a homophobic society as gay parents. Reproductive technologies can be very costly, especially for gay men pursuing surrogacy who must pay service fees, legal fees, medical costs, travel expenses, and more to cover the process of egg donation, fertilization, implantation,

gestation, and birth (Baumle & Compton, 2015). Legal recognition of surrogacy contracts remain a patchwork from state-to-state, creating vulnerabilities for LGBTQ people who may have their parental rights challenged in court. California law is exceptionally friendly to surrogacy and reproductive technology, leading to a wealth of clinics and services in the southern California area (Markens, 2007; Mamo, 2007). Private and international adoption can also be very expensive, and while the direct costs of public adoption are low, qualifying parents must pass a home inspection and prove a minimum standard of living (Goldberg, 2012). The financial, legal, and social barriers to adoption and reproductive technology ultimately limit their availability to middle- to upper-class families (Smock & Greenland, 2010). As a result, LGBTQ people who achieve parenthood through these methods represent a small, relatively privileged section of the LGBTQ community (Boggis, 2001; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). The Normal Gay Father ideology is built to enhance the visibility of this small segment of the LGBTQ community, but without also illuminating the challenges that structure their pathways to parenthood, little is being done to make these families more accessible and equitable.

The second problem with the Normal Gay Father ideology is that it undermines the diversity of LGBTQ families. Although the social forces contributing to its visibility has resulted in several legal gains, the symbolic power of the Normal Gay Father has outpaced the demographic realities of LGBTQ family life. Recent estimates suggest that between 2 million and 3.7 million children in the United States have a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender parent (Gates, 2015). Fifty-nine percent of these children are biologically related to their parent, indicating that most were born into heterosexual unions (Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014). In other words, despite their lack of representation in contemporary media, research, and politics, the demographic data suggests no sign that lesbian, gay, or bisexual parents via heterosexual

unions are on their last limb, ambling toward the historical dustbin. The Williams Institute argues that the current state of LGB parenting research is “problematic” in its focus on planned LGB families, given that they represent a minority in the gay parenting population (Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014, p. 9).

Demographic research suggests that gay parents via heterosexual unions disproportionately occupy intersections of race, class, and sexual orientation that render their families especially vulnerable to a host of disadvantages. For example, same-sex couples with children are more likely to be unemployed and more likely to be living in poverty than their married, different-sex counterparts (Badgett, Durso, & Schneebaum, 2013; Gates, 2015), and they are more likely to be racial minorities than same-sex couples without children (Gates, 2015). Census data also shows that the proportion of same-sex couples raising children are highest in more conservative areas of the country, where LGB youth are more likely to have children at younger ages and LGB families face hostile legislation (Gates, 2015). For example, Salt Lake City, Utah had the highest concentration of LGB parents in the 2010 U.S. Census, compared to other U.S. metro areas, with 26% of same-sex couples raising children under age 18 (Gates, 2015; Rodriguez & Gaitlin, 2013). Given that LGB parents via heterosexual unions are such a vulnerable demographic group, the lack of qualitative data investigating their lived experiences is unfortunate.

For parents who come out later in life, after having children, the experience of heterosexual divorce or relationship dissolution – in itself tied to higher rates of depression and strained relationships with children (Amato, 2010) - intersects with the experience of coming to terms with new sexual identities, and, often, religious identity conflicts (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). The earliest studies of gay and lesbian parenthood focused on parents who had children in

heterosexual unions, finding patterns of depression, anxiety, and guilt (e.g. Bozett, 1987; Patterson, 1992; Wright, 1998). As the political climate has shifted and narratives about LGB families have gravitated toward parents via adoption or reproductive technology, qualitative sociological information about LGB parents via heterosexual unions is now out of date (Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014).

With the exception of a few studies involving intact lesbian stepfamilies (e.g. Moore, 2011; Acosta, 2013; Hequembourg, 2004), sociological research has prematurely dismissed LGB parents via heterosexual unions as relics of the 20th century. It is true that increasing levels of social tolerance have made an impact on LGB family demographics: between 2000 and 2009, the percentage of same-sex households with an adopted child grew from 10% to 19% of all same-sex households with children (Gates, 2011). Yet the total percentage of same-sex households raising children dropped from 18% to 16% in the same time period (Gates, 2011). This indicates that some LGB people may be coming out at earlier ages, before having children, but increases in adoption and ART have not kept pace (Gates, 2011).

Study purpose

Several contradictions characterize the current state of gay fatherhood. The Normal Gay Father, as an ideological construct, has created a series of expectations for LGBTQ families and individuals that emphasize respectability, sameness, and approximation to normative family values. Yet while white, monogamous, middle-to-upper class, married gay fathers who resemble the Normal Gay Father exist, their experience and positionality is structured by the constraints inherent to the processes of adoption and surrogacy. The Normal Gay Father ideology does little to investigate or challenge how they navigate barriers to parenthood or experience daily life as

gay parents in an overwhelmingly homophobic society. Furthermore, by failing to represent intersectional disadvantages that characterize LGBTQ parents, the Normal Gay Father perpetuates inequalities of race, class, kinship, and marital status. Families with LGBTQ parents have the potential to offer challenges across multiple dimensions of family life, but the Normal Gay Father ideology is designed to present differences in sexual orientation within families while preserving other inequalities. In other words, the political potential of gay families is undermined by the Normal Gay Father at the same time that normalizing discourses have helped LGBTQ people achieve greater legal access and social tolerance.

The relationship between the Normal Gay Father ideology and the lived realities of gay fathers on the ground is worthy of further study. In this dissertation, I trace the origins, mechanisms, and consequences of the Normal Gay Father ideology as it interacts with gay fathers and the gay parenting community. Using ethnographic data from gay parenting groups and interviews with gay fathers, I analyze how and why the Normal Gay Father became incorporated into gay fathers' collective identity, creating a sense of "who we are" as a group. I also analyze the impact that the Normal Gay Father ideology has on gay fathers on the ground, with particular attention toward gay fathers of color, single gay fathers, and gay fathers who had children in heterosexual unions. For gay fathers who are excluded by the Normal Gay Father ideology, I examine how their lives diverge and what we lose by excluding them. I also examine how the Normal Gay Father ideology is communicated through media, scholarship, and gay fathers themselves as they carefully manage interactions that could potentially harm their children.

Through this research, I aim to fill a gap between existing qualitative research on gay parenthood, which has been driven in part by the Normal Gay Father ideology, and quantitative

research showing vast diversity among gay parents. By taking an explicitly intersectional approach to gay fatherhood, this research gives a voice to gay fathers who are marginalized by systems of race, class, gender, sexuality, family normativity, and knowledge production.

Methodology

This study relied on a combination of ethnographic observation of gay parenting groups and in-depth interviews with gay fathers, which took place in California, Texas, and Utah between 2010 and 2015. Ethnography allowed me to engage with gay fathers in group contexts, develop an understanding of the issues that are most important to them, and observe the language and norms that define gay parenting spaces (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Interviews complemented these findings by filling in more details of gay fathers' personal journeys and allowing them to share additional experiences and points of view that were not shared in the context of the group. The combination of ethnographic observation and interview data provides a rich sample from which to analyze the relationship between gay fathers' individual experiences, community characteristics, meanings of gay fatherhood, and pathways to parenthood (Roy, 2015).

Ethnographic Contexts.

Ethnography formed the foundation of this study. The primary site of observation was a gay fathers' group in Southern California, which I attended from November 2010 to December 2015. The first 2 years involved intensive observation of group processes, whereas the following 3 years were aimed toward recruiting additional interviewees that did not regularly attend the group. Overall, approximately 190 hours of participant observation were recorded. California was chosen as a research site because it is among the friendliest regions in the United States for

gay and lesbian families. Surrogacy contracts are legally recognized in California, and marriage and adoption laws were inclusive of gay and lesbian families during the period of observation, especially after federal courts overturned Proposition 8 in 2013. The institutional support for gay and lesbian families extended to a vibrant gay parenting scene, with groups and events sponsored by local LGBTQ community centers, as well as multiple active gay parenting organizations.

The gay fathers' organization in Southern California, referred to pseudonymously as Fathers with Families (FWF), described itself as the largest and longest-running group for gay fathers in the world. FWF hosted monthly meetings for gay fathers to offer support, discuss their experiences, share resources, and socialize with other gay fathers' families. FWF also hosted information panels, children's entertainment, and special events throughout the year, and they maintained an online presence and newsletter to connect gay fathers to resources and sources of support globally. According to an internal survey in 2009 (n=195 children), a majority of FWF members' children had been adopted (70%), followed by those born via surrogacy (22%), and a small minority born in heterosexual marriages (6%).

In 2014, I also performed approximately 20 hours of participant observation at gay parenting events in central Texas, hosted by a Texas-based online resource for gay fathers. Observation of a gay fathers' support group in Utah was conducted in 2014 through attendance at a closed monthly meeting and gay pride events, totaling approximately 10 hours. I chose Texas and Utah as comparison sites hoping to find more parents who had their children in the context of heterosexual unions. Although the online resources associated with the Texas group were aimed at all gay fathers, no members from the local informal parenting network were able to put me in touch with gay fathers via heterosexual unions. The gay fathers group in Utah, by contrast, consisted exclusively of gay fathers who had children in heterosexual unions.

Texas was chosen as a comparison site because it offered a middle-ground between strict institutional discrimination yet relatively friendly public attitudes toward gay and lesbian families. Texas did not legally recognize same-sex marriages until 2015, and second-parent adoptions were not available for same-sex partners during the time of observation. Yet public attitudes in central Texas, especially in more urban districts, were considered especially progressive by participants. The gay fathers' organization in Texas, referred to here as Gay Dads Online (GDO), aimed to support gay fathers nationally through online resources such as adoption agency directories, lists of local parenting groups, and referrals to IVF clinics. GDO also served as the hub for an informal network of gay fathers in central Texas, occasionally hosting get-togethers for gay parents at local parks. GDO was founded by a couple who had adopted a child, and the informal network of parents that participated in local meet-ups consisted primarily of adoptive and surrogacy parents who were personal friends of GDO's founders.

Utah was chosen as a comparison site because of its strong demographic presence of gay and lesbian families and its reputation for intolerance toward LGBTQ communities in both institutional and interpersonal contexts. During the time of data collection, Utah's capital had the highest concentration of LGB parents nationally, compared to other U.S. metro areas (Gates, 2015; Rodriguez & Gaitlin, 2013). Yet Utah's laws have been unfriendly to same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and surrogacy. Many gay and lesbian people have found community in Utah, but the influence of the LDS Church on Utah's civic life and culture has contributed to the state's reputation of hostility toward gay and lesbian families.

The Utah gay fathers' organization, referred to here as the Support for Gay Fathers of Utah (SGFU), held monthly in-person meetings, one of which I attended. Group leaders noted that I was the first outsider invited to attend one of their closed monthly meetings and that my

presence likely altered the typical meeting pattern. To compensate, I asked interviewees to describe a typical meeting and membership demographics. I also observed public SGFU events connected to the local pride festival, including a booth on the festival grounds, a parade march, and a picnic for members' families.

Semi-structured interviews began approximately 4 months into the observation period and continued until the study concluded. Interviewees were recruited in-person and online through the gay parenting groups under observation. Theoretical sampling was used so that gay fathers who were underrepresented during the observation period (e.g., fathers of color, single fathers, and those whose pathway to parenthood was atypical of their parenting group) were especially encouraged to participate (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Most interviewees in California were group members with whom I had become acquainted through group meetings and events; other interviewees, including many in Utah and Texas, explained that they had contacted me following strong endorsements of the project from their group leaders. My interview sample therefore included members who were active and present in their gay parenting groups, as well as those who my observations were less likely to include. By recruiting through multiple avenues and selecting interviewees who could advance theoretical concepts, I was able to compile an interview sample of group members who could speak to a broad range of gay fathers' experiences and settings (Browne, 2005; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015).

Interview Sample.

Forty-two semi-structured interviews with 56 gay fathers, lasting from 1.5 to 6 hours, were conducted between 2010 and 2015. One additional interview took place in 2017 with a California couple who posted information on FWF's social media about a new gay parenting group that they had founded for gay fathers via heterosexual unions. Partnered gay fathers were

given the choice to be interviewed alone or with their partner to maximize participation and capture variation in gay fathers' perspectives (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2014; Frey & Fotana, 1991). Interviewees were given blank forms to indicate basic demographic information. Appendix A provides a full profile of the interview sample demographics, highlighting comparisons in location, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and marital status by pathway to parenthood.

In general, the interviewees represented the observed demographic distribution of their respective parenting groups' memberships. Thirty-two interviewees resided in Southern California, 15 interviewees resided in Texas, and 11 were residents of Utah. Ages ranged from 23 to 63 years with a median age of 46 years. All 56 interviewees were cisgender men. Only 4 men (7%) denoted any identification with bisexuality, 3 of whom specified a stronger affiliation with a gay identity. Despite the presence of bisexual respondents in the interview sample, the term "gay fathers" is used to describe study participants as a reflection of the emic concepts that emerged through participant observation (Harris, 1976). Group names, mission statements, and discussions consistently used "gay fathers" as the collective noun for their members.

A quarter of interviewees identified as racial minorities, including 6 (10%) who identified as Black or African American, 5 (8%) who identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 2 (3%) who identified as Asian. In addition, one interviewee identified as both Asian and White. Four couples interviewed were in interracial relationships, including 2 Asian and White couples, 1 Black/African American and White couple, and 1 Hispanic/Latino and White couple.

