The Dissertation Committee for Sarah N. Wagner Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

NEGOTIATING A CONTESTED IDENTITY: LESBIAN AND GAY PARENTS' DEFINITIONS OF *FAMILY*

Committee:

Patience Epps, Supervisor

Ian Hancock

Susan Heinzelman

Richard Meier

Angela Nonaka

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by

Sarah N. Wagner, BA; MA

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Cheryl. From the very beginning, you have helped me see my potential and pushed me further than I thought I could go. You have stayed with me through it all, and have sacrificed for this dream of mine. Words on paper are not adequate to express the depth of my love and appreciation. It was not easy, I know, and I would like to spend the rest of my life thanking you.

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Sarah N. Wagner, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Patience Epps

This dissertation examines changes in the meaning of *family* and what this reveals about the complex, socially grounded mechanics of meaning-making more generally. Examining the discourse from interviews with 23 gay and lesbian parents, I show that they have very concrete and definable ideologies of family that reflect an American/Western concept of kinship in which family is made up of those who are related by blood, marriage or adoption; as well as an understanding that family can also be chosen and therefore outside of traditional biogenetic structures. For these men and women, family of choice and the dominant American kinship structure are not mutually exclusive.

Through an analysis of the participants' definitions of *family,* this dissertation finds that the parents gave both a narrow definition (that which includes only blood and legal relationships) and a broad definition (that which includes those not related by blood, marriage or adoption). Based on these definitions, both from the participants themselves and from those who have spoken out nationally against same-sex marriage and parenting, I apply Lakoff's Prototype Theory to offer a way to understand the disconnection between those who believe being gay and being a parent are incompatible, and those who see it as one of many types of family that do not conform to a dominant ideology. I identify a prototype of FAMILY made up of two radial categories to account for two

central, yet opposed, ideologies, separated solely by whether parents could be the same sex.

I also discuss the parents' positioning of their narratives toward local and nonlocal interactants and their use of generic and personal features in their discourse. The parents both draw upon external influences and become meaning-makers themselves through negotiations of their family identities in the context of dominant ideologies of family that often regard them as illegitimate. The outcomes of the negotiations that the parents undertake do not reflect a new, radical kind of family on the whole, but often a traditional sense of family that sometimes gets more broadly defined to include a supportive network of family and friends. The discursive micro-shifts in definition that these parents perform inform our understanding of the bridge between local negotiations and global shifts in ideology.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the growing body of literature available on lesbian and gay headed families, there is little that deals directly with the meaning of the word *family* as understood by lesbian and gay parents themselves and virtually none that has as a primary focus lesbian and gay parents living outside of major coastal metropolitan areas. In this dissertation, I have endeavored to fill these gaps by interviewing gay and lesbian parents in central Texas to ask what *family* means to them. In the interviews, parents were able to explain in depth how they define the word, and also to share at length their family lives—the creation of family, the successes, the difficulties and their connections to their families and others. Through their stories, we can easily see a picture of family lives that are complicated, varied, sometimes stressful and often joyful.

In previous work on language use between lesbian parents, I found that much of the research that has been available on language and gender and on lesbian couples has focused on challenges to patriarchal social structures, including marriage and kinship terminology (Wagner 2004). The predominant analyses—of the possibility of lesbian couples and lesbian parents being in a position to challenge gender inequality—did not take into account what the women themselves were attempting to do as parents. These theoretical analyses of potential were, to an extent, disconnected from the reality of these women's experiences. This gap in the prior literature is inescapable, as it has relied on extrapolation from research on straight parents, on couples in general or on lesbian couples in crisis (as much of the work was for therapists).

At the time of the interviews undertaken for this dissertation, the lack of research available was made particularly noticeable, as same-sex marriage was being actively

debated around the country; some of the main arguments of which were for and against same-sex parenting. The procreative intent of marriage, some said, precluded the need for lesbians and gay men to get married. Therefore, their desire for marriage was rendered at best unnecessary; at worst, it was dangerous to the well-being of children, both those who might be allowed to be parented by these married couples, and those who would be forced to learn that same-sex marriage was acceptable. Accordingly, those lesbians and gay men who had children began to speak up and speak out in this debate.

In working on this dissertation project, I have found it nearly impossible to consider theorizing about gay and lesbian parents and their families without first learning from them what *family* means. Do they consider themselves to be challengers of the hegemonic gender order? How do they they negotiate their roles as parents, and what are their interactive goals? What ideological resources do they draw from as they envisioned and began their families? This dissertation is the outcome of those inquiries, and is primarily a study of the discourses and the discourse tools that speakers use to define and negotiate their identities as *family*. It is a study of the ways in which ideologies inform speakers' talk, and the ways in which speakers' talk can be a part of ideological shift.

In order to properly and fully explore the influence of ideologies about central institutions such as the family, I look at narrative text and context and use the forms of data and analysis that serve to best elucidate this subject. By employing a variety of research methodologies, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, I was able to address the complexity of these families' lives. First, by being located in Texas, this work adds to the existing research the voices and perspectives of people not studied elsewhere. Second, the sampling methods were designed to bring greater economic and ethnic diversity to this study than is often found in studies of gay and lesbian parenting. Additionally, through the use of grounded theory in my analyses, I allowed the parents to

speak for themselves as much as possible. Finally, this dissertation is unique in that it addresses the semantic aspect of parents' talk about *family*, employing Lakoff's Prototype Theory in conjunction with sociolinguistic analyses of identity negotiation.

The study of family and language is not the domain of one field only, as language use affects all aspects of our lives. From its inception, this study has been interdisciplinary in nature. By working with theories from fields such as anthropology, sociology and psychology in addition to linguistics, I can provide a fuller picture of lesbian and gay parenting as undertaken by these families. In particular, kinship has long had a home in anthropology. For this dissertation I turned to work by anthropologists such as Diana Pash, Kath Weston and Ellen Lewin as key descriptions of the lives of lesbians and gay men as parents and as family members. Anthropological explorations of kinship recently have been refocused on the United States and Europe, as anthropologists are urged to self-reflect and reconsider their understandings of kinship as a part of their own enculturation (Franklin and McKinnon 2001: 8). Debate continues over whether and how to separate kinship as a matter of biological fact from kinship as a product of culture, especially in light of newer reproductive technologies and newly accepted forms of family formation (Schneider 1981, 1984; Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Stone 2010).

Language use is fully integral to the process of identity negotiation. Kinship identities are performances of self, not a singular self that is stable and unchanging. To echo Thompson (2001), "this work is thus about 'doing' kinship, as opposed to simply 'being' a particular and fixed kind of kin" (176). The focus of my research is to explore fully the ways in which people use language to define and negotiate their family identities. In particular, I look at the ways in which culturally significant labels are attended to and applied to oneself, and how those labels may change. Through my

analyses, we will see how this label of *family* has been contested by others and remapped by the participants.

Identity is a definition of self, created not only by one's self, says de Fina (2006), but by others outside of the self. People do not live in a vacuum, but rather create their identities in concert with, and acknowledgement of, others' views of that identity. This identity-making is therefore an interactive process. This process is made up of at least two types of interactions: those defining the identity and those negotiating it. Often times, these interactions are described in sociolinguistic research as "creating" and "maintaining" identities. The advantage of thinking about "defining" and "negotiating" identities is that this view takes into account the work being done in interaction with other people. Creating and maintaining an identity can be seen as what de Fina calls a "local" event—an identity created by the individual and maintained by that individual. By focusing on the local as well as the nonlocal, this study of identity work focuses on the two-way effect of linguistic moves, that is, the effect of the individual on societal understandings of that identity as well as the effect those societal understandings have on the individual.

Though social and legal recognition of lesbian- and gay-headed households is a fairly new phenomenon in the US, and even though the parents' status as married is inconsistently recognized by the federal and state governments, the stories of lesbian and gay parents are the stories of American parents. The parents who participated in this study are not "new" or "radical" or "special" parents. While their families are part of the discussion of the dominance of the bilateral cognatic kinship structure found in the US and Europe more generally, through these interviews, conducted in the central Texas area between 2009 and 2011, I found that the everyday lives of two-parent lesbian- and gay-headed families look quite the same as any other family.

In fact, I argue that the main distinction between these parents and any other parents in the US is that their status as a *family* is up for debate. And it is through this distinction that I focus on how the parents manage their identities as a family with each other, with their own families of origin, and with their communities. In this respect, this study is not about gay and lesbian parents only. As we look closely at how these parents negotiate this contested identity, we will see the types of linguistic resources available to any couple, or potentially any person whose status, in the view of their community, is not standard.

VIEWS OF SAME-SEX FAMILIES IN CONTEMPORARY US SOCIETY

My research comes at a time when mainstream culture has more fully embraced the fully lived existence of gay and lesbian people in our society. One way that we see this borne out is through the lens of the marketplace. If we take popular television as an example, no longer are fully developed, central lesbian or gay characters or personalities relegated to specialty networks like Logo TV or independent film festivals. By looking at the placment of characters on major networks, we can see a shift that has taken place. There are two fathers on the ABC television show *Modern Family*, a married Ellen DeGeneres (who lost her ABC sitcom *Ellen* in 1998 because she came out) hosts the most popular television talk show, and straight advocates such as the singers Lady Gaga and Carrie Underwood speak out publicly in support of same-sex marriage. Even on the popular game show *Wheel of Fortune*, with an average viewership in their 60s, host Pat Sajak asked a player about his being married, to which the player answered that he had recently married his husband.

However, this is not the only force within popular culture reflecting national ideologies about marriage and family. There is the popular reality show, *19 Kids and Counting*, which celebrates procreation, God, and the heterosexual nuclear family. There were the popular Republican 2012 presidential candidates Rick Santorum, who believes homosexuality is a choice and a sin, and that women should welcome all children—even those conceived through rape—as gifts from God (CNN.com 2012), and Michelle Bachman, whose husband runs therapy clinics that claim to cure people of their homosexuality (Blake, 2011). And then there are the reality shows like the Kardashians, which were frequently referenced in my college classes on defining marriage as the quintessential examples of the deterioration and cheapening of so-called traditional marriage.

If I might go down this path for a bit to look more closely at popular culture, we can see how national ideologies of family and of gay parenting play out. While of course television shows do not depict a real situation, they do reflect a reality in national ideology. Aired in primetime, on major networks that depend on advertising revenue, the success or failure of these shows give us some peek at the discourse available and accepted nationally. Two shows that aired in 2012 and featured gay fathers as central characters are *Modern Family* and *The New Normal*. A brief comparison of the discourses and their connection to ideology illustrates some of the perspectives I will be addressing in this paper.

Modern Family is a situation comedy centered around one extended family—a father and his new wife and stepson, and his adult children and their spouses and children. In the first episode, one of the storylines is of the son Mitchell and his partner Cam's adoption of a baby girl. Here is the sum total of the dialogue in which Mitchell explains to his family why they have adopted a baby:

> So anyway... about a year ago, Cam and I started feeling this longing for something... more. (from personal transcription)

Later, his whole family has gathered around, not knowing about the adoption, when the ever-dramatic Cam brings out their child to the song "The Circle of Life" from the musical *The Lion King* and holds her aloft. After a few moments of wondering whether Mitchell's father will accept the child as part of the family, he does, and a voice over concludes the scene with "We're from different worlds, yet we somehow fit together. Love is what binds us, through fair or stormy weather."

In 2012, *The New Normal* aired for just one season. The central characters were a gay couple, Bryan and David. The plot of the show revolved around the fathers going through the process of having a child via a surrogate mother. Here is my synopsis of this show's explanation for their entering into fatherhood.

> Walking through the mall, casually shopping for clothes, the meticulously dressed Bryan says "Oh my god, that is the cutest thing I have ever seen. I must have it." The camera pans to reveal he's looking at a child. When he gets home, he pulls out a child's fashionable jacket and says to David, "When I saw that miniature person, whose skin was flawless by the way, I really got it. I want us to have baby clothes. And a baby to wear them." A scene later, they're discussing whether a child would be ok being raised by two dads, since the one dad the partner had didn't raise him well. "You really think it's such a good idea to bring a kid into the world with such a nontraditional family?" Then they talk about children being raised by grandparents, a older woman who had her children via IVF, a Deaf couple with hearing children, and a little person with a "regular-sized" husband and child. After which he says, "Face it, honey, abnormal is the new normal." (personal transcription and description)

The scene in *Modern Family* plays with stereotypes of gay men while taking ownership of those stereotypes at the same time. The writers raise the issue of acceptance within the family of origin, and immediately tackle the ideology that gay men do not have children. Additionally, the show depicts the motivation for the adoption like that of any other committed couple. *The New Normal*, on the other hand, does none of

this. Though they acknowledge that having gay parents is much like having parents of other nonnormative sorts, they don't challenge the label of "abnormal" and instead lump others such as Deaf parents into the Abnormal category. In fact, the show reproduces and strengthens the idea that gay fathers are not normal by having their motivation be purely "gay" in the sense of stereotypically superficial. As we will see later in this dissertation, this characterization of lesbian and gay couples as being unfit for parenthood because of this type of superficiality is an often-used argument in the debate over same-sex marriage. The titles of the two shows alone give away the difference: *Modern Family* assumes each type of family (divorced/remarried; straight with mother who "wears the pants"; gay fathers) is a family. *The New Normal* brings up for debate the intrinsic worth of this family by judging it as normal.

The depictions in these two portrayals of same-sex families share similarities with the issues raised and discussed in this dissertation. The very assumptions that we make about what defines family are at the heart of the study. Ideologies based on these assumptions drive our legal and social understandings of marriage and its legitimizing—normalizing—effect on families. These ideologies are behind anti-same-sex marriage articles with titles such as "Why Marriage Matters: The Case for Normal Marriage" (Gallagher 2003) and "People of Faith Must Join the Fight to Preserve Normal Marriage" (West 2012). Acceptance, normality, the tension between stereotypes, traditions and lived experiences—all of these form the backdrop to this study.

The United States still has mixed feelings about gay and lesbian parents. National support for same-sex marriage has passed 50% as of March 2014[1], the majority of the

[1] Gay issues find increasing acceptance. (April 17, 2014). Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/page/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2014/03/05/National-Politics/Polling/release_301.xml

undergraduate students I've spoken to support it, and gay and lesbian public figures adopt children without outcry. At the same time, politicians can't support gay rights nationally and be assured of public support, laws remain in place barring lesbians and gay men from adopting children as a couple, and the most common argument against same-sex marriage is that marriage, both legally and religiously, is meant to support mothers and fathers in raising their biological children.

These mixed feelings are changing, however. In May 2012, President Obama became the first sitting president to publicly express his support of the right of gay men and lesbians to get married. Though he qualified that support as his "personal" feeling on the subject, his policy changes in support of lesbian and gay Americans (such as ending the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in the military and not defending the Defense of Marriage Act) have proven otherwise to many. The President's main challenger in the 2012 election year, Mitt Romney, publicly supported a definition of marriage as between one man and one woman, but backed the right of gay men and lesbians to adopt and raise children. For this president and others in elected position, national popular support for same-sex marriage and lesbian- and gay-headed families may be the difference between election and defeat, or between their support for changes in laws regarding family and marriage. By 2014, however, court decisions overturning same-sex marriage bans have been passed down in many southern and western/Rocky Mountain states, including Texas, and the Supreme Court is likely to be asked to decide the matter once and for all in their next session.

As the number of gay and lesbian parents grows, their appropriation of the terminology of family will expand. This study is meant to enlighten our understanding of identity maintenance and ideological change not only in the case of *family* but for other contested identities as well. It will connect the local to the national, explore the tension

between ideological frameworks encompassing *family* and show the complexity of the processes of identity negotiation. This dissertation fills gaps in the research available in several ways. First, it gives us a very close examination of the language of identity negotiation, bringing our linguistic inquiry to lesbian and gay parents. Second, the parents were asked to discuss family on their own terms—not in comparison or as an alternative to straight-headed households. This research takes into account the ideologies, terminologies and family histories that lesbian and gay parents bring to their families with them. Third, by focusing on language, the parents are not put into a psychological context, where we find much of the other work on LGBT parenting. Finally, this research draws from participants of greater geographic, cultural, economic and ethnic diversity than many studies available. This dissertation gives a voice to those who are not often counted in research—those in Texas, those in nonacademic communities, and those who are not middle to upper-middle class. Without the voices of people in different communities, we do not have a complete picture of how meaning making is performed by those in different positions of identity negotiation.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation's chapters are organized as follows:

In Chapter 2, I outline and discuss the existing research that has informed my work. I look at three areas of the literature: work on family, work on language, gender and sexuality, and literature on ideologies and how they can inform meaning-making and identity work. Chapter 3 outlines the methodologies I used to gather and analyze the data that constitutes the basis of my work. In Chapter 4, I introduce the couples who participated in the study and explain the particular contexts in which they live their lives.

To this end, I discuss the debates over same-sex marriage and parenting, the laws in existence in Texas in particular, and the current demographics of lesbian- and gay-headed households in the United States.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 I look closely at my interviews with these couples. I have taken a two-pronged approach to my analysis: First, I examine at the defining of *family* both by the participants I interviewed and through the language of the debate over same-sex marriage, as used by the media and organizations focused on marriage and family issues. I will show that the parents' definitions of *family* and later, their negotiations of family, take into account the work of defining being done on the nonlocal—that is, regional and national—fronts. Second, I focus on the parents' stories, which illuminate the identity negotiation work they do with others in their communities as well as with me in our interviews. With Chapter 8, I conclude and discuss some of the possible future directions of this research.

CHAPTER 2: GROUNDWORK: RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE, GENDER AND FAMILY

At the 2013 "Austin Summit on LGBT Families", top-tier academics from a wide variety of disciplines joined to share their research on LGBT-headed families and discuss the state of research on this topic more generally. Researchers came from fields like economics, anthropology, sociology, law, women's studies, and public policy, each adding a particular perspective to this newly developing subject. The study presented here intentionally draws from this kind of multidisciplinary research for the same reason: much of what has been studied about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender parents and their families resides in many different disciplines. While I apply a primarily linguistic focus to the ways people define themselves in interaction with others, work on identity negotiation in psychology goes back decades, language use within families is well-studied in anthropology, and research on the workings of heteronormative ideologies has homes in sociology and gender studies. My analytical focus derives much from the theoretical frameworks of discourse analysis, including critical discourse analysis and in particular that of positioning, and prototype theory. In this review of the research, I focus on key areas that inform my dissertation: the makeup and formulation of family, including lesbian and gay parenthood and the historical context of family in the United States; language, gender and sexuality; and the ways in which ideologies and our ideological assumptions affect our understanding of *family*. In Chapter 4, I will look at the larger contemporary political and social contexts within which the participants in this study live.

IDEOLOGIES OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Our view of family has moved from a nuclear, male breadwinner model to one that includes single parenting, divorce, step- and extended families, and gay and lesbian parents (Coontz 2005: 262-275; Powell, et al. 2010). As families in our society continue to change in terms of size, members, and work status (Marcus-Newhall et al. 2008), most families will be negotiating several ideologies at once. Families with working mothers, for example, have long been struggling with the "woman as caretaker" ideology as well as the ideology of women as equal partners and family breadwinners (Coontz 2005: 260).

Fields such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology have attempted to define criteria for family. In their review of the trajectory of anthropological research on kinship, Franklin and McKinnon (2001) lay out the history of critiquing and challenging the biologism of previous kinship studies, which they note has been an ongoing debate since the 1950s, most notably taken up by Schneider (1984). Schneider and others argue against the "natural facts" of kinship, pointing out that kinship is not simply a matter of biology but of culture as well. Since the 1980s, Franklin and McKinnon explain, kinship study has begun to return to the United States and Europe, as Western anthropologists engage in a more reflective set of questions regarding their own structures of kinship rather than viewing the field as a study of "others", particularly pre-state, so-called "primitive" societies (8). This trajectory is furthered by Pash (2008) who looks at studies of fatherhood and, in particular, gay fatherhood. Research on gay fathers in the area of "new kinship studies" has for the most part focused on the families of choice model of kinship as well as on the process of disclosure of gay identity (Pash 2008: 23). Pash explores the contributions as well as the limitations of these foci, finding them to often inadequately describe the complexity of kinship construction and maintenance by gay fathers.

Many researcher-oriented studies arise from preexisting theories and relying on more quantitative than qualitative data. Psychologists Levinson and Huffman (1955) place ideological orientations to family along a scale that ranges from democratic—with decentralized authority and greater equality between husband and wife, parents and kids—to autocratic, with a sharper focus on tradition, discipline and clear gender roles. Sociologist Robert Staples (1985) looked at ideology and its influences on family structure and practice within the black community. "Black family ideology" is outlined via a review of current statistical studies on numbers of married black women, rates of pregnancy, and the like, and the description of a stable family is given by the researcher; we don't hear the voice of the families being studied.

> The basis of a stable family rests on the willingness, and ability, of men and women to marry, bear and rear children, and fulfill socially prescribed familial roles. In the case of women, those roles have been defined traditionally as the carrying out of domestic functions... Conversely, the roles of men in the family are more narrowly confined to economic provider and family leader... (1007)

Sociologist Jon Bernardes (1999) implored researchers to resist defining family altogether, since that previously understood social category had long since outgrown its anthropological and sociological definitions. Furthermore, he argues, adhering to the out-of-date meaning has inflicted serious harm on its members:

> If 'The Family' is natural and universal, then people who fail to convince themselves that their own situation is a case of 'The Family' are likely to label themselves as unnatural. Moreover, the image of universality encourages many people to try and make their own family life like the image of 'The Family' and imitate what may be uncomfortable and unworkable images of personal behavior and gender. It is astonishing the impact sociology has had on society in glorifying and continually extolling 'The Family,' in the oppression of huge numbers of individuals and the creation of suffering and misery on a truly grand scale. (25)

Bernardes' claims echo Fairclough's (1989, 2001) theory of the power of ideologies behind such "common sense" understandings (discussed below).

Anthropologist Kath Weston's (1991) *Families We Choose* is one of the key works that researchers and others look to when discussing the intersection of LGBT studies and family. Weston explored the many ways that gay men and lesbians have broadened their definitions of *family*, to offset both the rejection many faced from their own families of origin, and the lack of regular recognition of their ability to create new families (as through marriage), by incorporating friends and LGBT community members into a "family of choice." Weston argues that "gay kinship ideologies [are] historical *transformations* rather than derivatives of other sorts of kinship relations" [italics in the original] (106). Central to her discussion is the definition of "gay family" as "chosen family", and she uses the two terms interchangeably in her work. Weston describes "gay families" in this way:

> Gay or chosen families might incorporate friends, lovers, or children in any combination. Organized through ideologies of love, choice, and creation, gay families have been defined through a contrast with what many gay men and lesbians in the [San Francisco] Bay Area called 'straight,' 'biological,' or 'blood' family. (27)

Weston's work has been central to an understanding of the role that family plays in LGBT communities and helped to redefine the way that lesbian and gay people are studied, as well as the language used to talk about familial relationships. Her work challenged a relatively stable understanding of *family* as a matter of biological and legal kinship and shed light on the alternative that lesbians and gay men were creating. Weston (1991) provides a critical insight into the inner workings of gay and lesbian communities in the late 20th century. However, its discussion of *family* assumes a set of kinship ideologies for gay people, and that that set is somehow different altogether for straight people. Because she is not looking at parenting, Weston's argument does not

explore the dominant family context that gay and lesbian people grow up in and how it informs gay and lesbian parents. As Pash (2008) points out,

> While gay and lesbian kinship networks likely vary in the degree to which they incorporate lovers, former lovers, friends, family and others, the fact that lesbians and gay men have all come from families is a point often lost or overlooked in political legal and moral debates over gay and lesbian kin relationships and family life. (26)

Weston's (1991) point that we can not assume that gay and lesbian people create families that "passively reflect" heterodominant family forms is well taken; yet, even with non-parenting relationships, assuming that family as created by gay and lesbian people is a radical departure from other kinship structures mistakenly radicalizes them as wholly different in content and therefore outside of the current definition.

To be sure, Weston's (1991) *family* was a new concept at the time. Families of choice arose in a context in which gay and lesbian parenting was not a regular part of the American understanding. *Family* in the 1980's gay and lesbian community in San Francisco, where this study was situated, was an entity created (or re-appropriated) by those who were placed outside of the American kinship system because their sexuality conflicted with the ideology of parenthood. Weston acknowledges in her methodology that while she tried to achieve a high level of diversity in her study, she included relatively few gay and lesbian parents. She explains that she has "situated chosen families in the specific context of an ideological opposition between families defined as straight and gay—families identified with biology and choice, respectively" (108). Though this ideological opposition served a specific and undeniably critical purpose in the early 1990s (a markedly different sociohistorical context in the US for gay and lesbian rights), the data I've gathered from the participants in my current study challenge this binary understanding of *family*, in no small part by looking at the meaning of *family*

from the point of view of lesbians and gay men with caretaker-dependent (parent-child) roles and responsibilities rather than mutual caretaker (adult-adult) roles and responsibilities.

"Families of choice" as a concept is mentioned in many of the interviews in this dissertation and has likely not lost its meaning even though the social, political and legal landscape has changed for lesbians and gay men, a finding supported by new work from Ortyl and Hull (2012, unpublished ms.). Ortyl and Hull researched how lesbians and gay men in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota define *family*, one of their stated goals being to assess the current relevance of Weston's concept of "families of choice". They did not seek out parents in particular as informants, but anyone who identified as lesbian or gay. Their findings show that the concept of "families of choice" is still relevant, though just ten percent of their participants listed only family of choice in the makeup of *family*. Most respondents, they found, favor functional definitions of *family* (family defined by what you do) over structural (family defined as a relational system), and support an expanded definition that includes both biological families and families of choice. They conclude that

> Conservative claims that greater acceptance of ...LGBT parenting will undermine 'the family' lack credibility, given the degree to which LGBT people continue to define members of their families of origin and extended families as part of their current families. ...Thus, increased acceptance of LGBT people may be creating space for definitions of family that are, paradoxically, simultaneously cutting-edge and conventional. (16)

That LGHFs are not regularly included in studies of family and parenting in general does not mean that they have not been studied. Indeed, studies have been done on gay men and lesbians as parents, but have not focused on them as members of their

own nuclear families.[2] In fact, the study of lesbian motherhood and gay fatherhood is growing, as is research on their families' interactions and internal workings.

From a quantitative perspective, Gates' (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014) work with the US Census has been an invaluable addition to the literature. He and others at the Williams Institute have been publishing analyses of demographic data on gay men and lesbians in the United States since 2000 and additionally on lesbian and gay-headed families since 2010. With this work, we now have longitudinal information for the past 20 years that has been very enlightening as to the who's-who of LGHFs. One of the most game-changing statistics that has come out of this research is that, per capita, more gay men and lesbians in the South are raising children than anywhere else in the US (Gates 2011). This statistic directly challenges the image of Southern lesbian and gay people as hidden and not leading as full lives as those in more gay-friendly, metropolitan areas. Even so, there are still too few studies in any field that include parents living in non-urban, non-coastal gay communities.

On the qualitative end of the research spectrum is Ellen Lewin's groundbreaking anthropological work, detailed in her books *Lesbian Motherhood* (1993) and *Gay Fatherhood* (2009). *Lesbian Motherhood* was one of the first explorations of the topic from a non-medicalized perspective. She discusses a range of issues, from gender normativity to the everyday experiences of mothers. This work was critical for its ability to look at such a commonly understood identity—mother—and its supposed antithesis—lesbian—and to challenge the assumption of a conflict between the two.

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[2] And for good reason. Until recently, societal barriers to lesbian and gay parenting were so high that many people who grew up gay never considered parenting an option. Adoption, in vitro fertilization and surrogacy have only been widely available and acceptable choices in the last 15 to 20 years. In addition to barriers to the means of bringing children into a family, there were (and still are) barriers to societal acceptance of gay and lesbian parents.

In her introduction to *Gay Fatherhood*, Lewin gives an in-depth, detailed analysis of the scholarship on gay- and lesbian-headed families, stating that much of it continues to regard LGHFs as either a) succumbing to heterosexual gender norms and therefore not worthy of study, or b) by definition a radicalizing force intended to upset patriarchal norms. Many scholars, she argues (and as I will argue below), are unable to see gay and lesbian identity as anything but "an intrinsically oppositional ethos" (10). The possibility that gay/lesbian identities might persist even as lesbians and gay men move out into the 'real world' has received scant attention [from scholars]," she says, "leaving us with little understanding of how (or whether) those identities might be reconfigured under such conditions (10). Lewin's goal is to give a voice to those gay fathers and let them tell the reader whether or not they see themselves as radical or subversive.

Many other studies available are descriptions of nascent family events, such as choices to have a family, how to have children, or how to name the nonbiological mother (e.g., Benkov, 1994; Mason Bergen et al., 2006; Gabb, 2005). As argued by Lewin, these studies have focused on the "extraordinary" nature of lesbian and gay parenthood, highlighting specific actions and decisions that differ from heterosexual family norms. In reaction to the emergence of these "different" families, much of the early research in psychology and social work revealed a general concern for the social and psychological well-being of children raised by lesbian mothers (e.g., Harry 1983; Dew and Myers 2000; Dundas and Kaufman 2000). Later research found no basis for assuming psychological risks exist, but was still focused on psychological issues (Lewin 1993; Tasker and Golombok 1995; Morningstar 1999; Peplau and Spalding 2003). As recently as 2013, sociologist Mark Regnerus attempted to raise the specter of the intrinsically flawed nature of gay men and lesbians as parents (Regnerus 2013). This study has since been widely recognized as fundamentally flawed within research communities as well as in the court

system, where opponents of same-sex marriage attempted to present it as evidence (Watson 2013; Eckholm 2014; Frank 2014).

