

“QUEERING” THE AMERICAN FAMILY:
BELIEF, FALLACY & MYTH

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

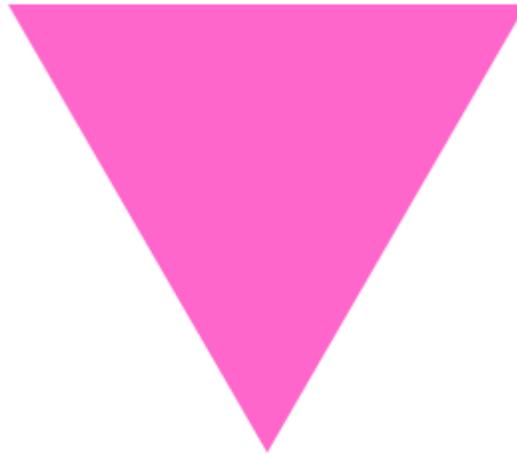
In the existing, but sparse academic literature that exists, queer lives and lifestyles have consistently been juxtaposed to an intangible hetero-normative ideal. This becomes particularly problematic for the study of this distinctly varied population, when operationalizing gendered markers that are typically correlated with the concept of relationships, family and family life. Many, if not most of the indices are composed of dichotomous variables that are only applicable to the lives of a hetero-normative population.

Today, it is still the case that those who declare LGBTQ identities often do so at the risk of undermining relationships with families of origin (Patterson, 2000). It is also the case that we have our most intimate of relationships vilified and marginalized, though I argue, more covertly than overtly forty plus years after the Stonewall riots. It is of particular interest to my research to ascertain just how queers construct the concept of partnership and of family. Are queer couplings destined to fail, unstable, as is the argument social conservatives? What forms of social networks are formed within the queer “community”? How do LGBTQs construct the concept of family? Where does the “Fictive” familial unit (Schneider, 1984) fit into queer lives and how does that differ from the hetero-normative extended family? Is it possible for same-sex couples – denied the rights and privileges appropriated exclusively by heterosexual married or unmarried partners – to find fulfillment when they are not – under our current system of government – even considered a legitimate family?

Queering the American Family involves different ways of knowing that have been prominent in feminists' peace research and feminist politics. An understanding of the complex ontologies, faced by the sexually marginalized based on a lifetime of accepted prejudices is an important aspect of this research. Limits to political power, loss of familial support and learning to navigate the complexities of life without the benefit of role models are just a few of the elements to be addressed in this facet of my research.

**“QUEERING” THE AMERICAN FAMILY:
BELIEF, FALLACY & MYTH**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of
Daniel Bremner



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Chapter One

An Introduction

Aims & Objectives

Family life research on or about a presumed gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and/or queer¹ (GLBTQ or LGBTQ) community in the United States has almost always been scrutinized from a hegemonic, yet elusive, heterosexual point-of-view, due to the perspective of the researcher or the methodology employed (Calvin, 1985; Jackson, 1999; Richardson, 2000; Seidman, 1996; Wittig, 1992). In the existing, but sparse academic literature, queer lives and lifestyles have consistently been juxtaposed to an intangible hetero-normative ideal. It becomes particularly problematic for this distinctly varied population, when operationalizing gendered markers that are typically correlated with the concept of family and family life. Many, if not most of the indices are composed of dichotomous variables that are only applicable to the lives of a hetero-normative population.² This lack of academic inquiry and a history of marginalization were first introduced by Kingsley Davis (1934) who observed that historically, sociologists have relegated social discourses regarding human

¹ The relevant definition of “queer” within the context of this dissertation is “...all the various other than accepted hetero-normative sexualities which defy traditional moral values” (Seidman 1996).

² To be discussed in detail in later chapters.

sexuality and desire to the studies of biology, medicine, theology, law, and psychology. While questions of complex physical and emotional human relations can and do belong to the various academic disciplines, they remain fundamentally sociological in their impact.