There was significant overlap between gay fathers' pathways to parenthood, their social context, and the support systems offered by their local gay parenting groups. Among the interview sample, 14 families (33%) had their children in the context of heterosexual relationships, including 2 families who had adopted at least one child while married to women.

Ten (71%) of the gay fathers via heterosexual unions in the interview sample were residents of Utah. Of the 29 families that were formed by openly gay parents, 22 (51%) families had adopted, 6 (14%) families were formed via surrogacy, and 1 father had children via a co-parenting agreement. One parent via surrogacy was a resident of Utah; all other parents via surrogacy, adoption, and co-parenting (97%) were residents of California or Texas. Despite the presence of a gay father via co-parenting in the interview sample, I refer to “adoption and surrogacy” as a category of gay parenthood throughout the analysis as a reflection of the discourse within the gay parenting communities under observation.

Interview Procedures.

Interview questions were intentionally broad and open-ended, allowing interviewees to control the conversation with minimal probing from the interviewer (Rapley, 2001). Questions were drawn from observations at gay parenting groups and evolved over time to investigate interviewees’ individual experiences, including concerns that may not be addressed within the group context. For example, interview prompts included, “Tell me about your journey to parenthood,” and “How did you become involved in [the local gay parenting group]?” This interview strategy offered flexibility to capture a wide range of parenting experiences. The interview schedule of questions varied slightly for gay fathers who had children in heterosexual unions and those who had children through adoption or surrogacy (see Appendix B and C). Interviews ranged from 1.5 to 6 hours, with most lasting about 2 hours.

Analysis.

During field observations, mental notes and brief jottings were collected and developed into field notes within 72 hours (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. Field work and interviews were

conducted until saturation was achieved, ensuring a comprehensive collection of available data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following the completion of data collection, interview transcripts and ethnographic field notes were coded in MAXQDA software and analyzed according to themes that emerged inductively through the data, consistent with a grounded theory approach. Through an iterative coding process, themes were identified and refined that reflect gay fathers' relationships to their gay parenting communities, the challenges they face as parents, and their relationship to cultural narratives of gay parenting (LaRossa, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Overview

In this dissertation, I argue that the ideological figure of the *Normal Gay Father* has an impact on gay fathers' experiences and daily lives. While normalizing ideologies can have a positive impact on some gay fathers, I argue that cultural narratives of gay fatherhood create a stratified system in which gay fathers of color, single gay fathers, working class gay fathers, and gay fathers who have children in heterosexual unions are marginalized and underserved by mainstream gay parenting resources. The symbolic figure of the *Normal Gay Father* encourages a homophobic public to tolerate LGBTQ individuals, but by painting the gay parenting community with a broad brush, it also glosses over significant obstacles facing gay parenting via adoption and surrogacy and renders families via heterosexual unions invisible. My goal with this dissertation is to walk through the origins and consequences of gay fathers' collective identity, its relationship to *Normal Gay Father* ideologies, and the specific mechanisms of visibility that grant disproportionate attention and resources to some gay fathers over others.

I begin in Chapter 2 by exploring the origins of gay fathers' collective identity and the positive impact that normalizing ideologies have on the most visible gay fathers (i.e. white,

middle-to-upper class, married men parenting children via adoption or surrogacy). For those who resemble the *Normal Gay Father*, narratives that normalize their families provide validation, protection against homophobia, and new meanings of gender, sexuality, and parenting that are compatible with their experiences. This chapter focuses especially on how a collective identity of gay fatherhood, fostered through gay parenting groups, resolves conflicts in gay fathers' identities as men, gay people, and parents. It also establishes gay parenting groups as a space in which ideas about who gay fathers are can be exchanged and reinforced.

Chapter 3 expands on the intersectional approach to gay father by examining how subtle inequalities of race, class, and marital status are built into the Normal Gay Father ideology. For gay fathers on the margins of gay fathers' collective identity (i.e. gay fathers of color, single gay fathers, and working class gay fathers), normalizing narratives of who gay fathers are reinforce their status as outsiders. This chapter analyzes the unique challenges specific to marginalized gay fathers' positionality, their relationship to the gay parenting community, and the patterns of resilience that allow them to survive.

In Chapter 4, I analyze how pathway to parenthood is especially integral to the Normal Gay Father ideology. By comparing the experiences and group styles of gay fathers who had children in heterosexual unions (most of whom were interviewed in Utah) and those who had children via adoption and surrogacy, this chapter reveals the extreme negative consequences of normalizing narratives of gay parenting for gay men whose experiences as gay parents have been dismissed, invalidated, and underserved. This chapter highlights how cultural contexts shape gay fathers' experiences, further contributing to the stratification of gay fatherhood.

Following these extensive portraits of gay fathers by race, class, marital status, and pathway to parenthood, Chapter 5 focuses on the mechanisms that perpetuate the Normal Gay

Father ideology. Gay fathers' relationships to media and scholarship explain how some gay fathers have become symbols of LGBTQ social movements while others have been rendered increasingly invisible. I also examine how gay fathers' visibility is enacted in everyday interactions, through a process that I call *incidental activism*. Gay fathers raising young children via adoption or surrogacy become more visible when interest in their children's well-being compels them to correct strangers' heterosexist assumptions. The cumulative affect of these interactions, as well as gay fathers' participation and representation in media and scholarship, communicate an incomplete portrait of who gay fathers are to the outside world.

In Chapter 6, I conclude with an emphasis toward the responsibilities of LGBTQ researchers to represent gay families in all their forms. The Normal Gay Father ideology has compelled us to focus on the most respectable members of the LGBTQ community while giving limited attention to the social constraints that shape their families. Our reluctance to study complex LGBTQ families who fall outside of the Normal Gay Father ideology has a direct relationship to the distribution of resources, policy reforms, and public support directed toward LGBTQ people. I suggest that an inclusive research agenda is essential as we adapt to generational changes in LGBTQ identity discourses that will further complicate LGBTQ family forms.

Chapter 2: Gay Fathers at the Center: Establishing a Collective Identity at the Intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Parenting

Openly gay men raising children find themselves situated in a contradictory social location, marked by three specific dimensions of their identities: gender, sexuality, and parenthood. The prevailing assumptions surrounding each of these identities preclude the intersection of all three. Gay parenting groups offer gay fathers a unique space in which all three of these identities can be enacted simultaneously. Through their interactions in gay parenting groups, gay fathers are able to create new meanings of gender, sexuality, and parenthood through the construction of an emerging intersectional “gay father” identity.

In this chapter, I explain the roots of the *Normal Gay Father* identity category. This identity category has come to define gay fatherhood in that it has set societal expectations for who gay fathers are. The Normal Gay Father is synonymous with white, respectable, two-parent families. Yet it is important to note that the construction of this identity has emerged from an intersectional space in defense of dominant meanings of gender, sexuality, and parenthood that conflict for gay fathers, including gay fathers of relative privilege. The Normal Gay Father identity category exists to rewrite meanings of gender, sexuality, and parenthood in ways that can be compatible with gay fathers’ experiences.

To elucidate how an emerging gay father identity creates new meanings of gender, sexuality, and parenthood, I present comparisons that gay fathers made between themselves and those who share only 2 of their locations within these categories. Gay fathers’ comparisons between themselves and those sharing only 2 of these categories offer insight into the social meanings associated with each category in everyday contexts. These comparisons explain how the collective identity of gay fatherhood departs from hegemonic definitions associated with gender, sexuality, and parenthood. The data presented in this chapter is restricted to gay fathers

via adoption and surrogacy who were associated with gay parenting groups in California and Texas.

Figure 2 illustrates the intersectional nature of the emerging Normal Gay Father identity category. Quadrants are numbered to guide comparisons between gay fathers and those that share only 2 of their 3 most salient identities. Gay fathers' comparisons between themselves and gay childless men (quadrant 1) reveal how societal expectations of gay men contradict expectations of parents. Gay fathers' comparisons between themselves and heterosexual fathers (quadrant 2) highlight the salience of sexuality in shaping gay fathers' experiences. Finally, a close examination of the relationship between gay fathers and lesbian mothers (quadrant 3) demonstrates how the intersection of sexuality and parenting identities is further complicated by gender.

Figure 2: Gay Fathers' Identity Comparisons

NOTE: 1=Gay childless men; 2=Straight fathers; 3=Lesbian mothers; 4=Gay fathers' collective identity. Gay fathers comparisons between themselves (quadrant 4) and others sharing two salient dimensions of their identities (quadrants 1, 2, and 3) demonstrate the constraints of each category and suggest that gay fatherhood must be understood through an intersectional lens.

Quadrant 1: Gay Fathers and Gay Childless Men

In May of 2011, FWF announced to their members that they would be hosting a Father's Day brunch event at a popular local gay bar. "Is it OK to bring our kids?" asked one father. Alex, who oversaw scheduling the event, assured him they had planned accordingly: "That's why it's over at 3 [PM] – because the dancers show up at 4." Looking around the venue on the morning of Father's Day, I noticed that the dancers were not only absent, they had been replaced by cardboard cutouts of children available for adoption, provided by the Department of Children and Family Services. The cutouts leaned against the dancer's poles, smiling and frozen in time, unaware of their own significance as symbols of the complexity of gay identity and its contentious relationship to the institution of families.

Figure 3 and 4.
Cardboard cutouts depicting children available for adoption, leaning against dancers' poles at FWF's Father's Day Brunch in 2011. Photographed by the author.

The inclusion of a parenting identity contradicts existing assumptions about gay men's gender and sexuality, thus contributing to the need for a new collective identity among gay fathers. While I found that gay fathers considered themselves to be a subset of the gay and lesbian movement, the relationship between gay childless men and gay fathers oscillated between moments of cohesion and tension. Ultimately, gay fathers' identities as parents interacted with their gender and sexual identities in ways that significantly altered their everyday experiences as gay men.

Many gay fathers reported that they were perceived as "crossing a huge line" or "betraying the idea of that which is uniquely gay" by having children. When asked how the broader gay community was different from the community of gay parents they knew through FWF, most interviewees would cautiously refer to partying, sexual liberation, image-consciousness, adolescence, or self-centeredness, all of which they associated with gay single life. By contrast, gay parents would describe themselves as boring, introverted, old, or tired - though most interviewees volunteered that their descriptions of gay childless men would have applied to themselves when they were younger. As the following interview excerpt demonstrates, these differences in lifestyle after having children often led to a loss of friendships with other gay men and a disconnection between gay fathers and the broader gay community:

"[My friends and I] used to get on the phone and just go on and on for hours. And now, when I'm talking, my life is [my family]. So I'm not talking about going out to the club. I'm not talking about who I'm hooking up with. I'm not talking about "oh this man" or that man, or this relationship or that. I'm talking about poop. I'm talking about preschool. I'm talking about the play, the art show, and all this stuff. And it's just some dead silence on the phone... We enjoy being with [straight parents] and they're great with us. But in the gay community, there's an "us" and a "them." (African American, 53, upper-class, cohabiting father via gestational surrogacy)

Navigating spaces that were defined by gay men became one source of tension for FWF members after having children. In addition to the example from Father's Day, the group's

participation in the annual local pride parade also invoked anxieties from parents who wanted to protect their children from hypersexualized images of gay social life. For example, Robert said during a board meeting that he did not want his kids – his daughter in particular – to see “all the guys with their shirts off” at the parade. Some fathers assured him that “even the sexualized guys are never as bad as people imagine.” Both Robert’s fears and the framing of the reassurance he received illustrate the tension between stereotypes of childless gay men and the incorporation of FWF members’ parenting identities.

In addition to gay bars and the pride parade, gay cruises were also invoked in interviews and during FWF meetings in ways that highlighted the fracturing of gay men’s identities across statuses of parenthood. For many of the affluent men in this study, cruise lines like the Atlantis served as strong symbols of gay single life. Cruise lines specifically for gay families, such as the one owned by celebrity and lesbian mother Rosie O’Donnell, thus offered an alternative space in which gay men could enact their identities as parents in conjunction with their gender and sexual identities. The following story that was shared during an orientation meeting offers one example in which an affluent white and Latino couple who had been together for 11 years attended their first FWF meeting after returning home from a cruise for gay families:

We decided to go on the Rosie cruise because I didn’t want to be on the Atlantis, which is much more “party-party.” I am so over that. I’m 41 now, I don’t want to do party-party. But the Rosie was so nice because we could just relax and be ourselves. We’ve been on what I call “straight cruises” too, and you know, we can be affectionate and no one bothers us, but it’s not the same level of acceptance. Not as comfortable...It was just so amazing to see all those children and their gay parents, like it was totally normal. So we decided during that trip that having kids is something we really want to do.

The cruise ship industry has helped define the collective identity among gay single men by providing a space in which their sexual and gender identities could be openly expressed (Cantú, 2009). The rising popularity of gay family cruises thus supports the importance of an

intersectional approach to gay fatherhood and the demand for spaces in which all three identities can be embodied.

Quadrant 2: Gay Fathers and Heterosexual Fathers

Comparisons involving straight fathers were rarely mentioned by FWF members. Instead, members tended to refer to “straight parents” more generally. For example, during meetings in which parenting challenges were discussed, a member would often offer a reminder that the challenge they were experiencing “would happen to straight parents, too,” as if to quell any concern that their children’s negative behaviors were causally linked to their parents’ sexuality. In this context, “straight parents” thus represent the hegemonic “normal family” rather than a gendered image of parenting roles to which gay fathers could relate. Unlike lesbian mothers or gay childless men, direct references to straight fathers were usually absent from gay fathers’ group discourses.