Research on LGHFs has acknowledged the presence of both heteronormative and distinctly nonheteronormative ideologies in family construction (e.g., Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005; Folgero, 2008; Perlesz et al., 2006; Sullivan, 2004). However, many studies, especially of lesbian parenting,[3] still focus on this type of parenthood as nonnormative—"undoing" (Sullivan 2004), "challenging" (Dunne 2000), and "disrupting" (Weeks, et al. 2001: 172) ideologies of gender, family, and parenthood; changes that are welcomed by the authors. This research highlights specific actions that differ from heterosexual family norms, most often without also highlighting the ways in which the norms are adopted by these families. Dunne (2000) directly challenges the connection between heteronormative gender divisions and lesbian families: "Rather than being incorporated into the mainstream as honorary heterosexuals,…their lives represent, I believe, a fundamental challenge to the foundation of the gender order" (33).

In *The Family of Woman: Lesbian Mothers, Their Children, and the Undoing of Gender*, Sullivan (2004) discusses one couple's decisions to adopt a more conservative division of labor, with one mother staying home with their child and the other fulfilling a primary breadwinner role. In this case, the stay-at-home mother also owns a business, which she tries to balance with full-time childcare and homemaking.

> Brenda talked about 'needing an hour' or 'needing space' in the same hungry way that Hochschild's working heterosexual mothers from the 1980s talked about sleep. The similarity between Brenda's account of her days and the daily lives of working heterosexual mothers points to the ways in which this division of labor not only compounds income gaps between partners but leisure gaps as well. (119)

[3]There is still very little research on gay fatherhood, though the topic is gaining interest. See Pash (2008), Lev (2006) and Dunne (2001).

The author's direct comparison to heterosexual family life places this lesbian-headed family with mainstream parents. This analysis serves both to fully describe the influence of gender roles on labor division as well as to normalize lesbian-headed families as just one type of family with its own issues regarding gender and parenting. Sullivan does not analyze the situation for Brenda as somehow radically different from that of any mother who works the classic "second shift" (Hochschild 1990).

However, when analyzing another couple who similarly have divided labor in a traditional way, Sullivan provides an overall critique of the situation that serves to clearly mark her view that LGHFs are essentially different from, even when they are comparable to, heterosexual-headed families. Her starting assumption is that lesbian mothers should want to reject any sort of patriarchal model of family. When it becomes clear that another couple, Shannon and Marian, are more conservative in their view of appropriate behavior, Sullivan characterizes this view as betrayal:

> In their criticism of the "irresponsibility" of Marie and her ex-boyfriend, Shannon and Marian betrayed an affinity for the image and values of heterosexual family life and sexual mores prominent in the 1950s... (121)

As she continues, Sullivan imposes her view of heterosexist ideology and what the proper reaction to it is without attending at all to why the parents might have made these decisions. To the researcher, any incorporation of more traditional views of gender roles is tantamount to betrayal:

> ... Invoking the 1950s intact nuclear family as personally preferable to the 1990s extended, nonmarital, multiracial postmodern family, Shannon and Marian's values and division of labor epitomized heteronormative assimilation and replication...(122)[4]

[4]Sullivan may be right in her characterization of this family's situation. However, this characterization is hers, and not one brought forth by the parents themselves. One mother mentioned security as a value that she wanted to teach her son, but she did not place this notion of security in relation to homophobia but

While many linguistic studies of family interactions exist, and some sociological and psychological work has been done on lesbian- and gay-headed households, few studies combine the two to explore the linguistic interactions in LGHFs. In fact, in the majority of available research in any field on LGHFs, the sense is that researchers are still getting acquainted with them, learning parent naming practices, exploring others' reactions to the families (e.g., Benkov 1994; Hequembourg and Farrell 1999; Perlesz 2006; Powell 2010) and focusing on the effects of the disclosure of lesbian and gay identities (Pash 2008). Like any type of marginalized family, there are parenting questions that are specific to lesbian and gay couples, such as choosing parents' names, and many that are not specific at all, such as how to have children or how to deal with intolerance. But lesbian and gay parents are not regularly included in studies of family interactions or ideologies of family.

Several excellent studies have looked at specific details of LGHF practices that are explained in some part by the parents' own ideologies. The first practice is naming—in particular, the language used to differentiate the two parents and in the choice of last names. Where mother and father do the work of differentiating parents based on sex, researchers have found that children easily find other ways of distinguishing their two mothers or fathers. Benkov (1994) found that some names were based on the different

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rather in opposition to an unwed mother's family structure. That potentially more conservative reading of the family's actions is driven by the researcher's ideologies rather than by the parents'. Our full understanding of parents' actions and identities must develop from their own understandings of their worlds. The context of "brutalization of gay people" cannot be imposed onto the couple's world if the influence of that context is not meaningful for them. That said, concepts such as homophobia and patriarchy certainly must not be ignored; Charmaz (2006) talks about the utility of this background conceptual knowledge, or "sensitizing concepts". "Blumer's (1969) notion of sensitizing concepts is useful…These concepts give you initial ideas to pursue and sensitize you to ask [yourself] particular kinds of questions about your topic" (16). I discuss the importance of grounded research methodologies to this study in the Methodology section below.

cultures of the parents (e.g., Papi or Ima), whereas other times children used their parents' first names or created new "pet names" for them (170-171).

Research on naming by Gabb (2005) and Mason Bergen, et al. (2006) considers how naming can exclude or legitimize the nonbiological parent. Here, Gabb (2005) elaborates on the place of the "other mother" within the family and how naming can be central to her identity as a parent.

> …many 'other mothers' did share an unease about adopting the title and status 'mother', even though many undertake mothering roles and responsibilities. Their shared sense of (m)other-ness represents a dynamic source of dislocation and belonging, where social status and corresponding sense of self remain uncertain." (599)

Similarly, Mason Bergen et al. (2006) discuss the implications of linguistic choices for offsetting the lack of public, legal recognition for nonbiological parents. Because most states do not automatically legalize the relationship of second parents in a lesbian or gay couple to their children, first and especially last names for many couples take on greater symbolic importance as a defining characteristic of *family* than they would for straight parents (209).

A second practice regularly studied is the division of labor in the household. For example, Sullivan (2004) argues that by not having the heteronormative model of household labor division, lesbian parents develop more equal work allocation practices. In an earlier study (Wagner 2010), I found that parents divided work based on preference or skill rather than traditionally gendered duties. Moore (2008) found that traditional gender expectations do continue to be relevant for some couples. Her study of power relations in black lesbian-headed households concludes that, when material power differences between partners is not a defining factor, lesbian couples will assert their influence over the other through their status as biological parents. "Lesbian families

associate control over some forms of household labor with greater relationship power. ... Biological mothers...often cast their partners in traditional stepparent roles with less childrearing power" (353). Moore's attention to the ways in which these parents draw upon both traditionally accepted and new ways of parenting and partnering challenges studies that primarily see LGHFs as radical departures from the ideological norm.

A third area of study considers how lesbian and gay parents and others in their family justify or in other ways negotiate their family form within a society that expects families to adhere to a heterosexual, nuclear norm. Clarke and Kitzinger (2005) discuss lesbian mothers' responses to questions on talk shows and in other debates about the involvement of men in their children's lives. They argue that "although lesbian parents do challenge anti-lesbian stereotypes, for the most part the strategies employed to defend lesbian-headed families function ideologically to mainstream lesbian families" (149). Perlesz et al. (2006) take a different approach by looking at how children and grandparents in lesbian families define *family*.

> The participants in our study 'do family' in rich and diverse ways; yet the traditional dominant discourse about family—that families involve two heterosexual parents with children—continued to influence the way many of the children and grandparents understood family and presented their family to the outside world. (196)

Pash's (2008) work moves the study of gay fatherhood and kinship negotiation into newer territory as well, challenging the previous focus on either the family of choice model of kinship or on gay fathers' struggles around identity disclosure. Pash's exploration of the limitations of these previous studies highlights some of the ways in which the fullness of gay fathers' lived experiences have been missed. The family of choice model, while still relevant to a degree, does not look at the state of kinship relations when gay couples bring children into their families. Chosen family for many of

these parents is no longer the primary kinship bond, but rather, as she shows, support and bonding with more traditional kin (particularly female family members) become increasing important. Pash explores the intricate ways in which these kin bonds are strengthened, and upheld along with bonds with community members and chosen family members. Pash found that gay fathers in her study not only valued the bonds with both chosen and biological kin, but "In announcing their plans to become fathers, they gain a greater sense of how they are perceived and what they must understake to be viewed as a viable family" (94). Pash's work makes clear that studies of gay and lesbian kinship can no longer be separated from other kinship studies as if there is an inherent disparity between families headed by people of different sexualities.

LANGUAGE, GENDER, SEXUALITY AND FAMILY

In addition to the increasing number of studies on LGHFs, my work also draws on the foundational work that has come before in gender, language and sexuality. Early work on language and gender (Lakoff 1972; Spender 1980; Tannen 1990; also, an excellent overview is provided in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003) defined a field of study that acknowledged the deep connections between the language people use and their identity as male or female. The decades-long discussion begun by Robin Lakoff in the 1970s addressed first the ways in which linguistic features used by men were regarded positively, while those used by women—even when they were the same features—were seen in a negative light. This line of inquiry was concerned with the dominance of men's speech over women's speech. In the 1990s, Deborah Tannen posited that men's and women's speech might be similar to two different dialects, both equally valid as any

language would be. This view, of difference rather than dominance, seemed focused on removing sociopolitical concerns from the study of women's linguistic features.

Both of these lines of inquiry were complicated by later research showing that what was seen as "women's" or "men's" speech was not so clearcut, with men and women sharing speech features (see, e.g., Cameron 1997). No longer could we just say that men and women speak differently, or that patterns of male power are borne out in language. While still critical to our understanding of language use, the complexities of defining crucial categories and terms such as "male", "female", and "power" has forced researchers to look beyond binary categories of biological sex.

Newer research began to look at how sexuality intersects with gender and language use, from works exploring specific linguistic features—often misleadingly referred to as gay [or lesbian] language—associated with gay and lesbian community members (e.g., Queen 1997; Livia and Hall, eds. 1997; Podesva 2011) to studies on transgender language use (e.g., Barrett 1997; Hall 2005) and discursive reproductions of heteronormativity (e.g., Clarke 2008). Work on heteronormativity and heterosexual presumption underlies much of the existing research on gay and lesbian parenting, as discussed above, as well as this dissertation's discussion of parents' and children's negotiation of "normality" (Chapter 7).

The idea of identity as constructed and therefore negotiable is a key foundational concept underlying the current study. By asking what *family* is and how these parents perform it, I build upon these conversations about the intersections of language, sexuality and identity through an analysis of context and discursive positioning. As Bucholtz and Hall (2008) argue:

> neither identity categories nor interactional analyses alone are enough to account for how social positioning is accomplished through language; the two levels of

> analysis are most effective when they work in unison, and in conjunction with a focus on the larger social, cultural, and political contexts in which identity work is carried out. (154)

One of the key bases to the study presented here is the theoretical work on performativity done by Butler (1990) and those who followed (e.g., Cameron 1997; Kitzinger 2005). Butler's (1990) work on the performance of gender has become a central theoretical starting point for new lines of inquiry on identity creation and maintenance. Performativity is the idea that identity is not a given, static measure of a person or a group, but a created, changeable work in progress. Similarly, family is an achievement of the work of identity negotiation and, as such, draws upon some type of cooperation in understanding (Swann et al. 2009).

Family is not a preset category, as we will see; it can index functional as well as emotional and structural groups. Each couple that defines *family* in this study is acknowledging, in a sense, that the family takes active description and definition, the meaning of which is not a common sense assumption. As previous studies have shown, people are likewise "doing" family rather than just "being" family. The complex of descriptions involving different members, venues and values attest to the many active meanings that *family* entails. These interviews may be the most raw form of negotiation, as the interviewer asks questions to elicit a clear definition of *family* and the interviewees respond with a counteroffer, if you will. They let me know when I was right, wrong, or if I'd misinterpreted their definition. I clarified, they clarified, until hopefully some understanding of their identity of *family* was successfully exchanged.

Finally, my discussion of the narratives of family that I will present here would be markedly different, were there not a conflict between the ideological understanding of *family* in the United States as a whole and the embodiment of family in these couples. Though acceptance is growing in the United States, LGHFs are far from being fully

recognized as legitimate. In this light, my work draws on an understanding of ideology and power to contextualize this specific instance of contested identities and the need for identity negotiation. Fairclough (2001) connects ideology and language to struggles over meaning and the power of the meaning makers:

> Among the various forms which social struggle may take, it is ideological struggle that is of particular concern in the present context because ideological struggle pre-eminently takes place in language. We can think of struggle as not only in language...but also over language. It is over language in the sense that language itself is a stake in social struggle as well as a site of social struggle. ...Having the power to determine things like which word meaning [is] legitimate or 'correct' or 'appropriate' is an important aspect of social and ideological power, and therefore a focus of ideological struggle. (73)

The nature of certain social phenomena (word meanings, interactions) as "common sense", argues Fairclough, means those phenomena have ideological power. A word's meaning, when regarded as commonsensical, masks the ideology that lies behind that meaning (Fairclough 2001: 27, 69). Discourse in this view is powerful in itself. To control the meaning making of a word gives power to the meaning maker.

From this viewpoint, the debate over same-sex marriage is a debate about meaning-making and meaning-makers. The debate itself involves ideologies that have conflated marriage and family. First, marriage automatically confers legal and widely recognized family kinship status to the couple and their biological or adopted offspring; second, the two institutions are typically seen within a US context as very closely related, often in a necessary cause-and-effect relationship. This close relationship is interwoven into our culture in many ways: in the childhood rhyme, "first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a baby in a baby carriage"; in religious strictures such as the Catholic sacraments; and in many of the arguments for and against same-sex marriage.

In fact, the most common argument against same-sex marriage currently is that the institution of marriage is meant to support men and women who come together to have children, as William Duncan of the Marriage Law Foundation pointed out in 2011 after the New York Legislature ratified the right to marry in that state:

> This is what makes same-sex marriage so unique in its impact on the institution. The decision to forego (through cohabitation) or end (through divorce) marriage undoubtedly has a broad social impact... But these kinds of decisions can be understood only as a departure from an ideal. ...The new ideal, that marriage is the state's way of endorsing adult relationship choices, will necessarily displace the old one, which had the potentially procreative relationship between men and women at its core. (2011, National Review Online)

This argument has been made on both religious and political grounds. Marriage is for many both a religious and a legal institution. The legal recognition of same-sex marriage in the years preceding and following my interviews for this dissertation triggered a very strong reaction from many conservative religious people and organizations. Recognizing, perhaps, that a religious argument cannot be made in a debate over legal status, the opposition to same-sex marriage has changed since it was first legalized in Massachusetts in 2003. What was once most often a religious argument (namely, God created marriage for procreation) has evolved into a Constitutional argument for religious freedom. Just as in the *Commonweal* argument that heterosexual marriage embodies the hope of children, defenders of "traditional marriage" argue that the state ought to support the model, if not the reality, of heterosexual marriage so as not to force religious groups and individuals into taking part in these marriages.[5] Thomas Messner of the Heritage Foundation argues that legal recognition of same-sex marriage

[5] Recently, in 2014, clergy in North Carolina have challenged this line of reasoning in court, arguing that their *inability* to perform legal same-sex marriages has infringed on their religious freedom.

on the basis of following nondiscrimination laws will encroach upon religious freedom and relegate liberty in America, he fears, to "a begrudged afterthought":

> In America, liberty should be the starting point, not a begrudged afterthought, in every context of law and public policy. Many nondiscrimination laws included protections for religious and moral conscience when they were first enacted. Lawmakers should update those laws when radical legal changes such as same-sex marriage create new situations that are likely to trigger significant burdens on the free exercise of religious and moral conscience in the future. (Messner, The Heritage Foundation, 2011)

Others take an even stronger position. In response to New York's legalization of same-sex marriage, Franck (2011) alleges that courts and legislatures which pass same-sex marriage laws are not only changing the meaning of the word *marriage* and disconnecting the institution of marriage from its human, familial components, but engaging in a form of government control antithetical to democracy:

> The most notable thing about the arrival of same-sex marriage in New York is that it was brought about by legislative and not judicial fiat. ... What has been gained by the forces behind this act? Certainly not marriage for same-sex couples. They have gained a name, but not the thing it names. They have only destroyed a word's meaning. And they have harmed the thing it does name, by teaching — one of the things the law does — that marriage has no connection to children and families, but instead is just a bundle of privileges from the government, to be taken up if it is in one's self-interest. New York has struck a great blow, in the name of a false "right," against real freedom. Same-sex marriage is inseparable from authoritarianism, as we will see when New York's Christians, Jews, and Muslims lose the religious freedom to act on the truth about marriage as they know it. (Franck, 2011 NRO)

Activists such as Franck, Duncan, Messner and Maggie Gallagher (2003) argue that same-sex marriage is misguided policy because it favors sexual liberties and adult desires over the needs of children. Some go so far as to argue that if we allow same-sex marriage, catastrophes such as a change in humanity itself will result, due to a complete abandonment of the procreative imperative altogether (Stanton 2011). These equations of

marriage to family via procreation are promoted by most of the major voices against same-sex marriage.

It is language as the site and stake of struggle, as Fairclough puts it, that underlies the work of this study. The meaning of *family* in US society has been a matter of common sense understanding: the structural/biological definition of *family*, that it particularly does not include two men or two women as parents, had gone essentially unchallenged until the past two decades, and the struggle for the legitimacy of *family* that includes two men or two women as parents is ongoing. As the couples who took part in this study define and describe *family*, their definitions reveal the lived stakes in the ideological struggle. As they simultaneously define and embody *family*, they become the meaning makers; the power in the language of *family* becomes theirs to hold.

CONCLUSION

As I will show in the following chapters, the parents in my study did not present themselves as radical challengers of the heterosexist ideological underpinnings of our society. While there are differences in some aspects of their lives, and certainly in the gender makeup of the parents, more often, when asked how they considered themselves in relation to heterosexual-headed families, they saw themselves as no better or worse. Yet, the power embedded in the ideology of *family* contributes greatly to the context of these parents' lives and to the ways in which these parents position themselves in their narratives as they negotiate their identities. I advocate for a balanced approach to our view of the lives of lesbian and gay parents. While their existence does challenge the predominant assumption that *family* is headed by a mother and father, their day-to-day negotiations of family identity revolve around making a life that is best for their children.

To view them solely or primarily as actors in a fight against structural heterodominance would be to put their narratives to use for a theoretical end that would erase their understanding and presentation of *family* as really quite the same as any other. These parents are not ignoring or succumbing to dominating forces, but in many ways are simply not allowing those forces to control their understanding of themselves as a family.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is based upon 12 audiorecorded interviews that took place in 2008 and 2011. Each interview except one involved both parents of a same-sex, two-parent household; the "solo" parent met with me on her own. In addition, questionnaires regarding demographic information as well as open-ended qualitative information were sent out electronically to each individual. The interviews were conducted using Labovian (1984) interview modules, in part designed to elicit candid, casual conversation from each couple on a range of topics related to family. The interviews each lasted between an hour and half and nearly four hours; each was transcribed and coded using Charmaz' (2006) model of grounded theory.

In this chapter, I will discuss the methods by which I recruited and collected data from participants as well as the methods I used to analyze the data for this study. The chapter is divided into five sections: first, Goals, in which I outline the goals of the methodologies used in the study; second, Participant Selection, which includes a lengthy discussion of the requirements for and selection of the study participants; third, Data Collection, which covers the necessity for and use of different types data collection, namely interviews and questionnaires; fourth, Data Analysis, which outlines the process of transcription and the theoretical grounding for my analytical methods, and concluding with my overall impressions of the success of the methodologies brought to this topic.

GOALS

One of my primary methodological goals in this study was to recruit a diverse set of participants. I wanted to engage informants who might not otherwise be represented in

the literature. Too many studies in the area of gender and language or gay and lesbian parenting feature mostly or only middle-class, urban, educated Anglo-Americans. The authors of one article regretted "reproduc[ing] the problem of whiteness in studies on gays and lesbians" but still found the answers useful to furthering an understanding of middle- and upper-middle-class white gay men and lesbians (Berkowitz and Ryan 2009: 157). This lack of diversity is a problem I determined not to excuse but to avoid, and have been reasonably successful at doing so. My study is not a study of "non-white" or "rural" gay and lesbian parents, but it is also not a study of urban Anglo-American gay and lesbian parents. In addition, all of the participants were recruited from Texas, an area outside of the strongholds of lesbian and gay communities with local structural supports in government, business and social realms. I will discuss the diversity of the informant pool in more depth below.

Another goal of the study was to conduct it from the ground up. The study of gay- and lesbian-headed families, or of gay and lesbian parenting, quite reasonably starts with an assumption that "*family*" equals the parent-child relationship. While this research will not render that assumption significantly problematic, by not starting with any assumption of what *family* means to these parents allowed me to give the parents the power to define it themselves. The importance of taking control of their own stories and voicing their own realities cannot be overlooked in a context in which these parents often are not automatically heard and whose realities are not automatically accepted by those around them.

In that same vein, I strove to lessen my role as an interactant with whom the parents needed to negotiate their identities. Had I entered their homes with a preformed, normative idea of their family as parents-children, I would have run the risk of having at least some participants either not include others outside of that unit, or have to spend time

first negotiating (i.e., clarifying) with me their definitions. Likewise, if I had gone into the interviews assuming their families were non-normative, those whose families resemble the heterosexual norm may have been put at a disadvantage. This does not mean, of course, that there was no identity negotiation during the interviews. As one of the audiences of their personal narratives, they certainly spent some time negotiating identity with me. However, I believe leaving the defining up to the parents also left the negotiating, or the need to negotiate, up to them as well. In short, I did as much as I could to not require them to negotiate their identity with me.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

Recruitment Methods

I recruited informants through snowball sampling, a request in a newsletter sent to a small network of local churches for lesbian and gay couples with at least one child and announcements about the study on two local gay and lesbian parenting e-mail lists. Each subsequent respondent was sent a personal email from me to give them more detailed information about the study requirements and to set up a time and place for the interview. They were each given a chance to ask more questions before the interview was arranged.

Selection Criteria

I placed relatively few constraints on participants for recruitment in this study. In this section, in addition to describing the participant demographics more generally, I will

take some time to describe my reasoning for my selection criteria. In Chapter 4, I will introduce and describe each couple individually.

The basic requirements for inclusion in the study were to be a two-parent family living in Texas who had at least one child of any age. To be part of the study, the couples were informed that they were to participate in an interview lasting between 2 and 3 hours and to complete an online demographic questionnaire. In all, I recruited twelve couples with at least one child. One of the interviews involved a "solo" parent who interviewed alone, but has a partner and is part of a two-parent household unit.

The requirement to interview couples was motivated by a few factors. First and foremost, unlike single parents who identify as lesbian or gay, the sexual orientiation of a same-sex couple is more readily accessible to outsiders. Passing as straight, or otherwise not being out as gay or lesbian is much more difficult than for a single parent. This would then give me the chance to discuss challenges associated with their negotiation of their identity as same-sex parents.

My choice to recruit solely two-parent families may raise the concern that I have predetermined what a family includes, or that I do not believe households without two parents can be families. This is far from the case. There is a long list of studies of the makeup of families with single mothers, with divorced fathers and with extended family acting in the place of others who are not present to parent. I readily acknowledge that there is a wide variety of family forms. Indeed, as I discussed earlier, the point of this study is not to ask if LGHFs qualify as families, nor to prove that they do. In fact, the purpose of this study is to find out from LGHFs what their definition of *family* is, and then how they negotiate that identity with the outside world.

As a case in point, their status as a couple was made relevant in their interactions with their children's schools, where they need to negotiate who is going to make

decisions for their child. It was made relevant for their children, as their children need to negotiate who these two people are in their life. They often needed to explain their family makeup to their friends and are confronted with people asking who the other person (parent) is. They are, in many cases in this study, reported by their parents to have corrected those who don't know the difference, for example, between who is "Mommy" and who is "Mama". Having a two-parent household, then, by its very nature, adds the homosexuality of the parents' relationship to the equation. Were I to have studied single parents, the questions would have been different and the context of their parenthood would certainly be different. The context of a single-parent household does not by its nature include homosexuality. This is not to say that single gay parents with children don't date or have relationships, nor that their homosexuality never arises in conversation or in interactions with schools. For gay and lesbian parents, however, it is a context that they cannot avoid, that is very difficult to hide from those around them.

If we approach this issue from another angle, when they are in two-parent families, gay and lesbian parents most resemble, both to the outside world and possibly to themselves, the normative heterosexual family form. The heterosexual norm of a man and a woman being married and producing children is at the crux of, and therefore definitions of, marriage and family. *Family*, for many, is parents plus their biologically produced children; or in the absence of an ability to produce children, they may adopt or in some other way have children. The expectation and assumption is that parents and their offspring make up a family. Where you have two parents and children in a lesbian or gay headed household, there are again two parents and offspring (even potentially biological offspring), but there is an immediate recognition that this is a "gay family"—an immediate recognition that this family goes somehow contrary to, or needs to be

explained as different from, the heterosexual norm. Indeed, this is borne out in academic studies that argue the radical nature of LGHFs (discussed at length in Chapter 2).

The heterosexual norm covers more than the 1950s view of a traditional nuclear family—mother, father and one or more biological children. As pointed out in a 1991 piece in the Catholic journal *Commonweal*,

> Normative heterosexual marriage recollects parents in the act of parenting and literally embodies hope in the bringing forth of children. Homosexuals may, of course, recall parents and be hopeful for the future but they do not, of course, embody a family history. (685)

From this perspective, every other family form that we look at is somehow either mother-father-biological children, or is a family form created or maintained because that other form was not possible. Single motherhood is formed because the father either never joined the family, left, or the mother chose not to have the biological father involved (as in the case of both lesbian and straight women having children through sperm donation). Grandparents raising children may result when the parents of the children are not able to do so themselves. In divorced, blended families, the mother and father didn't stay together. All of these forms are alternatives to the standard heterosexual norm. Every other family form that is looked at in the literature is viewed through the context of this heteronormative family form. One would be right to say, then, that a two-parent lesbian- or gay-headed household is one more variation on that two-parent heterosexual family norm. That is, in fact, a very salient reason to choose that form over the more complex context of, say, single lesbian motherhood. By having a two-parent household, we can say that this is one form that is not an alternative to the heterosexual norm because that was never in the cards for the gay or lesbian parent, but on the other hand, it is in fact a slight difference, and yet seems to complicate or be enough of a contextual shift on the heteronormative form that it sparks debate and controversy and provides the crux of

arguments against same-sex marriage, same-sex parent adoption, and family court judgments in favor of gay parents.

The requirement of children to be part of the family unit was motivated by some of the same factors as was having two parents. While one could argue that I am relying on a normative family structure (two parents plus children) for my data; again, as I explained above, this is actually much the point. My goal is not to find the many variations on family forms which include gay and lesbian people, but to elucidate the definitions and negotiations of identity for those who in some basic respects both resemble and are contrary to heteronormative family forms. Again, this is the very tension point that I view as a motivating factor for this study as a whole.

I had no stipulations about the age of the child or children, how they became part of the family, or who had legal ties to them. As a result, the interviewees' family creation stories ranged widely: there are children who were birthed after the couple had been together for some time, children who were adopted as babies, children from former heterosexual unions, children birthed in former homosexual partnerships, and so on. Some of the couples had raised or were raising their children together, others became a couple after the children of one parent were grown, but the participants still considered themselves parents to that child. This range of family formation is indicative of at least two perspectives on the phenomenon: first, the multiple ways that children can be and are brought into gay and lesbian headed households; second, the necessity of this multiplicity—that is, the ways that, by dint of their circumstances (e.g., as more recently out or unable to be married or to bear their own children), the couples bring children into their relationship with each other. I will discuss these perspectives in later chapters as I introduce the families and as I analyze the factors that influence their identity negotiations.

Participant Diversity

As I indicated earlier, having a diverse demographic sample was of critical importance to this study. I have achieved diversity in several ways, though it is still imperfect. To begin, all participants live in Texas, outside of the gay and lesbian community strongholds of the Northeast and Northern California. Not all parents are Texas natives (though many are), but all have lived in Texas for many years. Along with this national-regional diversity, there is more local diversity as well, with three couples living in rural communities, five living in suburban communities, and four living in urban communities. It should be noted that the distinction between attitudes toward and acceptance of gay and lesbian people in a Texas city and in a rural town 20 minutes away can be stark. The differences show clearly in the interviewees' negotiations, as we will see in Chapters 6 and 7.

I also achieved a modest level of diversity in participant sex, ethnicity, educational and economic status. Out of 23 participants, 6 are men and 17 women; 4 are Mexican American, 1 African American, and 18 Anglo American; 2 have high school diplomas or trade degrees, 5 have Associate's or Bachelor's degrees, and the remaining who responded reported achieving higher than a Bachelor's degree; 3 consider themselves to be working class or lower middle class and the remaining respondents replied that they were middle class. While this is not the level of diversity that I had hoped for, I am satisfied that this study will be able to report on the experiences and ideologies of people from a range of American contexts.

DATA COLLECTION

In this section I will lay out the details of the administration of the interviews, questionnaires and videotaped family interactions. Each data set required its own

equipment as well as its own methodological basis. As with any study, the analysis is to a large extent dependent upon the type of data collected and the method by which it is collected. I believe it is valuable to discuss in some measure the methodological choices I made in order to illuminate the subsequent analytical methods.