The use of the word *queer* throughout my writing is utilized only as a form of “sexual shorthand”. In no way do I wish the reader to assume that the life experience of a black lesbian is in any way analogous to that of a white gay male. Nor do I wish to depict the existence of a unified cohesive community of sexually disenfranchised men and women without the plight created by the hierarchies and hegemonies of race, class and gender. Although some postmodernists might find my use of the word *queer* to suggest a “false unity of men and women” (Butler, 1997), I find myself in agreement with Steven Seidman that queer articulates a theoretical sensibility that can and is often expressed in political terms, as a transgression or “permanent rebellion” (1977).

Often, during the disclosure of a variant sexuality or a “coming-out” to parents and/or the nuclear family there will exist feelings of loss that strain both sides. Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998) report a process from “shock to acceptance,” similar to the Kubler-Ross (1969) model on death and dying for families of LGBTQ members. If acceptance is ever achieved - it may take years (Bozett & Sussman,

1989; DeVine, 1984; Pearlman, 1992). In the time that follows disclosure or coming out “queer offspring” are less likely than parents to perceive a positive change in parent-child relationships. For example, Ben-Ari (1995) reported that following disclosure, 56% of the lesbian and gay young adults felt that their relationship within the family improved. This was truer for their relationship with the mother (66%) than the father (44%). Parents were strikingly more likely to report improvement, 84% of mothers versus 63% of fathers (1995).

Corrigan and Matthews (2003) review some of the major issues facing those who live outside of the accepted norm, following disclosure or coming out. There are both costs and benefits for people with any social variation, when publicly disclosing their divergence. These issues include familial avoidance and disapproval as key costs, and improved psychological and interpersonal relations with peers or extended families are key benefits. This is specifically the area of concern that I explore in *Queering the American Family*. The queer community has struggled with these tensions and discoveries in the process(es) of coming out. Each person may experience differing degrees of identity confusion and comparison, identifier acceptance, immersion, and identity synthesis. In addition, feelings of love, self-actualization, and fulfillment must be realized against the impact of homophobia. Lessons learned about coming out into a queer community, and acceptance by extended, non-nuclear familial units,

include a variety of models that map many strategies for successful living, which must be deconstructed and studied if they are to be understood and implemented. Queers must vie for their rights to construct their own contemporary familial units by establishing long-term relationships - for which they demand unrestricted recognition - and begin to publicly parent children.

Over the last one hundred years - and counting in America, the term “homosexuality” has acquired a bona-fide social stigma that transgresses any notion of conventional substance. The nuclear family remains overriding. Neither the public’s emerging awareness of a queer identity nor the growing visibility of GLBTQs living within hetero-normative social institutions have led to increasing real social tolerance - let alone acceptance - as the institutions of marriage and family are becoming more impenetrable. At present, married heterosexual couples take for granted 1800 rights and privileges that queers cannot even access, with marriage and family remaining the most fiercely guarded³ (The Empire State Pride Agenda for Equality, 2003). Even though “cohort replacement” may have liberalized individual attitudes, the Defense of Marriage Act of 1996 (DOMA) - which reinforces the privileged and protected status of heterosexuality – has provoked growing arguments regarding the fundamental rights of LGBTQs.

Consequently John D’Emilio aptly states “*The Marriage Fight Is Setting*

³ Currently, only in Massachusetts and Connecticut are same-sex couples entitled to all of the State-level rights and benefits of Marriage. In addition, same-sex couples in Vermont are able to enter into State-sanctioned civil unions.

Us Back” (2005). He posits that the ongoing battle to win marriage equality through the courts and State legislatures has done something that no other single campaign or group of issues in the LGBTQ movement has done over the past fifty years: created a vast body of new anti-gay law (D’Emilio, 2005). The recent passing of California’s Proposition 8, which rewrites the constitution of the State of California, to preclude same-sex marriage is a prime example of this anti-gay backlash.