Straight fathers were also seldom discussed during interviews, with a few notable exceptions. For example, as our interview came to a close and devolved into casual chitchat, Alan and Shawn (an Asian and white middle-class married couple in their late 40s who had a son through gestational surrogacy) asked me about why I was interested in gay parenting. The conversation about gender and family involvement that followed prompted Alan and Shawn to share the following story of an interaction they once had with a heterosexual father:

Shawn: When we went to Asia on a plane, this Korean American guy saw us and [our son]. Of course he was kind of eyeing [us]. He’s like “wow you guys are doing a great job,” all that stuff. And then – I think he told you, right?

Alan: No, he told you. [He said] don’t tell his wife. Don’t let his wife see.

Shawn: “Don’t let her know because I don’t want her to know that men can *do* this. I have no interest in doing this.” [We said] “No, I don’t think you need to worry about that.” But it’s sort of funny.

Alan: Yeah, it’s very funny.

Shawn: But it's very typical. Like, my dad. He would be *screaming*, "oh, *your* daughter!"

Alan: "Your daughter needs her diaper changed."

Shawn: Yeah, "your daughter's dirty!" And that's just... the way.

Gay fathers' conversations at FWF tended to center around issues of family. Accordingly, one possible explanation for the absence of straight fathers in FWF's discourse is the perceived limited involvement of men in family life, which the above interview data supports. Another explanation could be that homophobia constrains heterosexual fathers from interacting with gay fathers, thus FWF members are not as consistently aware of straight fathers' experiences. While this suggestive analysis can be improved with further research, the social conditions surrounding gay men's family formation include popular discourses about gender roles in the family, which assume men are dispassionate about parenting. By contrast, the majority of FWF members are in planned gay families and had children through adoption or surrogacy. Therefore, by means of the interaction between their gender, sexuality, and parenting identities, members of FWF are actively challenging the social systems which seek to reinforce men's presumed limited involvement in families, as well as gender essentialist notions that parenthood is incongruent with masculinity.

Quadrant 3: Gay Fathers and Lesbian Mothers

The flight attendant on [our] flight! [Our son] was crying. There was 3 or 4 babies crying, by the way, mind you. There's mothers doing what they can to calm the babies down. And [the flight attendant] walked past *two* crying babies and just said [to us] "would you like me to hold him?" And I was just like, that's the weirdest thing! Like, I think she felt in her – totally coming from probably a genuine place – but I just thought she felt "mother holding baby: she'll be fine. Another mother holding crying baby: she'll be fine. Me holding crying baby: needs help." I didn't really expect that, going into parenting. I expected more of a political thing [because of my sexuality], but I didn't expect to have that much of an [insight] in terms of [gender]. (African American, 36, upper-middle-class, cohabiting father via traditional surrogacy)

Gay fathers often felt that their families were marginalized by the ubiquity of images that associate women with parenting. Though gay fathers reported to have much in common with lesbian mothers, they imagined that lesbian mothers were less likely to face these challenges as a result of their gender. Previous research supports the notion that lesbian women achieve an “esteemed” status through motherhood, though this is understandably complicated by their co-existing marginal status as sexual minorities (Hequembourg and Farrell, 1999). From the perspective of gay fathers, however, cultural notions regarding gender and family served to stratify the experiences of gay parents by gender.

In addition to the presumption that they were incompetent parents, many gay fathers reportedly encountered the strong association between women and families as a potential threat to their children’s stigma consciousness. Most gay fathers felt that social cues regarding the esteemed relationship between mother and child served as constant reminders that growing up without a mother was “abnormal.” One interviewee, for example, celebrated the failure of a children’s film called *Mars Needs Moms*, scoffing that it was “going to be another thing in [my daughter’s] face about *mom*s.”

In addition to feeling marginalized by strong associations between women and families, gender also impacted the visibility of gay fathers in public spaces. Coupled gay fathers felt that, because seeing two men with a child contradicted strangers’ gender expectations, people could perceive their sexuality immediately, recognizing them as a gay family. Gay fathers felt that, because it was “unusual” to see two men alone with a child, strangers could “put two and two together” without the fathers needing to verbally disclose their sexuality. The automatic exposure of their sexuality was often invoked by interviewees as a key difference between lesbian mothers and gay fathers. For example, Andy and his husband Phil (a white, middle-class married couple

in their early 40s who became fathers via private adoption) referenced visibility when comparing themselves with lesbian mothers in their interview:

Andy: I think people just expect women to be parents. You know what I mean? Like, in terms of our ideas of gender roles. It's not unusual. Even if there are two women, I think it's not "weird" for people. So you know, I think it does present different issues.

Phil: Like, if we're walking down with a baby, having brunch or something, people notice, as opposed to maybe two women. I mean, when we first had [our son], we went to visit Andy's dad in Kentucky, and the waitress would ask, "Oh, letting the wives sleep in?"

Andy: People do notice. I think that's true. I never thought about that. But I think people are much more likely to notice two men walking in a place with a kid than two women.

For gay fathers alone in public with their children, the phrase "mom's day off" represents another interactional pattern in which taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and family surfaced. Gay fathers reported that it was common for a receptionist, server, or cashier to ask in a friendly tone if they were "giving mom the day off" when gay dads were alone with their children. Xavier (white California father via public adoption) offered the following example in our interview:

[Most of our negative experiences] have been casual, you know the tradition, you're at the mall and some ladies are walking by and they say, "Oh, Mom's day off?" And the answer is, "Yes, every day is Mom's day off." And they don't get it...[From their point of view] what's obviously missing is the mother, and she must be getting a pedicure.

The fact that strangers assumed "mom" was still the primary parent, despite being confronted with only an adult man and child, demonstrates the uphill battle that gay fathers face as they work to challenge hegemonic ideas about gender, sexuality, and the family.

Gay Fathers Groups Facilitating Gay Fathers' Identities

Gay fathers groups like Fathers with Families gave gay fathers a space where all three identities - gender, sexuality, and parenthood - could be enacted simultaneously. By attending in-

person meetings, gay fathers were able to interact with others who shared their experiences and construct a new identity category at the nexus of their gender, sexual, and parenting identities. The resulting “gay father” identity category liberated gay fathers from the constraints and contradictions of its 3 component identities.

Gay fathers discussed the emotional impact of having a space that was for gay fathers only. For example, multiple FWF members described their first meeting as “like *The Wizard of Oz*, when everything goes from black-and-white to color.” Interviews with FWF group leaders revealed that the group had considered allowing lesbian women to join a few years before the study began, but the idea was met with resistance from a majority of the membership. As Alan explained in his interview, FWF provided a rare context in which he could enact his gender and parenting identity simultaneously:

Going to Fathers with Families where it’s all dads, it’s *very* unusual. It’s really a community that you don’t find anywhere else. And when you start having the moms there too, it changes the whole dynamic, I think. Everywhere you go, you find you’re immersed in a community with moms. (white, 51, middle-class, married father via gestational surrogacy)

Groups like FWF were attractive to gay fathers because it allowed them to connect with others at the same intersection of identities. They also created spaces that were uniquely gay-friendly and family-friendly, thus helping gay fathers combat heteronormativity in everyday life. When FWF surveyed its members in 2006, they found that 46% of members joined because “my kids can see other families like ours.” Interviewees emphasized that FWF and GDO were essential to letting their children “feel normal” when their family structure was otherwise unique among their peers. Group meetings offered gay fathers a normalizing space to combat the influence of heteronormative ideologies. The construction of the Normal Gay Father identity category can thus be considered a reaction to both macro and micro social forces that marginalized and dismissed gay fathers’ families.

From Gay Fatherhood to the *Normal Gay Father*

On a macro scale, ideologies of “The Reproductive Homosexual” drove a response from LGBTQ family activists who needed to communicate a reality of gay family life that was non-threatening, respectable, and devoted to their children’s well-being. The image of a Normal Gay Father serves as a countermeasure to the idea that gay parents are evil purveyors of sin, hell-bent on destroying America. Yet on a micro scale, the Normal Gay Father category also emerged through interactions between gay fathers who needed to resolve conflicts between key components of their social identities. Existing meanings of gender, sexuality, and parenting were incompatible with their experience, leading to the creation of a new collective identity. The gay fathers’ group spaces in which the Normal Gay Father identity was enacted also shielded their children from the outside influences of heteronormativity.

The Normal Gay Father serves as an image and an identity category that represents a reality of gay fatherhood that is gentle, normalizing, and mainstream. Its characteristics are distinct from stereotypes of gay single men (too old and tired for partying) and heterosexual fathers (enthusiastically embracing parenting responsibilities). Its visibility is propelled by gender. Ostensibly the Normal Gay Father identity represents progress as it expands ideas about who men can be, who gay people can be, and who parents can be.

Yet beyond the intersection of gender, sexuality, and parenting, it is also infused with meanings that align with hegemonic power systems. The Normal Gay Father is white. He is in a dyadic relationship. He is middle-to-upper class, and he had his children through adoption or surrogacy, after coming out. The experiences of gay fathers of color, single gay fathers, and working class gay fathers, in search of a community that embraced the complex intersections of

their own identities, best illuminate these inequalities embedded in the Normal Gay Father collective identity.

Chapter 3: Gay Fathers On The Margins: Race, Class, and Marital Status

The previous chapter identified the micro-level origins of the Normal Gay Father identity. Through gay parenting groups, gay fathers can connect with others at the intersection of their identities as men, gay people, and parents. This chapter explores how other identities of race, class, and marital status intersect with gay parenting. The experiences of gay fathers of color, single gay fathers, and working-class gay fathers illuminate unique challenges and triumphs that are often overlooked in research and popular representations of gay fatherhood. As outsiders of gay parenting communities, these gay fathers represent the limitations and consequences of the Normal Gay Father identity category.

The ideological Normal Gay Father was constructed in response to the controlling image of the “Reproductive Homosexual,” aimed at “selling sameness” to a homophobic society (Walters, 2001). The “sameness” that they needed to sell meant more than just heterosexuality. Dorothy Smith (1994) coined the term SNAF – the Standard North American Family – to describe normative family ideologies that encompass multiple axes of inequality. White, two-parent, middle-class families remain the idealized standard in American family life, and the Normal Gay Father was constructed in close proximity to that image.

Gay fatherhood, however, has not developed in isolation of the same contemporary demographic shifts that characterize family change in the general population (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001). In reality, African American and Latino same-sex couples are more likely to have children in their household than their White counterparts (Gates, 2015). Single gay fathers, divorced gay fathers, and working-class gay fathers are all part of the fabric of queer family life. Yet few studies examine how family structure, class, or race shape and constrain gay fathers’ communities and daily lives. A closer look at the unique challenges that these families face can

inform our understanding of how systems of inequality operate across multiple axes of family life (Collins, 1998; Few-Demo, 2014).

Figure 5: Gay Fathers at the Margins of Gay Fatherhood

NOTE: 4=Gay fathers' collective identity; 5=Middle-to-upper class, partnered gay fathers of color; 6=White, middle-to-upper class, single gay fathers; 7=Middle-to-upper class, single gay fathers of color; 8=Working class, single gay fathers of color. The dotted lines represent the identity categories rendered invisible by the construction of the Normal Gay Father.

Figure 5 represents the intersectional systems that characterize gay fatherhood. The categories with solid outlines – gay, men, and parents – are repeated from Figure 1 to symbolize the identities at the forefront of gay fathers' collective identity formation. Numeral 4 continues to represent the intersectional space around which gay fathers' groups organize and the Normal Gay Father image reflects. New identity categories of race, class, and marital status have been added, with dotted lines to symbolize their invisibility within gay fatherhood communities. Gay fathers of color, working class gay fathers, and single gay fathers are all present within gay father communities and represent a significant part of the fabric of queer family life. Yet their

experiences reflect unique challenges that are seldom addressed by gay parenting groups, and their visibility is diminished by the Normal Gay Father ideology.

This chapter analyzes the community ties, challenges, and patterns of resilience among marginalized gay fathers. First, single gay fathers by choice demonstrate the consequences of a social movement that emphasizes coupled relationships in the context of queer families. Next, gay fathers of color reveal the racial boundaries of gay fatherhood communities. Finally, working class gay fathers offer insights into the financial and social obstacles that impact queer families according to their pathway to parenthood.

Single Gay Fathers: “We’re Kind of An ‘Other’”

As of 2016, 32% of households with children were headed by a single parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Although many single-parent households thrive, in general they face challenges such as reduced financial resources, limited social support, social stigma, and constraints on time spent with their children (Coles, 2015; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). While all types of single-parent families challenge the normative preference for two-parent families, the single gay fathers in California and Texas’s gay fathers’ groups can best be characterized as single parents by choice.

Single parents by choice are those who embark on parenthood without the aid of a partner or co-parent, often through adoption or reproductive technologies (Graham & Braverman, 2012; Hertz, 2006). Single mothers by choice tend to be well-educated, middle-class women who are enabled by a strong desire to nurture, financial autonomy, and strong social support systems, allowing them to build their families despite stigma against single parents (Bock, 2000; Hertz, 2006; Mannis, 1999). Little is known about the experiences of single heterosexual fathers by

choice, but they represent a crossroads of identities that contradict stereotypes of gender and parenting, leading the media to frame them as either a laudable new generation of masculinity or a deviant family form that deprives children of mothers (Johnson, 2017).