Since the focus of this dissertation is not on the inner workings of family per se, but in particular on the meaning making engaged in by the parents, the interview format served this purpose best for several reasons. First, an interview puts the research endeavor on how the participants characterize, position and recount stories about themselves. Rather than looking for a truth or validity to their stories, I am able to highlight the way parents are making this meaning for themselves and relating it to others. Second, the extended, participant-led interview format gave the parents the opportunity to speak about their lives at length, describing their families and their histories and recounting incidents and interactions that were meaningful to them as a part of their creation of family. Third, as a researcher, I was able to collect more discourse data from more people than I would have had I been following a small number of families for extended periods of time. With an analytical focus on the discourses that parents use themselves in their negotiations of a family identity, having in-depth, extensive interview data on the subject of family life was critical to this project. Finally, I chose very consciously to not rule out participants who were unwilling to be videotaped. For some of the participants, the risk of revealing their identities on camera was too great. None of the participants agreed to have their interviews videotaped, and only three of the twelve couples agreed to be videotaped after they had met me. Two subsequently changed their minds, leaving me with scant video data from which to do any analysis.

Before the interviews, I prepared Labovian-style interview modules (see Appendix), which are a list of useful topics and subtopics thought up before interviews and studied by interviewer so that interviewer can thoughtfully follow up on (rather than guide) topics raised by the interviewees. Though I always had the modules list with me, most participants seemed comfortable talking about themselves and their lives. The modules were helpful as a reminder to the interviewer to follow up on questions at times when it was quite easy to get caught up in the flow of the conversation. Some participants, however, wanted or expected a more formal question-and-answer type interview with the researcher in control of the dialogue and topics of conversation. The modules were effective at allowing me to be prepared for this style of interview and to ask questions in a logical, fairly linear manner.

Eleven of twelve interviews took place in the participants' homes, and one took place in a meeting room at their local church. Since there was relatively little background noise, I was able to use a minidisk recorder with a central microphone sensitive enough to pick up different volumes of speech. The minidisks were then uploaded as mp3 files and stored on a password-protected computer. During each interview, I had only a pad and a pen, which I tried not to use so as to lessen the researcher-participant separation as much as possible. I took notes only for things not captured on tape, as well as for information given after the taping had stopped, such as preferred pseudonyms.

Before every interview began, parents were given a consent form approved by the University of Texas Institutional Review Board that they signed, as well as a copy for their files. Parents were assured that only their speech would be transcribed, not that of their children, though references to the occurrence of parent-child interactions or the presence of the children would be made if relevant. On the consent form, parents could indicate their willingness to participate in a videotaped family interaction (such as a

playtime or a dinner). Each parent who indicated willingness was later contacted; as noted above, only one family subsequently agreed to participate.

Interviews lasted between one and a half and three and a half hours, ending once the questions I had were answered and there was a natural break or slow down in conversation. At the end of the more structured portion of the interview, I asked parents if they had any questions about the study, and several asked for more information on what I was looking for. Parents were aware that I continued to record these questions and my answers. Three of the participants expressed reservations about the interviews. One couple asked that they be kept informed of my research findings, as they had been interviewed by another researcher some years before and had never heard from them again. I assured them that I would contact them when a final product was available, as well as in the interim to let them know about my progress. One other participant expressed some reservations during the interview about doing the interview at all; her partner, who had agreed to participate, explained to her why she thought the interview was worth doing, and both agreed to continue.

The interviews were semi-directed and had no set length in order to give as much control of topic flow as possible to the parents. This style of interview mirrors the goals of the study, that is, to ask parents to define *family* for themselves and to talk about family as they see it, rather than to solely react to questions about family from an outside point of view. All of the interviews ended up covering the topics in the modules, nearly always as a result of the natural flow of conversation. Some findings certainly came about as a result of not having a set list of questions to ask. As an example, the one place that parents did not go on their own, somewhat surprisingly, was to a discussion of gay social networks. Other networks, such as with parents of their children's friends, were brought up, but only two couples brought up a network of LGBT friends in which they

actively participated. However, some did point out that individuals who they considered part of their family were lesbian or gay. I will discuss this further in the analysis section, but it is a clear example of the usefulness of the methods chosen for this study. The modules, as well as the semi-directed interview structure and (as I will discuss below) the grounded theory method allowed both for topics to arise organically and for patterns of topic-raising to be brought to the fore.

Part way through data collection, I changed the order of questions to have the semantic definition question—"What does *family* mean to you? How do you define it?"—put up front. This decision to change was motivated by the previous interviews, per Charmaz' (2006) idea that the success of previous interviews should inform subsequent interviews. In the first six interviews, I started the conversation by asking a fairly general, open-ended and personal question, "How did you start your family?" This worked fairly well, but I had the impression that for some, it was too personal, too early in the interview. At the same time, one participant "beat me to the punch", so to speak, and started giving her definition of *family* before I had even asked a question. It occurred to me that participants were recruited for a study in which it was stated that they would be asked for their definition of *family*, and so I ought to begin with that question rather than ending with it (thus maybe leaving them wondering for a couple hours why I had not asked). There did not seem to be a noticeable difference in the flow of conversation using the two different ways, except for parents being more comfortable after I began with the question.

After the interviews were completed, a demographic questionnaire was sent to each individual participant. The original questionnaire was in the form of a Microsoft Word document and participants were asked to fill out the document either electronically and to email it back, or to print it out and mail it back (and I would send them the

envelopes). Only one woman sent back a questionnaire out of the six couples who had so far been interviewed. I subsequently created an online, password-protected Google document that could be sent to each participant in the form of a survey. Their answers could be entered online, and would go directly into a spreadsheet. Though this took some time to create, have approved by the IRB, and sent again to the participants, in all 16 out of 21 participants did respond, with at least one of each couple responding. The nonresponse of the others, therefore, may have been due to a misunderstanding that only one parent needed to send in the information (though I did attempt to make it clear that each person, not each couple, was to respond). Between these questionnaires and information that came up in the interviews, most pertinent demographic data was obtained in the end. Each section on the questionnaire allowed the parents to add their own comments, as the questions asked were both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

Finally, one family was videotaped during a family dinner. I invited every family I met to be videotaped, but as mentioned above, due to the potentially risky nature of their position within the Texas communities, I did not require it to be part of the study. As noted above, there were two other families who had initially agreed to be videotaped, but later decided not to do so. While the lack of video data does takes away one avenue of analysis from this study, I am confident that the taped conversations provide the in-depth look at meanings and meaning making that I had designed to focus upon in this study.

DATA ANALYSIS

Transcription

Transcriptions were done in different stages, following Charmaz (2006). As a first stage, the interviews were broadly transcribed either by myself or by a research assistant (and subsequently checked by me). This broad transcription gives the basic flow of conversation, the topics and some details, but does not include exact transcriptions. Transcriptions were entered into a spreadsheet, which allowed clear separation between fields. A separate sheet was used for each interview, and included a running time for easy reference to portions of the interview, a column for conversation topics, a column for transcriber notes (such as places to return for close transcriptions or questions about the data), and a column for exact transcriptions. At the second stage, each interview was reread and discourse themes or topics were noted in the first column. This provided an overview of the flow of conversation (which will be discussed in the analysis section) and with a way to look at discourse patterns across interviews. By using a standard notation convention for themes, I was able to filter by topic, or to even do a quantitative tabulation of themes for the entire set of data. This chart shows a sample of the transcribing and coding:

race; child's idea of himself; others' views of gay	940	they thought being same-sex parents was going to be the big issue with other people, but it's not, it's that they are white and their kids are black. J has made comments about race recently, not all in favor of his own "racial heritage". He told H recently that he wanted [to be white].
parenting; race; difference	1010	they were ready for explaining two dads, but not race. at first, he just wanted to understand why he was different.
parenting; bio mother role	1055	he also wanted to know where his mother was; they answered "in Illinois" [the truth], and that's all he needed to know

Table 1: Transcription and Coding

Finally, in the third stage, close, exact transcriptions were done for sections of the interviews of particular interest. Time and a lack of monetary resources prohibited full close transcriptions for all of the interviews; furthermore, for the purposes of this study, they were not necessary for the analysis. The overall impressions gained through multiple listenings of the interviews provided excellent guides for further, close analysis. Having all of the data readily available in one program, as it was by using spreadsheets, allowed relatively easy reference to demographic data, linguistic data, and thematic data.

Transcriptions are presented in narrative form, with microanalyses of speech noted only when relevant to the overall analysis. Nonstandard or abbreviated speech (e.g., *cuz* for *because*) was transcribed when noticeably different than other uses of the same feature by the same speaker. Repetitive discourse markers, repairs, false starts and other nonessential parts of the speakers' narratives were eliminated within this dissertation for readability, and only when their extraction did not affect the tone or character of the speakers' words. The following limited set of transcription conventions are used:

italics vocal stress on italicized item

CAPS indicates loud or shouted speech

h exhalation/laughing; the more h's, the longer the exhalation

[onset of overlapping, simultaneous utterances

[text] bracketed text is reserved for information or notes provided by the author

[ ] brackets with no text shows parts of the excerpt that were inaudible

(.3) indicates the length of a pause

ta- a hyphen following text indicates a cutoff in speaking, often followed by rephrasing or repair, or the loss of a turn

Overall Analysis

The analyses in this dissertation will follow three main paths. First, I will delve into the parents' definitions of *family*, given for the most part in direct response to my question "What does *family* mean to you?". This discussion (Chapter 5) will be in part descriptive, detailing the variety that exists in the definitions even of a study of this size. Chapter 5 will also engage the theoretical concept of prototypes that Lakoff (1986, 1987) explores. Lakoff's prototype theory will afford a way to explore similarities in the parents' definitions as well as similarities to and contrasts between the parents' definitions and those of people who do not believe the definition of *family* can include lesbian and gay parented kinship units.

The second layer of analysis, given in Chapter 6, will examine the ways in which parents position themselves and their definitions within and through their narratives. This discourse analysis will show the intersections of the parents' local and nonlocal contexts, the national debate and their daily lived experiences, the generic vision of family and their personal narratives of family. I will employ primarily models used by Baynham and de Fina to show the ways the parents negotiate their identities on a day-to-day basis with a number of different interlocutors. In Chapter 7, I will explore negotiation tactics used by the parents in different arenas of their lives, namely home, school, church and community. I will also explore the linguistic and material tools used in these negotiations.

Through this analysis, it will become clear that the negotiation of a nonnormative identity take many forms and that its success depends on attending to a variety of ideologies and experiences. The justification and reasoning behind the employment of each theoretical underpinning will be given in the chapters themselves.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT FAMILIES AND THEIR CONTEXTS

INTRODUCTION

In this section, I will introduce the families who participated in this study and the local and national contexts they are navigating. I have chosen to make this a stand-alone section to highlight each couple's generosity and willingness to share their lives, their motivations, their opinions, their histories, and some of their most personal family details. Each of the interviews I conducted lasted roughly between two and three hours—not an insignificant amount of time to talk to a complete stranger. I heard about love and loss, about acceptance and non-acceptance, coming out stories, birthing decisions, and adoption processes. The women and men in this study allowed me to probe into the inner workings of their current families and their families of origin. Some of the parents were clearly nervous, one or two cried, some shared so much they felt they had to apologize to me for taking my time; I was in fact overwhelmed by their generosity.

The families are the center, the focus, and the heart of this project. Each is unique, and as a whole, they are the very picture of diversity. My intention is to introduce each family first as a group of real people, and later to discuss them as subjects in the study. In each vignette, I include a full range of demographic data in order to highlight the diversity of the families. This serves two purposes: first, to help give readers a visual "picture" of these men and women and their families; second, to give a picture of the diversity I was able to capture in this research.

The data for these introductions was taken from the parents' completed demographic questionnaires. Two couples did not complete their questionnaires. In four cases, only one parent filled out the questionnaire. As noted in Chapter 3, this outcome

could have been due to a misunderstanding that I wanted each individual to fill out a survey; they may have thought just one parent in the couple needed to do so. After two attempts to gather further information, I filled in the demographic gaps where I could myself. While I will miss some details available in the open-ended questions, many of the relevant opinions could be found in the interview transcripts.

In most cases, I rely on the parents' assessment of their demographics, rather than on imposed, official designations. The parents' view of their situation (e.g., their socioeconomic class and the size of their town) is in fact more important to my analysis than any official designation, in particular since even though the reality of these facts never came up in the interviews, their perceptions did. In just a few cases, parents differed in their answers, and this provided further insight—one parent, for example, listed three children; her partner four. The partner's oldest son is older than the first parent, putting her in an ambiguous "parent" position with him. Another parent just listed his partner as his immediate family, not his partner's adult children.

One somewhat complicating factor in the descriptions is preserving the family's anonymity. While many of the individual parents are open about their family makeup in their workplaces and communities, by no means are all able to be. A balance needed to be struck between the reader's understanding of the family diversity, my giving a respectful representation of the individuals, and maintaining each family's anonymity. In order to achieve this, I have chosen to give only as much information as necessary and to leave some statistics that I think are vital to the study in the form of charts, so that the information included will not be individually identifiable. Of course, all names in this dissertation are pseudonyms, some of which were chosen by the interviewees (and in one case by one of the children).

FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS IN TEXAS AND THE US

In these first two sections, I will show a broader snapshot of same-sex families in the United States and in Texas. This demographic and legal information will set the context within which these twelve families are creating and maintaining their families. To begin, according to the Williams Institute's analysis of the 2010 Census, in the United States there are 646,464 same-sex couples, which equals .55%, or 5.5 per 1,000 households. In Texas there are 46,401 couples, slightly lower than the national number, at .52% (5.2 per 1,000 households). Texas ranks 22nd in the nation in numbers of reporting same-sex couples. Gates and his colleagues at the Williams Institute also found that of all same-sex couples in the US, 17% are raising children. By comparison, slightly less than 20% of same-sex couples in Texas are raising children, matching the findings of the Williams Institute that "Childrearing among same-sex couples is most common in Southern, Mountain West, and Midwest regions of the country" (Gates, LGBT Parenting in the United States, 2013: 1).

The parents in this study represent some of the diversity found by Gates, et al. in the 2010 Census of the demographic characteristics of LGHFs in the United States:

> As many as six million American children and adults have an LGBT parent. Same-sex couple parents and their children are more likely to be racial and ethnic minorities. An estimated 39 percent of individuals in same-sex couples with children under age 18 at home are non-white, as are half of their children.
>
> (http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/census-lgbt-demographics-studies/lgbt-parenting-in-the-united-states/#sthash.pEzqESOu.dpuf)

Removing the parents in my study with children over 18, about 78% are white, 17% are Hispanic/Latino(a), and .06% are black. The median annual household income of two-parent households with biological, step- or adopted children under 18 is $63,500

(LGBT Parenting in the US, 5). For the parents in my study, it's higher, at about $75,000.

LEGAL STATUS

Texas has specifically prohibited same-sex couples from marrying for nearly 15 years through statutes in its Family Code as well as the state's Constitution. Since 1997, the year after Hawaii first enacted same-sex marriage rights (which were later overturned), Texas has had a law in effect through its Family Code which prohibits the issuing of marriage licenses to same-sex couples. In 2003, the same year that the case Lawrence v Texas ruled antisodomy laws in the state and the nation unconstitutional, and the year that same-sex marriage was legalized by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, the Subtitle C: Dissolution of a Marriage section of Texas' Family Code was changed to make illegal the recognition of same-sex marriage, presumably even through recognizing divorce. Then, in 2005, a year after the Massachusetts law went into effect, Article 1 of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution was amended to specifically prohibit same-sex marriages in the state as well as recognition of marriages performed outside of the state.

Article 1, Sec. 32	MARRIAGE (a) Marriage in this state shall consist only of the union of one man and one woman. (b) This state or a political subdivision of this state may not create or recognize any legal status identical or similar to marriage. (Added Nov. 8, 2005.)

Table 2. The Texas Constitution—Bill of Rights

Code Section	Code
SUBTITLE A	MARRIAGE
CHAPTER 2	THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP
SUBCHAPTER A	APPLICATION FOR MARRIAGE LICENSE
Sec. 2.001 (b)	A license may not be issued for the marriage of persons of the same sex. (Added by Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 7, Sec. 1, eff. April 17, 1997.)
Sec. 71.003	FAMILY. "Family" includes individuals related by consanguinity or affinity ... individuals who are former spouses of each other, individuals who are the parents of the same child, without regard to marriage, and a foster child and foster parent, without regard to whether those individuals reside together. (Added by Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 34, Sec. 1, eff. May 5, 1997. Amended by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 821, Sec. 2.03, eff. June 14, 2001.)
SUBTITLE B	PROPERTY RIGHTS AND LIABILITIES
CHAPTER 3	MARITAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AND LIABILITIES
SUBCHAPTER E	CLAIMS FOR REIMBURSEMENT
Sec. 3.401	(5) "Spouse" means a husband, who is a man, or a wife, who is a woman. A member of a civil union or similar relationship entered into in another state between persons of the same sex is not a spouse.
SUBTITLE C	DISSOLUTION OF A MARRIAGE
SUBCHAPTER C	DECLARING A MARRIAGE VOID
Sec. 6.204	RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE OR CIVIL UNION.
	(b) A marriage between persons of the same sex or a civil union is contrary to the public policy of this state and is void in this state.
	© The state or an agency or political subdivision of the state may not give effect to a: (1) public act, record, or judicial proceeding that creates, recognizes, or validates a marriage between persons of the same sex or a civil union in this state or in any other jurisdiction; or (2) right or claim to any legal protection, benefit, or responsibility asserted as a result of a marriage between persons of the same sex or a civil union in this state or in any other jurisdiction (Added by Acts 2003, 78th Leg., ch. 124, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2003.)

Table 3. Texas Statutes—Family Code

Through these laws, some tucked away in the middle of extensive codes, one in the Texas Constitution coming just before Section 33 "Access and Use of Public Beaches", have the cumulative effect of denying any legal standing to the parents of families headed by same-sex parents. Of interest, the definition of *family* disregards, at least in part, the marriage status of parents. As we will see, many parents in this study have found it relatively uncomplicated to take part in Texas' second-parent adoption process, becoming both parents of the same child.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I strove to find a participant group that was more diverse than many studies of gay and lesbian parenting tend to be. The table and charts below detail the basic demographic information as was given by the participants in a survey. By avoiding "easy targets" such as local university professors and graduate students, and instead reaching out to churches, social club email lists and snowball sampling, I was able to find a group that included public school educators, a truck driver, and mid-level managers, with household incomes ranging from working to middle class. In total, I interviewed three gay couples and nine lesbian couples. The majority were white, though several Hispanic/Latina(o) and one African American parent also took part. These men and women ranged in age from 32 to 58 at the time of their interviews and had achieved levels of education from high school diploma to doctorate. They live in rural, suburban and urban areas of central Texas and formed their families in vastly diverse ways. Their stories are endlessly fascinating, and I am grateful to be able to share just a part of what they offered to me.

The information in this chart comes from the demographic data portion of the questionnaire I sent to each parent. Not all parents sent back the questionnaire. For those who didn't answer, I filled in the blanks in three ways: I used information from their interviews, I duplicated the information from the other parent (in cases where the information would be the same), and for the rest I made an educated guess where possible. In cases where I made guesses or used the other parent's answer, I put the information in parentheses to note that it was not their answer. Name, age, and occupation were open-ended questions; the others had a limited drop-down list of choices borrowed from standardized questionnaires.

	Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Residential Area	Education Level	Occupation	Socioeconomic Status
1	Victoria	44	White	Suburban	Associate's degree	Xray Tech	Middle class
	Rifka	49	White	Urban	Master's degree	Manager	Middle class
2	Barbara	57	White	Suburban	PhD	Retired Principal	Middle class
	Lynn		(White)	(Suburban)			
3	David	39	White	Urban	Master's degree	Assistant Principal	Middle class
	Harvey	56	White	Urban	Bachelor's degree	Real Estate	Middle class
4	Terry	51	White	Suburban	Bachelor's degree	Human Resources	Middle class
	Ann		(White)	(Suburban)			(Middle class)
5	Joanna	44	Black or African American	Urban	Master's degree	Public Administrator	Lower middle class
	Lacey		(White)	(Urban)			
6	Connie	58	(White)	Urban	Master's degree	Management	Middle class
	Janelle			(Urban)			
7	Joe		(Hispanic/ Latino)	(Urban)			
	Thomas	52	White	Urban	High school diploma	Management Assistant	Middle class
8	Catherine	43	White	Suburban	Master's degree	Environmental Scientist	Middle class
	Jane	38	White	Suburban	Bachelor's degree	Surgical Assistant	Middle class
9	Rachel	32	White	Rural	Master's degree	planner	Middle class
	Paula	50	White	Rural	Certificate	Chemical Dependency Counselor	Middle class
10	Isaac	32	Hispanic/ Latina(o)	Suburban	Master's degree	Social Worker	Working class
	Mario	41	Hispanic/ Latina(o)	Rural	Bachelor's degree	Healthcare	Working class
11	Brenda	37	(White)	(Suburban)			
	Dani	30	(White)	(Suburban)		Banking	(Middle class)
12	Callie		(White)	(Rural)	(Bachelor's degree)	(Stay-at-home Mother)	(Working class)
	Yelina		(Hispanic/ Latino)	(Rural)	(Trade degree)	(Truck Driver)	(Working class)

N=23 Age range: 30-58

Table 4. The Twelve Couples

To further clarify the demographic information about the participants, the following pie charts map out their racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, educational and residential characteristics.

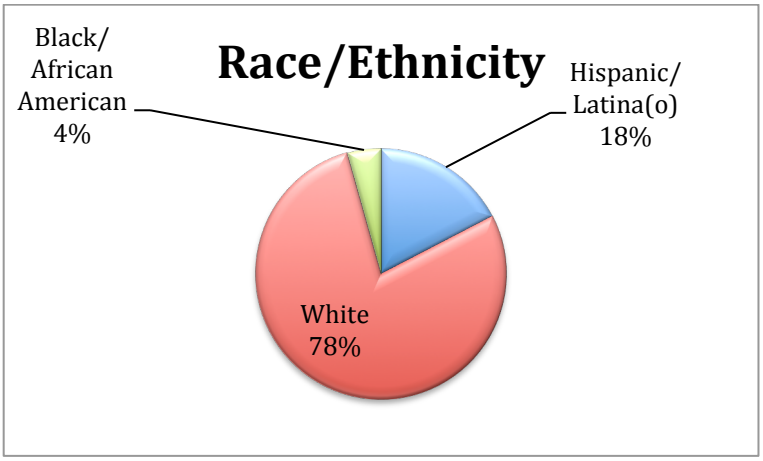

Figure 1: Race/Ethnicity

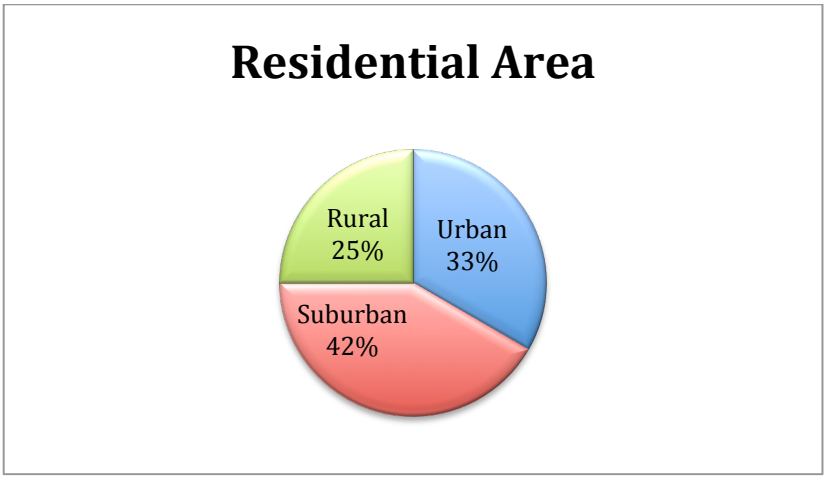

Figure 2: Residential Area

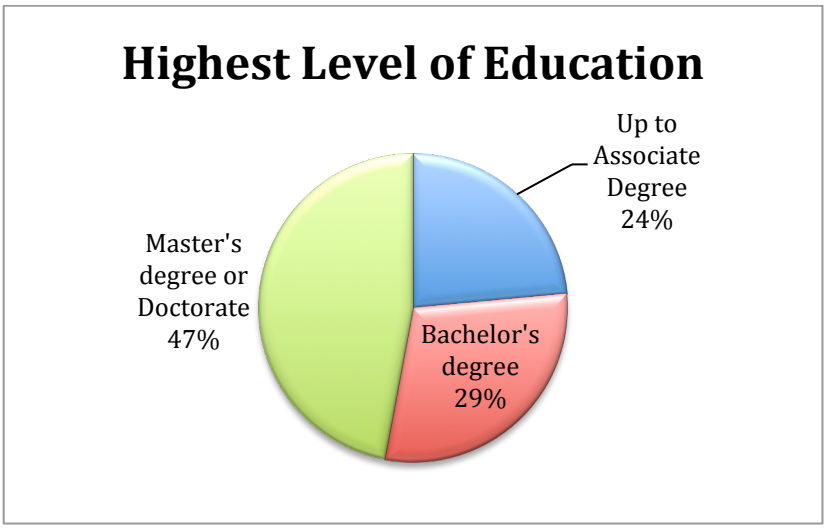

Figure 3: Education Level

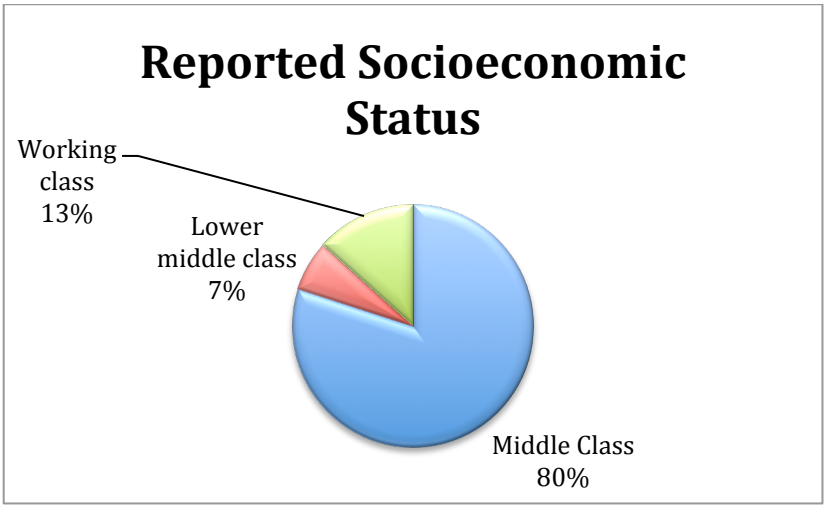

Figure 4: Socioeconomic Status

THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The first couple is Paula and Rachel, who live in a small rural town near a metropolis. Paula is white, 50 years old and works as a licensed counselor. Rachel is also white, 32 years old, has her Master's degree and works as a planner. They both consider theirs to be a middle class family. They have one 14-year-old son, Evan, a 15-

year-old daughter, Rose, and a young daughter, Jennie, who is 6.[6] Rose and Evan are Paula's biological children from her previous heterosexual relationship; she has joint custody of both children. Jennie is Rachel's biological child, and Paula is her co-parent. At the time of the interview, all three children lived with and were being raised by them. In the comment section of the questionnaire, Paula wrote that she wishes there were "more options". She would like her "spouse...to have a legal relationship" with her biological son and daughter, since "she has been their parent since they were 2 and 4. I wish we could have a legal relationship."

The second couple is Callie and Yelina.[7] They live in a small rural town in central Texas as well. Yelina is Mexican-American, has a trade school degree and is a long-distance truck driver; Callie is white, has her college degree and is a stay-at-home mother who also homeschooled her son during the time of the interview. Yelina said that "I prefer for her to be a stay-at-home mom with him due to the fact that he doesn't have a dad that is active in his life." Their son, Cody, is Callie's biological child. He was conceived during her previous marriage to Cody's father, but was born into her current family. Yelina describes in loving detail the joy of having been at Cody's birth and that he "stole my heart."

The next couple is Joanna and Lacey. Joanna and Lacey live in an urban part of Texas. Joanna is originally not from Texas, but has lived there since 1995. She is African American, 44 and has been a stay-at-home mother since they adopted their two

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[6]There is another, older son, a biological child of Paula's, who never lived with the couple, and who does not come up in the interview much at all. On their surveys, Paula listed him as a child, while Rachel did not. Neither parent listed him under the survey question "Who makes up your current immediate family?"

[7]Neither parent responded to the survey request. I have included information that was given during the interview only.

girls. Lacey is from Texas, is white, in her early 40s and works for the government. Joanna considers her family to be lower middle class. Both are military veterans. Their have two daughters: Arianna is 9 and Carla is 7. The girls are sisters, and were adopted by both Joanna and Lacey from the Texas state foster care system.

David and Harvey also live in urban Texas with their boys Jordan and Paul in a home that they renovated. David is white, 39 years old and has his Master's degree. He works in the local school system as an assistant principal. Harvey is also white, age 56, and has his Bachelor's degree. He works in real estate. Both consider their family to be middle class. They have two sons, Jordan, 7, and Paul, 6. They adopted Jordan through a private agency outside of Texas, and later Paul through the Texas foster care system. Both men are legal co-parents to their boys.[8]

Next are Dani and Brenda who live in a suburban town with their two children, Heather, who is 12 and Erica who is about one year old.[9] Prior to her relationship with Dani, Brenda was in a long-term relationship with a woman Heather calls her "Meemom". Heather is Brenda's biological daughter from that relationship and she splits her time between the two homes, spending every other day and every other weekend at her Meemom's house. Erica was adopted by Dani and Brenda through the state foster care system and they are both legal coparents. Heather is legally coparented by Brenda's former partner.