I argue that over the past decade the greater social integration -whether politically motivated, or as a usual form of communal assimilation - has made gay marriage and family as well as LGBTQ rights in general, an even more contentious site, minimizing any progress made towards inclusion since the Stonewall riots of 1969 - believed by many to be the impetus for the gay rights movement in America.

If today, it is still the case that those who declare LGBTQ identities often do so at the risk of relationships with families of origin (Patterson, 2000), then it is of particular interest to my inquiry how queers construct the concept of family. Where does the “Fictive” familial unit (Schneider, 1984) fit into queer lives and how does that differ from hetero-normative extended family? Is it possible for same-sex couples – denied the rights and privileges appropriated exclusively

by heterosexual married or unmarried partners – to find fulfillment when they are not – under our current system of government – even considered a legitimate family?

The Family Research Council (FRC) and their pundits state many beliefs, myths and fallacies that I challenge in my research. They are, but not limited to:

“Homosexual relationships are unstable. . . . Every argument for gay marriage is an argument that would support polygamy. . . . They have the most profound interest in polygamy, rooted in the logic of their doctrine in discrediting the notion of marriage. . . . Homosexual adoption is not in the best interest of children. Children need both a same-sex and an opposite sex parent in order to have the best chance to develop healthy sexual identities. . . . Homosexual households are not a suitable environment for the development of children because of their instability and hostility toward natural families. This issue is being driven more by its perceived power to advance the homosexual agenda than by the concern about what is best for children” (Knight & Garcia, 1994).

In an effort to challenge some of these long-held beliefs, myths and fallacies my research will ask:

- ❖ What societal factors affect the stability of queer lives and relationships?
 - Do the support and/or the acceptance of families of origin have an effect of the stability or longevity of queer relationships?
 - How does the construction of fictive familial units affect the stability of queer relationships and/or queer lives?

- What effect, if any, does past and/or present discrimination have on queer lives?

- ❖ What are the political discourses are taking place within the LGBTQ community, regarding marriage or any other institutional and/or legal acknowledgement of LGBTQ relationships?
 - To what extent do LGBTQs believe the institution of marriage necessary for full societal recognition?
 - Alternatively, to what extent do LGBTQs consider marriage an outdated hegemonic institution that queers should want no part of?

- ❖ How do LGBTQs construct the concept of “family”?
 - Do liberal attitudes about sex and sexuality on the part of LGBTQs’ parents and/or other relations in the family of origin have an effect on the construction of family in the lives of their LGBTQ offspring?
 - What role does “fictive-kinship” (Schneider, 1984) play in the construct of a “queer” family unit?

- What role does parenting play in the construction of family among LGBTQs?

The explicit aim of my research was to obtain a multi-dimensional understanding of the queer familial experience from “the-inside-out” utilizing a web-based survey. One-on-one interviews were also conducted to provide additional insight into the lives of those, queer courageously living both within and outside established hetero-normative American institutions by attempting to marry and parent children.

CHAPTER TWO

A Review of the Literature

“In sum, it has not been demonstrated that the family is appreciably worse than it was; it is different.”

-Emile Durkheim, *Libres entretiens*⁴

The contemporary American familial unit cannot be understood merely in terms of a socio-economic alliance that relegates, maintains and often restrains sexuality. Rather, the socially constructed role of the family retains a hegemonic role of conjugal kinship that safeguards heterosexuality by consigning sex to an advantaged societal norm, unveiling pleasure in terms of good or conventional forms of sexuality verses unacceptable, variant sexualities. Sexual relations between a married man and woman are sacrosanct and shrouded in the privilege of privacy while those considered divergent are scrutinized: the discourse both public and odious.