Single gay fathers by choice face similar contradictions of stereotypes; yet their contributions and implications for family diversity have been given limited attention. Because nationally representative surveys have yet to include adequate measures of sexual orientation in their questionnaires, the number of households headed by single gay parents is unknown (Williams Institute, 2009). Furthermore, by forefronting marriage equality as a flagship issue, gay and lesbian movement leaders have excluded single gay parents from the proliferation of images of gay families through the media over the past 2 decades (Moscowitz, 2013). Some qualitative studies of gay fatherhood have included interviews with single participants, but rarely have single gay fathers' experiences been theorized in the context of a social movement that emphasizes coupled relationships through marriage equality legislation.

Single gay fathers represented a minority within gay parenting groups in the sense that there were fewer of them and the issues pertaining to single parents were not frequent topics of conversation. In this way, they also perceived themselves as outsiders within gay fathers groups in California and Texas, faced unique challenges, and adopted strategies of resilience to combat the challenges of single parenthood.

At FWF, single prospective fathers would occasionally come to a group meeting and express concern over whether they would be able to handle parenthood on their own. They would receive encouragement from coupled dads in attendance. Several meetings were facilitated by a single father (Alex), in which case the conversation would involve more details of how he made single parenthood possible. However, the experiences of coupled dads typically

dominated the conversation. When asked in interviews whether they prefer to associate with other single parents, some single gay fathers were ambivalent. Gabe (White Texas single father via adoption), for example, responded, “I know very few single gay fathers. Most are partnered...I don’t find myself specifically seeking out other gay single parents. Or not in general. I’ve thought about it but then run out of time.” Miles (Black California single father via adoption), a longtime member of FWF, felt differently:

Even within the [FWF] community, we’re kind of an “other.” . . . For me, it’s really those single dads—less so the coupled dads, actually; more the single dads—that I feel like I can connect to and we have the same issues. . . . All of the publicity that you see is coupled dads. And there’s a great deal of us that are single dads. And I think I’m doing a great job!

In interviews and during meetings, coupled gay fathers offered deep reverence and empathy for those who were parenting without a partner. As one father said during a meeting with single parents in attendance, “I have so much respect for single parents now, after having these two [children]. I mean, there’s two of us and it is still so much work.” Indeed, when asked to elaborate on the challenges of their experience, single parent interviewees referred primarily to the practical day-to-day logistics of being a full-time caregiver. As Miles explained, “American society is not designed around parenting. As much as we like to talk about family values, it’s really much more about corporate and industry and work.” Single gay fathers recognized that having to provide for their children’s needs at all times, even when they were sick or had to work, would be easier if they had a partner to help. Others, such as Simon (White California single father via adoption), were most concerned for their children’s long-term welfare: “The fear is, being a single parent, what if something happens to me? That’s probably the biggest fear. How do they go through another loss like that [after losing their birth parents]? How could they possibly survive another loss?”

Single gay fathers also indicated that because they were usually in public alone with their children, they were more likely than coupled gay fathers to be confronted by heterosexist assumptions. Coupled gay fathers reported that they were immediately identified as a gay family while together with their children in public spaces, but single gay fathers did not illicit the same “automatic” recognition. Many fathers—whether single or coupled—indicated that when they were in public alone with their children, strangers would ask them in a friendly tone whether it was “mom’s day off.” This prompted a daily coming-out process that gay fathers found tiresome. For single gay fathers, these encounters indicated that they did not share coupled gay fathers’ visibility. Carl (White California single father via adoption), for example, talked about how he wanted to wear a rainbow pin in public: “I’m a little bit annoyed that I don’t have a partner, so it’s not like blatantly obvious that I’m gay.”

Although interviewees reported substantial challenges attached to being single parents, single gay fathers also expressed resilience in the face of difficult obstacles. Single fathers primarily found resilience by taking pride in their accomplishments, celebrating their ability to parent without a partner, and cherishing the bond they had with their children. The fulfillment they gained by becoming parents was described as “a weight off the shoulders,” and they believed their children likewise benefited from being part of their family.

Single gay fathers also expressed resilience by vying for visibility. Many had built their families through public adoption and were frustrated that others did not realize adoption by single parents was legal. Alex (White California single father via adoption), for example, became formally involved in public adoption advocacy. Simon was also eager to share his perspective with others considering adoption:

I'm a single gay White man with HIV and AIDS for 20 years who's in recovery from drug addiction, so I think I have a specific place and voice for [gay parenting]. . . . That [my experience] is not only possible but doable.

Single gay fathers also sought visibility from within the gay parenting community. When FWF marched together in the local pride parade in 2012, Bruce, a single gay father via adoption in California, arrived wearing a T-shirt that read, "I'm a single parent. What's your superpower?" By embracing their ability to tackle the challenges associated with single parenthood and promoting their own visibility within and outside the gay parenting community, single gay fathers by choice proved to be highly motivated, dedicated, and resilient parents.

Gay Fathers of Color: "We Don't See Our Image Anywhere"

The normative, nuclear family ideal is a racialized image. Concepts, vocabularies, and experiences of family life are coded through a lens that positions White families as standard and non-White families as "others," or deviant (Smith, 1994). Non-Hispanic Whites now represent a minority of births in the United States, and families of color account for 93% of population growth in the United States (Passel, Livingston, & Cohn, 2012). But even as the United States becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, ideologies of race and White supremacy continue to create substantial challenges for families of color. Black families, pigeonholed by legacies of the Moynihan report and the so-called pathology of matriarchy, continue to face controlling images of absent Black fathers and Black motherhood's failures (Coles & Green, 2010; Collins, 1992). Similarly, cultural caricatures have suppressed the vast diversity of Asian and Latino families, leading many researchers and policymakers to ignore the legal, political, and institutional structures that influence the family dynamics of both native and immigrant households (Baca Zinn & Wells, 2000; Ishii-Kuntz, 2010).

Despite the fact that White families have dominated media representations and literature on queer families, African American and Latino same-sex couples are more likely to have children in their household than White same-sex couples (Gates, 2015; Moscovitz, 2013). A growing body of literature has documented the experiences and identity negotiations for queer individuals of color (e.g., Hunter, 2010; Ocampo, 2014; Yep, Lovaas, & Ho, 2001), but little is known about how these findings apply to gay parents.

In perhaps the most comprehensive study of gay parents of color to date, Moore's (2011) study of *Invisible Families* examined how race and class influence the sexual identities, presentations of self, and family formation patterns of Black lesbian mothers. Moore found that the experience of stigma drove Black lesbian mothers to cultivate respectability and engage in Black gay subcultures. Less is known about whether these insights apply to gay fathers of color, including Latino and Asian gay fathers, who also must navigate challenges associated with their dual membership within their racial or ethnic communities as well as the gay community. I found that Black, Latino/Hispanic, and Asian gay fathers are impacted by racialized images of ideal queer families.

The gay parenting community that manifested through parenting groups was predominantly White. Incorporating racial diversity into gay parenting groups was reportedly very challenging. One Black gay father who served on FWF's governing board spoke of other Black fathers who felt "isolated" and "dismissed" at FWF. He made conscious efforts to expand racial representation through the group website and provide a forum where parents could talk openly about race. Many parents believed that the group had become more racially diverse over time, but racial segregation remained a reality of the gay parenting community.

Michael (Black partnered California father via surrogacy), a member of FWF, elaborated on the layers of inequalities in which he was embedded:

We're all the gay community. But we're again outsiders in that community. And then take another step: We're in the gay community, and the gay community itself is segregated. So we're the Black guys, you know, the Black section of the gay community. And then we're in a smaller—we're in the Black section with children in the gay community. We don't see our image around anywhere.

Like Michael, most respondents indicated that racial segregation was characteristic of the gay community in general and not unique to gay parents. Bryan (Asian partnered California father via adoption), for example, described his experience attending a Black Pride event in Washington, DC, that he described as “a whole different ball of wax”:

There's always been a segregation. Even though there's a better mix than the general population, there still is the gay bars for Black people and [for] everybody else. Black people do tend to get segregated more than any other race.

Miles, a Black single California father via adoption, appreciated knowing other Black gay parents but lamented the absence of a Black gay parenting community: “I think that it would be helpful for my child to also be able to connect to race and gender and sexuality. And unfortunately, we don't have that [opportunity].”

Gay fathers of color faced challenges that were not shared by White gay fathers. Many reported conflicts between their racial or ethnic communities and gay identities. Shawn (Asian married California father via surrogacy) spoke of receiving backlash from his family after his marriage was featured in a Chinese-language publication:

It caused a lot of pain, even [to] my siblings. Some of my sisters felt like, “Isn't it enough that Mom and Dad accepted you guys?” It's a culture thing. You don't change your family openly. Fast-forward, now they're fine.

Rufus, a Hispanic married California father via adoption, similarly described obstacles as a gay parent that he attributed to “Hispanic culture,” including more formal relationships to his parents. Evan and Martel (Black partnered California fathers via surrogacy) lived in a “predominantly

Black area,” and although they were careful not to generalize for the entire African American community, Evan spoke of how his community in general had “a long way to go in understanding, and accepting, and then at some point, embracing” sexual diversity. As he explained, “I love this community, but I [had to learn how] to survive in it in a way that makes it livable.”

Although some gay fathers of color reported feeling caught between their sexual and racial and ethnic identities, these attributes also informed their resilience against bigotry and family inequality. Shawn, for example, said that as a Chinese American, he related to the scrutiny for gay parents. As he explained, “in the old days” someone could have asked his own parents, “why would you bring a child into this world knowing that you were gonna get all of this prejudice?” Black gay fathers were also especially quick to describe themselves as pioneers. When I first met Evan and Martel at a FWF meeting, Martel told me that “It feels pretty cool, what we’re doing. My partner and I. Because here we are, two African American gay men, and we’re dads through surrogacy. We feel like pioneers.” As pioneers and parents who had overcome obstacles on their journey to parenthood, gay fathers of color were resilient against bigotry and well equipped to pass on those lessons to their children.

Working Class Gay Fathers: “It Does Hurt A Lot to Be Here”

Methods of family formation have diversified with the rising popularity of adoption and the development of reproductive technologies. These methods give more parents-to-be the opportunity to build their families, but they are also accompanied by financial and social challenges (Smock & Greenland, 2010). For example, adoptive families in the general population are faced with social stigma and misperceptions about children’s dependency and

adjustment, despite the fact that most adoptions have positive outcomes for all parties involved (Fisher, 2003; Harris Interactive, 2002). Reproductive technologies, such as donor insemination and surrogacy, can be costly and legally complex, challenging taken-for-granted relationships among bodies, genetics, and parentage (Almeling, 2015).

Despite the normative emphasis toward biological parentage in the general population, gay fathers who transition to parenthood via adoption and surrogacy are more visible than those who had children in the context of different-sex unions. The gay and lesbian movement's emphasis on marriage and family rights has expanded adoption opportunities for same-sex couples around the country and spread awareness of gay couples raising children as out, gay men. Yet it is likely that a majority of same-sex couples continue to raise children who were born of prior heterosexual relationships (Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014). The class implications of gay parenting have been given limited attention. The financial and social barriers to adoption and reproductive technology limit their availability to middle- to upper-class families, allowing only the most privileged gay couples to achieve parenthood (Boggis, 2001; Smock & Greenland, 2010).

Most interviewees, including those of relative privilege, agreed that there was a public perception that all gay parents are wealthy. Many attributed this perception to the financial obstacles inherent to family formation options like adoption and surrogacy. When asked whether they know any gay parents struggling financially, affirmative responses referred almost exclusively to parents who had their children in the context of heterosexual unions. The only interviewees who discussed their own financial strains, such as filing for personal bankruptcy, were parents via heterosexual unions.

Gay fathers who come out later in life, after having children, are rarely seen in mainstream gay parenting spaces, such as those in California and Texas. In the next chapter, I go into more detail on how the gay parenting community is organized by pathway to parenthood, with an emphasis on the experiences of interviewees in Utah. Relevant to the current conversation, however, is the role that class played in bifurcating gay fathers' experiences by pathway to parenthood.

Gay fathers via heterosexual unions were unsure of whether they would have been able to have children at all, had they not been married to women. Groups like FWF in California and GDO in Texas thrive specifically because institutional barriers to having children are extraordinarily high for openly gay men. The membership of FWF had exceptionally high socioeconomic statuses as a result. According to an internal survey of the Fathers with Families (FWF) group in California (n=106), more than a third of their members had annual incomes of \$250,000 or more, and 86% had incomes of at least \$100,000. By contrast, some gay fathers via heterosexual unions in Utah spoke of their own histories of filing for bankruptcy, financial losses through divorce, and financial hardships that they shared with other gay parents in their community.

Gay fathers via heterosexual unions were often interviewed in small apartments or public spaces of their choosing, whereas gay fathers via adoption or surrogacy more often opted to be interviewed in their multi-bedroom houses, often in expensive neighborhoods. For SGFU members, who had the fewest resources and the strict institutional constraints against LGBTQ family-building, parenthood through adoption or surrogacy seemed indefinitely out of reach.

Simon, a Latino single father, was one of the few gay parents via heterosexual unions interviewed in California. He spoke of how his social location within multiple marginalized identities, particularly class, alienated him from other gay fathers at FWF:

As much as it is support, it does hurt a lot to be here. [Their membership includes] a lot of different ethnicities . . . [but] I feel like . . . they all have a home. They all are living the “American Dream” while I’m living in a room and I’m in debt . . . and I feel like I’ll never get out. I feel like I’m stuck within the ghetto. I’m stuck within the “gay” [category], I’m stuck within the “teen dad” [category], I’m stuck within the “Mexican” [category]. I can’t rise above it.