Rifka and Victoria live with their two sons, Stevie and Ben, in a suburban town in central Texas. Rifka is in her late 40s, has a Master's degree, and works as a manager. Victoria is in her mid-40s, has an Associate's degree, and works as a medical technician.

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[8] One parent said they are both legal co-parents; the other did not.

[9] Neither parent responded to filling out the demographic questionnaire, nor did her exact age come up in the interview.

Both are white and consider themselves to be middle class. Their son Stevie is 8, and is Rifka's biological son; Ben is 6 and is Victoria's biological son. The boys share the same donor. Rifka and Victoria are legal co-parents to both of their sons.

Barbara and Lynn are a middle class white couple who live in suburban central Texas. Barbara is in her late 50s, has her PhD and is a retired school principal. Lynn is also in her late 50s and is a teacher. The two women met and became partners after their children were born in their previous, heterosexual marriages. Lynn has a biological daughter, Kat, who is 35 years old; Barbara has two biological sons, Dave, age 24, and Mark, age 22. She shares legal parenting status with her ex-husband. In the comments section of the questionnaire, Barbara writes, "Our children have been among our greatest joys. We participated in the cosmic miracle of giving birth. We were blessed to raise amazing children and the bonds among us are very strong."

Ann and Terry also live in suburban central Texas. Terry is 51 and works in human resources. They are a middle-class couple raising their daughter Becky, who is 8. Becky is Ann's biological daughter. Both women are Becky's legal co-parents. We met at their church (the only couple who wanted to meet outside their home), a place where both parents said their family is very welcome and accepted by the pastor as well as by the congregants.

Connie is a 58-year-old woman who lives in urban Texas. She works in management and has one daughter, Christie, who is 23 years old. Christie is Connie's biological child from a previous lesbian relationship, and Connie is her sole legal parent. Christie knows her biological father, but Connie does not consider him part of the family. Connie has a partner, Eileen, who joined the family when Christie was in high school. Eileen works for the city. She was not present for the interview.

Thomas and Joe are an urban, middle class couple who live in central Texas. Thomas is white, 52 and works for the public school system; Joe is Hispanic and is in his mid-40s. There are four adult children. From a previous marriage, Thomas has two biological daughters, Amy and Sandra (both about 30 years old), and a stepson Sam. Joe raised his niece Jessica as his daughter. She is 22 and considers Joe her father. Joe and Thomas have been together for six years. On the questionnaire, Thomas listed only Joe as a member of his current family.

Catherine and Jane are a white, suburban, middle class Texas couple. Catherine is 43 and works as a geologist; Jane is 38 and is a surgical assistant. They are legal co-parents to their son, who is eight, is Catherine's biological child, and chose the pseudonym Green Hornet. They both seemed a bit nervous during the interview, and Catherine seemed quieter than Jane. However, they were very welcoming, generous and open about their lives, and have been the most concerned with my staying in touch to give them results of the study.

The last couple I would like to introduce are Isaac and Mario. Both men are Hispanic, native Texans who live in a quiet neighborhood in rural/suburban Texas.[10] Isaac is 32 and works as a social worker; Mario is 41 and works as a healthcare quality control specialist. They consider themselves working class. They have two daughters, Mandy and Beth, both of whom they adopted from the state foster care system when they were less than a year old. Mandy is 7 and Beth is 6. Both fathers are legal co-parents to their daughters.

[10]Isaac listed their location as suburban; Mario listed it as rural. In my judgment, it is more rural than suburban, but with the growing population overflowing from the nearby city, and with a fairly easy commute to the city, it could be considered suburban. The importance of region will be brought up in the forthcoming analyses.

CHAPTER 5: THE SEMANTICS OF *FAMILY*

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will explore the participants' definitions of *family* and the varied ideologies of family that come to bear on these definitions. My assumption that lesbian and gay parents likely draw from both traditional definitions as well as more community-specific uses of *family* will prove to be entirely the case. I will first look at *family* as a term with specific connotations within LGBT communities, and then at how the term is used within wider US society as a means of instantiating a traditional kinship model of family that does not include LGHFs. Then, I will turn to the parents in this study to show the richness of their definitions of *family*, and how their definitions draw from both of these connotations. Finally, I will use George Lakoff's Prototype Theory to suggest a model of categorization that can explain the gulf between these differing ideologies of family, as well as illuminate how the participants in this study have the facility to use the two in a cohesive definition of their own.

THE MEANINGS AND ANALYSES OF FAMILY WITHIN THE LGBT COMMUNITY

To begin, we look at two of the common uses of *family* within the LGBT community. First, the meaning of *family* has been broadened in the US to signify simply being gay or lesbian. It has been used for several decades by members of the LGBT community to discuss covertly who is or who is not gay, as in "Oh, I bet she's family." The polysemy embedded in the use of the word allowed these discussions to happen in public without fear of outing someone who does not want others to know their sexual orientation. A clear understanding of this in-group usage not only serves to contextualize

the parents' understanding of the concept, but will also serve to show how *family* may not initially nor even predominantly be seen by these parents through the lens of biological or legal kinship.

The understanding of *family* as indicative of in-group membership is also attested to in Weston's (1991) use of *family of choice* as a supportive group created to replace the biological family of origin, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Through this study I have found that gay and lesbian people have very concrete and definable ideologies of *family* that reflect an American bilateral cognatic concept of *family*, as well as an understanding that *family* can be chosen and created as a system of support within a potentially hostile environment. Almost all of the men and women in this study defined *family* as both shared kinship (that unit which they were born into and those they had birthed or had other legal ties to), and as those to whom they had no traditional kinship relation, but had chosen to label *family*. For these men and women, Weston's family of choice and the dominant American kinship structure are not mutually exclusive. This point is attested to clearly by Connie:

> You know, I have umm, I have family of origin and family of choice. In my case, there's a lot of overlapping between the two.

and by Barbara:

> Um, and you know sometimes there's a little overlay between the people we want to be with and the people we're genetically related [to]...and that's nice.

and in a very distinct way by Joe, who seamlessly weaves immediate family, family of origin, and family of choice together into one definition of family:

> Sarah: What does family mean to you?
>
> Joe: It means us. I come from a very large, Catholic, Hispanic, Mexican American family. So and, the family unit is still very important to me. Um and Thomas comes from a large-, you know, well, medium-sized family as well, so, and I think we still keep in contact with our parents and with our brothers and sisters so, you know I- we've never felt the- the sting of the alienation of our

> families because of our sexuality. So you know, when we say family I think we know we mean extended and any of those others that we bring in that aren't necessarily related by blood as well.

Even as Joe acknowledges the history for many lesbians and gay men of estrangement and alternate family creation, that history is not his current reality. He has been able to integrate his sexual orientation with the traditional family form and expectations that he grew up with.

The meaning of *family* for gay and lesbian parents, then, cannot be assumed to be wholly separate from traditional conceptualizations of kinship. These parents' definitions have been informed by the LGBT community's history of familial rejection and re-creation, by the structures and expectations of their own families of origin, and by their own experiences as parents. Weston shows us that there is flexibility, historically, within gay community ideologies to incorporate a broader, nontraditional membership. I have found that for these families divisions between traditional and nontraditional conceptions of family do not always determine their current definition of *family*.

This conclusion is attested to in other ways in this study. Of the 23 individual participants, only two—Dani and Callie—said they had left their families of origin and created new ones, in both cases due to homophobia and nonacceptance. And as we might expect, both Dani's and Callie's definitions, on the surface, seem to redefine or expand definitions of family. Yet both women actually stay quite close to the traditional definition as they discuss their and others' families. For example, in this excerpt, Dani makes a clear distinction between her definition of family and her partner's:

> I can't define it for Brenda, but I would say in my opinion my definition of family is a lot broader than hers because I have had friends that I'm very very close with. Whereas Brenda has always stayed very close with her family and has been in the same proximity to her family. ...I moved out the- literally the day after I graduated high school moved out and never went home and moved hundreds [laughs] of miles away. You know we all live in Texas, but I don't live anywhere

> near them, on purpose. And uh, so I made a very close group of friends who became my family in every way...

This "family of choice" that Dani created is not as stable a definition as it first appears. As Dani continues to describe her friends and coworkers to whom she felt she was a parent, her absolutes (underlined) become tempered with nonabsolutes (italics).

> ...and so I made a very close group of friends who became my family in every way I mean just- I would do anything for my friends and even with- *still to this day with* [*two friends*] I would do anything for them because I consider them *family in a lot of ways* ... and before um when I was a teller manager I very much considered myself a parent of my employees you know like they were my babies and everybody knew that and you know it's like I was very protective of them and very- family to me has a lot of different meanings and it it's doesn't have anything to do with blood it doesn't have anything to do with last names and all of this. It's about the emotional bonds that I've formed with someone. And once I've committed to you, and I've formed that emotional bond, you are my family and that's what I always say, is that *I always want my work to be to feel like a family* and not like coworkers.

We can see the tempering of her statement that her friends became her "family in every way" in several places:

- local naming of specific friends and references to coworkers becomes more general/nonlocal "you" (as I will argue in Chapter 6)
- the summative "every" is demoted to "a lot of"
- the generalized "friends" lessens substantially to just two specifically named friends
- the temporal permanence entailed in "family" whom she would do anything for becomes less permanent as she qualifies it with those who "still to this day" she would do anything for
- coworkers who, in the past were her "babies", become a group that is not in truth her family, but those who she wants to "feel like a family".

Dani says she has many definitions for *family*, and whether we read that her definition changed over time, or due to circumstance, or was always more flexible than she first states, her discourse shows very clearly that family is neither monolithic nor singular.

The other participant estranged from her family is Callie. Her family of origin was not able to accept her sexuality, Callie says, and that is one reason she has decided they cannot be a part of her life.

> But when it came push to shove, because I chose an alternative relationship, I was no longer lovable. I was no longer the good child, even though I was the one that made straight As through school and did all of this stuff because I wasn't- I mean I didn't even pick the perfect husband [ ] but because I chose to go outside of that and find something else, they totally pushed me aside, and I don't have anything to do with them. [My son] has never met them. He will not meet them as long as I have a say.

Callie describes her friends and their children as part of her family, a family created in light of this rejection. She defines kinship relations as they are salient to her life, and I would argue defines the relations for her son, both through not letting him meet her family of origin (and thus not admitting them into his inventory of relations) and through labeling non-biological relationships with familial kinship terms when she refers to her best friend's daughter as her son Cody's "sister".

Even so, in the following excerpts, Callie does not exclude the biological features of *family* (it can be one that you are "born into"), and actually elevates her biological family of origin with her use of "real":

> You've got family you're born into, and family that you choose. It's up to you to make them work.

> My real family knew everything [about us]. And that was- that's the reason why I don't have anything to do with them now, at this point.

These two instances illustrate the continued relevance of the "family of choice" model for some lesbian and gay parents, even though this model does not predominate nor exist to the exclusion of a traditional kinship model.

People on both sides of the debate over same-sex marriage have discussed what effect LGHFs might have on the structure of family in the United States. Many have

argued that these new families would result in a significant change in our cultural ideologies of family; some do not see that change as socially beneficial (as I will discuss below), while others welcome it. Sociologist Jacqui Gabb, for example, casts lesbian motherhood's existence as disruptive to cultural norms and categories:

> I suggest that it is lesbian maternity's disruption of progenitor categories of parenthood which denote its radical potentialities, through resistance to simple mapping of parental categories onto gendered bodies. (Gabb 2005: 590)

Gabb's contention raises two critical points for this study. First, in US culture today, parenthood and family creation is still seen as fundamentally the work of heterosexual couples. While this assumption is changing as more and more gay men and lesbians have or adopt children, the strong link between the procreative nature of a couple's relationship has not broken. Second, Gabb reminds us that blurring the lines that delineate gender roles still carries "radical" and "disruptive" potential. Though Gabb's focus is on lesbian mothers, one could argue that men's creation of family takes this radicalism even further. Nurturing of, bonding with, and attention to children continues to be placed in the purview of women as "women's work". Male interest in children is still often viewed with skepticism and caution. The disruptive nature of disregarding gender norms plays a central part in what I argue is the primary "sticking point" in societal acceptance for same-sex marriage, and by relation, lesbian and gay parenthood.

However, while these points must be kept in mind when analyzing data on gay and lesbian parents, Gabb notes radical <u>potential</u>, not reality. The data presented here shows that gay and lesbian parents, on the whole, do not consider their families or their status as parents "radical". They consider themselves no different than heterosexual parents, and when asked about their social networks, it is clear that they have established relationships with others based on their identity as parent more so than their identity as

homosexual. While there might be radical potential, then, that potential is not realized by these parents.

IDEOLOGIES OF NORMATIVE FAMILY VS. LGHFS

The context within which the parents in this study are living and negotiating their identities includes of course not only the "families of choice" model understood by and still relevant in the gay and lesbian community, but also the more dominant US ideology of the bilateral cognatic *family*. By looking at several widely accepted sources for models of family in America we can see similarities that help us understand how *family* is defined by different groups.[11]

To get a sense of some current, popularly held beliefs about family, I had an in-class discussion with University of Texas undergraduate students, mostly sophomores and juniors, who are almost all from Texas. On the whole they agreed that *family* necessarily includes many features related to close emotional connections. Their preliminary assumption was that *family* is a unit made of parents and children; as the discussion went on, other types of family were brought up, such as church family.[12] When I asked about its use as a noun modifier as in "family movie", they readily came up

[11]There are other groups referred to as *family*, such as church groups, sports teams and other organizations where people are expected to and do work closely together toward a shared goal. For simplicity, for this discussion I focus on data regarding *family* in the sense that I am using with the participants in this study, a parent-child or caregiver-dependent relationship.

[12]After discussing whether or not "respect" and "love" were necessary characteristics of *family*, the students also agreed that although the ideal situation would be to not have an abusive family member, when it does happen, the relationship does not change, but rather becomes degraded. When one student shared that she, in fact, had redefined her relationship to her abusive parent, and no longer calls him "father", nor regards him as part of her family, this was viewed by the class as the exception rather than the rule.

with the connotations of that use as well. The class was able to outline a fairly detailed sense of the word *family* with little direction. The major characteristics included:

- socially oriented features: respect, stressful, obligation, loyalty, tradition, affection, love, commitment, shared responsibility, care, shared culture, good citizen, community
- materially related features: physical proximity, pets, time and resources (as part of commitment), dinner together/spending time in shared activities
- features related to 'family' as a modifier for movies, TV, etc.: kids can see it, wholesome, has a moral/is moral, no sex, PG/G, acceptable, no violence, no swearing, happy

As these students point out, *family* is often used as a modifier for many nouns and adjectives, including *values*, *movie*, *business*, *friendly*, *arts*, *man* and *activity*. In each of these cases, the modifier *family* again references the caretaking relationship that exists between parents and children—a man focused on his family, an establishment that welcomes parents to bring their children to use their services, and values relating to the needs of a family.

However, each of these phrases also implicitly – or often explicitly – indexes other layers of social expectations in addition to caretaking. Examples can be found in Texas-based newspapers as well as on the national stage, since both media outlets and national spokespeople (particularly politicians) are resources for the maintenance, clarification and perpetuation of national ideologies:

Family man, with family as stable: In an article about a local artist from the *Dallas Morning News* website, Diane Reischel writes, "Despite the Bohemian splendor of that time—sleeping in the front of the studio, working in back—he says it was no recipe for stability. These days, the family man prefers to concentrate on real estate sales..." (accessed 6/29/14 from http://www.dallasnews.com/lifestyles/home-and-gardening/gardening/20100414-History-repeats-for-former-re-enactor-8629.ece) The

sentence before the author calls him a *family man* defines what a family man is not: unstable, Bohemian.

Family-friendly with family as appropriate for children: A review attributed to the *Orlando Sentinel* described a movie called *Letters to God* (accessed 6/29/14 from http://triblive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/ae/movies/s_675525.html#axzz364I0lfqx). In this review, the author notes, "Thus, while 'Letters to God' is certainly family-friendly, the blandness robs it of whatever emotion or redemption the filmmakers were shooting for."

Family-friendly, with family as synonymous with free from vice: From the Republican Party platform, ratified in August 2012, I include the whole excerpt to give the context of vice and sexuality, as it will come up later in my analyses (retrieved from http://www.gop.com/2012-republican-platform_Renewing/#Item1):

> "Making the Internet Family-Friendly
>
> Millions of Americans suffer from problem or pathological gambling that can destroy families. We support the prohibition of gambling over the Internet and call for reversal of the Justice Department's decision distorting the formerly accepted meaning of the Wire Act that could open the door to Internet betting. The Internet must be made safe for children. We call on service providers to exercise due care to ensure that the Internet cannot become a safe haven for predators while respecting First Amendment rights. We congratulate the social networking sites that bar known sex offenders from participation. We urge active prosecution against child pornography, which is closely linked to the horrors of human trafficking. Current laws on all forms of pornography and obscenity need to be vigorously enforced."

Family values: One of the most influential phrases with *family* as a noun modifier is "family values". "Family values" has been a key term in American politics for several decades, and is most often used to reference conservative political beliefs about the structure and role of the family within American society. In the 2012 presidential campaign, the phrase "family values" was not used as prominently by politicians as "American values", though the term "family values" is easily found in media coverage of

the campaign.[13] A review of both the Republican and Democratic Party platforms and of the websites for the two parties' candidates found that "values" was featured prominently on the Republican sites, closely associated with marriage and family. For example, on the site for Republican candidate Mitt Romney,[14] "Values" is listed alphabetically under "Issues". On the "Values" page, the title is "Values: Marriage, Family, Life", attesting to both the previously discussed association of marriage and family as well as to the interconnectedness of "values", "family" and conservatism in the United States. Likewise, on the platform page of the Republican Party's website, one of the planks is "Renewing American Values". First on the list of values is "Preserving and Protecting Traditional Marriage", about which the party says, in part,

> We recognize and honor the courageous efforts of those who bear the many burdens of parenting alone, even as we believe that marriage, the union of one man and one woman must be upheld as the national standard, a goal to stand for, encourage, and promote through laws governing marriage.

"Values" was not featured on the DNC website except in a blog by a DNC staff member,[15] nor was it a featured issue on President Obama's reelection site. In a search on that site,[16] "values" did come up in a section on faith and family, quoting Obama as saying,

> Treating others as you want to be treated. Requiring much from those who have been given so much. Living by the principle that we are our brother's keeper. Caring for the poor and those in need. These values are old. They can be found in many denominations and many faiths, among many believers and among many non-believers. And they are values that have always made this country great...

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[13]E.g., "Playing Politics with Family Values" (found at http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2008/09/07/playing_politics_with_family_values/) and "In Ohio, Romney Touts Family Values, Record in Appeal to Women" (found at http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2012/08/25/in-ohio-romney-campaign-touts-family-values-record-in-appeal-to-women/)

[14]http://www.mittromney.com/issues/values

[15]Chan, http://www.democrats.org/news/blog/lets_talk_about_values1

[16]http://www.barackobama.com/people-of-faith/faith-and-family

This bit of campaign rhetoric makes clear that the "values" of the party's candidate are not explicitly connected by the party to marriage and family in particular, nor to any religious tradition—a clear distinction from the Republican sources.

To make clear the connection between values, family, and conservatism in the US, a look at two major conservative meetings— the Values Voters Conference[17] of 2012 and the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) 2014 meeting—is warranted. The Values Voters Conference, held in September of 2012, was sponsored by the Family Research Council and featured as noted speakers and sponsors many of the most influential conservative activists and politicians in the US. Republican Vice Presidential candidate Paul Ryan, one-time presidential candidate Representative Michele Bachmann, Senator Rand Paul, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, the president of the Institute for American Values Gary Bauer, and many other influential voices took part in the conference. The conclusion here is that *family* and *values* have been connected and appropriated by the Republican party and many of its most influential conservative adherents in a way that specifically excludes support for same-sex marriage and lesbian and gay parenting. That is, *family* in this significant political realm means quite specifically <u>not</u> "gay".

However, those connections appear to be waning to some extent. In March of 2014, former Reagan cabinet member and Fox News political commentator Oliver North spoke about conservatives' values in the United States. In this excerpt, he equates the political necessity of conservatives' fight against same-sex marriage to that of the fight against slavery in the 19th century:

[17]http://www.frcaction.org/get.cfm?i=PG12H02

> Some say that we must ignore social issues, like the definition of marriage and the sanctity of life, religious freedoms. I say those are not social issues. They are deeply moral and spiritual issues and they should be part of America's elections. In the 1850s, in the 1850s a political party was born on the idea of a great moral issue - human bondage, the abolition of slavery in America. If we as conservatives cease to be a place where people of faith and those who believe in strong moral values can come, we will cease to be a political force in America. (http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/oliver-north-gop-must-oppose-marriage-equality-it-fought-slavery)

Though North received vigorous applause for his comments, it was widely reported that same-sex marriage was not raised as a forefront issue at CPAC in 2014. The relative silence on this "strong moral value" reflects the change in momentum of the legal recognition of same-sex marriage. Judicial rulings and political action in several states has legalized same-sex marriage in nineteen states, and brought legal recognition of same-sex marriage to over half of the United States. Conservative leaders such as Senator Alan Simpson are now voicing support for same-sex marriage equality as a conservative value:

> I'm a Republican and the party's basic core is government out of your life and the right to be left alone. Whether you're gay or lesbian or straight, if you love someone, and you want to marry them — marry them. (http://onpolitics.usatoday.com/2014/04/08/gay-marriage-alan-simpson-ad-utah/)

That the examples given above are all from political sources is neither by chance nor representative of transient political concerns. The politically active organizations quoted here, these politicians and the "issue" of "family values", are all long-term fixtures of the American political scene. Anti-same-sex marriage activists referenced above have had a role in the exclusion of the participants in this study from the institution of marriage. They all played a part in the enactment of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which allows states to not recognize marriages performed in other states, and in the defining of "normal marriage" (Gallagher 2003) as heterosexual and, by extension, the definition of "normal" *family* as "not gay".

One analysis of the opposition to gay- and lesbian-headed families seems to be in major part about the intersection between this idea of normality (which I will discuss further below and in Chapter 6) and volition. Volition sets gay and lesbian parents apart from most other non-traditional family forms in the sense that these parents are making a choice to create a family form that is not seen as normal. Gay and lesbian parents are illegitimized based on the perception that, unlike other family forms, the inability to procreate means that theirs can only be chosen; therefore, the parents have chosen to be a non-heterosexual and subsequently non-normative family. In addition to highlighting the nonprocreative nature of these families, the consistent equation by those against same-sex marriage of homosexuality to pedophilia, bestiality, or love of inanimate objects dramatically highlights the illegitimate, abnormal or impossible nature of a parent-child caretaking kinship for gay men and lesbians. By contrast, other nontraditional family forms imply, or are perceived as acknowledging, that two-parent heterosexual unions are still the ideal, even if not the reality. Cases in point include:

- single motherhood: a father would have been there if one had been available, or if the father had not left
- teenage pregnancy: could have been normative if the children had waited until they were mature
- both parents absent: there were two parents, one mother, one father, even though another caretaker is raising the kids
- divorced/remarried: a heterosexual union, though a failed one
- once-married, now out gay/lesbian parent: child was from a heterosexual union, and the new choice to be gay is a mistake
- transgender male/female with an apparently opposite-sex spouse: follows the heterosexual norm by the look of it, able to get married, so legally a family
- unmarried parents: still heteronormative, just not choosing to legalize the union
- adoptive parents: they may have had their own kids if they could have

The idea of volition as it interacts with heteronormativity seems to explain much of the opposition to this family form, as there are so many other family forms that do not

receive the same amount of attention. Adoptive straight parents, for one, choose to be parents in the same way that adoptive lesbian and gay parents do. Their family form tends to be relatively unmarked in the US context, and to contest the legality of a straight couple adopting a child doesn't even register on the radar of advocates of a heteronormative definition of family. Potentially the next closest family form having volition, in the sense of a choice to do something nonnormative, is that of unwed teenage parents, especially mothers. The idea of an accidental pregnancy is overlooked by those opposed to this type of family in favor of a focus on the choice to have sex in the first place. Teaching teenagers to choose to wait is the preferred solution to what they view as a social problem.[18] Abstinence-only education and chastity pledges, both popular in Texas, are current forms of pregnancy prevention. And yet, we do not find the same level of resistance to teen pregnancy as we do to lesbian and gay parenting. Teen pregnancy is seen as a social and moral issue, but there are no claims of godlessness (with Bible verses included) or of a danger to the children being raised, and most importantly there is no call for its legal outlawing. Opposition to teen pregnancy, unlike opposition to same-sex marriage, does not create an environment in which parenting rights are denied and the family form is unrecognized. In Chapter 6, I will discuss this issue at greater length.

In contrast to the language conflating marriage and family, the parents in this study reported that they did not believe having marriage legalized in Texas or in the US

[18]It is well beyond the purview of this work to discuss the social benefits or disadvantages of teen parenting; my point simply is that, given a similar "social problem" that marriage and family advocates discuss, there are still key differences that might illuminate the nature of the debate over the definition of *family*.

would change their family at all, though that did not mean they saw no disadvantages to not having access to it.

> Sarah: Do you think that your family is different in any ways from straight families?
>
> Brenda: I think only because you know we can't legally marry so there's those you know problems with- you know we can't say "spou-" you know we don't say "spouse" it's always we have to find the right word to say of who we're talking to. If we say "significant other"...there's always that potential hurdle when I'm trying or about to communicate with somebody because you know I'm not married, but I don't want them to think that I'm single.

Some mentioned that they would benefit from being able to have access to each other's health insurance or social security benefits. When the topic came up, some parents said that if marriage were legal in Texas they would get married (none have traveled to get married in a state where it is legal), but most just noted other benefits such as being able to celebrate a major life event with others.

> Jane: It wouldn't change anything. The only reason we would get married is for the benefits.
>
> Catherine: Yeah, and to have a party. I want a party.

Contrary to the driving voices in the marriage debate which assume the procreative nature of marriage, none of the participants in my study said that marriage is a prerequisite for family creation. That is, whereas family is argued by many in the national debate as both a natural and expected outcome of marriage, this type of requirement did not come up in the interviews. These points are, on the one hand, a rather unsurprising finding considering the legal status of these parents; on the other hand, they show the difference between the rhetoric of marriage and its reality.

PARTICIPANTS' DEFINITIONS OF *FAMILY*

Gay and lesbian parents in the United States form their families with varying degrees of ease and societal acceptance. In Texas, although there are avenues open to gay and lesbian people to build and maintain a family, there is no systematic support in the form of legal recognition of kinship status. The state does not recognize same-sex marriage, gay and lesbian couple adoptions need to be done surreptitiously, and while co-parent adoptions can be performed with a parent of the same sex, they cannot happen simultaneously. According to two of the parents I interviewed, they are often done "off the books" and parents need to know which judges will perform them. Furthermore, community support for their family form, while not absent by any means, is not a foregone conclusion for these parents.

In this section, I will look first at the parents' stated definitions of *family*, with a focus on the similarities and differences between them as well as the overall characteristics of their definitions. I will illuminate the ways in which parents draw upon both broad and narrow definitions of *family* through their acceptance or rejection of dominant ideologies of family. In addition, we will see that family is often characterized as active, dependent upon location, and having fluid membership. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about what is happening to the definition of *family* overall, tying together both the parents' definitions and popularly available definitions that are frequently at odds with each other. Using Lakoff's (1986, 1987) prototype theory, I will offer a prototype model of *family* and show the way that seemingly small shifts in the characteristics of the category of family can account for an ideological impasse between those who accept LGHFs as a legitimate family form, and those who do not.

One of the first questions I asked the interviewees in this study regarded their definition of family. Though conversational in nature and delivery, the question was

always a slight variation on "What does family mean to you? How do you define it?" Some had an answer immediately, others needed to think a bit. All phrased their answers in a succinct, rather dictionary-like way, unsurprisingly. My analysis of just this piece of the interviews focused on these three distinguishing descriptive points: broad/narrow; active/static; and member inclusion. In this section, I will show how these characteristics were realized through the discourses of the interviews.

Broad and Narrow Definitions

One of the distinctive features of these interviews was the parents' use of both broad and narrow definitions of family in response to the question "What does family mean to you?" as well as throughout the interviews. I use "broad" to mean a definition that is open to inclusion of non-blood-related or otherwise legal kinship (such as adoption and marriage) and often including descriptions of relational/emotional connections. This roughly equates to Weston's "families we choose". I use "narrow" to refer to a more traditionally understood definition of family, namely those people connected by blood and marriage, including the couple's own relationship.[19] Of the total 22 individuals who responded to the question "What does family mean to you?", 20 offered narrow definitions, and 14 offered broad definitions. Just over half (12 of 22) characterized family both broadly and narrowly.[20] For example, Joanna and Lacey first defined family

[19] Since the couples are not able to legally marry, their relationship to each other is not "blood and marriage"; however, obviously it does not fall under the "families of choice" model either. Since same-sex marriage is only legal in nineteen states, its place in the anthropological realm of kinship is still "non-blood/non-legal"; however, this does not square with the reality of these and many other couples' lived experiences as long-term, committed relationships in which two parents are raising children.

[20] In counting the number who gave both definitions, I counted only those who verbalized or verbally agreed with both types of definition. This is a slightly problematic accounting, since both parents took part in the same interview. One parent, then, could have just talked about the other type of definition,

more broadly, and then qualified it by saying that their "current" family is themselves, their daughters and extended family members. Similarly, while both Rifka and Victoria broadly define *family* as a group of choice, they spoke about the importance for the boys to have a physical resemblance to each other and to have the same last name. Rifka said "obviously our immediate family is the four of us", and both agree that, as she put it, "family is two boys, two moms, one dog and two cats." But in the end, Victoria and Rifka agreed that, as Victoria said, "basically, family is people that we want to be with and love to be with and choose to be with and that to me, it's everlasting."