I posit that variant sexual and familial arrangements in the United States have long been known, and vilified since Europeans first colonized these shores. Little has changed. The State has vested itself with the power of a communal third party in what otherwise should be a private contractual and personal transaction. The conservative, public

⁴ *Libres entretiens*, Emile Durkheim (1912, 322).

posture taken by the State apparatus - with regard to marriage and family - operates as a deterrent against any variant forms of family. Pandering to religious and patriarchal authority, *The Neo-Family-Values Campaign* (Stacey, 1997) envisions the “truth” (Garcia & Knight, 1998) about families, stating that two-parent families consisting of a female mother and a male father are always better for the well-being of children specifically, and for society as a whole. They blame fatherless families as the root of escalating violence and social decay, stating that “broken” traditional marriages are the cause for all social crises. Espousing an ongoing sexist and racist rhetoric, they argue that communities, which tolerate large numbers of young men growing into adulthood in broken families or those dominated by women, ask for chaos – an indeed get it.

Furthermore, the State views itself as an arbiter of “tradition”, scrutinizing the function of the family as a unit in need of social controls. The family unit as hypothesized only through a lens of social conservatism provides for the orderly transfer of property and social status. Yet, a more historical examination situates the family as a unit of plasticity, both socially constructed and culturally relative. Through this lens, we can see that the family is not the concrete institution envisaged to fulfill the universal needs of humanity; rather, the American family is an ideological construct designed for the benefit of the modern capitalistic state (Coontz, 2000; Hull, 2003; Patterson, 2000; Stacey,

1997; Stacey & Bablraz, 2001; Weston, 2000 & 2005). The State effects and affects procreation, childbearing and socialization to guarantee the continuity of State, as it promotes a standing reserve of human capital (Sussman, Cates & Smith, 1970; Sussman, 1975).

Talcott Parsons states in *Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States* (1942), that the single most important structural element of society is conjugal kinship. "In all societies the initial status of every normal individual is that of a child in a given kinship unit" (p. 604). Yet, as Judith Butler argues "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual" (2002), "fictive" kinships operate in such a way that LGBTQ parents can provide an environment where offspring are presented with role models to emulate, and that child development does not derive from sexual orientation.

According to Parson's definition, marriage and the conjugal familial unit consist of an adult male emancipated from his biological family and married to an unrelated person of the opposite sex (p. 613). His status is determined through his occupational achievement, his responsibility and his authority. His wife, on the other hand derives, her social status from her husband's professional accomplishments and through domesticity; as a "glamorous" wife, as a mother to his children and as a good companion (p. 612). According to Parsons, this structural model is functional for a working, moral society (p. 612). However, this representation of marriage or kinship

...is not the same as that of gay kinship or marriage, but seems that the two become confounded in U.S. popular opinion when we hear not only that marriage is and ought to remain a heterosexual institution and bond, but also kinship does not work, or does not qualify as kinship, unless it assumes a recognizable family form (Butler, 2002. p.15).

Nevertheless, difference does not indicate that a deficit exists.

Pundits of the FRC argue that the breakdown of the “traditional” American familial unit is to blame for a plethora of social ills: child poverty, declining educational standards, substance abuse, increasing homicide rates, AIDS, infertility, teen pregnancy, even the Los Angeles riots! In addition, the breakdown of “traditional” roles within the family has been argued to be responsible for the creation of feminism, the sexual revolution, gay liberation, excessive welfare policies, and the escalation of demands for social rights and equality of the roles of women within marriage (Stacey, 2001).

The Stability Factor

The lack of stability in LGBTQ relationships is often quoted by the religious-right as the paramount reason for the State not to sanction queer relationships. Charlotte Patterson, in “Family Relationships of Lesbians and Gay Men” (2000), suggests several indices of satisfaction and stability in committed relationships. They include, but are not limited to: a couples’ ability to resolve conflict, egalitarianism, intimacy, and equality in the division of labor. Satisfying relationships are the cornerstones of the well-being of all families, whether heterosexual,

queer, biological, or fictive. Though limited research exists, Blumstein and Schwartz found in their study, "American Couples" (1983) that LGBTQ couples, who have been together ten or more years, have a low incidence of future breakup while the opposite was found to be true with heterosexual marriage. When surveyed, LGBTQs expressed the same desires for an enduring relationship that heterosexual couples did. What little survey data is available suggests that 40 to 60% of gay men and 45 to 80% of lesbians are involved in long-term relationships (Peplau & Cochran, 1990; Patterson, 2000; Peplau et al., 1996).⁵ When asked about their current relationship, most reported satisfaction, with the great majority describing themselves as happy (Cardell, Finn & Maracek, 1981; Kurdek & Schmidt, 1986; Patterson, 2002; Peplau, Padesky & Hamilton, 1982).