When Simon first joined the group, he expressed relief and excitement over spending time with other gay fathers. But over the course of a few months, he found that he didn’t quite fit in, and he points to his social locations in terms of age, ethnicity, and especially class as the source of his alienation.

Characteristics of the Normal Gay Father

The experiences of gay fathers of color, single gay fathers, and working class gay fathers reveal implicit characteristics of the Normal Gay Father. Gay fathers who occupy each of these categories became outsiders of gay parenting communities, even as they benefitted from being members of gay parenting groups in other ways. The micro-level boundaries of gay parenting groups were mirrored by the macro-level representations of the Normal Gay Father. Single gay fathers’ visibility is limited as “all of the publicity you see is coupled dads.” Gay fathers of color “don’t see our image anywhere.” The Normal Gay Father is thus white, married, and middle-to-upper class.

The race, class, and marital status inequalities embedded within the Normal Gay Father identity category are tied to a broader history of family inequality. Heterosexual families who are not white, middle-to-upper class, and married are constructed as inferior to the normative family

ideal. Yet one characteristic of the Normal Gay Father is unique to same-sex families: pathway to parenthood. While biological relationships are given higher status in heterosexual families, the Normal Gay Father had children through adoption or surrogacy as an out, gay man.

The next chapter analyzes the experiences of gay fathers who had children in heterosexual partnerships. These fathers occupy outsider statuses of gay parenting groups, and their needs and experiences are very different from gay fathers who had children through adoption and surrogacy. I demonstrate that pathway to parenthood is not only an important characteristic of the Normal Gay Father, it is also a key axis of inequality among gay fathers that intersects with systems of race, class, and marital status.

Chapter 4: Divided Pathways to Parenthood: Gay Fathers with Children from Heterosexual Unions

Pathway to parenthood is a key component of the Normal Gay Father identity category. The Normal Gay Father had children through adoption or surrogacy as an out, gay man. Gay fathers who had children in heterosexual unions are rendered invisible by the Normal Gay Father image. This chapter will illuminate the experiences of gay fathers who had children in heterosexual unions, with an emphasis on differences in their social context and support systems.

Census data showing high concentrations of LGB parents in Salt Lake City, Utah inspired me to visit a pride festival in Utah in 2014 (Gates, 2015; Rodriguez and Gaitlin, 2013). I had been spending years collecting data with gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy through a California gay fathers' group (FWF), and I had recently found a similar gay fathers' group in Texas (GDO). I had already noticed that gay fathers via heterosexual unions were excluded from these mainstream gay parenting spaces, so I expected to find very few resources for gay families in Utah, despite their demographic concentration. Instead, I found a gay fathers' group that was specifically designed to support gay parents via heterosexual unions.

In this chapter, I explain how Support for Gay Fathers of Utah (SGFU) and its members were unique from gay fathers in California and Texas. I argue that gay fatherhood communities are bifurcated by pathway to parenthood. By comparing the experiences of gay fathers by pathway to parenthood and investigating fissures within the gay parenting community, this chapter identifies a key characteristics of the Normal Gay Father and illuminates how social context intersects with sexuality to stratify gay families. I argue that pathway to parenthood is a key organizing factor for gay parenting communities and foundational to the Normal Gay Father identity category.

Religion, Emotions, Geography, and the Closet: Interviews in Utah

A comparison of interviews and observations in Utah against interviews and observations in California and Texas reveals that the lived reality of gay fatherhood is bifurcated into two major categories: fathers who had children in heterosexual unions and those who had children as openly gay men via adoption or surrogacy. Gay fathers' pathways to parenthood were intrinsically tied to their social context, and distinct challenges accompanied each path. Themes emerged from interviews with gay fathers in each context, broadly summarized in Table 1, that reflect differences in the religious backgrounds of gay fathers, emotions that accompany gay fatherhood, gay fathers' geography, and gay fathers' relationship to the closet.

Table 1. <i>Summary of Micro-Level Experiences of Gay Fatherhood by Pathway to Parenthood</i>		
Experiences	California/Texas: Fathers via Adoption, Surrogacy	Utah: Fathers via Heterosexual Unions
Religious Background	Rarely discussed	LDS Church
Emotions	Joy, optimism	Guilt, shame, depression
Geography	"Lucky to live in [Region]"	Obligated to stay in region
Relationship to Closet	Defiantly out	Compartmentalized

First, 9 out of 10 gay fathers interviewed in Utah grew up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as the LDS Church or Mormon Church. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) has been famously reluctant to affirm gay and lesbian relationships (Dehlin et al., 2015; Johns & Hanna, 2011). A large study of 1,612 same-sex attracted members of the LDS Church found many negative outcomes - including depression, internalized homophobia, poor quality of life, failed conversion therapy attempts, and divorce - associated with anti-LGB beliefs and practices common to the modern LDS Church (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Crowell et al., 2014; Dehlin et al., 2014; Dehlin et al., 2015).

The LDS Church uses the language of “same-sex attraction” to describe individuals who find themselves attracted to those of the same gender, avoiding the term “gay.” In doing so, they position same-sex desire as something one is struggling with and can overcome, rather than something that is part of one’s identity or who one is. Historically, the LDS Church has advocated for those experiencing same-sex attraction to seek reparative therapy, but in light of recent research (e.g. Dehlin et al., 2015), they now advocate celibacy.

Church theology was a major theme of interviews with Utah gay fathers. By contrast, religion was rarely mentioned during interviews with gay fathers in California and Texas. Many Utah gay fathers discussed how their journey toward marriage and family was primarily driven by church doctrine, and many had been ex-communicated or otherwise separated from the Church since coming out. Warner (34, White, Utah father via heterosexual union) explained how the Church influenced his relationship to his sexuality:

I had grown up in a very staunch LDS atmosphere, even to the point that while I knew I was attracted to men, [I believed] I had “same-sex attraction,” *not* that I was “gay”. There was a difference in my mind. One was a mental disease, the other was something that in some regards in my mind just didn’t exist. People who were gay were people who hadn’t been strong enough or hadn’t tried hard enough or hadn’t endured long enough.

In addition to differences in their religious backgrounds, the emotional journey of gay fatherhood was strikingly different by pathway to parenthood. Gay fathers via adoption or surrogacy spoke at length about the joy and love in their lives that accompanied parenthood. The journey to parenthood itself was long, intense, and in some cases, expensive, but gay fathers consistently described the rewards of parenthood as outweighing the battle they fought to obtain it. For example, Alex (52, White, California father via adoption) spoke of the rewards that accompanied seeing his children thrive after several years in foster care: “When these kids came, they were very broken...I think back on where they came from, what happened, how far we've come. There's that sense of accomplishment. That is a pay-off.” By contrast, the emotional

journey of gay fathers via heterosexual unions tended to be painful and traumatic, but ultimately rewarding.

One prominent pattern among gay fathers via heterosexual unions was feelings of guilt and shame. Gay fathers spoke at length about feeling responsible for “destroying” their family. Many had strained relationships with their ex-wives and children, especially if the children were teens or older. For gay fathers who had “tried everything,” suicidality or extreme emotional catalysts often preceded coming out. Angel (31, Latino, Utah father via heterosexual union) described his turning point after he spent a week in a psychiatric unit under suicide watch:

I realized it's either I choose to live and get out of this marriage and move on with my life or I choose to stay and die. Because I knew that at some point, I would kill myself. I just could not deal with it any more. So I chose to live.

Another example of this sentiment came from Warner. Counter to the narrative of coming out as a celebration of one's true self, Warner (34, White, Utah father via heterosexual union) explained “I didn't come out, I gave up.” He elaborated in our interview:

I'd tried everything else, anger towards God, toward society. I still had pretty strong, deep rooted beliefs in LDS theology, because it's all I'd known. So coming out was more giving up... I was in a place where that's - in a sense it was that or death, and I wasn't going to die. I was gonna enjoy the ride to hell if I was going to hell.

Although it is possible that other gay fathers had difficult coming out experiences in their pasts, suicide and reparative therapy were never mentioned during interviews with gay fathers via adoption or surrogacy. These transitions were not inextricably linked with their present identities as gay fathers the same way that they were for fathers via heterosexual relationships.

Geography was also a central theme of gay fathers' experiences. A pattern emerged in Fathers with Families (FWF) meetings in California in which, nearly every month, a member would remind the group that they were “lucky to live in SoCal.” The phrase “lucky to live in SoCal” was followed by statements like, “where we can easily find other gay parents in our

children's schools," or "where we don't need to worry about being mistreated by the county as gay adoptive parents." Although gay parenthood in California came with its own challenges, gay fathers used the phrase "lucky to live in SoCal" to express their consciousness of the additional institutional challenges faced by gay parents in other regions.

"Lucky to live in SoCal" also serves as a symbol for the optimistic point of view that consistently characterized the narratives of gay fathers via adoption or surrogacy. When asked whether they felt lucky to live where they did, Texas gay fathers who were affiliated with Gay Dads Online (GDO) typically said yes and referred to more conservative areas of the state in their answer. The only Utah gay father via surrogacy that I interviewed similarly answered in the affirmative, attributing his relatively welcoming neighborhood to its proximity to a metro area.

By contrast, Utah gay fathers via heterosexual unions were not as optimistic about their geographic status. During my first outing with the SGFU group, one father offered to be interviewed "in case you want to hear about more than how easy it is for gay dads in California." When asked whether Utah was a good place for gay families, most respondents said no. Whereas fathers who had been through adoption or surrogacy in California and Texas often talked about the importance of being surrounded by an affirming community, gay fathers in Utah who had children in heterosexual relationships spoke mournfully about the relationship between their geography, religiosity, and difficult transitions into an openly gay identity.

Although most interviewees did not feel that Utah was a good place for gay families to live, when asked why they currently lived in Utah, many explained that they preferred to remain close to their children. Their ex-spouses were unlikely to leave Utah, so gay fathers were obligated to remain in the state, despite finding it inhospitable to their new status as openly gay

men. As a result, their geography conditioned both the experiences that led to their marriages and their experiences as later-in-life openly gay parents.

Gay fathers' relationship to the closet was another theme of interviews and observations that varied by pathway to parenthood. For gay fathers in California and Texas who had children via adoption or surrogacy, being out was embraced as a key moral value. For example, most adoptive/surrogacy dads talked about situations in which strangers asked about their children's mothers. Rather than appease the strangers' heterosexist assumptions, gay fathers explained that they would correct the stranger. As Michael (53, African American, California father via surrogacy) explained:

Once we decided - when we had a child - that every closet door is off. Every curtain is lifted. We have to be authentic. Because otherwise, she [our daughter] is going to grow up around lies and that will make her feel less than anyone else.

By contrast, gay fathers in Utah via heterosexual unions were more reluctant to publicly declare the status of their sexuality, often preferring to compartmentalize their sexuality, their families, and their work. Oliver (35, Latino, Utah father via heterosexual union), for example, explained why he would not likely tell a stranger that he was a gay father:

Before I am gay, I'm a father. That comes before anything. My primary duty is to be a father, and then my identity is, I am gay, but I don't intermix the two of them all the time when people talk about parenting.

Other interviewees in Utah spoke of being in jeopardy of losing their jobs and generally expecting other people in their communities to judge them harshly if they knew their sexuality.

Support Mechanisms by Pathway to Parenthood

Group styles of gay fathers' organizations reflected distinct pathways to parenthood through the atmosphere they provided, members' motivations for joining, topics of discussion, and the norms/rules of each group. Each gay fathers' group – Fathers with Families (FWF) in

California, Gay Dads Online (GDO) in Texas, and Support for Gay Fathers of Utah (SGFU) – included in their mission statement the desire to “support” and build a “community” among gay fathers. While members of each group said in interviews that their group was succeeding in that mission, attending meetings and speaking to group leaders revealed that the communities that manifested through gay parenting groups were segregated by pathway to parenthood. FWF and GDO were organizations built and maintained by gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy, whereas SGFU was designed for gay fathers via heterosexual unions. Differences in the atmosphere, rules, discussion topics, and recruitment methods that characterized gay fathers’ groups, summarized in Table 2, reflect ways in which each group served a specific segment of the gay fatherhood community.

Table 2. <i>Summary of Group Styles of Gay Parenting Organizations</i>		
Group Characteristic	California/Texas: Fathers via Adoption, Surrogacy	Utah: Fathers via Heterosexual Unions
Atmosphere	Up-beat, positive	Down-beat, supportive
Why join	Kids meet other gay families	Help through difficult transition
Topics of discussion	Adoption, surrogacy process	Divorce, custody issues
Group rules	Strong norm of outness	Discretion, privacy strictly enforced

There was an atmosphere of positive energy at FWF meetings in California, consistent with a pattern of optimism that emerged through interviews with gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy. FWF had the milieu of a preschool classroom, full of joy, liveliness, and kid-friendly language. They offered each other support while radiating positivity and excitement. Even painful stories, such as losing an adoption placement to the child’s biological family, were relayed with a positive spin (e.g. “you end up with the child you’re meant to have”). FWF often provided childcare and children’s entertainment, creating a unique space for members that was both family-friendly and gay-friendly.