Paula and Rachel's family makeup might be the least traditional (though not particularly outlying) of the families in this study, as it includes stepchildren who are the biological children of Paula's previous heterosexual, unmarried relationship, Rachel's biological child conceived within their relationship, and Paula's first son who is older than Rachel. This nontraditional makeup notwithstanding, the mothers described *family* as "all the Hallmark card stuff" and "the place where you learn how to do everything". They agreed that *family* is "who you spend time with and it's who you love" and "who you're responsible to and for". For them, *family* involves commitment, and can include friends as well as blood relatives.

Of those who only gave one type of definition, far more were narrow than broad: eight gave just a narrow definition, while only two of the parents gave just a broad definition. Of the 10 couples in which both parents responded, all but two responded the same way. That is, both parents gave both definitions, or both parents gave just the same single definition. Of the two who did not respond in parallel fashion, one stated their

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voicing what had not already been said. I believe that these numbers still give a useful picture of the range of definitions, and importantly, show what the parents are attending to in their definitions.

opposite life experiences openly. The other gives the impression that the second speaker is following the first, adding to a jointly constructed definition. The overarching picture, then, is that most speakers articulated a definition that mirrors a standard, more traditional definition—one that many would call heteronormative.

Eleven of those articulated a clear distinction between two types of family. In some cases, the speaker employed linguistic cues including changes in voice quality, hesitations and discourse particles that offset one definition from the other. For example, Dani's shift from talking about her family of origin to her family of friends (and from her partner's narrow definition of *family* to her own broad one) can be seen through the use of the discourse particle string "and um so", which took nearly two-and-a-half seconds.

> Dani: Whereas Brenda has always stayed very close with her family and has been in the same proximity to her family, I didn't. I moved out the- literally the day after I graduated high school moved out and never went home and moved hundreds [laughs] of miles away. You know we all live in Texas, but I don't live anywhere near them, on purpose. And um, so, I made a very close group of friends who became my family in every way I mean just I would do anything for my friends

Barbara, on the other hand, uses a change in voice quality for dramatic effect. In addition, she interjects 'um' at the very start of her broad definition, and two more times, where that kind of hesitation had been absent in the narrow definition.

> Barbara: For me there's an immediate polarity. There's [dramatic, breathy-voice] 'family'—as in biological family and the frustrations that exist with being genetically really closely related to people and just wondering how things came out so differently. Um and then there's [clear, positive voice] 'family'—um those that we have drawn to ourselves, the affectional bond, the commitment bond, um that have made them family even though there's no genetic relationship. Then the mother bear, passionate [3 sec] sub-group of that that's our kids. Um, and you know some- sometimes there's a- a little overlay between the- the people we want to be with and the people we're genetically related [to]...and that's- that's nice.

In the next example, Joanna defines *family* for herself in a narrow way,[21] and after the hesitating "um" expresses a clear understanding that other LGHFs do not always have the same type of support.

> Everyday, our prayer that we say at our table is that we- 'we thank God for the love and support of our family and friends.' We thank God for the food, we thank Him for our health, but we also thank God for the love and support of our family and friends because the fact that we know that um [.2] not a lot of gay and lesbian families have the support that we have and we are thankful every day that we have parents and brothers and sisters who talk to us.

Looking further at the responses, we find that of the narrow definitions, not surprisingly, 14 out of 20 individuals included their immediate family[22] in their definition. Six of 20 included their families of origin, five referenced a traditional family such as Ozzie and Harriet Nelson (from 1950s television);[23] four included extended families of origin (cousins, aunts, grandparents, etc.), and four included their pets. As for the broad definitions, 10 of 14 included "anyone" (using that word or a related term) in their definition; eight included friends; and two included coworkers. The examples of broad definitions below reference three distinct features (underlined): blood/legal/genealogical kinship; choice; and the idea of "bringing in" outsiders to the family.

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[21] Joanna does include their long-time friends as "extended family" in the context of the interviewer's previous use of the term. "And then [there is], like you said, our outside- our extended family, you know, our friends that we've known for many many years." I would argue strongly that, without the outside suggestion, Joanna would not have included friends in her definition of family.

[22] "Immediate family" was counted when a speaker either used the term itself or described it as themselves plus their children.

[23] A family that "embodied wholesome, 'normal' American existence so conscientiously (if blandly) that their name epitomized upright, happy family life for decades." (Museum of Broadcast Communications)

Rifka: ...then I would also say that family is the support structures that you create to be able to reinforce and hold up um your nest and we've got that with extended family, with family of choice that we've brought in who we learn from and care about.

Victoria: basically, family is people that we want to be with and love to be with and choose to be with and that to me, it's everlasting.

Ann: I have a big family, so family is not just nuclear, it's the whole kit and kaboodle. For us, on my side of the family is ...one of my brothers' wife, her mother is just as much part of the family as anyone else. We're ...it's much more of an emotional than a legal or genealogical thing. I have a half sister; if you ask me how many siblings I have, she doesn't get added in because we didn't grow up with her.

Joe: We've never felt the sting of the alienation of our families because of our sexuality. So you know, when we say family I think we know we mean extended and any of those others that we bring in that aren't necessarily related by blood as well.

Barbara: Um and then there's [clear, positive voice] 'family'—um those that we have drawn to ourselves, the affectional bond, the commitment bond, um that have made them family even though there's no genetic relationship.

Callie: you've got family you're born into, and family that you choose. It's up to you to make them work.

Connie: You know, I have umm, I have family of origin and family of choice. In my case, there's a lot of overlapping between the two. I have a brother half a mile away that I see several times a week. Family are the people that I guess that I'm closest to that I love the most and that I have an important ongoing relationship with them.

Dani: I can't define it for Brenda, but I would say in my opinion my definition of family is a lot broader than hers because I have had friends that I'm very very close with....When I was a teller manager, I very much considered myself a parent of my employees.

As we can see, lesbian and gay parents, though barred from some standard markers of family such as marriage, and until recently not expected to make biological families of their own, still for the most part define family within a traditional kinship

system of genetic or legal ties. At the same time, many recognize the existence of and often very easily include an array of others in their family system.

Family as Active and Located

Definitions of *family* can be analyzed as more than simply broad or narrow. *Family* is more than just membership status. For many participants, *family* is not just who you are, but where you are and what you do. For seven interviewees, some type of action was central to their definition of *family*. In twelve discourse segments, *family* was not defined just by a relational or emotional connection, but by the actions one performs for another. For those who included action in their narrow definition, two involved immediate family and two involved families of origin. Joanna, for example, invokes a broad definition when she says:

> I don't know how I define my fa- how do I define what family means to me? Obviously it's a group of people, um a group of people who you know are together for whatever purpose.

She then brings in an active component when talking about family, though now *family* is defined more narrowly as family of origin as well as parent-child kinship:

> we know that um [.2] not a lot of gay: and lesbian families have the support that we have and we are thankful every day that we have parents and brothers and sisters who talk to us. And that- you know, even go beyond that, they send us stuff and they send us our love and we're welcome in their houses and our kids are wel[come]. We know that that's something that not everybody has.

Mario's definition very prominently includes an active component as well:

> I mean they can be involved in the same event but uh I think the difference would be the household family, I mean those are the ones that you're going to: take to the doctor, to the hospital if you need to, where with friends, I think they might have uh someone else to do that for them. So it's not- they don't live with you.

Another notable feature of the definitions given is the speakers' locating of *family* in particular places, as we saw above with Mario's "household family" and even Joanna's "we're welcome in their houses". Location was mentioned by nine of the 23 participants, in both broad (3) and narrow (6) definitions. Brenda, for example, says that unlike her partner Dani (who includes a broad range of friends and coworkers in her definition of *family*), her primary focus is on her immediate family. To highlight this, she says she would do anything for "the people in the room", referring to her partner and her two daughters who were all in the room at the time of the interview. Similarly, Catherine responded to the question "how do you define *family*?" with "Well, there are six of us in the house". And, as we saw above, Mario makes a distinction between two types of *family* by indexing home as well when he says "you can have a family household and you can have a family of friends."

Three participants included certain members of their family with direct reference to the proximity to where they live. Thomas lists a "brother who lives [in a nearby town]" and Connie has a "brother half a mile away". Mario's partner Isaac talks about their family now being made up of people who live nearby, since their families of origin are a day's drive away.

> That's pretty much it hhh. And I guess for us, here in [this town], our family is mostly our friends cuz all our family is in other cities.

In this interesting case of seeming semantic ambiguity, *family* is entirely defined by location. Our family in "all our family" has a different referent altogether than in "here in [this town] our family". The two are distinguished with ease by the speaker through locational modification only.

Likewise, Terry described a change in her definition of *family* occurring after moving from New York to Texas. Without extended family nearby, *family* became just

her immediate family. Travel limitations led to a breakdown of the previous version of family:

> And so then when we left New York and came down to Texas, my family was just my immediate family, I didn't go back up to New York very much, I didn't have very much contact with you know my cousins, [it] just sort of fell apart.

Family as Fluid

For some parents, *family* is not a permanent set of people, but is characterized as rather more fluid or changeable.[24] In addition to many "permanent" sets of families, there is a temporality for some. Connie references a temporal nature of *family* with the use of "current" and "recently":

> My family currently includes Janelle, my partner; I have a 23 year old daughter, hallelujah, who lives on her own [incomprehensible; laughing]; my brother; and it also includes uh John, who was my housemate for several years, and his mother has recently moved in with him because she has some health issues. So that's how I, you know, the last time I had to list my family on something, that was who we listed. Oh, and we listed Christie's boyfriend too.

Joanna also notes that her "current" family is her nuclear family as well as her partner's family of origin:

> My current family I consider, you know, obviously, these three folks, my parents, and Lacey's family [emphasis on "and", as if she wanted to highlight their inclusion] I consider Lacey's family very much, her brothers and sisters, my family.

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[24] See Weston (1991) for a similar argument.

As we saw before, for Dani, *family* has been the friends she has made over the years after she left home, and is a group whose membership has changed over time. *Family* is not one stable, defined unit, but rather a set of bonds that can be and are formed with a variety of different people. Again, her use of the nonspecific *you* is significant, as it denotes open, ongoing membership:

> Family to me has a lot of different meanings...it's about the emotional bonds that I've formed with someone. And once I've committed to you, and I've formed that emotional bond, you are my family.

This idea of temporality has as a subset the "families of choice" that Weston (1991) explores. Many of the parents in this study, as I've noted, have defined *family* as one that you can choose. However, there is a difference in that the "traditional" idea of family in the gay community is a family made of other gay men and lesbians who are there to support you as you come out about your sexuality, as you begin to live your life as a gay man or a lesbian, and as you weather the loss of support from your family of origin, your friends, and your community. For the parents in this study, however, families of choice do not include only (or even often) other gay people. For those who related experiences of rejection from their families of origin, their descriptions of their families of choice have more to do with them as individuals or as a gay couple than as parents with children. This suggests that the "family of choice" model supports their individual identity negotiation rather than their negotiations as an LGHF.

Prototype Theory in a Social Context

When people talk about marriage or gay parenting as a transformation, they are talking about a cultural shift: a redefining of these two central organizing institutions in US culture to allow for same-sex couples. And as language and culture are intimately

connected, the transformation of cultural understandings of *family* is very tightly bound to the transformation of the meaning of marriage, the meaning of parenthood and how "normal" is defined. It's no surprise, then, that many against same-sex marriage argue that its legalization will change the definition of marriage altogether. Likewise, arguments have been put forward challenging the right of the courts and the government to codify this definitional change as a means of advancing (or, some would argue, forcing) this cultural shift.

In a sense, then, this debate revolves not around gay and straight couples, or conservative and liberal thinkers, but around meaning-making and meaning-makers. And we have seen two sets of meaning-makers so far: on the one hand, people are invoking the meaning of *family* as a way to discard the notion that gay and lesbian couples should be able to get married; on the other, people in this study are defining *family* as they live it, regardless of their right to marry. However, these meaning-makers are not engaging in changing (or refusing to change) a singular, stable definition of *family*, but are dealing with two different definitions altogether.

George Lakoff's (1986) discussion of prototype theory (PT) offers a way to look closely at these contested definitions—or categories—of *family*. Put in terms of the rallying signs held by supporters on both sides, this is "one man+one woman" versus "love makes a family". As *family* is not a fixed entity but rather an ideological one, any transformation in the definition of *family* would take place in the prototype of *family*, not in the nature of *family* itself. By using PT to examine the meaning-making by the families in this study and by those in opposition to their families, we get a deeper, more complex look at how these models are made and how ideologies might shift.

Figure 5: Marriage = One Man + One Woman (http://www.komonews.com/news/local/gay-marriage-137909658.html)

Figure 6: Love Makes a Family (http://scott-norton.blogspot.com/2012/06/gay-marriage-you-cannot-straddle.html)

Lakoff (1986) argues that linguistic categories involve a base structure and an internal structure. The base structure of a category defines what belongs in the category and what does not—in his example, it divides birds from nonbirds in the category *bird*. The internal structure of the category, on the other hand, tells us more about the specific features of the category. These features affect human cognitive processes such as remembering, inferring and reasoning (32).

Different base models then can converge in a prototype, an "experiential cluster" (37), or into what Evans and Green (2006) call a "composite prototype" (275). Lakoff explores the prototype of mother, arguing that it is actually a cluster of base models such as the "birth" model, the "genealogical" model, and the "nurturant" model. Furthermore, when looking at different members of the category (e.g., robins versus penguins in the bird category) central (robins) and non-central (penguins) members of the prototype are connected to each other via what he calls a radial structure. This structure is a way of illustrating how subcategories (say, of flightless birds) are more or less closely related to the prototype. Radial categories are "cultural products" (Evans and Green, 2006: 276). The non-central cases in any category, says Lakoff, are simply conventionalized variations on the central case and must be learned.

Applying this theory to the definitions discussed above, three base models converge into the prototype of *family* in the United States. First, I will outline and briefly discuss the three base models I believe make up the prototype. Then, I will show how the models allow or do not allow for LGHFs, leading to the impasse present in this debate.

The first model for the category of *family* includes relational/emotional characteristics and is based on definitions discussed in the interviews with my participants. I'll call this the Love Model, as shown below in Figure 7.

- who you do things for
- who you're responsible to and for
- those you've drawn close to you
- those who live nearby

Figure 7. Love Model of *family*

Features included in this model, interestingly, are rarely discussed by groups opposed to same-sex marriage. Though I would certainly not make an argument that these people do not believe love is a part of marriage and family, it is striking that the terms used in this model are not brought up in this debate either as features of their own families or as features of groups headed by gay and lesbian parents.

The second model I call the Blood-Marriage Model. While it shares characteristics with a classic anthropological model of kinship, this model contains features specific to the discourses used in the debate. The Blood-Marriage model shares the most features cited by both groups of meaning-makers, likely because both groups have experiences with family that includes a blood-marriage component, whether their current families or families of origin. This model is shown here in Figure 8.

- family terms of relation (sister, brother, mother-in-law, etc.)
- genetic relation: "family you're born into" (Callie, participant)
- God-given
- marriage creates family
- heterosexual sexual relationships create family
- parents are biologically male and female
- parents are biologically related to children
- parents live with dependent children
- gender normative childrearing practices
- non-sexual
- child-focused

Figure 8. Blood-Marriage Model of *family*

The third model, shown in Figure 9, I call the Choice Model. This model has overlap with the Love Model in that those the couples chose to bring into their families are also those they love. The key distinction is in the parents' focus in their definition. The Love Model includes both families of choice and biological and legal kinship relations. Many parents specifically referenced the feature of "choice" when they defined family. Given the historical significance of families of choice within gay and lesbian communities, its specific inclusion in the definition of family sets it apart from the more widely encompassing Love Model. The internal features apply both to my participants' definitions of *family* (especially with respect to Weston's definition of "families we choose") and to those of opponents of same-sex marriage. However, as I argue below, this model is not available to both sets of meaning-makers in the same way.

- those you bring closer to you who are not connected by blood or marriage

Figure 9. Choice Model of *family*

These three base models then converge into a FAMILY prototype, which I call the Caretaker-Dependent prototype.

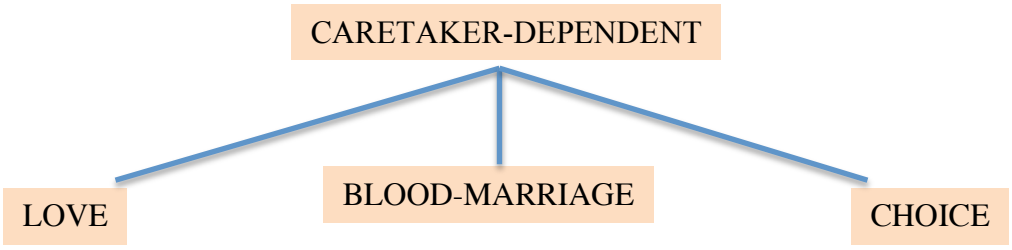

Figure 10. Caretaker-Dependent Prototype of FAMILY

From this same prototype, we need to account for **two** different sets of radial categories, one that includes LGHFs, and one that rejects it. For while Lakoff argues that there are different models that can converge into on prototype (*mother* as nurturer, bearer, and genealogical forerunner), none of those models produce radial structures that essentially disagree with each other. To be one kind of mother does not preclude you from being another kind of mother. Let's look at what the radial categories look like, and then discuss how these two different sets emerged from one prototype.

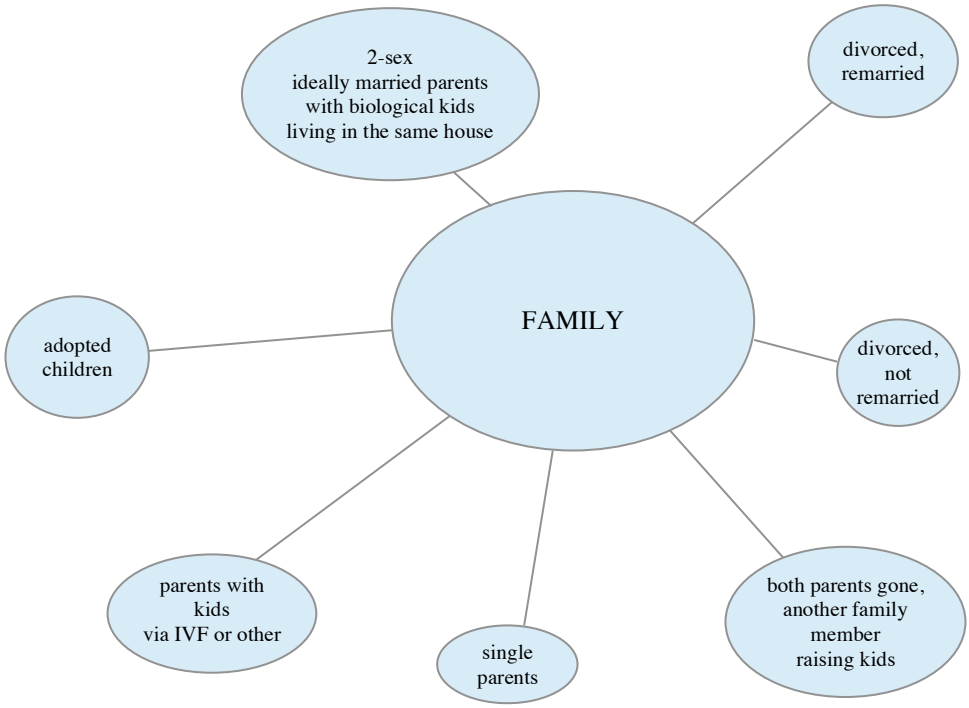

Figure 11. Radial Categories for the FAMILY Prototype: Against LGHFs

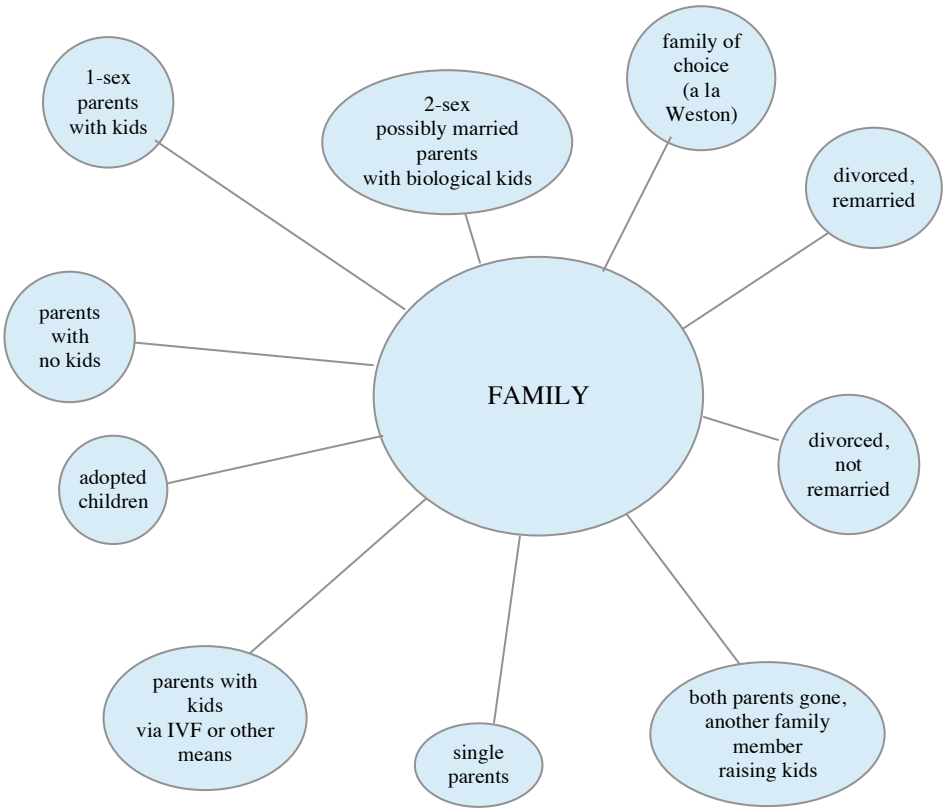

Figure 12. Radial Categories for the FAMILY Prototype: Supporting LGHFs

So our question now is this: how can we describe and fully account for the fact that family plays such a central role in the discourse against same-sex marriage as well as for same-sex marriage (in particular as shown through thousands of lesbian and gay people raising children), and yet the two sides fully disagree on the central legal question regarding same-sex marriage? The discourse against same-sex marriage very often involves this deduction involving family: marriage requires/allows/expects children; same-sex parents are bad for children; therefore, same-sex marriage is bad (for children).

And the responding argument often holds that the first and second "truths" are in fact purely subjective, and not truths at all. "Not all married people must have children," is one reply, along with "Abusive parents are bad for children, but they can get married." These arguments, however, are not persuasive to people and organizations against same-sex marriage, many of whom are mentioned throughout this chapter.

Though many of the features of the FAMILY prototype are shared, based on the discourses of the national debate and of my participants, the model of *family* cannot be singular. For the participants in this study, the FAMILY prototype must allow a married, heterosexual, "2.5 kids" model and a same-sex parents model. The prototype model above achieves that end, provided we qualify four of the items in the Blood-Marriage base model, noted here in bold:

- family terms of relation (sister, brother, mother-in-law, etc.)
- "family you're born into" (Callie, participant)
- God-given (**optional**)
- marriage creates family (**optional**)
- heterosexual sexual relationships may create family
- parents in 2-parent household **may be** biologically male and female
- parents **may be** biologically related to children
- parents live with dependent children
- gender normative childrearing practices
- non-sexual
- child-focused

By contrast, for the opponents of same-sex marriage/families, there must be a different model that does not include gay parents but can include single parents, grandparents raising grandkids, divorced and remarried parents, teen and adoptive parents, and so on. In fact, it must be able to include a gay person married to a

biologically opposite-sex[25] person who could be either homo- or heterosexual. Though not widely espoused as a viable option, this position was asserted by no less thoughtful a voice than the dissenting Justice Francis Spina in the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's 2003 decision to legalize same-sex marriage:

> All individuals, with certain exceptions not relevant here, are free to marry. Whether an individual chooses not to marry because of sexual orientation or any other reason should be of no concern to the court. . . . There is no restriction on the right of any plaintiff to enter into marriage. Each is free to marry a willing person of the opposite sex.

To satisfy these criteria, the Blood-Marriage model outlined above works, provided that we again qualify some of the features internal to the base model. In particular, the biological sexes of the parents in a two-parent household must be different:

- family terms of relation (sister, brother, mother-in-law, etc.)
- "family you're born into" (Callie, participant)
- God-given
- marriage creates family
- heterosexual sexual relationships may create family
- parents in 2-parent household **must be** biologically male and female
- parents may be biologically related to children
- parents live with dependent children
- gender normative childrearing practices
- non-sexual
- child-focused

In addition to the qualifiers noted above, the understanding of the meanings of two other features play a critical part in the contrast between these two versions of the Blood-Marriage base model. The first is "non-sexual". In the view of many anti-same-

[25]I do acknowledge that there are several intersex biological varieties, and do not wish to exclude people who identify as intersex. According to the law (and therefore to marriage rights) and to our primary understanding of biological sex that has a part in this debate, I have chosen to limit my discussion to the two-sex binary.

sex marriage activists, the presence of homosexuality is, in itself, a sexualization of the parent-child unit, thereby precluding it from family status. This position is readily explainable from a markedness viewpoint: to those with little or no personal contact with LGHFs, the sexuality of the parents is highly marked. This markedness makes sexuality a very visible, rather unavoidable feature of these families. For those who who have more personal experience, and of course those who are in an LGHF, the parents' sexuality is nearly unmarked, and these families register as "non-sexual". Lakoff notes that domains of experience are highly relevant to categorization; I would add that in a social context such as this, domain of experience is a central component.

At the same time, this difference in position on the feature "non-sexual" can also be understood by looking at different views of homosexuality, one as an action or behavior, and the other as a passive, innate orientation. The view of homosexuality as a "preference" for a type of sexual behavior—a view held by many against same-sex marriage—prioritizes an active quality above any other. This active quality renders the behavioral part of homosexuality more visible. If, on the other hand, homosexuality is seen as an orientation, the active nature recedes to the same level of visibility as any other personal quality.

The second feature we should look at more closely is "child-focused" as opposed to parent-focused. This idea highlights the self-interest that gay people are seen to have by choosing (in this view) to be gay. This feature and the "non-sexual" feature are found in both pro- and anti-LGHF meaning-makers' definitions.[26] Indeed, "non-sexual",

[26]To many, the researcher included, these arguments are not about gay marriage or LGHFs at all, but actually about a dislike of homosexuality altogether. And many times the counterargument to "defense of marriage" laws is "They're homophobic, end of story." While I agree that this is true to an extent, I have encountered many very thoughtful speakers and writers who (at least publicly) know and respect gay people, but cannot reconcile that with laws allowing gay marriage and family

"child-focused" and "parents must be biologically male and female" go well together for some opponents. In 2003, noted Institute for Marriage and Public Policy leader Maggie Gallagher gave testimony before the US Senate in which all three of these features coalesce into her argument that marriage and same-sex marriage are mutually exclusive ideas:

> Two ideas are in conflict here: one is that children deserve mothers and fathers and that adults have an obligation to at least try to conduct their sexual lives to give children this important protection. That is the marriage idea. The other is that adult interests in sexual liberty are more important than "imposing" or preferring any one family form: all family forms must be treated identically by law if adults are to be free to make intimate choices. This is the core idea behind the drive for same-sex marriage. And it is the core idea that must be rejected if the marriage idea is to be sustained.

Gallagher argues both that lesbian and gay parents' sexuality is a choice, an "adult [interest] in sexual liberty", and that bringing children into their relationship is to expose children to adult sexuality. Her linguistic choices of the phrases "intimate choices" "preferring" and "adult interests" readily conjure images of sexual behavior, pornography in particular. Furthermore, for Gallagher, gay men and lesbians are not homosexual by nature, but by how they "conduct their sexual lives." While she does not argue against adults making these choices for their own private lives, she rejects the idea that children should be exposed to these choices, since those choices are inherently antithetical to child protection.

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formation. Most of the time, the sticking point, if you will, is a religious argument. Marriage is understood by many to be rooted in the Bible, as is a prohibition against nonprocreative sexual behavior. Since this argument can so easily be refuted (e.g., laws in the US are not based on the Bible; the Bible has many instances of polygamy), the question becomes why, in the face of clear evidence to the contrary, do people hold on to this argument?

CONCLUSION

As we have seen throughout this chapter, defining *family* is not as straightforward as it might seem. In addition to its conflation with marriage and the intersections between normality and volition, *family* references actions, emotions, prohibitions, and religious belief. Even for the parents in this study, who knew the purpose of the interview, defining the word itself was not always a simple task. Franklin and McKinnon note the complex nature of contemporary kinship in the West:

> It is not simply that kinship must always be created, negotiated, and brought into being in practice, as Yan and others argue. It is also that the lines between kinship and other forms of relationality are fluid (see Carsten 2000). On the one hand, friends…and strangers can be made into kin, while mothers…and patrilinieal relations can be made into strangers… On the other hand, the same substance (blood, genes, eggs, sperm) that is mobilized to create kinship ties in one context, will in different institutional contexts…be made to create other kinds of relations, or no relation at all. Kinship is not a preexisting thing but rather something 'congealed…' (13)

It comes as no surprise, then, that the debate over same-sex marriage and parenting rights is also more complex and harder to resolve than advocates on both sides would expect. When people who support same-sex marriage try to argue against the hypocrisy of citing passages from Leviticus (e.g., homosexuality is prohibited, but so is shellfish), their attempt to simplify this complex issue renders them unable to understand how people against same-sex marriage cannot see the hypocrisy and lack of reason. Likewise, when people against same-sex marriage argue that marriage is an agreement with God to raise children, in their attempt to show the simplicity of this argument, they are unable to work out how one would not want purity, faith, and a child-centered focus in their families.