As with any enduring relationship, heterosexual or homosexual, communication is the basis for developing and continuing intimacy between partners. It is openness and honesty, when discussing differences which facilitate longevity in intimate LGBTQ relationships (Diemer, Mackey & O'Brien, 2004). Researchers posit that trust and understanding have been instrumental in developing communication and satisfaction in same-sex relationships (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Kirurdek, 1988; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984; Rempel, Holmes & Zenna, 1985). Studies that question the quality of communication and

⁵ As with any sample of GLBTQ that involves statistical analysis, this was not, nor could it be, a random sample (Hull 2003; Wald 1999).

satisfaction in long-term, same-sex, intimate relationships have found emotional distancing and impaired communication between male partners after a period of “over-communication” during the courtship process (Diemer, Mackey & O’Brien, 2004; George & Behrendt, 1987; McWhirter & Mattison, 1894). After this decline, gay males involved in enduring relationships reported a renewal of positive communication in the years that followed. However, lesbian couples reported (Diemer, Mackey & O’Brien, 2004; Mackey, 1997; O’Brien & Mackey, 1997) a tendency to emulate familial relationships and personal history when communicating with their partners - unlike their male counterparts - both in their capacity for openness in communication and in their avoidance of issues.

Research has also focused on factors related to differences in relationship satisfaction between couples. According to Patterson (2000), the correlates of a quality relationship or relationship satisfaction for gay and lesbian couples include: egalitarianism; perceiving many outside attractions, yet few alternatives to the current relationship; and placing high value on the relationship while maintaining few dysfunctional beliefs about the relationship.

LGBTQ Couples, Problems & Conflict Management

While LGBTQ couples are not immune to the top five topics of conflict that plague their heterosexual counterparts - finances, driving style, affection/sex, being overly critical, and the division of household tasks (Kurdeck, 1994 & 1995) - there are several spheres of discord that are unique to LGBTQ couples. Principal among these are issues created by the negative social stereotyping of "homosexuality" (Kurdeck & Schmidt, 1987; Patterson, 2000). Disclosure and disagreements regarding the extent and the nature of relationships can create schisms that may be difficult and problematic to resolve. However, LGBTQ couples are just as committed to the resolution of these conflicts as are heterosexuals. This commonality within the partnership may assure even more stable close-knit relationships (Patterson, 2000; Peplau et al., 1996).

A study of heterosexual couples, married thirty years or more, found that there was a decrease in marital satisfaction when avoidance was used to manage marital conflict (Levinson, Carstensen & Gottman, 1993; Vaillants, 1993) Based on psychological responses to conflict in heterosexual marriage, men show a tendency to react to conflict and the stress associated with controversy and disagreement, by withdrawing (Gottman & Krakoff, 1989; Gottman & Levenson, 1988). Women, on the other hand, were likelier to react more confrontationally and to initiate

face-to-face discussions of relational conflict (Gottman, Coan, Carriere & Swanson, 1998). It is women that institute the majority of discussions of marital conflict in laboratory settings.

Mackey, O'Brien and Mackie (1997) have found the same holds true for lesbian partners as for their heterosexual counterparts. However, when unable to openly discuss problematic issues or when avoidance takes place, 85% of lesbian couples surveyed have sought professional help to open lines of communication and confront relationship issues for managing conflict. Lesbian partners did report a substantial improvement in their abilities to discuss differences and an increase in the overall satisfaction with their relationships. Unlike lesbians, gay men tend to use avoidance as a consistent tool to evade conflict. Unless the viability of the relationship itself is threatened, men - both heterosexual and homosexual - find it difficult to confront relationship issues with open lines of communication.