By contrast, the atmosphere and discussion topics at SGFU in Utah did not lend themselves to an environment for children. The milieu of SGFU resembled an atmosphere you may expect from a traditional support group: a quiet, down-beat safe space where members can open up and receive support. In interviews, many Utah gay fathers spoke of joining the group during the most painful moments of their lives. Warner (34, white, Utah father via heterosexual union), the founder of SGFU, explained that his own coming out experience inspired him to build a support network for himself and others. Counter to the narrative that coming out represents a celebration of one's true self, Warner explained: "I didn't come out, I gave up."

I'd tried everything else, anger towards God, toward society. I still had pretty strong, deep rooted beliefs in LDS theology, because it's all I'd known. So coming out was more giving up... I was in a place where that's - in a sense it was that or death, and I wasn't going to die. I was gonna enjoy the ride to hell if I was going to hell.

The emotional journey of gay fathers via heterosexual unions tended to be painful and traumatic, though ultimately rewarding, and SGFU was designed to support gay fathers on that path. For gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy, the journey to parenthood was long, intense, and in some cases, expensive, but gay fathers consistently described the rewards of parenthood as outweighing the battle they fought to obtain it.

The leaders of FWF found that most members joined because they "wanted their kids to meet other kids from similar families." Dads arrived smiling, often with strollers in tow, and introduced themselves by telling the story of how they came to be parents or where they currently are in the process. Many interviewees emphasized how important FWF was for normalizing their family for their children and helping them feel less out of place in a heteronormative society. When I asked Utah's group leaders why dads joined their group, they explained that the Support for Gay Fathers of Utah (SGFU) group was there to "help dads through a difficult transition." Members of SGFU were facing divorce, strained relationships

with children, conflicts of faith, and new identities as gay men. Rusty (54, white, Utah gay father via heterosexual union) explained in his interview his motivation for joining and staying involved with the group:

I'm not gonna be as bold to say that it saved my life, but in certain ways it has. You'll find with most guys, when they go through a divorce and then try and make it on their own in the gay world, after six months to a year, they say, "I can't do this anymore. I'm just gonna go back." A lot of guys will tell you that. The support from this group made it possible for me to stick it out and make it work.

The topics of discussion at FWF and SGFU directly addressed issues related to specific pathways to parenthood. At FWF, the discussion consistently involved details of the adoption or surrogacy process. Members would share crucial information about adoption agencies, lawyers, schools, and surrogacy clinics, counseling each other on how to manage each barrier that stands in the way of having children. For example, when a prospective father was suspicious that his sexuality had an effect on how long it was taking receive a match for adoption, other members encouraged him to advocate for himself by persistently calling the agency. By contrast, SGFU members described divorce, custody, and members' feelings about the process of coming out as typical topics of discussion. Interviewees explained that when a member felt guilty about breaking up his family, other members would encourage him not to give up custody of his children and stand up for what he was entitled to in the divorce.

Finally, the rules governing FWF and SGFU reflect their different relationships to the closet as parents. FWF had a strong norm of outness among its members. Group discussion sometimes touched on the relationship between sexual authenticity and family pride, or the tendency for children to innocently out you themselves. For example, the following field notes reflect a conversation that took place during a FWF meeting in 2011:

Gabe shared that his son introduced him to a friend the other day by saying "This is my dad and he's gay," then reenacted his stunned response. The group got very excited, as other parents all at once joked about how there was no hiding your sexuality once you

became a parent. Michael laughed and shouted above the group's commotion, "Oh yeah, the closet doors are just ripped right off the hinges! The door is wide open!" Evan told the prospective parents in the room to "get ready" for that reality, agreeing that there's no such thing as being in the closet when you're a parent. Kyle added that once he became a parent, "any vestiges of the closet that I had left are now totally gone. I mean, you're *really* putting yourself out there once you have kids." Everyone was laughing and enjoying this moment in the conversation.

Gay fathers' relationships to the closet were closely intertwined with the practices of gay parenting groups. During a particularly fervent marketing year, FWF recruited members through bus ads and radio ads. When entering the building where FWF meets, bold, colorful signs announced the direction of the room. SGFU, by contrast, had strict rules against outing its members and made every effort to protect members' privacy. SGFU recruited new members through the Men-Seeking-Men section on Craigslist, where parents who were covertly seeking sexual connections could find them. They met in a private room in a large public facility where, the group leader explained, you could easily make an excuse for why you were there if you happen to run into someone you know. During meetings, members were told that they did not have to use their real names. There were no signs on the doors announcing the group's meeting space, only a small label with the group's name on the facility's schedule list. Discussing other members' identities outside of the group was strictly forbidden.

The Texas gay fathers' group, Gay Dads Online (GDO), was different from FWF and SGFU in that its mission statement was deliberately inclusive of all pathways to parenthood ("...no matter your path to fatherhood: foster care, adoption, surrogacy, or biological children from a heterosexual relationship, it really doesn't matter. Dads are dads..."). Yet the events and interviews obtained through GDO were exclusively populated by gay fathers via adoption or surrogacy, closely resembling the group style of FWF. When asked whether they knew any gay fathers who had children via heterosexual unions, Texas interviewees rarely said yes, and despite strong snowballing efforts, none were able to connect me to a family for interview. The leaders

of the group informed me that they were surprised when the first request for their mentorship program came from a father via a heterosexual union. The Texas case therefore helps demonstrate that the segregation of gay fathers according to pathway to parenthood is not merely an accident of geography. The social forces shaping gay fathers' needs and experiences lend themselves to separate support systems and social networks.

When Gay Fathers' Worlds Collide

There were instances in which gay fathers were situated outside of the support systems that corresponded to their own pathway to parenthood. Five interviewees in California had children in heterosexual contexts, and one interviewee in Utah had children via surrogacy. The experiences of these fathers and their relationship to their local gay parenting groups give further insight into the segregated, bifurcated landscape of gay fatherhood.

Over the course of 5 years' participant observation with FWF, gay fathers via heterosexual unions would make rare appearances at meetings and events. At a meeting in 2013, for example, a gay father named Monty who had children in a previous heterosexual marriage sat defensively, with his arms and legs crossed. After Monty introduced himself, the group leader asked a few questions, including whether his adult children were aware of his sexuality. "There's no problem," he answered dismissively, prompting the group leader to move on and address other attendees. Monty did not return to a second meeting. This example illustrates how the rules governing FWF - in this case, the expectation of outness - were not always compatible with the kind of support and community gay fathers via heterosexual unions may have needed. Overall, only 4 gay families via heterosexual unions were recruited for interviews through FWF, each with a tenuous relationship to the group.

Malcolm (63, White, California father via heterosexual union) attended a public event with FWF, but never came to a regular monthly meeting. Jayne (51, Asian/White, California father via heterosexual union) attended several meetings, introducing himself as a father via “co-parenting,” but his membership was short-lived. “Co-parenting” is typically used at FWF to refer to platonic, mutually committed parenting agreements, often between gay men and lesbian women. I did not find out that Jayne’s co-parent was an ex-girlfriend until we had already begun our interview in his home. Jayne did not seem interested in sharing details of his background with other FWF members, as he noted in our interview: “I went to the 11:00 thing [FWF’s orientation hour] twice, and you have to tell your life story. So I stopped doing that.” Introducing himself as a co-parent allowed Jayne to blend in with other members. Jayne explained that he had joined the group hoping to find a partner but felt disconnected as one of few single fathers in the group.

Like Jayne, Simon (23, Hispanic, California father via heterosexual union) attended some meetings but left after a few months. Simon was unique in that his sexual expression was fluid, distinct from the Stonewall-era identity politics that characterized other FWF members’ perspectives. But as a father who had a child with a woman, he noted that the discussion leader singled him out during the orientation meeting: “The way he did it, it was just like, ‘Oh. You can even do it that way.’ I’m still a minority within a minority within a minority!”

Two years after data collection ended, there was a post on FWF’s social media indicating that a new group was forming in Southern California for gay fathers via heterosexual unions. When I contacted the author of the post and founder of the new group, Bruce (29, White, California father via heterosexual union), to learn more, he explained that FWF had not been able to meet his family’s needs:

We didn't get anything out of going to that meeting. So I kept asking [on FWF's social media if other dads shared custody of their children], and no one would respond. And it was just (pause) that was eye-opening to us. It was like, "Really? The only gay dad association that I'm aware of doesn't have anyone that shares custody with their kids?" So, it was really disheartening, and I think it just reinforced the isolation.

Following their disappointment with FWF, Bruce explained that he and his husband decided to form a separate gay parenting group after meeting an older couple at a wedding who were parenting a child from a previous marriage:

I felt a sense of community and connection meeting them. I think it was maybe the first time that I really saw ourselves in someone else. Granted, they are an older generation, but I felt like I could see us being just like them down the line and that was really inspiring for me for the first time ever. And so I wanted to create this group for us to connect and feel supported, and it fed off of that feeling of community that I had gotten by going to this wedding.

FWF offered little that gay fathers via heterosexual unions could share or relate to.

Likewise, the Support for Gay Fathers of Utah (SGFU) group did not interest Arthur (50, White, Utah father via surrogacy). Instead, he had been involved with a since-defunct gay parenting group in Utah for gay men and lesbians who had children through adoption or reproductive technology. When asked why he was no longer involved with gay parenting groups, his explanation resonated with patterns among FWF members: when his children were first born, he wanted an affirming support system and had since become too busy to be involved.

Leaders of each gay parenting group expressed curiosity about what life must be like for dads on the other side of the pathway to parenthood axis. Xavier, the leader of FWF, spoke with sympathy for dads so immediately harmed by institutional systems of homophobia. Darren (56, White, Utah father via heterosexual union), the leader of Utah's gay fathers' group, was concerned that SGFU needed to find ways to support gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy to help the group "remain relevant" amongst rapid social change. He spoke in our interview about

struggling to figure out how to accommodate them without losing resources for gay fathers via heterosexual unions:

A lot of the discussion of gay fathers [at SGFU] right now generally is about, “What a witchy woman my ex-wife is being, what do we do to navigate through all these child custody issues and all the divorce issues?” So that’s what historically it’s been. Now we have this whole population for whom this [gay families] is normal, and they want to normalize their lives...So being able to balance all of those issues and provide opportunities and activities and strategic direction and the support and the funding and all those things is a massive undertaking, because of this huge societal change.

Part of the challenge of creating an inclusive group for gay fathers is finding common ground. When asked who they had more in common with - single heterosexual fathers or gay fathers via adoption or surrogacy - most Utah gay fathers responded single heterosexual fathers, some of whom referred to themselves as former heterosexual fathers in their answers. Warner, as the founder of SGFU, gave his perspective on how each pathway to parenthood lends themselves to segregated support systems:

Could I see an umbrella organization for them [gay fathers of all backgrounds] to do general activities together? Yes. Can I see support systems being together? No. ...There are some dads [via adoption or surrogacy] who have been involved in our Facebook group, but a lot of them most of the time say, “I feel really bad for these guys, but I don’t have anything in common with them. I haven’t had to deal with these issues. Just come out. Live your life. Whatever.”

Prematurely Dismissing Gay Fathers via Heterosexual Unions

The gay fathers in Utah represent the uneven distribution of social change. Their stories of religiosity, marriage, suppression, divorce, pain, guilt, and healing are familiar patterns of a social context in which sexuality is strictly regulated by powerful social institutions. New to their pattern of experience is the broader societal narrative of the Normal Gay Father as an ideological construct. Gay fathers in Utah do not conform to the image of the Normal Gay Father because their children were born into heterosexual unions. Their family histories are “messy,” i.e. contaminated by divorce and the painful, strained relationships that accompany it. Their support

systems demand privacy and anonymity. A paradox has developed in which a majority of gay parents continue to have children in heterosexual unions (Gates, 2015), yet the diffusion of the Normal Gay Father image has constructed these families as relics of a bygone era, undeserving of advocacy, exploration, or assistance from mainstream gay parenting support systems.

The Normal Gay Father ideology ultimately harms gay parents by downplaying the struggles of gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy and rendering gay parents via heterosexual unions invisible. Both categories of gay parents have unique struggles which lead to segregated support systems. Furthermore, census data indicates that gay parents who had children in heterosexual unions are concentrated in communities of color and in the South of the United States (Gates, 2015). In this sense, Utah is an anomaly in which mostly white gay fathers, constrained by a particular religious doctrine, have devised an accessible means of support, visible to researchers. It is unclear how the findings from Utah apply to gay parents of color living in conservative areas, or whether similar support mechanisms exist for their families.

In the next chapter, I identify the myriad of social forces that propel the visibility of the Normal Gay Father construct. By identifying how the Normal Gay Father image is distributed and communicated, I aim to expose the social forces that render gay fathers via heterosexual unions, gay fathers of color, single gay fathers, and working class gay fathers particularly invisible.

Chapter 5: Mechanisms of Visibility: Creating the Normal Gay Father through Media, Scholarship, and *Incidental Activism*

I have established that the Normal Gay Father is ideologically coded with a specific set of characteristics. The Normal Gay Father is white, in a two-parent family, had children via adoption or surrogacy, middle-to-upper to class, and non-threatening to the status quo. In this chapter, I explore how the construct of the Normal Gay Father is communicated. Gay fathers' relationships to media, scholarship, and the closet combine to create meanings of "who gay fathers are." I also introduce the term *incidental activism* to describe gay fathers' interactions that contribute to the Normal Gay Father construct. I conclude by demonstrating that the Normal Gay Father image has succeeded in creating a cultural definition of gay fatherhood itself.