CHAPTER 6: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY THROUGH LOCAL AND NONLOCAL POSITIONING

INTRODUCTION

From a social constructionist perspective, identities are not given, nor static, nor products of socialization; rather they are produced and reproduced in specific interactional contexts. That is, the negotiation of identities occurs through social practices, of which discourse is one (de Fina, et al. 2006: 2). In the process of everyday interactions and reporting those interactions, the parents in this study created and performed their identities as parents and family members as concretely, if not more so, than through their specific discussions of the definition of *family*.[27]

Fairclough (2001) suggests that power arises <u>in</u> discourse when more powerful interactants put constraints on discourse content upon those with less power. He also argues that power lies <u>behind</u> discourse when longer-term structural constraints are put upon discourse content.

> I have been arguing that discourse is part of social practice and contributes to the reproduction of social structures. If therefore there are systematic constraints on the contents of discourse and on the social relationships enacted in it and the social identities enacting them, these can be expected to have long-term effects on the knowledge and beliefs, social relationships, and social identities of an institution or society. (61-62)

Fairclough's analysis of language and social struggle emphasizes the hidden power of these long-term structural constraints and the naturalizing of ideologies to maintain that

[27]For the purposes of this discussion, parents' reports of their interactions are not analyzed nor questioned for veracity. In fact, the truth of any one reported exchange is very much beside the point. How parents experienced, remember, and report these events is itself one form of constructing and maintaining an identity. In another context, certainly, a discussion of the difference between reported (subjective) and observed (objective) events would be appropriate, but it is outside of the scope of this dissertation.

power. In the case of this dissertation, the parents' ability to speak in the generic, for example, is a position of power through agency as they actively define themselves during the interview.[28]

This chapter focuses on parents' agency—that is, the power they exercise to use, attend to, and position themselves towards different ideologies. A complex picture is drawn in which we see that the interactions in which parents negotiate family become instances in which they can create, affirm, or redefine shared understandings of their identities (de Fina 2006: 355). James Gee's notion of capital-D Discourse brings together the political, ideological, and linguistic aspects of these interactional situations. Gee (1989) defines Discourse this way:

> Discourses are connected with displays of identity; failing to fully display an identity is tantamount to announcing you don't have that identity, that at best you're a pretender or a beginner. (10)

I employ this sense of Discourse to help me frame identity negotiation within and by these lesbian and gay parents. Even more precisely, I will, to use Georgakopoulou's (2006: 83) description, be highlighting what "pre-existent, socioculturally available—capital D—discourses are drawn upon and employed by tellers in the course of narratives in order to construct, justify, and explicate a sense of 'self' and, when applicable, 'other'...."

[28] There is a related line of inquiry and analysis regarding who in the couple has more power in defining *family* during the interview. However, since other factors (such as personality) that were not researched for this dissertation are relevant to fully understanding the inner workings of that type of power relationship, that line of inquiry is outside the scope of this dissertation.

POSITIONING IDENTITIES

In Chapter 5, we saw how parents define *family* when asked directly to do so. I showed that there are two overarching definitions of *family* that the participants draw upon: a more traditional notion of *family* that mirrors the long-standing bilateral cognatic structure found in the US and a broader one that includes unrelated members such as friends, roommates and their family members, multiple sets of godparents and coworkers. While this distinction between narrow and broad definitions is effective in showing the ways that these parents define themselves as a family, it might be easy to assume that the definitions are mutually exclusive. In this chapter I further develop my analysis of the negotiating moves the parents make to show that these different views of family are not contradictory at all. Rather, these moves highlight the variety of ways the parents accomplish their identities. I look at both the negotiation of identity through positioning—in particular as the parents explicitly define *family*—and at the themes that run through their discourse and make up the complex picture that is their family identity.

In order to uncover the ways in which people construct and reconstruct their identities through discourse, I focus on the positioning of and ideologies involved in interviewees' discourse. At times, dominant ideologies of family seem to play out upon the parents, as we saw in Chapter 5, and I will show the influence of these ideologies on discourse choices made by the interviewees. However, always embedded in this "acting upon" are the choices that parents are making in accepting or rejecting these influences. De Fina et al. (2006) describe this "bi-directional agency"—speakers as not just being affected by dominant ideologies, but being "constructive and interactive agents" (7). In that vein, this section will highlight the parents' agency in their negotiations, as they use,

pay attention to, and position themselves towards different ideologies when creating their identities.

A closer examination of the discourse in the interviews used in this study shows the ways in which parents position themselves differently when discussing family. Throughout the interviews, the parents orient to national discourses of *family* as well as more local ones (de Fina 2006) through the use of both generic narratives and personal ones (Baynham 2006). An analysis of these different types of positionings serves to elucidate the parents' different versions of their definitions and identities as *family*. As we saw in the discussion in Chapter 5 of the Love, Blood-Marriage and Choice models that make up the FAMILY prototype, there is a multiplicity of identities that *family* can reference for any one couple. In this section, I expand that discussion by looking at not just how parents define *family*, but how they negotiate that identity with others, in part by taking multiple positions as they discuss family.

Baynham (2006) suggests that an analysis of speakers' positioning through the use of two types of narratives—generic and personal—can show us how speakers define what they are and are not.

> [N]arrative resources enable speakers to perform identities discursively...such identities are relational, not absolute, since they involve comparisons and oppositions with present interlocutors, but also with past identities. (377)

Baynham found that personal narratives often involve the use of past tense and first-person pronouns, while generic narratives are marked with the use of grammatical constructions such as the habitual present tense and non-specific "generalized" actors. These grammatical differences allow speakers to relate the "typicality" of a narrative (in the case of generic narratives) or uniqueness (in the case of personal ones) (382). In

addition, Baynham argues that, in using the generic form, speakers are assuming a position of authority with a "right to speak" for others (383).

De Fina (2006) explores positioning as well, particularly in the discourse of marginalized communities. She argues that focusing on identity creation and its relationship to specific actions and reactions "is especially important [in order] to understand the repertoire of identities from which minorities and marginal groups draw in order to build images of themselves and their own interpretation and appropriation of mainstream labeling categories" (351-2). De Fina argues that identities are not just created on the local level since they are "based on ideologies and beliefs about the characteristics of social groups and categories and about the implications of belonging to them" (354). That is, for minority groups in particular, building a coherent representation of themselves involves the use of identity markers that are created and understood locally, as well as drawing upon those understood and created at a global (national) level. De Fina charges analysts with explaining "the fact that the construction and presentation of identity is a process in constant development and that one of its crucial sites of negotiation is interaction" (355).

I start with an analysis of the data through the lens of Baynham's positionings, and connect the generic and personal positioning to the parents' use of both local and nonlocal ideologies. Through an examination of case studies from my data, I show that family identities are constructed by the speakers through positioning toward these national and local understandings. This analysis of the parents' positioning within their narrative through the use of generic and personal narratives as well as the outward situating of their discourse both locally and nonlocally contextualizes the parents' discourse and shows the multiple dimensions in which gay and lesbian parents regularly negotiate their identity as a family.

The salience of the local/nonlocal and generic/personal axes of analysis with these families can be even better understood through the lens of the shared LG experience. The context of these families in Texas, one of many states currently without legal recognition of marriage, and with very limited state recognition of domestic partnership status, is very different than for others in the US who live in states where their relationships are recognized by law. Therefore, the parents' discourse positioning takes forms unique to this context, in which parents at times rely on nonlocal acceptance of their family form or align with local (more traditional) family forms. As the rights of gay and lesbian people, particularly adoption and marriage rights, have been debated at the national level for some time, it is not surprising that knowledge of nonlocal constructions of *family* play a role. Attending to the local and nonlocal aspects of the couples' narratives illuminates the roles that national discourses play on locally lived, everyday experiences. This analysis will give us one means by which to focus on how the parents are negotiating the tension between ideas of what a "normal" family is (recall the radial clusters in Chapter 5), by using those national ideologies along with local ideologies of *family*.

Finally, a short discussion at the end of this section will show examples of parents' negotiations in which one narrative form (the coming out story) intersects with another narrative form (the creation of a family), all within negotiations with members of their family of origin. This intersection employs what will be termed here a "three-in-one model" of identity negotiation. Contrasted in part with Weston's idea of families of choice, this model highlights the unique nature of the negotiations of *family* performed by lesbian and gay couples with children.

Generic and Personal Positioning

When asked for their definition of *family*, couples switched between a generic narrative that could define any family unit including nonbiological and nonlegal family relationships, and one that defined them personally. In this section, I will show examples of the ways the personal can shift to the generic and vice versa; in one instance, the personal and generic merge, giving the impression of a standardized definition of their own family. Through this analysis, we will see how speakers' use of these two narrative forms positions their identity as both unique to themselves (personal) and typical of others (generic). These micro-shifts are indicative of how parents position their families as normal, legitimate members of the FAMILY prototype.

Isaac and Mario

At the beginning of the interview, when asked what *family* means to them, Isaac and Mario both position themselves immediately with a generic narrative of *family*, using impersonal terms (bold) such as *it* (contrast with *our family* in the follow excerpt), *they*, *a/the parents*, and *(the) kids*. Isaac does this more so than Mario. Mario's definition is still generic (*anyone*, *whoever*) but his use of *you* (underlined) is slightly less impersonal, implying an actor in "you love" and "you can have".

> Isaac: For me **it**'s just **a parent and kids**, uh **a parent and kids** that you know, **they** watch out for each other and take care of each other, both **the parents** to **the kids** and **the kids** to **the parents**. Provide love and respect [to?] each other.
>
> Mario: I think to me, family is **anyone** that's close enough to <u>you</u> that love and support <u>you</u>. Cause <u>you can have</u> a family household and <u>you can have</u> a family of friends. So I think just **whoever**, again, who <u>you love</u> and who is supportive of your life.

Mario's pronouncement of what "you can have" in a family echoes Baynham's argument that the use of the generic narrative form presents the speaker with an "authorization" (383) to speak for others and to claim the typicality of one's own situation. When

prompted to explain further, Mario continues with the generic, using terms such as *those*, *they*, *them*, and *ones*, as well as generalized *the*:

> Mario: I think the difference would be **the household family**, I mean **those** are **the ones** that **you**'re going to take to the doctor, to the hospital if **you** need to, where with friends, I think um **they** might have uh someone else to do that for **them**. So it's not- they don't live with you.

Isaac elaborates on this generic narrative and changes it altogether by adding a personal narrative about his own family. This supports his partner's distinction between a "family of friends" and a "household family" (discussed in chapter 5).

> Isaac: That's pretty much it hhh. And I guess for us, here in [this town], our family is mostly our friends cuz all our family is in other cities.

With their personal narratives, Isaac and Mario also position themselves locally in relation to heterosexual families. In response to the question, "So before you had kids, would you have called yourselves, just the two of you, a family?" they responded that a family for them does not require children. Isaac said, "It's the same. We even have heterosexual friends that don't have kids, and aren't gonna have kids, but they're a family." And having children doesn't require marriage, either: Mario sees no difference between his life and his straight brother's; and was expected by his family of origin to have kids just as his straight brother was, even before their ceremony and even though they could not legally get married.

> Sarah: Did [the perception of you as a couple] change after you had a commitment ceremony?
>
> Mario: I really don't see a difference in our lives, from, for example, my brother who's you know who's been married and you know anything that was expected of him before and after he got married, it's been the same expectation for me. So I mean I really don't think because we didn't actually have a a legal ceremony and um you know a legal document. I don't think we're we're seen as as have anything less expected have any less expectations of us.

> Isaac: Even before our ceremony, like in terms of the larger family they always said "Well when are you guys gonna have kids? When are you going to get kids? When are-" you know, [from] both families.

Mario's choice to position to his own brother serves to highlight the equality afforded him within one local context, their family of origin.

Rifka and Victoria

In this passage, from the end of the interview with Rifka and Victoria, the personal and generic narratives intertwine throughout the interaction between the two parents. When asked by the interviewer if they had any final comments on what *family* means to them, Rifka turned the question to her partner. After Victoria's first very generic, short answer, Rifka pushes her to expand, at which point Victoria switches to a very personal, emotional description of their own family. Not satisfied, Rifka asks Victoria another question, attempting to have her answer the question with a generic, dictionary-type definition. As Victoria struggles with this imposed narrative type, Rifka teases her about it.

> Rifka [to Victoria]: What does family mean to you?
>
> Victoria: A unit.
>
> Rifka: A unit?
>
> Victoria: It's um I mean a family is what we have. it's you know, started off with just you and me, then we've added a child and now we've added another child we've been through three houses together I don't know how many cars, animals, I mean we started out small, but now it's like really a big thing, and it's the most important thing.
>
> Rifka: But so what is it?
>
> Victoria: It's:: people that are very that are very (.4) um::
>
> Rifka: Why don't you go off in your little corner and think about it and come back with an answer. ...

And yet, when asked the same question, Rifka begins exactly as Victoria did—with a short, almost too-generic answer, then a longer, very personal narrative describing their own family. Only after an interchange with Victoria about their specific personal history (the cost they incurred with the adoptions) does she continue with her own, carefully worded, more generic definition.

> Sarah: [to Rifka] What about you?
>
> Rifka: Ah, what is family? well I think family is um whatever you want it to be, and for us:, I would say that obviously our imMEDiate family is the four of us, um who, you know, um however we came to be, you know, I adopted Ben and you adopted Stevie but it was um very intentional to create our children...and then very-
>
> Victoria: Yeah, it wasn't an accident was it? [laughter] Far from it, it was an expensive accident.
>
> Rifka: It was a very expensive accident. [next section spoken slowly as if choosing each word carefully] Yeah, so it was intentional um and it's supported with love and then I would also say that family is the support structures that you create to be able to reinforce and hold up um your nest and we've got that with extended family, with family of choice that we've brought in who we learn from and care about and-
>
> Victoria: -yeah I mean basically family is people that we want to be with and love to be with and choose to be with and that to me it's uh everlasting, family is...I mean, you know, the boys'll never go anywhere, I mean, they're always gonna be with us. I mean, my family will always be with me, regardless of whether they're alive or not. I mean, it's just uh to me, family is love and how much we love each other [unconditionally
>
> Rifka: [and the other people that we care about too.
>
> Victoria: Right, right.

Rifka's definition merges the generic with the personal, blending formal social science type words such as intentional, support structures and family of choice and generic markers such as you with the personal "we" and "nest" and references to their own

extended families and experience with the love and care they've received. Victoria seems to resonate with this type of definition, adding in her own, merged, personal-generic narrative. She aligns herself first with "yeah", and then uses both generic devices such as the generalized nouns (*family* and *people*) and personal ones, distinguishing herself through the use of first person pronouns in the phrases "I mean" and "to me" and the personalized pronoun *we*. As each woman shifts her positioning from generic to personal—to each other—their narratives become aligned. A conversation that started with one parent condescendingly taking the other to task for her answers ends with a joint narrative about love and family.

At the end of the interview, Rifka again makes her personal definition of *family* the model for a generic one. Shortly following this exchange, after talking about her own father not being around to be a grandparent, she pauses and then states definitively that:

Family is two boys, two moms, one dog and two cats.

With this statement, Rifka assumes the authority to speak, as Baynham describes, by making her personal situation a generic definition. This right to speak in the generic shows an empowerment to so fully include LGHFs in the definition of *family* that she positions her own specific situation as a model for all families.

Intersections between Personal - Generic and Local - Nonlocal

In this section, I will highlight excerpts showing the ways that the personal and generic positioning can intersect with local and nonlocal positioning in identity management. With each couple, the discourse transitions from personal to generic (or the reverse) in direct relation to their local and nonlocal positioning.

Isaac and Mario

In the interview with Isaac and Mario, Mario discusses their visibility as being critical for acceptance of gay fathers on a national level. This narrative shows Mario positioning his narrative first to the national ideology of family, in particular its erasure of gay fatherhood. Very quickly, though, we see his resistance to this ideology takes the form of personal, local management of his identity as a gay father through participation in the city's Gay Pride parade.

> Mario: I think it's very important especially for gay fathers, because I agree with you, there's not many male- uh gay male family households out there, there's not much literature on it, um so it was important for me to be in the parade so that people could actually see that we do exist. And we <u>are</u> adopting children, and we <u>are</u> having families, and you know there's some that are going through surrogacy you know but we <u>have</u> families.

Mario speaks first using the generic "gay fathers" and "gay male family households"; his subsequent negotiation of identity is both with a generic people and literature "out there" and with local Gay Pride parade onlookers. Mario's negotiation involves narrative positioning moves that go from generic and national to personal and local; after the mention of the local Pride parade, "gay fathers" becomes "we" and "gay male households" becomes "families". Visibility of his family, for Mario, links to national visibility in much the same way that parades work in general, as local events that carry a national/nonlocal import. His family form, the fact that he and Isaac have children, is presented as a local example of a national reality.

By linking the two together, Mario in effect is negotiating with a national ideology of legitimate *family*. His description is not just about himself and his family, but about the gay community more generally. In this description, not only do gay fathers exist, but they are active agents in their own creation of family. Mario's use of the present progressive "we are adopting...we are having" doesn't just reposition his narrative

from local to nonlocal, but repositions gay fathers from non-existent to existent and active.

Ann and Terry

The following excerpts from my interview with Ann and Terry show very clearly the ways these two axes of analysis—personal and generic, local and nonlocal—illuminate another complex tale of identity negotiations within their own definitions of *family* as well as with local and national media representations of parenting and motherhood in particular.

Ann begins her definition of *family* with the generic, using the indeterminate noun form (*family*). However, she then immediately restarts and continues with a short personal narrative that ends with an informal idiomatic expression.

> Ann: Family is the—I have a big family and so to me family is definitely not just a nuclear family, um it's kinda the whole kit and kaboodle.

A few minutes later Terry uses the same personal narrative form of describing her own experience of family as the basis for her definition.

> Terry: For me, um, you know, I guess my thoughts about family have changed over the years. I grew up in a you know Italian family in New York and our family our immediate family was two of my sisters and my parents.

As the interview progresses, the mothers also position themselves locally and to national ideologies of family, womanhood, and motherhood. In a discussion about using the term *wife*, Terry attempts to explain why she doesn't like it, and describes a somewhat tentative process of negotiation with an unnamed set of possible interactants (or, rather, reactants).

> Terry: I don't know, I guess because it might elicit, umm, [long pause] I don't know. That's an interesting question but I- I guess I'm the type of person who's very...I like to do, you know, make baby steps to being gay and building bridges with straight people. I'm not in your face, I'm more stealth kind of, umm, [lower,

> quieter] not going to disagree with it. But umm, so, I don't prefer terms that could elicit a, any kind of, st- uhh stronger reaction than another. And somehow I think "partner" is more, you know, uhh, easier t-to hear or something. I don't know.

In this case, Terry's process of negotiation is one of making her marked status as a lesbian mother unmarked on a local level. Her negotiations accommodate those who might not readily accept their relationship by using partner because "'partner' is easier to hear". And while, on the one hand, this is about local management of her identity on a day-to-day basis, her discourse includes generic forms such as "straight people" and a lack of a named interlocutor. Likewise, Terry uses inanimate subjects ("terms" and "partner") rather than the people involved in the interaction, with the effect of leaving herself as a speaker and the hearers who would potentially react to the term *wife* faceless, faultless, and nonspecific.

Ann, on the other hand, reasons against using *wife* by positioning herself non-locally to a national ideology and as the clear actor:

> Ann: And for me, it's because she's not my my wife because I can't get married. And so I will not use that term until [we can get married].

Her refusal to use the term *wife* acts as a protest against her non-inclusion in the national, legal definition of marriage. The power and relevance of this local linguistic move relies on her positioning to a national ideology of marriage and its related kinship terms.

Terry also connects a local understanding of *family* to a national media portrayal of stereotypes of gay men and lesbians. The following quotes recall Mario's comments about the importance of visibility of gay fathers at Gay Pride parades. In our conversation, she and Ann were talking about their neighborhood, Ann's role as a Girl Scout leader, and others' perceptions of them as parents and as a family. Remembering my conversation with David and Harvey, in which they noted that having a job and going to church were two things that marked them as "normal" in their neighborhood, I saw

some similarities when she said that Ann being a troop leader helped others see their family as "valid" (as she put it). I asked her to elaborate on what she thought others notice as "normal":

> Terry: It's probably more of what they, what we don't do than what we do do. Um, you know and it's hard to say at this day and age, I mean, what the mainstream fantasy is about what a gay or lesbian person, and particularly what a gay or lesbian family is. Um, so I don't really know what they think, but I think it's the lack o::f, I don't know, debauchery and maybe [chuckling] the lack of um, I don't know, that our kid is a normal, well-adjusted kid.

Later in the interview, Terry is describing her level of political involvement, and she again positions herself to a national ideology of normality and the importance of being visible to others in the community:

> Terry: I think it's also important and I think the whole Girl Scout thing, the church thing, is to be a counterweight because the media will focus on the more extreme...within the gay community. And it's like literally we were there [at the Pride parade], uh you know, protesting for the parent thing—who did they put on the TV but some twenty-year-old kid who was not going to have children, I would be willing to wager, any time in the near future.

In both of these excerpts, Terry positions her argument to general stereotypes of gay men and lesbians as well as the ideology of parents as not lesbian or gay. "The mainstream fantasy" of possible "debauchery" as well as the "extreme" representations of gay men and lesbians at Pride parades all reference stereotypes of gay men and lesbians as hypersexual or abnormally sexualized beings (Zemsky 1998: 259). As discussed in Chapter 5, "non-sexual" is a key component of the FAMILY prototype. One of the primary arguments against the legalization of same-sex marriage is that opponents feel it will completely redefine marriage as sexualized and serving to fulfill the couple's desires. To counter this redefinition, American society must hold on to an ideal of marriage as a procreative institution, best serving children when both a mother and a father are involved. A "twenty-year-old kid" on the television does not represent Terry's lived

experience and understanding of *family* as outlined in the prototype, in particular because it reaffirms cultural stereotypes about gay men and lesbians as either not parents at all, or unfit parents who can't raise "normal, well-adjusted" children.

In this next passage, both Ann and Terry describe a change in their identities once they had children. Through their descriptions, they position their narrative with respect to several interconnected ideologies of what it means to be a mother, a woman, queer, a family.

> Terry: I know I felt more superior once I had a child. How horrible that is but-
>
> Ann: Me too, me too, [laughing] I just felt more like I had a right to be a woman and I had a right to be part of this family- I'm a mom.
>
> Terry: Yeah, a right to be in society, yeah, you had a more mainstream identifiable role in society that people could relate to, right? What are you? A mom. Well people know what that is. What are you? I'm queer. Well, god that could be that or it could be...um but for me, I think there's a different [status]. And status is not in a, you know, one-is-better-than-another [way] but I think when you're a couple with a child, [that] is a different type of couple than a couple without a child. Within the gay community...because of the lack of freedom I think that the people with children have, so when I think of couples without children, I think that they're just kinda more like we used to be, more spontaneous, that you can just kinda get up and go, and do a vacation any time you want and you don't have to worry about "oh my god well she can't miss Tuesday because she's got a math test" and you know where we just used to have to worry about ourselves. So I guess there is, it's just a difference.

Ann and Terry's negotiations here are with multiple parties—the gay community and the straight community, the schools and multiple ideologies—woman, parent, queer—and their joint narrative is both personal (with the use of "I" and "we") and generic ("people" and "society"). Their positioning is also local and nonlocal: there are the local gay people they compare themselves to, a nonlocal ideology that accepts "mom" more than "queer", and even their earlier selves who could go out and be spontaneous but couldn't concurrently be part of a family with children. Finally, they are negotiating with these

ideologies as they speak. Terry in particular tempers her feelings of superiority with a hesitation and then a clarification that "one is [not] better than the other" but merely different.

CASE STUDY: A THREE-IN-ONE MODEL OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATION

As a lesbian or gay parent, that is, by being in a relationship with someone of the same sex and raising kids together, the parents are actively negotiating their identities simultaneously in three ways.

- The individual as a gay person
- The couple as an active realization of the individual's gay identity
- The couple as parents to one or more children

This "three in one" model of identity negotiation is shown in several accounts of acceptance by families of origin. Time and again, stories of acceptance by a family of origin weave seamlessly in and out of stories of coming out as gay. Coming out stories are one common form of personal narrative within LGBT communities as they mark a milestone in most gay and lesbian people's lives. The coming out story very often serves to explain one's current position with one's family of origin as well as one's current identity relative to a past identity. Baynham (2006: 377) discusses narratives as a resource for creating and maintaining identities. He notes that not only are our identities not fixed and singular, but that they are negotiated relationally with others as well as with our past selves. Indeed, as we see in the narratives that follow, as well as in the next chapter, several participants' family and parent identities involve both a process of redefining their relationships to their families of origin as well as to themselves. These

negotiations are not simply with the family of origin, but with the ideological assumptions their families of origin have about *family*.

In this first example, Mario tells about the time that his family of origin fully accepted who he was. The negotiation of his identity as a gay man and a family man plays out through this coming out story. As Mario's family came to understand that he would always be gay, they accepted his partner Isaac and their identity as a family.

> Mario: So when I came out to family, um they actually sent me to Seattle with a friend because they thought it was just gonna- just something I was going through at the time and I would get over it by the time I'd come back, and- not knowing that I was going to see my best friend who was very gay, openly gay, too. So I was supposed to move to Seattle, and um I just didn't like the weather, I just couldn't get used to it, it was very different from [my hometown], so I decided to come back to [my hometown] and I did not go back into the closet. I lived my life, um by that time I had graduated from high school and everybody- it was more, "We're ok with it as long as you don't (.3) talk about it." And that was OK with me for a while. But as- as I got older, they became more accepting and I think eventually it finally sunk in and that's when they started being supportive of me. Um when I met Isaac, everybody loved Isaac, you know. And I- I think that's when it really hit that this was going to be my family. It wasn't something I was going to change for anybody.

Likewise, stories of not being accepted as a family are told as part of a larger story of not being accepted as an individual. In this excerpt, Callie describes her parents' rejection of her family as due to their rejection of her and her "alternative" relationship. She says that their pattern of giving love conditionally...

> ...really hit home when I was 22 and I divorced my first husband. They chose him over me. And, growing up, they'd always told us 'husbands and wives come and go, but your family always sticks together'. But when it came push to shove, because I chose an alternative relationship, I was no longer lovable. I was no longer the good child, even though I was the one that made straight As through school and did all of this stuff. because I wasn't- I mean I didn't even pick the perfect husband [ ] but because I chose to go outside of that and find something else, they totally pushed me aside, and I don't have anything to do with them. [Cody]'s never met them. He will not meet them as long as I have a say.

Throughout the interview, Callie's identity as a lesbian is realized by virtue of her relationship with Yelina. At one point she relates a story in which a friend tries to get Callie to state that she is a lesbian, but she rejects the label in favor of a relational identity. In this excerpt, too, the work of coming out as an individual is done through choosing a relationship with a woman rather than a man. That her interactions with her family of origin are negotiations is unmistakable. Her narrative is a powerful account of rejection, on both sides. Though she has been "pushed aside" by her family, she is an empowered actor in her own narrative and has the agency to push back, against her family's actions and against the dominant ideology that says her choices are outside the realm of what is acceptable.

Acceptance for some individuals came hand in hand with the birth or adoption of the couple's children. For Victoria, though she was out to her family of origin, having kids was another step in her coming out story. Worried that her conservative, Catholic parents might not accept this part of her life, Victoria relates the negotiation of this part of her identity as a change from gay and in a relationship to being a parent:

> When we decided that we were gonna- was it the day before the first insemination? I finally called my parents and told them we were going to start a family...I was worried about you know kinda like the whole cutting-out-of-the-will thing but I was more worried about my parents being very judgmental...and basically my parents told me, they said, 'you know what? It's your family, you do what you want with your family'.

For Catherine, the change in her own mother's willingness to accept her partner was a result of Catherine's mother passing a milestone, from mother to grandmother:

> Catherine: I guess for my mom it was much it was easier for her to accept Jane when she knew the baby was coming.
>
> Jane: Yep.

> Catherine: Yep. She wasn't quite dealing with things too well before then, but somehow it magically changed.
>
> Sarah: So, [it was easier to take in] the idea of you being a parent with another parent, maybe, or-?
>
> Catherine: No, I think it had more to do with her being a grandma.

The milestone of becoming a grandparent was important for Brenda's father as well, and allowed her the space to finally come out to him two years after she'd come out to her mother.

> Brenda: I had come out to my mom, before, long before, Heather was even thought of, but I didn't come out to my dad—my dad's very Republican, very conservative—until we, the day that we went to um what do you call that?
>
> Dani: get inseminated?
>
> Brenda: inseminated—get inseminated. Um it was- we did a Friday and then a Saturday and that Saturday we drove to [my parent's town] after and I sat down with my dad and I told him what we'd just done, and that he'd be a grandpa. And so I think for me that was 'OK, now, you know, tell him because I've got some good news for him.' You know, cuz he's always wanted to be a grandpa, so I can tell him 'I'm gay' and say 'and I want you to be a grandpa' too, so it's OK, you know. And I think that did help, I really think.