Intimacy

According to Diemer, Mackey and O'Brien (2004), "intimacy refers to two aspects of relationships: psychological openness based on effective verbal communication and sexual relations" (p. 111). Due to a lack of longitudinal studies of same-sex relationships, there is little data available concerning the quality of psychological and sexual intimacy

over the course of long term same-sex-relationships. However, the limited number of studies that do exist (Blasb & Peplau, 1985; Kurdek & Schmidt, 1985 & 1986; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984) have found that lesbian women report higher levels of satisfaction when monogamous in their relationships (Kurdek, 1991), unlike their gay male counterparts, when not monogamous in their relationships. Men tend to stay together longer when they do not practice monogamy (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983).

Though it may appear that in reporting these studies I am siding with the religious-right and the FRC's contention that gays are more promiscuous; studies show that heterosexual couples are not immune to infidelity. Marital infidelity has a long history in human existence (Harvey, 1995). In U.S. samples alone, the percentage of married men and women reporting at least one incident of extramarital sex (ES) ranges from 13% to 50% or higher (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). For example, a recent NORC study based on a representative sample of the U.S. population indicates that approximately 25% of married men and 15% of married women report having engaged in ES at least once (Laumann et al., 1994). Although marital infidelity is not uncommon, attitude surveys reveal that there is widespread disapproval of extramarital sexual relationships in the U.S. (Davis & Smith, 1991;

Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Laumann et al., 1994; Thompson, 1984; Weis & Slosnerick, 1981).

LGBTQ Parenting & the Division of Labor

Whereas traditional hegemonic marriage is touted by social conservatives, a great majority of LGBTQ couples are committed to an even more egalitarian relationship, which is reflected in their parenting styles as well (Patterson, 2000; Peplau & Cochran, 1990; Shallenberger & Quinn, 2001). Contrary to the Social Exchange Theory, which posits that the partner with the most resources wields the most power in the relationship, the effects of the balance of power remain a negotiated issue for gay and lesbian parents (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984; Harry, 1984; Harry & DeVall, 1978; Patterson, 2000; Peplau, 1991; Peplau et al., 1996). Blumstead and Schwartz report in their study (1983) that the wealthier, better educated partner in traditional marriages or those cohabitating in heterosexual relationships (usually the male) tended to exercise more power in relationships than the wife or female partner.

Given a history without role models, the general expectation might be that gay men and lesbian women would emulate the same power dynamic and division of labor as their straight counterparts, but research has found that this is rarely the case (Kurdek, 1995; Patterson, 2000, Peplat et al., 1996). Bell and Weinberg (1993) reported that most

queer couples share domestic responsibilities equally. More recent studies have confirmed this earlier finding and add that when rearing children, even more egalitarian divisions of labor exist (Chan, Brooks, Raboy & Patterson, 1998; Gartrell et al., 1999; Patterson, 1995 & 2001; Stacey & Bablarz, 2001; Sullivan, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1998). In addition, a series of interviews with gay fathers conducted in 2000 and 2001 finds that when the primary childcare giver needed a break from the responsibilities of supervision, the other partner - who was usually the primary bread-winner - is ready and eager to step in and assume the primary responsibility of caregiver to the children (Shallenbergr, & Quinn, 2001).

The Marriage Debate

If marriage is a civil right for gays, then you can marry your mother.

-Bill O'Reilly, November 16, 2006

Perhaps one of the most contested areas of social policy in recent years - both within and outside the LGBTQ community, is that of State sanctioned same-sex marriage. Discourses within the community over the institution of marriage have divided those who believe that marriage is a right that will level the playing field, from those that hold marriage to be an archaic institution. Courts have been divided on the subject as have legislatures. On September 21, 1996, the Defense of Marriage Act

(DOMA), which recognizes only those unions between a man and a woman, was signed into law by President Clinton. Bowing to the influence of special interests and social conservatives, the former President helped to make DOMA the law of the land.