Media

When asked for examples of gay families in media, the vast majority of interviewees referred to *Modern Family*, a long-running sitcom featuring a gay couple via adoption. Gay fathers via heterosexual unions less often said that they found the couple relatable, compared to gay fathers who had adopted or built families through surrogacy. Yet gay fathers from both backgrounds shared a pattern of simultaneously celebrating the show for introducing gay families to mainstream living rooms and criticizing its exaggerated representations of queer parents. As Angel (31, Latino, Utah father via heterosexual union) explained:

It's great that they have a gay family on TV. It opens up the idea that gay can be a family. But on the other side, what I have seen is too flamboyant or too funny or a little bit on the extreme of 'this is who we are' kind of attitude, and I don't believe it's like that. So great, we have gay families on TV. Let's just make it a little more real and focus on the priorities.

Answers like Angel's indicate that gay fathers via heterosexual unions were also invested in representations of gay families through media, even when those families did not resemble

their own. *Brokeback Mountain*, a film about two cowboy lovers with wives and children, was occasionally invoked by Utah interviewees as a representation of their own lives. The contrast in the themes and tone of *Modern Family* (an upbeat, silly family sitcom) and *Brokeback Mountain* (a heart-breaking drama of forbidden love) is symbolic of the contrast between the lived reality of gay fathers by pathway to parenthood.

When it came to participating in media themselves, GDO and FWF's leaders presented themselves carefully and skillfully. News cameras, reporters, bloggers, and even satirists were in attendance at special FWF events during the course of the study. As a Southern California gay fathers group in close proximity to the entertainment industry, FWF received casting calls or invitations to be interviewed on-camera nearly once a month. Utah's SGFU did not receive similar attention from local or national media.

Scholarship

Gay fathers also offered insight on their representation through scholarship. Several gay fathers via adoption or surrogacy cited information from gay parenting studies throughout our interactions and expressed familiarity with the work of top family scholars. FWF received calls to participate in research interviews several times a year, and many interviewees had experience participating in research. Texas's GDO group was also anticipating research requests as they grew. Following the controversial publication of a study that claimed to find negative consequences for gay parents, GDO took measures to avoid providing data that might later be manipulated to harm gay families.

Shortly before interviews began in Utah, a new report raised concerns over the fact that a majority of gay parenting studies focused on parents via adoption and reproductive technology, despite the demographic prevalence of children born into heterosexual unions (Goldberg,

Gartrell, & Gates, 2014). Gay fathers via heterosexual unions were asked why they think there might be this gap in the literature. Gay fathers' most common explanations were that gay fathers via heterosexual unions are "too messy" for researchers, and they are void of implications for marriage equality policies.

For example, Gary (55, White, Utah father via heterosexual union) explained that adoption and surrogacy dads are given more attention because if researchers "want to support the argument that [gay] families are functional and not dysfunctional, that's where you go to do the study. You don't look at an opposite or a mixed-orientation marriage." Rusty (54, White, Utah father via heterosexual union) answered, "the general public's view [is] that's not something you should have done in the first place, so let's try to keep it out of the eye of the public and pretend like it's not there."

Incidental Activism

Gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy stood out by not having an adult woman present in public with their children. Gay fathers either drew attention, exposing their sexuality, or encountered questions or comments that were laden with heteronormative assumptions. Rather than adopt strategies to reduce their visibility, gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy consistently embraced their public presence as educational opportunities that would provide immediate benefits for their own family. In other words, gay fathers via adoption and surrogacy became agents of social change through their everyday interactions, thus inadvertently contributing to the visibility of the Normal Gay Father.

Gay fathers spoke openly about how their everyday lives could have an impact on casual observers who might have biases against gay families. In our interview, Robert explained how he can change others' minds while out in public with his child:

What they see is, “They’re just treating their child the way I would. They’re buying ice cream for their daughter.” They see how normal it is. I think that’s what the pioneering aspect is without opening your mouth. People get to observe. They watch you, without you even knowing that they’re watching you. And they’re making assessments.

Empirical evidence supports the notion that intergroup contact reduces prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and gay fathers spoke passionately about their ability to make an impact on strangers by living their lives and performing ordinary parenting duties. Even single fathers, who were rarely identified as gay in public spaces, vied for similar forms of recognition. Simon (white California father via adoption), for example, talked about wanting to wear a rainbow pin in public, adding “I’m a little bit annoyed that I don’t have a partner, so it’s not like blatantly obvious that I’m gay and this is the deal.”

While changing minds was seen as a benefit to their interactions, gay fathers framed the positive impact on their own children as the highest priority motivating their public visibility. Michael (Black California father via gestational surrogacy) elaborated in our interview about why being out became increasingly important after the birth of his daughter:

We would not go anywhere and pretend that we have a different relationship. We cannot live like that. Once we decided - when we had a child - that every closet door is off. Every curtain is lifted. We have to be authentic. Because otherwise, she’s going to grow up around lies and that will make her feel less than anyone else.

Gay fathers felt strongly that being open about their sexuality benefited their children by fostering integrity and resilience. They welcomed the positive effect their visibility might have on strangers, but like Michael, gay fathers consistently emphasized their children’s well-being as the primary motivation for consciously abandoning the closet.

The “mom’s day off” phenomenon offers one example of gay fathers managing interactions in ways that were primarily designed to benefit their children. Strangers who asked whether it was “mom’s day off” were relying on heteronormative assumptions. Gay fathers acknowledged the innocuous intent behind the comments, but they also recognized them as a

threat to their children's well-being. Concerned that their response could affect their child's sense of shame or pride regarding their family structure, gay fathers consistently reported that they would answer with a correction. Some reported that they politely responded "there's no mom." Others used humor to diffuse tension: "every day is mom's day off in our house." After hearing similar accounts from several interviewees, I directly asked Todd (white Texas father via public adoption) why he would correct a stranger:

Todd: If they ask the question, I think you can't possibly just let it go. You can't—I would never lie and say, "Oh, yeah, wives are home."

Author: Why not?

Todd: What message does it teach [our son]? Are we ashamed of our relationship? Are we ashamed of being his dads?

Some gay fathers reported that their children had progressed to correcting strangers themselves by age 3 or 4, proudly announcing "I don't have a mom, I have two dads" when asked where their mother is.

By using humor and remaining polite, gay fathers were careful to assert their presence in ways that did not provoke backlash or conflict. For example, Xavier explained in our interview his strategy when advocating for his family at his children's school:

Our gay dad education was: Don't stick out. Don't make a big deal about being gay. But be present in the community. Be there the first day of school. Volunteer at school. Get to know the other parents. Be proactive. Let the teacher know what to do about Mother's Day. Explain things in advance so they're not taken off-guard.

Xavier's statement embodies the delicate balance that gay fathers walk as they navigate societal constraints against exclusively paternal families. Respectability politics prevent him from "sticking out" or "making a big deal about being gay," but he engages in "proactive" work to ensure that the people in his children's lives are prepared to accommodate his family structure. Xavier describes this balance as "our gay dad education," referring both to the lessons learned through his own experience and the strategies collectively shared through gay parenting groups.

Despite taking pride in influencing strangers' attitudes toward gay families, gay fathers were reluctant to identify as activists. Some interviewees drew boundaries between themselves and ACT-UP to explain what they thought "activism" was: deliberate, confrontational, and aimed at broad institutional change. Gay fathers saw themselves as parents first, not political activists, but they readily recognized and embraced the positive political consequences of their family's visibility. For example, when asked if they considered themselves activists, Kyle and Jim (white California fathers via private adoption) hesitated before ultimately deciding that their everyday interactions had a political impact:

Kyle: I don't consider myself any more activist than anyone else who's just living their life. I still think in this country, not so much here in [California] at this time, but in this country, to be a gay family, you're automatically an activist.

Jim: That's why I said yes to being an activist, because you're always pushing for more rights, more inclusion. To me that's activism. It doesn't necessarily imply that you're out on the street every day with a placard in your hand marching some place.

The ensuing argument, tracing their personal history of casually changing heterosexual parents' minds about LGBTQ equality, prompted Kyle to conclude, "OK, we're activists. You win."

When asked to explain their relationship to activism, some fathers would say that they did not have time for political action between parenting obligations, and they were extremely cautious about doing anything that would put their children in a vulnerable position, such as picketing or participating in media. They did not want their children to be targeted by hateful groups or individuals, nor did they want to be perceived as prioritizing politics above parenting. When asked for examples of stereotypes against gay parents, many dads mentioned a perception that they only have kids because it's trendy or makes a political statement.

Defining 'Gay Father'

Finally, cultural meanings of gay fatherhood were embedded in the boundaries gay fathers drew to define who gay fathers are and their perspectives on the future of gay parenting. To understand who counts as a gay father in the public imagination, I asked all interviewees to describe what they believe most people think of when they hear the term “gay family.” Almost all, including those from Utah, described an idealized same-sex couple parenting a young child together. The possibility of that child being born into a heterosexual relationship did not factor into most interviewee’s perception of the public imagination regarding gay families. For example, when asked whether people are aware that some gay families come from heterosexual marriages, Oliver (35, Latino, Utah father via heterosexual union) answered:

I don’t think they figure that. When they think about “gay family,” they would never consider me as a gay family. They would consider me as a man, a heterosexual guy who got divorced and had children. Until they see me with another man. Then I become a gay family, in my opinion.

From Oliver’s point of view, the term “gay family” is reserved for situations in which coupled men are raising children in partnership. Such a partnership is linked to a public declaration of his sexuality; otherwise, his previous marriage and divorce render him as “heterosexual” in the public imagination.

The construction of an exclusive identity category became especially clear when I directly asked interviewees to define “gay father.” Xavier (44, White, California father via adoption), the president of FWF in California, explained:

I think that gay father is an identity - a cultural identity, and not a demographic description. I guess it’s political, social...From a research point of view, maybe the definition is a father who is also gay, those two traits. But I think in our culture, the concept of gay father has to come with a certain level of acceptance and comfort with that label...I really feel like gay dad means, ‘I am willing to be seen by the world as being at this intersection of two identities.’ I think that’s what it means to me. There are a lot of closeted guys out there in marriages. I don’t view them as gay dads, personally.

Xavier went on to say that men who came out after being married also would not count as gay fathers, in his opinion.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Visibility matters. The Normal Gay Father, as an ideological construct, emerged in defense of controlling images of The Reproductive Homosexual. The Reproductive Homosexual is a deviant predator hell-bent on destroying American ways of life. His image was dispersed through formal institutions such as education, law, and religion, leading many to believe that gay parents are dangerous, morally-bankrupt pedophiles. The Normal Gay Father is a countermeasure designed to protect LGBTQ families and their children. The Normal Gay Father is constructed in close proximity to normative family ideologies. He is white, upper-to-middle class, and part of an intact, two-parent family. He resembles Seidman's (2002) concept of the "normal gay" by justifying integration of LGBTQ people but ultimately failing to challenge heterosexual dominance. Through its position within the domain of families, the Normal Gay Father image has the power to tap into deeply held values and shape perceptions of LGBTQ people more broadly.

The Normal Gay Father has been dispersed through media, scholarship, and micro-level interactions, and progress in gay family rights has followed. Since data collection started on this project in 2011, marriage equality has become legal nation-wide at the federal level, and access to adoption has followed suit in most states (Baumle & Compton, 2015). Family rights have expanded exponentially, creating more equitable access to institutional support. The LGBTQ+ movement as a whole has embraced the Normal Gay Father as a symbol of how similar LGBTQ lives are to heterosexuals' lives (Walters, 2001). Furthermore, the Normal Gay Father expands meanings of gender, sexuality, and parenthood that would otherwise conflict for gay fathers. It emerged, at least in part, out of gay fathers' need to connect over shared experiences and create a shared collective identity.

Although much progress has been made, there have also been negative consequences stemming from the Normal Gay Father ideology. It limits the representation of gay fatherhood to those who most closely approximate normative family ideologies. It constructs gay fathers as monogamous, white, middle-to-upper class, cisgender men who have children in the context of a same-sex union through adoption or surrogacy. The Normal Gay Father has permeated the public imagination so deeply that gay fathers themselves often refer to the characteristics of the Normal Gay Father when they describe who gay fathers are. Yet demographic data paints a different picture of gay parenthood.

Most children raised by gay parents were born into heterosexual unions (Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014). Same-sex couples with children are more likely to be unemployed and more likely to be living in poverty than their married, different-sex counterparts (Badgett, Durso, & Schneebaum, 2013; Gates, 2015). They are more likely to be racial minorities than same-sex couples without children (Gates, 2015). They disproportionately live in more conservative areas of the country where their families continue to face hostile legislation (Gates, 2015).

This research exposes how misleading narratives and representations of gay fatherhood affect gay fathers on the ground. Those that do not resemble the Normal Gay Father – i.e. gay fathers of color, single gay fathers, working class gay fathers, and gay fathers via heterosexual unions – each face unique challenges that have been given limited attention within the gay parenting movement. For gay fathers of color caught between their racial/ethnic communities and the gay community, gay parenting groups do not offer a space where all their identities can be enacted and embraced at once. For single gay fathers, their limited representation within gay parenting groups compounds the burdens of caring for children in a capitalist society that cares more about productive output than nurturing future generations. Working class gay fathers are

alienated by the wealth that adoption and surrogacy require of gay fathers. And gay fathers via heterosexual unions, who face extreme isolation and distress, are segregated from gay parenting resources designed to support adoption and surrogacy.