Like Callie and Victoria, Brenda's account of her negotiations position her as totally agentive in her use of active verbs: *come out, didn't come out, went, drove, sat down, told, tell, say*, and *think*. This kind of trade-off—I'm gay but you have a grandchild—can be seen in a few different ways. First, as long as the individual is doing something heteronormative, the nonnormative can be overlooked. Second, and in particular, if your child who is not heteronormative affirms your own heteronormativity, his or her identity can be more easily accepted. Alternatively, it can be seen as an act of negotiation in an almost diplomatic sense: I am doing something that you understand, therefore, you are able to better relate and understand me, and I can more safely perform my identity as gay/lesbian around you.

CONCLUSION

The performative aspect of family identity does not involve simply creating an identity or multiple identities as family, but taking a multitude of positions, in these cases to local and nonlocal actors. Speakers' connections to and feelings about their identities can at times be seen through their use of generic and personal narrative modalities. In addition, the parents' identity negotiations take into account others' perceptions and reactions on both a local and nonlocal level.

Using the analysis of personal/generic narratives allows us as well to more clearly describe the fine-grained interactional moves speakers make. As an example, let's look at Barbara's description of two kinds of family:

> Barbara: For me there's an immediate polarity. There's 'family'—as in biological family and the frustrations that exist with being genetically really closely related to people and just wondering how things came out so differently. Um and then there's 'family'—um those that we have drawn to ourselves, the affectional bond, the commitment bond, um that have made them family even though there's no genetic relationship.

Barbara has depersonalized and generalized her definition of the two types of family. Only two times is a subject human—*those* and *we*—and one of those is an indefinite plural determiner (those) that implies, but doesn't directly reference, specific people. Otherwise, the description has no subject ("just wondering") or includes inanimate subjects such as *frustrations* and *bonds*. The use of technical terms such as *biological* and *affectional*, while being a discourse that likely comes easily to a professional educator, serves to distance the narrative from herself, which is itself a form of generalizing. Even as she uses the personal pronouns *we* and *ourselves*, it is ambiguous whether that *we* references a generic *we* (as in "we humans") or a personal Barbara-and-Lynn *we*.

What makes this an especially interesting negotiation is how deeply personal it actually is. Though Barbara defines *family* through the use of the generic, her embodied description reveals a lived experience that is highly personal, one in which "things came out differently". The first, "biological family" is voiced as [fæ:mli] and was accompanied by a sinking of shoulders and a tired look, all marking this family as tiresome, bothersome, and lacking in or taking a lot of energy. The second "family" was voiced brightly as [fæmli] with accompanying arm and facial gestures showing a general feeling of energy and satisfaction. Far from impersonal, Barbara actively performs the polarity she has experienced—one in which one family has been frustrating and disappointing and the other a source of affection, commitment and closeness. Her account is a fine example of Franklin and McKinnon's (2001) and others' contention that kinship is not simply a matter of biology, but of culture as well.

The discursive positions the parents take show the multiple ways in which they must and do negotiate their identities on a regular basis. Where some would see LGHFs as an expansion of the current definition of *family*, it underestimates the amount of negotiation work these parents do to say that they simply position themselves in opposition to, or in addition to, family. This is not to say that gay and lesbian parenthood does nothing to upset the social order, undo gender, or radicalize family. From a rather heteronormative point of view, they certainly can be seen as doing all of those things, since their existence challenges the standard ideology of family and indeed of gender. However, history has many examples of "radical" family forms and roles—interracial marriages, single motherhood, and "househusbands"—that have all at some point upset social norms.

Furthermore, this data shows that the negotiation of identity is not just a theoretical or descriptive act understood only by researchers. The contested nature of the

parents' use of the label 'family' is not missed by these couples. While it was not always on the surface, the national debate over same-sex marriage and the ideology of what makes a legitimate family is salient in many of the conversations. Not missed either are the stakes of national recognition. Parents noted that nonacceptance of their family's legitimacy can adversely affect their children and even put the parents themselves at risk, as was recounted in one interview in stories of sexual harassment from coworkers and homophobia from school employees. While the parents say that it would not mean any difference in their emotional relationship to each other, many recognize explicitly that inclusion in the American institutions of marriage and family would mean legal and financial benefits as well as safety for their children.

CHAPTER 7: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY THROUGH DISCOURSES OF NORMALITY

INTRODUCTION

The nature of families with lesbian or gay parents is currently political, whether the parents intend it to be so or not. As one parent, David, remarked, "We felt political just by being us." At the same time, these families exist within an ideological institution of family that is often viewed as private and nonpolitical, yet is still accountable to the outside world. In the last chapter, we explored the ways that the parents in this study actively position themselves with respect to local and nonlocal ideologies through generic and personal narrative styles. In this chapter, I show the ideological underpinnings that act upon and are reproduced through the parents' negotiations of identity at home and in their communities. These ideologies can be explored by focusing on four key areas of negotiation: negotiations that occur family-internally; those that occur within the community; negotiations that use symbolic materials; and those that occur through specific lexical choices.

In this chapter, I continue my discussion of what de Fina et al. (2006: 7) describe as "bidirectional agency"—that is, the agency of dominant ideologies to act upon parents and the agency of the parents to affect the dominant ideology of family. At the heart of this study is the push-pull between the influence of dominant ideologies on the parents' definitions of *family* and the parts of their own lived experiences of *family* that at times conflict with those ideologies. The negotiations hint at an ideological shift that is in process within our culture, a shift that furthers a redefinition of the prototype discussed in Chapter 5.

INTERNAL-TO-FAMILY NEGOTIATIONS

One question that I posed concerned the values the parents try to teach their children. I reasoned that these values would illuminate some of their underlying ideologies of family that are influencing the parents' identity creation. The veracity of what values are actually being taught is not necessarily important; even if these values are only ones that are reported to the interviewer, the task of listing what is valued within the family informs us of family ideologies. After first asking if they thought parents should be teaching their children certain values, to which all said they did (or, in some cases, which they did not deny), I asked them to talk more specifically about what those values are. The lists that they came up with reflected both traditional and non-traditional ideologies. By far, the majority of values the parents talked about wanting to pass on to their children were what I would term "traditional", ones that we might expect from any parent: kindness, respect for parents and others, compassion, caring, honesty, hard work, integrity and responsibility.

kindness

> Lacey: I choose not to be around people that fight and get in trouble and things like this, so we're trying to show that to our children, to help them to make wise choices, to pick good friends, and to do the right thing.

> Paula: What is it that we teach? Well, like how you treat other people...The values are that you don't hurt other people's feelings you know unnecessarily, and that you treat people like you'd like to be treated and I guess that's what we try to communicate...you know, that family comes first, that's one thing we do and that healthy food is important, that's one of ours; and they have to do chores every day because we believe- I have a good work ethic and I think it's an important part of a person's life.

respect, empathy and love

Callie: Like I said, we have a strange idea of what family is, considering the times. We don't own a Xbox. We don't own a game station or a GameCube or a Nintendo. We don't own that because kids are raised by that, you know. He doesn't get to watch- I mean, he's 7 years old, but he don't get to watch the cartoons that are considered Y7. His is Y because I don't agree with the violence and the language. I mean cartoons now, I mean, I can't believe some of the things they allow the cartoons to say. They're supposed to be OK for that [age] but the way they talk to their parents on the cartoons, the way they talk to each other is very belligerent, and I don't agree with that. I'm very much *Little House on the Prairie*, you might say. hh I want my kids to say 'yes ma'am, no ma'am', you mind, you know.

Dani: The biggest thing with us is respect of others, never thinking that you're bigger or better than other people.

Rifka: I would say integrity is number one.

Victoria: Respect.

Rifka: Yeah, I would say respect. Respect and integrity are probably the big two. Um and-

Victoria: Well, I mean, compassion, loving, nurturing.

Catherine: I think some of those we've mentioned already, you know about not hitting and treatin' people with respect. And the school is doin' a good job too-

Jane: -the school's doing a really good job

Catherine: but I mean we- we've got a big role, and but it's nice when the school's doin' it cuz then we can build on it. ...

Jane: Main one I'm tryin' to concentrate on is 'treat others as you would treat yourself'. [I] tried several times to get that across to him and I think he's slowly getting it.

Catherine: He learns the empathy. ...

Jane: We teach him not to lie. It's not ok to lie, especially to us.

honesty and hard work

> Ann: I think being honest is a huge one. Being kind, probably giving people the benefit of the doubt, trying not to be too judgmental and make assumptions about people...those are the real main ones. You have to work hard, you actually have to get off your butt and do something, you know. I think a lot of kids in this generation definitely have an entitlement attitude and...the hh thing about Becky is that she you know she is as lazy as any kid, but she also has a thirst for responsibility and I don't worry about Becky like I worry about my 21 year old nephews.

In all of these excerpts, the dominant ideology of *family* acts upon the parents, but it is still an active choice on their part to either accept or reject that ideology. In addition to these "traditional" values, others came up that can be linked either directly or indirectly to families with gay or lesbian parents, as well as (or due to) being ideologies of the feminist or gay rights movements. These include being accepting of self and others (loving yourself, being yourself), pride, equality, and having a willingness to question:

acceptance of self and others

> Harvey: We don't care what they [our sons] believe, as long as they question. ...
>
> Sarah: And what what prompted that way of parenting? What do you think your influence has been?
>
> David: I don't think it's conscious, I think it's just the way we are. ...
>
> Harvey: I think because we are- we're clear about what it's like to be someone who's ostracized and outcast, and someone who's judged without being known who you are. I mean, all of this stuff that that comes along with being someone that mainstream society wants to demonize and shun, I mean that weighs on it

> Rachel: We go [to church] a lot, too just because we want to make sure that our kids know that they can be Christian they can be spiritual...because you hear all that terrible rhetoric everywhere, you know. We want to make sure they know that there's nothing wrong with them, they're not ungodly or going to hell or anything like that.

pride

> Terry: So that's I think the most important lesson I can pass on to her is something I didn't know until I was 45, or wasn't able to come to you know to have it come full circle and really feel like... I'm just proud to be who I am now. It took me a lot of years to really not care what anybody else did. ...
>
> Ann: Well, one, I don't think your parents really knew you. And if they did, they certainly wouldn't have celebrated you.

Though later she talks about inclusion and being yourself, Connie began the discussion of values with this comment on her daughter's perspective:

> It's very interesting to me to see this- now this real exploration of those roles and what they mean and how they look, and my daughter defines herself as queer, you know, because- and she says it's because she grew up in a queer family. Which I find very interesting, you know. So her idea that she's culturally queer is actually how she would des- how she does describe herself. She talks about having these cultural values that are not values- that are not the same as her friends grew up with because of the kind of family she grew up in.

In one case, Yelina was talking seemingly generally about teaching their seven-year-old son Cody to be who he is and to not change to please others.

> As long as he doesn't lose who <u>he</u> is, I don't have a problem with it. ...As long as he keeps the values that he can be who he wants to be and achieve and do anything he wants, it's wonderful.

"Except for the fact when he gets in my makeup," Callie interjects. Yelina "draw[s] the line" there. This example highlights the "push-pull" between the influence of hegemonic ideologies—in this case of gender and proper parenting—versus the gay rights ideology of acceptance and being true to yourself.

Gay and lesbian parents are pushing back against a range of ideologies to define and practice family in their everyday lives. In these interviews, much of the parents' talk about definitions of family included terms, references and discussions that index Discourse themes of stability, normality and tradition, such as: commitment, everlasting, responsibility, "normal Christian values," Hallmark, Little House on the Prairie, siblings

sharing the same donor, and safety. At the same time, their descriptions of their community interactions included themes of both stability and change, such as sameness, being "like all the other families," and having lesbian parents as "natural"; as well as "buck the system," "change the world," questioning and activism.

The Discourse of normality came up both implicitly and explicitly in many different ways. Parents spoke of themselves, their families, and their actions as parents in terms such as "natural", "like all the other families" and teaching "normal Christian values". In addition, as we will see, many negotiations of their identities as parents and as LGHFs involved the related Discourse of acceptance: Paula and Rachel noted that they don't have to demand acceptance from school officials; Joanna and Lacey found and taught their children acceptance through their church; and Callie related a statement she made to her unsupportive father, that "[If] you can't accept my family, you can't accept me." The Discourses of acceptance and normality have an important connection to each other, as acceptance involves some level of realization and normalization; if a construct such as "a gay- or lesbian-headed family" is normalized, then it has been accepted as "a family" on either the personal or the societal level.

EXTERNAL-TO-FAMILY NEGOTIATIONS

Each set of parents, especially those with children still living at home, identified the same basic areas of their lives in which they interact outside of their homes: their children's schools, church, and their children's friends. Noticeably absent was regular involvement in LGBT social or political groups, or in political organizations more generally. None of the couples except for David and Harvey are involved to any great extent with gay community organizations, nor do they keep up social connections within

the LGBTQ community in their area. In this section, I will highlight their discussions of interactions in these key areas of school and church, as well as adding in a discussion of their interactions in their communities. Though parents did not bring up politics very regularly, I found that there were a number of ways in which local politics and the local community—the polis—played a significant role in their negotiations. For this reason, I include a section on these reported interactions as well.

School

Regardless of the degree to which the parents were open about their relationships in their neighborhoods, at work, or with friends, they were up front about their joint parental status at their children's schools and were adamant about them getting the best education. For some of the couples, this meant considering the option of sending their children to private school or to a specific daycare that would be open to their parents being lesbian or gay. For many, the negotiations involved first and foremost showing up and being visible to the school administrators, teachers and to other parents. For others, the negotiation involved invisibility.

Paula and Rachel try to be as open as they can be with teachers, administrators and other parents to avoid awkward situations later. When asked if they have ever had any issues with their sons' schools, they said they were surprised that they have not. Paula explained it this way:

> When you act like you're not doing anything wrong, and that you're like everybody else, you're not pretending to be a family, you're not demanding to be a family, you are a family. …Other people are more comfortable because now they know how to interact with you because now you're a family just like all the other families they interact with every day.

In other words, Paula and Rachel don't do anything in particular to be visible except to show up at Parents' Nights together and act like all the other families. They have found

the administration to be accepting and supportive. They assume the teachers will treat their children the same as any others, and "deal with it immediately" if they don't. They do not believe they need to ask anyone to treat their family well.

Mario and Isaac have done much the same thing at their daughters' school. Their involvement is not just about their family being normalized more generally but about very specifically working to prevent their daughters from being ashamed or fearful. Though they report not having any problems "up to now", Mario does not sound convinced that there won't be issues in the future.

> Mario: One of the first things that we wanted to do was to make sure that the teachers were aware- very aware of our family dynamics. And so we both attend 'Meet the Teacher' day. We're very much involved in anything the school has, any functions, even the principal. We've made our- I've made myself known with the principal. So we've been very involved. And it just seems like, every time we go, everybody knows our girls. And the reason we wanted to do that is to make sure that the girls were taken care of. We didn't want them to be ashamed, we didn't want them to experience any fear, and to do that we just decided that we had to be involved. So when it comes to new teachers, right away we introduce ourselves. And every so often we'll have a different reaction, but everybody has been very welcoming. So we, up to now, we haven't had any problems at the school.
>
> Isaac: And we always take the girls to school too, in the morning we always drop them off together, we always pick them up together so other parents get to see us and they know us as well. And I think there's been a lot of support from other parents as well.
>
> Sarah: Really! Did you expect that in your community?
>
> Isaac: No. [laughing] That was one of our concerns when we moved out here.

Catherine and Jane, since they originally come from very conservative places in Texas, have been surprised at how pleasant the experience with schools in their area has been so far. Unlike Mario and Isaac, though, they are cautious when meeting other parents and literally make their relationship invisible:

Jane: Well, we've discussed whenever Green Hornet goes to a function or a birthday party only one of us will go to kind of break the ice.

Catherine: Generally especially new, like at the first of the year school year, to test the waters.

Jane: Kind of test the waters, and so far it's been fine but-

Catherine: We don't want to be in their face-

Jane: and it generally ends up OK.

Catherine: Well rarely, when you go to these birthday parties, rarely do two parents show up because it's on the weekend, everybody's got stuff to do.

In an excellent example of joint narration, we see how the mothers coordinate their identity negotiation in their interactions with new parents and children. Borrowing from classic homophobic descriptions of gay men and lesbians being "in your face" with their sexuality, Catherine explains their choice of invisibility. Two turns later, she normalizes their actions by comparing them to other parents who also don't go to the parties together. Even though, in the interview, it's clear that the motivations for not showing up together are totally different, she succeeds in showing that their actions are unlikely to be perceived by the other parents as any different.

Callie and Yelina have reason to stay invisible as well. They have few support systems to draw upon and have a harder time being out in their small, socially conservative community. Though many people at Yelina's workplace know she's in a relationship with a woman, she is unable to speak of it for fear of losing her job. There are no lesbian social groups, clubs or events in the area that they can attend, and to people they meet for the first time, Yelina is introduced as Callie's "roommate" and Cody's "favorite aunt".

However, when it comes to Cody's school, they are vocal and proactive. Like Paula, Rachel, Isaac and Mario, they go to Parents' Night at his school together. And

they make sure to meet all of the administration so that they know they will be supported. When a cook at his school one year protested Cody putting "Nonny"—the name he uses for Yelina—on the T-shirt he was making for her for Father's Day, Callie went immediately to the daycare director. She insisted that, since his "Nonny" fills the role of father for Cody, he be allowed to put her name on the shirt.[29]

All of these parents show tremendous skill at negotiating their identities and their children's identities in relation to their children's schools. They frame treatment of their children in terms of sameness or normality and their reactions to real or potential discrimination reflects their attempts at normalization. And yet, some negotiations do not seem to work in the parents' favor. In the next excerpts we can see the more negative effect of dominant ideologies of sexuality and family at work as some parents talked about not being too visible, and therefore overstepping some social boundary that might invite discrimination. Like Catherine and Jane, Paula and Rachel and Callie and Yelina framed their actions in certain contexts as appropriate in part because they did not make their sexuality overt. To Paula, in regard to acceptance by the people at their sons' schools, acting like your family is no different means not making any different demands:

> And we don't go in- we don't even make an appointment to go in and like, 'this is our family and you have to accept us.' We just go in and meet the teachers just like all the other families.

Similarly, when talking about the T-shirt incident, Callie argued that because other parents and children had no knowledge of their identity, the complaint (made by one staff person) was unfair:

[29]In the end, the daycare director (incidentally, a friend of theirs) decided to ban putting any names on the T-shirts to avoid future problems.

> none of the other parents had a problem with it…because none of the other parents knew what was going on, because it was just T-shirts made, they weren't- you know, it's not like they were displayed on the wall with the kids' pictures.

After the end of the story, Callie makes the connection between the visibility of their identities and the lack of discrimination they've encountered in a way that invokes a "blame the victim" mentality:

> …[the discrimination] hasn't been too bad because one, we don't put all our business out there. We don't- when we're out in public, we don't hand-hold, we don't show any kind of affection for each other…

Callie is essentially saying that not being discriminated against is their responsibility. As long as they are not "out there", they won't receive a negative reaction. In another reading, if they are "out", then they deserve the discrimination that they get.

The intent of both Callie's and Paula's previous statements is the same: in the context of their specific school/community, they need to negotiate their identities as lesbian parents with some care. Both couples believe they will get respect from others as being normal—"like all the other families"—in part because they respect those others' visions of parents and parenting. But the two situations are not the same. For Paula and Rachel, normal and visible can co-exist. To achieve normal status, they assume they will be visible. Callie and Yelina's lack of community support means that to be normal is to be invisible—they are not a "problem" because they cannot be seen. Not surprisingly, for them, protection and safety are two themes that also come up throughout the interview. Given the type of negotiations they have to do in their community in general, one form of safety is keeping themselves invisible when they can.

And yet, while they may not be able to be visible as lesbians, Callie and Yelina can and do make themselves visible as mothers. Callie is now involved in the Parent Teacher Organization at Cody's school. She says she joined because she wants to make some changes, to let people know that "you can't judge a book by its cover. I want other

kids to feel comfortable seeing families like ours." Yelina has come to PTO meetings as well, making visible their relationship to the other PTO members. Callie describes herself as someone who "bucks the system"—if it is outdated, she asks why it can't be changed. She says Cody is the same way, and is glad because he's the "one that's going to change the world."

In addition to stories of their own negotiations with teachers and others at school, each family with school-going children recounted stories in which their kids had to explain their family to other children. In these cases, the children were the ones contending with dominant ideologies of gender, parenthood and family. Four stories in particular stood out for their typicality and the clarity in showing what these children face.

Paula and Rachel's son Evan had many years of experience, it seems, in explaining his family form to other kids in school. When he was in preschool, classmates one day asked who was walking in to pick him up, since it wasn't the same woman who usually did. Evan explained that he had two moms, to which the classmates replied, "No fair!" More recently, as a teenager, Evan got a much different reaction from a school friend of his. His mother recounted Evan having to tell his friend that he could no longer be friends with her after she said that he would go to hell because he had two mothers.

In a similar account, Joanna and Lacey related the day that Arianna came home from school beaming because the other kids in her class thought she was lucky to have two mothers. "Moms do the cool stuff at this age," explained Joanna. When I asked if their being gay had ever been an issue at school, Joanna said that the fact that Lacey walks with a cane has been more of an issue for Carla, who asked Lacey once not to come pick her up because the other kids were making fun of her disability. In both cases, we see ideologies of motherhood coming into play, both in the mothers' choice of story

to relate and in the meaning-making they ascribe to their children. And yet, as traditional ideas of motherhood are upheld, these negotiations simultaneously upend ideologies against same-sex marriage and parenting.

Mario and Isaac tell a story of family identity negotiations that came to them second-hand. Some children at their daughter's school started to compare parents, and in a show of support from a parent they'd never met, the children's different families were normalized.

> Mario: Last year, it was towards the end of the year, they were comparing parents, and someone- uh, some little kid had said "I have a mommy and a daddy." And someone said "Well, I have two mommies." And Mandy said-
>
> Isaac: "I'm better than all of you because I have two daddies." [laughing] So then a parent that was in the classroom said "No, I'm better because I have two mommies and two daddies."

Cody arguably has experienced the most difficulty at school regarding his mothers' parental identity. When Cody was asked by kids at school where his father was, he responded, "I don't have a daddy, I have a Nonny who loves me." Cody came up with this answer on his own, Callie said, based on a conversation they had had when he was younger. Rather than accepting his situation, one child kept insisting that he must have a father. Cody, from his mothers' point of view, does not see an issue with their identity at all, and was unable to understand his classmate's insistence even after Cody had already answered that he has a Nonny. "It's natural to him," Callie explained in the interview.

Again, ideologies of what is natural or normal for a family have been undermined in these cases where a child has to negotiate with the dominant ideology of parenthood on their own. Instead, a new set of characteristics is being put into place, one that includes ideas of fairness, love, a flexibly appropriate number of parents, and parents of the same sex.

Church

This idea of creating and maintaining their children's understanding that their family is normal arose in parents' narratives of church-going as well. Nearly all of these families incorporated or were trying to incorporate faith into their daily lives. Yet, the connection between these gay and lesbian couples and organized religion is not without its complexity. Religion has the potential to be entwined for different families with political action, with rejection from their family of origin, and with renewal of faith. Additionally, as we saw in Rachel's discussion of values, religion—and Christianity in particular in the United States—can be a source of "terrible rhetoric" against lesbians and gay men. Many of the most vehement objections to same-sex marriage and legal protections for LGHFs has come from conservative religious believers, as discussed in Chapter 2. These rejections of LGHF identity were addressed explicitly by Dani, when she was discussing their daughter's recent interest in religion:

> Dani: I just want to make sure that she [is getting the right things] from religion and not getting trapped by all the judgments of religion. And I never- I guess one of my biggest fears—I hate saying it in front of her—is that if she gets too involved in religion, or Erica [does], and sees all the things that people say that the Bible says about homosexuals being horrible and all these things that she'll in any way feel bad about her family, or have any kind of judgments against her family, or be ashamed of her family. And so that's my biggest fear around religion and I guess why we don't use that as our standard for values.

While Dani and Brenda allow their daughter to explore her interest in religion, they actively reject the ideologies that conflict with their family identity. Throughout all of the interviews, the view of religion and homosexuality as incompatible was challenged by the lived experiences of these families. In their experience, religious faith is for the most part integral to their values and their construction of family. To illustrate, I will highlight the experiences of two families in particular who have different ways of

connecting with church and religion, but for whom church-going is a particularly salient part of each of their family lives.

Joanna and Lacey

Joanna and Lacey talk about their church community through nearly one third of the interview. Religious belief is clearly interconnected with their identities as parents, as members of their own families of origin, as lesbians and as members of a wider community of lesbian and gay people. As parents, they teach their children what they called "normal Christian values" and attend a church that welcomes lesbians and gay men. They both believe going to church as a child is important because it gives people a "foundation...a sense of place, somewhere you can always go for help, uplifting when your parents aren't around." If children don't go to church when they're young—even when it's a negative experience, the said—they won't go as adults. Faith is practiced in their household routines as well. When they adopted their first child, they said that she had already developed a love of Christian music, so they encourage it in their home. Each night before dinner, the family prays to "thank God for the love and support of our family and friends", because, they explained in an echo of Weston (1991), they know not everyone in the lesbian and gay community has that support.

Both women also described church as a very personal place, one that provided support that the wider secular community did not. This was especially true for Lacey, who had a very hard time as she was growing up. She talks about knowing "the power of prayer" and "what God does for me in my life." In this quote, Lacey discusses the connection between church and her life:

> You know, I was 23 before I came out. I just- it was a hard time, and the church helped…make me whole and keep me from thinking, you know, "everybody hates you," or not necessarily 'hate', hate's a strong word, but people can't accept. And ever since we got together, obviously we had to hide it at first, cuz I

> was in the Army and she was in the Air Force. …Once [we] got out of the military, we were like, we don't have to prove anything to anyone. We're not flaunting it, but we're not hiding it either. And that's just the way we live our lives and we think that's good for our kids, you know. They need to see people [at church] that, like she said, that are disabled or- you don't want them sitting and pointing and staring and making fun of somebody who's different. …It's all about showing them how to be loving, caring people."

In this single description, we see the strength of the connections between her individual identity, her relationship with her partner, and the way that she parents her children. And in this critical juncture we also see the collision of dominant homophobic ideologies with Lacey's challenging those ideologies. First, she makes a conscious decision to recharacterize the homophobic people in her life with a positive linguistic spin. The ones who likely kept her from coming out until she was 23 were not hateful, but were those who "can't accept" her as a lesbian. In the next two sentences, however, Lacey concedes as "obvious" the fact that she hid her identity in the military, and borrows from a classic homophobic stereotype of gay men and lesbians that, by being themselves, they "flaunt" their sexuality. Even as she describes the way that church helped her combat homophobia, her discourse choices are influenced by homophobic ideology.

Still, for this family, church is a place where they can see other families like theirs, and where their children can meet many different people. Joanna and Lacey appreciate that going to church allows their girls to see families like theirs and that seeing people with differing abilities, of different ages, and in some cases with illnesses teaches their daughters compassion and acceptance. Lacey and Joanna are passing down to their daughters a way to live their lives that rejects homophobic nonacceptance.

David and Harvey

David and Harvey have a different relationship with their church, but related some of the same connections between church and family as did Joanna and Lacey.

David and Harvey consider themselves "spiritual and political activists"—church for them is political, integrated with their family life through activist events. They say they are not "Christian in the traditional sense", though they have been active members of their church and had a "holy union" at their church six years ago. They talked very little about religion or church during the interview except in terms of activism, and said they don't attend church regularly.

At the time of the interview, they were planning to go with a group to protest a conservative church in Houston that has been unwelcoming to lesbians and gay men. They have chosen this type of activist event because it's a "family-focused thing". The connection between church and family came up when they were describing their former neighborhood. This area they described as more politically and socially conservative, a place in which David said that they "had to, in a way, prove that we were a family by just you know, raising our kids and going to church and having jobs". In this way, David contrasts their current rejection of the type of Christianity that ascribes to a homophobic ideology with their past, in which they successfully "proved" themselves by adhering to an ideology that sees church as integral to family.

Church experiences seemed to help parents to lay the groundwork of support for their children as they handle their own identity negotiations as children of lesbian and gay parents, as was evidenced in Dani's discussion of family values. Though the approach to religious life is different for these couples, church is a site of normalization for themselves, their children and the family as a whole. Church serves to help the parents assist their children with negotiations of their identity as a family—what they look like, what they value. It is an integral part of their parenting and their "doing" of family.

Polis/Politics

As much as these parents' identities are part of a national political debate over same-sex marriage and parenting, politics itself did not come up very often. Their place within their communities—what I'm calling politics in the classic sense of "polis"—came up more often, but still less than school and church. In the following examples, we will see the very local impact that politics has on family.

For David and Harvey, as we saw above, family has a political side to it. David talked about his family in the context of social acceptance when he said "We get a place at the table too. In the terminology of family, we count." He said that the most political thing he and Harvey have done is to "love each other and raise and adopt kids." In essence, their private existence has a political import. Likewise, Paula and Rachel value political involvement and take part when they have the time. More than any other parent, Paula chatted about politics, both in general (e.g., about President Bush or listening to National Public Radio) as well as specifically in relation to her family. She related a story about confronting her state representative who had voted for a ban on same-sex marriage. Seeing him one day while driving with her kids in the car, she pulled over and "made him come over and say hello" to her children. She said she enjoys living in a small community like theirs because of the big impact activism can make.

Other parents had a different experience with small-town Texas life. In Callie and Yelina's case, small town values—politics as polis—were important. They enjoy living where people look out for each other and where their son will be safe outside. Callie desires for their son to grow up with "the right small town values", a good work ethic and without the influence of cartoons and video games. However, that small town can be a hard place for them to be themselves as a couple and as a family. A conversation about

their involvement in church revealed the difficulties they face more generally in their town.

> Sarah: Are there other things that you regularly do as a family, or that you think are important to regularly do, like do you go to church, do you have mealtimes that are always-?
>
> Callie: I want him to understand church. He goes to vacation Bible school in the summer. If we get a wild hare and we decide to go to a church, you know, we do, but it's hard to find a church that [Yelina] feels comfortable in and I feel comfortable in, especially in a small town. If it was [the nearby city] it'd be a lot easier you know, [accepting churches] are all over the place in [the city] [laughing] But it's really hard for us. And it's also hard for us to find a place where we feel comfortable to go out and have a date—you know, we can't even go to [the nearby city] and have a date because the guys that she works with, they have friends that know, and you know, they talk.

Isaac and Mario also brought up interactions with neighbors in their town. In their case, though, they were surprised that they did not encounter the homophobia that they expected to, living in a more rural area.

> Isaac: We just thought small town, we were like oo:: [we weren't sure?] And even when we first moved here that we'd go to like the little parades or little festivals, they looked very conservative. hh But we were always out and about together, so hhh. Um and you know for a long time, we didn't know our neighbors and we finally met our next door neighbor. He's the one that said, 'Oh, yeah, everyone knows about you guys, like [laughing] it's no big secret.' hh Even though we weren't out and about talking to everyone, everyone knew us.
>
> Sarah: OK, and you haven't gotten any negative reactions?
>
> Mario: As a matter of fact, everyone's been very supportive. And I tell ya, everybody knows the girls. Before we got the girls, we tend[ed] to keep to ourselves, we weren't very social. Now, with the girls, we have to be social. Because they're very social. They say hello to everyone, they're out there so we have to be right behind them. So by everybody knowing the girls, then they know us as well.

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION THROUGH SYMBOLIC MATERIALS

Thus far in my analysis of these parents' definitions of family I have looked at the members included in this kinship unit; at what references the parents and their children make to ideological discourses such as motherhood, parenthood and sexuality; and at the ways parents turn toward or away from national and local understandings of family. In addition to looking at the ideological underpinnings of family and at the positioning of the parents, the data from this study reveals parents' reliance on and reference to material symbols of family as well. By material symbol, I mean those tangible objects which stand for family and in many cases serve as an physical anchor point around which family is located and legitimated. Each of these objects has a role in the performance of family, or the performance of the recognition of family. However, unlike "doing family" through rituals such as going to church or eating meals together, the performance has as its focus a tangible object through which the family identity is either realized or rejected. In this section, I will show how material symbols of family are an integral part of many parents' negotiations of family.

In three cases, the existence of pictures and particularly their location symbolized affirmation or rejection of the parents' families. In my interview with Callie and Yelina, Callie's description of who is included as a member of their family was accompanied by pointing to pictures on their dining room wall as she labeled all of the different relationships. The numerous framed photographs that filled the wall stood as evidence of the central nature of family to them, a concrete realization of relationships that were most often not characterized by blood or legal kinship.

In another interview, David referenced photographs as well as he talked about whether or not his and his partner's families of origin support their family. He said that

support was strong on Harvey's side of the family and provided a story about the placement of pictures at Harvey's stepfather's house as illustration of that support:

> David: [Harvey] has a stepfather who we visited last summer, who's, you know, our kids' pictures are displayed with all other grandkids. And he is like in his 80s, so [that's] real progressive...

This acknowledgement by the stepfather of their family is extralinguistic—it successfully conveys meaning, belief and attitude, as the "hearers" understand the message being communicated.

We see this communication even more clearly in the case of Jane's parents. Catherine brought up the fact that Jane's parents have her son's picture on a bedroom table and not on a more public wall with the other grandchildren:

> Catherine: [Soon after their son Green Hornet leaves the room to get ready for bed] There is a problem there and now that he's in the shower I'm gonna say it. Is that um her parents have pictures of their other grandchildren in the living room in isolated frames, lined up in a row, a horizontal row.
>
> Jane: And keep his picture in the bedroom-
>
> Catherine: And his picture's not on the wall. And that is- is not sustainable, that situation.
>
> Jane: And he knows it, you know, he hasn't said anything to us, but he knows.

The communicative effect of the material object as well as its physical location is highlighted here, as Catherine describes in detail the thoughtful placement of the other pictures and Jane connects their son's understanding of the message. In contrast, at work their family is acknowledged and affirmed, as illustrated again through reference to photographs:

> Catherine: Oh yeah, we have pictures on our locker, we take him to work, we've taken him to our office.

> Jane: Oh yeah, I have people at work who get mad if I don't update pictures in my locker after a while.

As I discussed in the previous section on identity negotiations at school, we see that visibility comes into play here—pictures are a visible negotiation of their identity, just as bringing their child to work is a performance of their identity as a family. The coworkers then are invited to join in this negotiation by viewing the pictures, an invitation they clearly appreciate and have taken up, since they require regularly "updated" information.

In addition to pictures, tangible items involved in traditional Christmas rituals came up in two interviews. Dani mentioned her grandmother making Christmas stockings for her partner and her children, which she said, "finalizes the family for her."

> Dani: You know, and they'll ask "How's Brenda? How's Heather?", whatever, but they were always, that was just kind of they're in my life so they'll ask about 'em, but they weren't ever fully embraced. We had Erica, and this year for Christmas, the thing that my grandmother does for her family, and for all of us when we were born, is she makes us Christmas stockings. Hand makes 'em, sews our names on 'em, with everything. For Christmas this year, Erica got one, Heather got one, and Brenda got one. And so that finalizes the family for her, and legitimizes it. And so that told me at the end, I don't know that I would've ever gotten those had we not had Erica. But having Erica made it official that I have a family now, I'm not just gay and have a girlfriend who has a kid. So that was a-interesting thing to me that it took a kid to legitimize me as a family to my family.

Clearly we can see that these Christmas stockings are not just material items, but expressions of legitimacy and inclusion in a family tradition. In addition, just as the acts of choosing solitary frames and their placement was as important to Jane and Catherine as the photos themselves, here, the performance of acceptance includes not just the stocking, but hand making, sewing, and giving the stocking. In a rather poetic way, Dani and Brenda's family is made real through a family ritual that includes permanently stitching the names of each member of the family.

In Callie and Yelina's case, Christmas symbols and rituals are a performance of nonacceptance. Though Yelina's family invites the three of them to celebrate Christmas,

Callie and Yelina often have to bring extra presents for their son because he doesn't get as many as the other grandson. In addition, during these visits Yelina's father will take his other grandson to do special things, leaving Horatio out of this ritual. In both this case and in Catherine's story above, the communicative impact of these performances is not lost on their children. At the end of the story about Christmas, Callie references another material symbol of family, the marriage certificate:

> They don't see that they're both boys, they're both part of the family whether there's a paper between us or not, whether he's blood or not, that's your chosen family.

Another symbolic representation of family mentioned by several parents is genetic relatedness. According to Weston (1991: 105), "genes and blood appear as symbols implicated in one culturally specific way of demarcating and calculating relationships." Many parents talked about the importance (or lack thereof) of biological similarities in their definitions of family, most often noting that the physical, biological connection does not alone define family. The lack of necessity of a genetic relationship came up in Chapter 5 in the discussion of prototypes, as well as in Chapter 6 with Barbara's distinction between the tiresome, biologically related family and the energizing family of choice.

For some couples, however, genetics plays a role in their performance or negotiation of family, even if not considering it as a condition of family. One couple put a great deal of thought into the meaning of genetic material when they planned their sons' conception. Rifka and Victoria each carried one of their two sons, both of whom were conceived through IVF. Rifka had their first son, and so they chose a donor who would look like Victoria because that "made sense." The physical match between mothers and son that would result and the meaning that would be made by this visual symbol of

family was a priority. However, when they decided to have a second child, the priority changed, though it was still built upon genetic similarity, as Rifka explains:

> And we were thinking at the time that if and when Victoria ever carried that we'd pick a brown-haired, hazel-eyed Eastern European Jewish person [resembling Rifka]. And so it's really interesting because then when we did um decide to have a second child and she carried Ben, we went, 'wait, that doesn't make sense anymore we want these two kids to be biologically related', so she ended up having a clone of herself cuz she's the blond-haired, blue-eyed-. Um so yeah, our boys are biologically related, genetically on the donor's side, um, which, in terms of family was really important to us that that link be there if it could happen.

The recognition by the two mothers of the meaning-making of physical similarity gives us some insight into the way in which genes define family, and how we "make sense" of family. Where their relationship to their son defined family in the first case, that definition shifted to prioritize their sons' relationship to each other. Rifka's discussion of what makes sense when creating a family recalls Fairclough's commentary on the ideological power behind "common sense" understandings. Rifka and Victoria have the opportunity to put serious consideration into the symbolism of physical characteristics because of their choice to have children through IVF. At the same time, they are able to undertake a normalizing performance of family by taking part in the dominant ideology of family as biologically related.

The meaning-making of family through biology came up in three other interviews as well. In my discussion with Joanna, who is black, and Lacey, who is white, genetic relatedness came up in terms of others' understanding and perception of their family. When they were starting the adoption process, they ruled out adopting an Asian child because no one would look like anyone else. Eventually, they adopted two Mexican American girls, and have found since that others try to make sense of their family by erasing any physical dissimilarities.

> Lacey: Even when we went to church [in another Texas city] this old elderly lady came up and said "Your daughter looks so much like you." And Carla was a baby and it was like "Thanks."
>
> Joanna: And people say she looks like me and I think "No, she doesn't!" But you know I mean people try to put you where [you're] supposed to be, or you know make those assumptions and we tell them right out "No:."

Joanna sums up quite concisely the powerful influence of ideologically based common sense ("where you're supposed to be"), even in the face of visible evidence to the contrary. The two different replies to these assumptions—"Thanks" versus "No"—reveals the mothers' understanding of others' attempts at meaning making. These meaning making attempts, and the mothers' understanding of those attempts, are extraordinary illustrations of the negotiation of family identity.

Rifka and Victoria and Dani and Brenda discussed attempts to find their children's siblings by the sperm donor. Dani and Brenda both seemed interested in and very open with their daughter about finding her genetically related siblings online. Through a donor registry, they found another lesbian couple who had had children by the same donor as Heather. They have been in contact with them and have visited on one occasion. Both noted with excitement in the interview the similarities between Heather and her brothers. Dani noted the change for Heather:

> Dani: Heather's life changed very quickly. She went from, in three years, from being an only child with absolutely no siblings
>
> Brenda: to having an older brother –
>
> Dani: -two older brothers ... and then a younger brother and now a younger sister.

For Dani and Brenda, then, biological relatedness alone is a reasonable condition to include others in their family.

This condition was not the case for Victoria. She and Rifka disagree about the importance of finding either the sperm donor or other children of the sperm donor.

Victoria was adamant that their family is theirs and not part of another family related only genetically. As a result of this discussion, Rifka claimed this difference as a difference in their definition of family altogether:

> Victoria: Why do they need to know [about those other families]?
>
> Rifka: Well, I mean, cuz everyone's curious, I think.
>
> Victoria: But their [the children's] family is an extension of our families.
>
> Rifka: Well see, and that's- in that case our definition of family is different.
>
> Victoria: My family is their family, your family is their family, the other siblings are not their family. I mean it's-
>
> Rifka: Well, but genetically there's a link.
>
> Victoria: Genetically, yeah, so? Genetically there is, yeah, so what?

NEGOTIATING NORMALITY THROUGH SPECIFIC LEXICAL CHOICES

We have already seen instances in which ideologies of family and parenthood have affected discourse choices made by the parents. There were cases of parents using language from common antigay statements about "flaunting" one's sexuality; others where parents made repairs to replace a negative word such as "hate" with something less strong like "can't accept." In this last section, I will focus in on three more lexical items: *prove, obviously* and *of course*. I argue that each has strong connections to Discourses of normality and normalization.

First, the word *prove* came up in two interviews, in discussions about community interactions, as a means by which parents situated themselves as normal.

Excerpts 1 and 2: ***prove***

> David: [We] had to in a way prove that we were a family by just you know, raising our kids and going to church and having jobs.

> Lacey: Once [we] got out of the military, we were like, we don't have to prove anything to anyone.

In the first excerpt, David says that he and Harvey had to prove themselves to their former neighbors by observing recognizable—that is, normative—family practices such as holding a job or going to church. In conjunction with "you know", David positions having a job and going to church as jointly (between himself and the interviewer) understood, expected ways they can prove themselves as family men. Furthermore, raising kids, having a job and going to church are parent functions; David's statement, talking as he was about proving themselves to their conservative, heterosexual neighbors, serves to affirm both gay men as able to have families and gay men's families as normal.

In the second excerpt, Lacey and Joanna had to prove that they were normal enough to be in the military, that is, that they were not lesbian. While this statement is not about them as parents, it echoes David's statement in the sense that by not acting abnormally—as homosexual—they prove themselves to be normal. Both of these excerpts also reflect Paula's and Callie's discussions of acting as a family at their children's schools. In those discussions, their identities as lesbians had to be unremarked upon in order for them to claim the identity of a normal family.

Proving, for each of these families, is an active negotiation that occurred prior to the interview, a form of a past performance. Indeed, one could analyze any action by these parents in which they negotiated their identities as "normal" as an act of proving

themselves. These performances of normalization came in the present as well, during the interview, signified by the related terms *obviously* and *of course*.

Excerpts 3 and 4: *obviously*

> Lacey: ...ever since we got together, obviously we had to hide it at first, cuz I was in the Army and she was in the Air Force.

> Rifka: ...obviously our immediate family is the four of us.

These uses of *obvious* also shows the speaker's assumption that the information they are giving is not going to surprise the interviewer. In Excerpt 3, the speaker knows the interviewer is lesbian, and may assume she is aware of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" restriction in the military. At the same time, this instance can be read as an acceptance of her and Joanna's marginalized status (at least within the military). That is, *obviously* references the normality of the choice they made not to come out before leaving military service.

In Excerpt 4, Rifka uses the term *obviously* while discussing her definition of *family*. Here, the term works in two ways as well. Again, the speaker indexes a concept—the definition of *family*—that she assumes is accepted by the interviewer as old information. But *obviously* also acts as a way to affirm, or even create, her family as normal. That is, while her definition of *family* as a concept was broader than blood relations, when she speaks of a real situation—her family—the definition does not deviate from the traditional nuclear model. The fact that they are two mothers is effectively erased as a relevant detail, and their family is thereby normalized.

Finally, the related phrase *of course* came up as particularly salient in Harvey's response to his son's classmate claiming that Jordan "doesn't have a mother."

Excerpt 5: *of course*

> Harvey: One time when this little girl came up to me in school and said, uh [taunting voice] 'Jordan doesn't have a mother. He's got two dads, he doesn't have a mother.' and I said, 'Well, you silly little girl, of course he's got a mother. She's in Illinois.' and he goes, 'Yeah!' and all the kids were standing around [laughs] and it was like that was the end of that. I might have been a little hard on her, but it was for effect, you know?

Harvey's use of *of course* functions at first sight as a correction, made for effect, to the young girl's description of Jordan as not having a mother. However, this correction illuminates Harvey's own definition of *mother*, as it is a conflation of the biological and familial roles (Jordan's mother plays no active parenting role). The girl's statement, which may have reflected the truth of the situation, was interpreted negatively as a taunt, prompting Harvey's response reconstructing the "normal" family—*of course* all children have a mother and a father. Furthermore, he reinforces Jordan's normal family status by providing proof of his mother's existence ("She's in Illinois."). Through his statement, Harvey deflects criticism of his son's family by drawing upon a normative idea of parenthood. Just like *obviously*, *of course* calls upon the dominant ideology, society's shared knowledge of who is included in the definition of *family*.

Within these lexical choices lies a fundamental tension between the identity of the parents as gay and lesbian people and as parents. The use of terms such as *prove*, *of course*, and *obviously* shows both an awareness of their status in American society as outside of the normative definition of family and that that status is not indicative of their own identities. In order to talk about themselves as "like everybody else," the parents acknowledge other perceptions of them as well as the dominant discourses of *family*, and in so doing, accept (perhaps unknowingly) those other perceptions to varying degrees and for a variety of reasons. Callie and Yelina, for example, negotiate their identities within their community by in a sense agreeing to not "put all our business out there" and to not

label those who don't consider them normal as discriminatory. For Paula and Rachel, on the other hand, acting "normal" is being normal. Their identity as lesbian does not have to be visible because it is inconsequential to their identity as mothers. Alternatively, David and Harvey's actions as fathers represent a political statement; and indeed, their status in society is even more marginalized than that of lesbian parents. This status might provide some foundation for Harvey's choice to normalize his son's *family* identity by proving that he has a mother as well as two fathers.

CONCLUSIONS

From the interview data presented here, we can see that the couples' interactions in public and in private reveal a range of traditional and nontraditional ideologies of family at work. Their use of Discourses of normality, tradition or change does not mean that the couples are looking to redefine *family*, but to provide their children with the best possible upbringings they can, even if that means working for a changed world. In order to do this, their identity negotiations have involved both micro- and macro-level discourse strategies based upon the different circumstances they are in and the different interactants involved.

In one clear example of the complexity of these negotiations is Callie's description of the discrimination her family has faced. After finishing the story about the T-shirt, Callie reflects:

> As a family, we've had people censor, or discriminate I guess, [lowered tone] you might say, but it hasn't been too bad…

At the same time that Callie acknowledges a larger pattern of discrimination against her family, she moderates it by saying "it hasn't been too bad". She carefully chooses to use

the less critical (or less politically charged) word censor to describe the actions of people in their town. She does this a second time a bit later when discussing the homophobia Cody may encounter from older kids and parents. "I don't want to use the word 'bigoted' in this town" says Callie, at which point Yelina offers up "narrow-minded" as an alternative. In both cases, Callie and Yelina's identities as members of a small, tight-knit town outweigh their identities as lesbian parents. Their negotiations of identity involve attention to the locational ("in this town") and the lexical (*censor* vs. *discriminate*; *bigoted* vs. *narrow-minded*). With potentially the most at stake of any of the families I interviewed, these two mothers' linguistic choices show a balancing act between tradition and progression, activism and understanding, and individual identity and community identity.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this final chapter, I briefly review the questions this study set out to explore, summarize the key points of that exploration and discuss the implications for future research that this study raises. The genesis of this study was an attempt to learn about gay- and lesbian-headed families through their own voices. Since the identity of "family" or of "parent" for lesbians and gay men was and still is a point of contention, I was interested in hearing how they define family rather than how others define family for them, or how researchers analyze the families that these parents head.

Though there is a more diverse body of research on LGHFs now than when this study began, the majority of it focuses on the differences brought about by having two parents of the same biological sex heading a family. Topics such as parent-naming practices, gender roles and labor division, power differences, and alternative parenting relationships, when taken as a whole body of work, imply that *family* is somehow altogether different for lesbians and gay men with children. This study has sought to show the reality of family identity work, at least as its participants see it, and how that reality is both more mundane and more complicated than the impression given by previous literature on the subject.

As part of negotiating their identity as LGHFs, participants have both embraced and rejected popular notions of what is a "normal" family. The regular defining and redefining of categories that this involves is the basis of the tension that this study has uncovered. As these parents negotiate their identities with their families of origin and with community members, school officials, and even their children's friends, they are not

charting new territory or creating new definitions. Their negotiations, I have argued, are part of and adding to a larger shift in the prototype of *family* in the United States.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I outlined the ideologies of family that have the most currency for these participants. The first is an ideology that generally excludes same-sex couples for a variety of reasons, including religion, tradition and the belief that lesbian and gay couples, by choosing to be gay, are too focused on their sexual desires to be appropriate parents. I discussed the conflation of marriage and family both in this opposition to LGHFs and with regard to the parents' feelings about marriage equality and what it might add to their families. The dominant ideology of *family*, as including two opposite-sex parents raising their children in one household, is a contrast to the ideology of family of choice that exists within lesbian and gay communities. This version of family is defined by the inclusion of other gay and lesbian people, often in place of or in addition to families of origin who may not be fully supportive of an individual's sexual identity.

By analyzing the participants' dictionary-type definitions of *family*, given in response to the question "How do you define *family*?", I found in Chapter 5 that parents most often gave both a narrow definition (which included only blood and legal relationships) and a broad definition (which included those not related by blood, marriage or adoption). I also showed that membership in a family is not fixed, but rather is fluid and possibly changeable. Furthermore, many parents' definitions of *family* rely on the actions one performs as a family member and included descriptions of physical location as a way to describe who is or is not included in a family. Therefore, a person who is related in a bilateral cognatic kinship model might not be included in a participant's "current" family due to living at a distance. Likewise, a person not related in terms of the

standard kinship model can be included because they perform actions that define them as family members.

Based on these definitions, both from the participants themselves and from those who have spoken out nationally against same-sex marriage and parenting, I used Lakoff's Prototype Theory to offer a way to understand the seeming impasse between those who do not believe being gay and being a parent are compatible, and those who see it as one of many other types of family that do not conform to the dominant ideology. I identified a model of a FAMILY prototype that I call the "Caretaker-Dependent Prototype", made up of three base models: Love, Blood-Marriage and Choice. I then argued that there would need to be two radial categories stemming from this prototype to account for two central, yet opposed, ideologies, separated solely by whether, if there are two parents, those parents could be the same sex. I showed that the parents' sexuality actually has less importance in the prototype than the biological sex, which gets mapped onto gender categories and roles.

In Chapter 6 I discussed the positioning of the parents' narratives, toward local and nonlocal interactants and the parents' use of generic and personal features in their definitions. This illuminated how parents attend to and draw upon external influences, whether local or nonlocal, and also how they themselves become meaning makers through their use of generic and personal definitions. This discussion then shifted to the parents' negotiations of their family identities, again discussing their influence on dominant ideologies as well as being influenced by dominant ideologies. The ideologies that the parents in this study draw from do not simply or even predominantly reflect a "new" kind of family on the whole, but often a rather traditional sense of *family* that sometimes gets more broadly defined to include a supportive network of family and friends. Their ideologies of family come from their towns, their experiences as gay and

lesbian individuals, their religious affiliations, and their own upbringings. Far from being radical, these families are very much "just like all the other families."

With access to the Discourses that index both family and gay- or lesbian-headed family, as well as those of other political and social ideologies, lesbian and gay parents make a variety of choices in how they position and normalize their families in society. In Chapter 7 we looked at the values parents teach their children, which show us the internal negotiations happening within each family. These values showed little variation from those we would expect from any caregiver/dependent relationship. Those differences that did exist could be directly related to their status as lesbian or gay, but did not dominate the discussion.

Their negotiations external to their family took place in four different venues: those with school, with church, with families of origin and with their local communities. In each venue, we saw a complex picture of identity negotiations. Parents who would normally be very private about their sexuality made themselves very visible at their child's school. Couples had very different connections to religion, and though overall most participants were trying to include church going in their family life, some had a difficult time finding a welcoming congregation. In their communities, parents were involved to varying degrees, but most often they did not report being politically active nor active in lesbian or gay social networks. Given the very political nature of the struggle for same-sex marriage rights, this finding might be seen as surprising; however, it is consistent with the overall picture of these parents conducting their lives with a focus on their children's well-being.

We also looked at two sets of tools that parents employed in the process of identity negotiations. The first was a set of symbols of family, particularly photographs, Christmas items and physical similarities. I showed that similar material/physical

symbols of family emerged in different interviews. Much like the locational aspect of the parents' definitions, these physical symbols highlight the importance of the tangible in the negotiation of *family*. Lastly, I focused on three specific lexical choices—"of course", "prove" and "obviously"—that signified parents' use of a Discourse of normality and normalization. I argue that the Discourse of normality shows that the identity work the parents do does not have as its goal the upsetting or radicalizing of family, but the safety and well-being of their children and the acceptance of their families within their communities. This does not mean acquiescence to an oppressive ideology, but rather an appreciation of the beneficial aspects of family, and a desire for *family* to be inclusive of themselves and their children.

Nor does it mean that these parents are unaware of the politics of the marriage debate or unreflective of the currently tenuous legal position of their families. On the contrary, the parents could readily talk about their negotiations of their identities as lesbian, gay, parents and family members in different spheres of their lives. They just as easily talked about kin brought into their families by choice as through biology and about the relative virtues of each relationship. While each couple could acknowledge that their families were not fully accepted and that there are some things they do differently than straight parents, they rarely spoke of themselves as challenges to the traditional family model. The acknowledgement of any differences instead seems to inspire their negotiations and becomes part of the overall shift in the ideology of *family* in the United States.

In this final excerpt, Callie encapsulates the aim and the focus of this work, as it shows the complexity of her and Yelina's relationship with their own identities and with the community around them. Here, Callie is talking about teaching her son Cody small

town values, when her narrative expands and draws in her relationship to her son, and their family's relationship to their community and to the world:

> I want my kids to say 'yes ma'am, no ma'am', you mind, you know. I mean, he's defiant, but he gets that honest. I mean, I was the same way. … Still am. I'm like, if you tell me it's gotta be a certain way, I'm gonna say 'Why'. If I don't agree with it, I'm gonna say 'Why.' You give me a logical, believable excuse, then or-or reason- then I'll say 'Yes.' But if you tell me 'This is the way it's been done because it's always been done,' I'm gonna say 'OK, then why can't we change it?' Because it's outdated, it's time to move forward, you know, things can't stay the same way. You know, there's a proverb that says you never step in the same river twice. Things change. You have to change with it or you're gonna be stuck. ...I do, I buck the system a lot. But I'm like, if somebody doesn't, then we're never gonna move forward, never gonna chan- we're never gonna evolve, we're never gonna get to a higher place. And it's the same way with him. He's defiant, he's constantly challengin' everything. And there's some things where it aggravates me, but some things I'm like, OK, you know, I'm glad you're like that because you're gonna be one that's gonna change the world. That one person that you- the family that says 'I don't have to stay like this. Because this is the way everybody else does it, doesn't mean we have to do it.' They're the family that could change the world. [Yelina]'s like, when I told her about this interview she goes, 'Why are we doin' this?' I said, 'Because, it's- it might change somebody else's view on what we do, on our lifestyle.'

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research on the topic of LGHFs and on meaning making and contested identities is certainly necessary and could set out in several different directions. First, a closer look at which parents assume a right to speak using the generic discourse form, as representative of families more generally, might dovetail well with other studies of power in interaction and power differentials between parents. Comparisons between married lesbian and gay couples and those not married, or who choose not to participate in marriage even after marriage equality is attained, could focus on the differences in language use regarding family membership.

Future studies could also look at intrafamilial interactions such as arguments or the negotiations in the dissolution of a same-sex marriage. Additional longer-term work on the effects of these negotiations of family identity on the children in LGHFs could give us a good picture of more and less successful means of identity work. Interviews with children of lesbian and gay parents would be one means by which to look at family from this perspective. To look over the longer term as well at the cumulative effects of the micro-shifts in Discourse and definition that these and other parents are performing would inform our understanding of the bridge between local negotiations and global shifts in ideology. As marriage rights continue to be obtained throughout the United States, it will be imperative for researchers in all fields to make their own ideological shifts. Ideally, scholars will quickly come to a point at which lesbian- and gay-headed families are regularly included in studies of family, marriage, child-rearing, intrafamilial discourse, and so on as one of the many possible constellations of the modern American family.

Any further research, in my view, would do well to foster a cross-disciplinary approach. The issues that studies of identity negotiation and meaning making raise affect people in their everyday lives. The acceptance or rejection of a child's family form is not at its heart a theoretical exercise, but theory can be put to the service of these children and their families. Sociolinguistics by its very nature asks questions that pertain not just to the linguistic academy but to the social world we live in. The research agenda undertaken, in particular by scholars of human rights and social justice issues, can easily lend itself to collaboration with fields such as anthropology, psychology, sociology and queer studies. Research on other groups wrestling with identities that are contested by culturally dominant ideologies would benefit from this type of collaborative effort.

Appendix

INTERVIEW MODULES

1. Family history
    1. couple's story
    2. decision to have children
        i. how to have them
        ii. process of deciding
        iii. reasons and factors in the decision
    3. info about children
        i. ages
        ii. school
            1. adjustment
            2. acceptance of family form
            3. choice of school (public vs. private)
            4. extracurricular activities
                1. description of activities
                2. acceptance of family form by other kids, other parents
        iii. previous family history (if adopted)
2. Family life
    1. work arrangements
    2. child care (if applicable)
    3. split of household labor
        i. how
        ii. why
    4. family activities
        i. church/temple
        ii. other regular, planned, recurring activities
3. Naming
    1. parents' names
    2. last/family name(s)
    3. how parents and children refer to each other
        i. in the home
        ii. outside of the home
        iii. to extended family/close friends
4. Discipline
    1. household rules
    2. who does it
    3. what form does it take

4. reasons to discipline
5. decision-making processes for the above

5. Networks
    1. parents' friends
        i. gay/straight?
        ii. is the sexual orientation of any consequence?
    2. kids' friends
        i. are the parents lesbian/gay?
        ii. do the friends know about kids' family structure?
    3. community/organization involvement
        i. national/political community
        ii. local/geographical community
        iii. what, if any, connections to the GLBT community

6. Ideologies
    1. what does *family* mean to you?
    2. how would you describe your family?
    3. what (are the most important) influences (on) your parenting?
        i. books
        ii. friends
        iii. your parents
        iv. selves/intuition
        v. doctors/other professionals
        vi. other
    4. do you see yourselves as different in any way from straight parents?
        i. how so? or why not?

7. Families of origin
    1. current involvement
    2. influence on family construction
    3. acceptance/tolerance of family form

8. Values
    1. what values do you teach your children?
    2. do you have a sense of where those values come from?
    3. what does the phrase "family values" mean to you?

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