Inequalities of race, class, and family systems did not originate within the gay father community. These patterns are endemic in society and emerge within many social movements as they struggle to fight for all constituents equally. The Normal Gay Father ideology has succeeded in presenting a sympathetic figure to a homophobic public audience, but it also serves as a symbol of LGBTQ+ social movements' priorities. The Normal Gay Father does nothing to address the inequalities within and outside the LGBTQ+ community. Instead, it obscures the mechanisms that make inequalities especially prominent within the gay parenting community (i.e. pathway to parenthood). It downplays the challenges that come with creating a gay family in favor of promoting their statistical successes. It creates "others" within the gay parenting community, with painful, tangible consequences. It constructs gay families via heterosexual unions as relics of a bygone era, encouraging us to ignore the social forces that cause most children with LGBTQ+ parents to be born into heterosexual unions.

Gay fathers via heterosexual unions are embedded within a set of institutional systems (i.e. law, religion, family, and gender) that are designed to sustain each other. These systems exist within the same society that has now legalized marriage equality and allows gay couples to adopt nationwide. Some institutions have proven to be resilient – though not immune – to increasing tolerance toward LGBTQ people, creating uneven patchworks of social change. Gay fathers via heterosexual unions offer examples of homophobia's enduring impact on family life, yet Normal Gay Father ideologies have exacerbated stigma against this large and disadvantaged group within the gay parenting spectrum. Gay fathers via heterosexual unions were aware that

they were inconvenient to narratives about who gay families are or what they should be. In many ways, these findings mirror the way society has treated other family types that break from normative definitions of family. Familiar patterns of family inequality are preserved within the gay parenting landscape when we offer some gay parents disproportionate visibility and institutional support, while other, less normative gay parents are isolated from mainstream support systems and cultural recognition. The marriage equality movement is symbolic of the LGBTQ+ movement's failure to set an inclusive agenda that does more than serve white, middle-to-upper class, respectable members of the community (Polikoff, 2008).

Responsibilities of LGBTQ Family Scholarship

The information presented in this study offers a challenge for future research: what would a truly inclusive LGB family scholarship agenda look like? This study showed that decisions social scientists make about whom to include in our studies and how we define "gay parents" has an impact on gay fathers on the ground. We are co-conspirators in the reproduction of inequalities among gay parents. We have contributed to the invisibility of gay parents who are also the demographic majority. Gay parents via heterosexual unions are struggling against unique obstacles, and more attention toward possible support mechanisms and variations in their experiences could make a positive impact on their lives. As researchers, we must carefully consider our recruiting methods and avoid perpetuating disparities between gay fathers by pathway to parenthood in accordance with the demands of the Normal Gay Father ideology.

This research also raises questions about future identity cohorts of gay parenting. The gay fathers in this study tended to describe sexuality as an essential component of the self, typical of Stonewall-era identity discourses (Rosenfeld, 1999). But discourses of queerness that reject

identity categories are on the rise among American youth (Guittar, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2001). The implications of family patterns for this new, queer generation has yet to be explored. For example, Simon (23, Latino, California father), the youngest interviewee in this study, was also a gay father via heterosexual union. Simon's description of his own background was one of liberated, queer, sexually fluid relationships and self-concepts, distinct from the narrative of other gay fathers who had children while closeted and those who had children via adoption or surrogacy. Simon could potentially represent a younger, more fluid generation of sexual identity that may continue the legacy of gay parents having children in heterosexual unions, albeit in distinctly different cultural contexts. A new wave of research on gay parents via heterosexual unions can thus offer new dimensions of social theory and expand representations of the diverse family forms within gay parenthood. Otherwise we perpetuate a state of research in which gay families who may be the most in need are also those that we know the least about.

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Appendix A: Interview Sample Demographic Information

Characteristic	All individuals (<i>N</i> = 58)		All Families (<i>N</i> = 43)		ASC Families (<i>n</i> = 29)		HU Families (<i>n</i> = 14)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Location								
California	32	55	22	51	18	62	4	29
Texas	15	26	10	23	10	34	0	0
Utah	11	19	11	26	1	3	10	71
Sexual orientation								
Gay	54	93	39	91	27	93	12	86
Bisexual	1	2	1	2	0	0	1	7
Combination of gay and bisexual	3	5	3	7	2	7	1	7
Race or ethnicity								
Asian	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Black or African American	6	10	3	7	3	10	0	0
Hispanic or Latino	5	8	4	9	1	3	3	21
Multiracial	1	2	5	12	4	14	1	7
White	44	76	31	72	21	72	10	71
Marital status								
Married to same-sex partner	29	50	18	42	17	59	0	0
Partnered with same-sex partner	9	16	5	12	5	17	0	0
Single parent by choice	5	9	5	12	5	17	0	0
Single, coparenting	1	2	1	2	1	3	0	0
Divorced from same-sex partner, single	1	2	1	2	1	3	0	0
Divorced from different-sex partner, single	7	12	7	16	0	0	7	50
Divorced from different-sex partner, with same-sex partner	2	3	2	5	0	0	3	21
Single, never married to different-sex partner	2	3	2	5	0	0	2	14
Married to different-sex partner	2	3	2	5	0	0	2	14
Pathway to parenthood								
Adoption	—	—	22	51	22	76	0	0
Surrogacy	—	—	6	14	6	21	0	0
Coparenting	—	—	1	2	1	3	0	0
Heterosexual union	—	—	14	33	0	0	14	100

Note. ASC Families refers to families formed through adoption, surrogacy, or co-parenting. HU Families refers to families formed in the context of a heterosexual union.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

University of Southern California
Department of Sociology
3620 S. Vermont Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90089-2539

INFORMED CONSENT FOR NON-MEDICAL RESEARCH*LGBT Family Networks*

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Megan Carroll, graduate student, working under the advisement of Timothy Biblarz, PhD, at the University of Southern California, because you are over the age of 18 and a prospective or current parent. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to understand the everyday experiences of LGBT parents. The networks between parents established by gay parenting groups in Southern California afford a unique opportunity for parents to share information with each other and talk about their experiences in a group setting. This study is interested in how these exchanges facilitate gay parents' identities, as well as their responses to societal attitudes about family diversity in the US.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions about your experiences as a current or prospective parent. More specifically, these questions will center around the preparations you made before having a child, your relationship to other parents, your participation in a parenting group, and your family's interactions in public spaces. The interview is expected to take between 1 and 2 hours and will take place at a comfortable location of your choice.

To ensure the accuracy of the information collected, an audio recording of the interview will be made and later transcribed by the principal investigator. If you do not wish to have your interview recorded, you may still continue with your participation in this study.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

As a participant in this study, you may be asked to answer questions about your personal experiences, which carries a minimal risk of psychological discomfort. To reduce this risk, you will be given the chance to review a copy of the interview questions beforehand, and you are reminded of your right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While you may not directly benefit from participating in this study, the information you provide should offer more general benefits to society by expanding sociological knowledge of family diversity and experiences specific to LGBT parents.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Only the members of the research team and the University of Southern California's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may access the data. The HSPP reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

Any notes, recordings, transcripts, or similar records of your participation will only be accessible to the principal investigator of this study and her faculty advisor. All records will be stored in a locked cabinet in USC's Department of Sociology graduate office. Electronic records will be stored on a flash drive, which will also be stored in the locked cabinet, and the files will be password protected. The data obtained from this study, including audio recordings, will be kept indefinitely (for a *minimum* of three years after the completion of the study).

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information will be used. Information such as names, locations, or details otherwise irrelevant to the aims of this study will be changed. Your decision to participate will not be disclosed to anyone, including other parenting group members.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact...

Principal Investigator:

Megan Carroll
Department of Sociology
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-2539
Phone: (214) 755-6122
Email: megan.carroll@usc.edu

OR

Faculty Sponsor:

Timothy Biblarz, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-2539
Phone: (213) 740-3547
Email: biblarz@usc.edu

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant you may contact the IRB directly at the information provided below. If you have questions about the research and are unable to contact the research team, or if you want to talk to someone independent of the research team, please contact the University Park IRB (UPIRB), Office of the Vice Provost for Research Advancement, Stonier Hall, Room 224a, Los Angeles, CA 90089-1146, (213) 821-5272 or upirb@usc.edu.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

- ☐ *I agree to be audio-recorded*
- ☐ *I do not want to be audio-recorded*

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this document and freely consents to participate.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix C: Interview Schedule (Gay Fathers via Adoption/Art)

- ☐ Demographics: age, race, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, education, child(ren)'s age/gender/race, family formation method, marital status
- ☐ Tell me about how you came to be parent(s).
- ☐ What do you like about [gay parenting group]? How did you get involved? Has it been helpful? Is [your group] succeeding in creating a sense of community among gay parents?
- ☐ Is [your city] a good place to be for gay parents? Is there anywhere you wouldn't want to live?
- ☐ Do you think it's important to be "out" as a parent?
- ☐ What is a "gay father"?
- ☐ I've heard some dads say that getting married and having kids before coming out is a "dying model" of gay fatherhood. Do you think that's true, or do you see it continuing to happen in the future?
- ☐ What is it like to go grocery shopping with your child(ren)?
- ☐ Have you had any encounters in public that you think of as a particularly positive statement on gay parenting? Any difficult encounters in public?
- ☐ How do you feel about how you've seen gay families portrayed in the media?
- ☐ Have you ever participated (or considered participating) in some kind of national media?
- ☐ Do you consider yourself an activist?
- ☐ Do you feel that straight parents think of gay parents as "just like them"?
- ☐ What do most people picture when they hear the term "gay family"?
- ☐ Who do you have more in common with: straight fathers, gay men without children, or lesbian mothers?
- ☐ What do you have in common with single [or partnered] gay fathers? Do you find yourself more drawn to others who share your partnership status?
- ☐ What do you have in common with gay fathers who had children from a previous heterosexual relationship [or via adoption, surrogacy]?
- ☐ Do you feel as though your family's racial composition has had an effect on your experiences as a parent?

- ☐ Some people think that gay parents are all wealthy by default – do you think that's true?
Have you had any concerns about financial stability as a parent, or know anyone who has?
- ☐ What do you think the future of gay parenting will be like (e.g. in 20 years)?
- ☐ Is there anything I didn't ask about that is important for people to know?

Appendix D: Interview Schedule (Gay Fathers Via Hetero Unions)

- ☐ Tell me briefly about [your gay parenting group]. What kind of group is it, what do they do?
- ☐ How do most people find out about the group?
- ☐ Tell me about why you joined the group.
- ☐ Walk me through a typical meeting. For example, how many people usually attend? Where do people sit? How do they start? What do they talk about?
- ☐ Has the group helped you?
- ☐ Is there anything you would like to change about the group?
- ☐ Are there any challenges to running/maintaining the group that you're aware of?
- ☐ How would you describe the group's membership?
- ☐ Is there anyone you can imagine joining the group who would not fit in? Are there cliques in the group?
- ☐ Why did you decide to live your life openly?
- ☐ Have you found your place in the gay community since coming out?
- ☐ How has parenthood affected your transition into living openly?
- ☐ Have your values changed since coming out? How so?
- ☐ What have you learned since coming out?
- ☐ Has your (ex-) spouse been understanding? Children?
- ☐ What is a "mixed-orientation marriage"? Do you discuss MOMs with your friends or at [SGFU]? What is your opinion about MOMs?
- ☐ Is Utah a good place to be, for gay parents?
 - Are Utah laws friendly to same-sex marriage, adoption, or surrogacy?
 - Is there anywhere you wouldn't want to live, as a gay parent?
 - How might you expect gay parents' experiences to be different in [other cities]?
 - I often hear gay dads say that they feel lucky to live in [California]. Do you feel the same way about [your city]?
 - Is it easy to meet other gay parents in [your city]?

- ☐ What is a “gay father”? Were you a gay father before you came out, or did you become a gay father through that process?
- ☐ Do you consider yourself a pioneer?
- ☐ Do you consider yourself an activist?
- ☐ How do you feel about the way gay families are portrayed in the media?
- ☐ Would you ever consider participating in national media, as a gay family?
- ☐ How do people react when they find out you’re gay and you have kids?
- ☐ When you’re out in public with your kids, has there ever been an occasion where a stranger realizes you’re a gay father? If yes: what happened?
- ☐ Do you think it’s important to be “out,” as a parent?
- ☐ Has your family’s racial composition had an effect on your experiences as a parent?
- ☐ What do you have in common with gay dads who built their families through surrogacy or adoption?
 - ☐ What might be different about your experience as a father? Are there challenges that might be unique to your family that they don’t experience?
- ☐ Who do you have more in common with: straight dads or gay dads who built their families through adoption or surrogacy?
- ☐ Could you imagine a gay fathers’ group that had ALL types of gay dads, those from adoption/surrogacy/previous marriage/etc.?
- ☐ I’ve heard some dads say that getting married and having kids before coming out is a “dying model” of gay fatherhood. Do you think that’s true, or do you see it continuing to happen in the future?
- ☐ If you had not been married (e.g. if you had lived openly sooner), do you think you would you still be a father?
- ☐ Do you believe that all children need both a mother and a father?
- ☐ What are some of the stereotypes about gay parents?
- ☐ Are you familiar with any research on gay families?

- ☐ What do you think most people picture when they hear the term “gay family”?
- ☐ Who do you have more in common with: straight fathers, gay men without children, or lesbian mothers?
- ☐ Do you think it’s important for straight people to see gay parents as just like them?
- ☐ Some people think that gay parents are all wealthy by default – do you think that’s true? Have you had any concerns about financial stability as a parent, or do you know anyone who has?
- ☐ What do you think the future of gay parenting will be like (e.g. in 20 years)?
- ☐ Is there anything I didn’t ask about that is important for people to know?