According to Robert F. Knight of the Family Research Council "... homosexual men will have sex with in excess of 500 men over the course of their lifetime..."⁶ Yet, when two gay men or two lesbian women want a monogamous relationship legally sanctioned, Knight is among the first to invalidate same-sex relationships, claiming, "Homosexual relationships are unstable ..."(1993).

Mary Hunt (2004), however, gives many valid reasons for LGBT or queer couples to opt for the establishment of an institutional marriage. The reasons are as varied as the population, and include, but are not limited to; providing legal safeguards for themselves, their partners and their children. There are political reasons as well: to be part of an expression of transgression or as a "permanent rebellion" of heterosexism and the civil rights battle that undoubtedly would ensue; to formalize their ongoing commitment in front of family and friends; and to have access to the financial privileges such as Social Security and health care reductions that are currently tied to marriage. In a society where over 50% of marriages fail (Richardson, 2000), the obvious question becomes: why would those traditionally marginalized by and through the institution of marriage want to engage in a convention

⁶ A statistic that cannot be substantiated by this researcher.

marred by the failings of heterosexual marriage? The answer lies in a matter of choice. LGBTQs should have the same choices with regard to their intimate relationships as do their heterosexual counterparts.

Marriage in America is not the social panacea many argue it to be. In Kathleen Hull's study, "The Cultural Power of Law and the Cultural Enactment of Legality: The Case of Same-Sex Marriage" (2003), respondents [49 couples sampled] were unanimous in their support for legalized LGBT marriage. However, demographics show that the American public overall is saying "no" to marriage. Only 56% of Americans are married, compared with 75% just thirty years ago. "Traditional" American married couples with children have declined to 26% of all American households from 45% in the 1970's (Richardson 2000). These findings suggest that it is opposite-sex marriage as we know it that is destroying the institution of marriage, not LGBTs or queers vying for equal rights. John D'Emilio counters Hull's thesis in *The Marriage Fight Is Setting Us Back* (2006) by stating that the fight for same-sex marriage legislation, and the effect it has had on the gay community, has actually resulted in more anti-LGBTQ sentiment and legislation in the United States. More and more states strictly are declaring marriage to be a union between a man and a women; this definition was not written into law before the fight for same-sex marriage began. In addition, he calls for new intellectual and strategic directions in the fight for equal rights.

Our previous president, George W. Bush, apparently knew little about the social fabric of the country he served. In a February 24, 2004 address calling for a constitutional amendment to protect heterosexual marriage, George W. Bush demonstrated a clear lack of knowledge – it was not a wishful perception – of the currently reality of American family life:

“The union between a man and a woman is the most enduring human institution, honoring – honored and encouraged by all cultures and by every religious faith. Ages of experience have taught humanity that the commitment of a husband and a wife to love and to serve one and another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society.”

It may be a lovely thought, according to Mary Hunt (2004), but it bears little if any resemblance to the present, let alone history. The American Anthropological Association corrected the record the following day, as they opposed the amendment in no uncertain terms:

The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship, relationships and family, across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or viable social orders depend on marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution. Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and humane societies.⁷

Bush’s administration continued its effort to make and to preserve traditionalism and the heterosexual family, (which he defines as a married man who heads the family, his wife, the supportive partner) as the centerpiece of the President’s social policy. In January 2001,

⁷ “Statement on Marriage and Family from the American Anthropological Association” February 25, 2004.

President Bush created the White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives [OFBCI]; In December of 2002, he signed an executive order directing federal agencies to formulate policies to ensure “equal protection” for faith-based organizations competing for federal social contracts, further blurring the line between “the Establishment Clause” of the Constitution and the separation of church and state.

Not only does this traditionalism further remove LGBT or queer couples and families from full social participation, it perpetuates an existing heterosexist bias in the way that federal social welfare policy makers - including the U.S. Census Bureau - define “the family” and the “household”. According to Lind, in the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, while there is “no specific question on the census about sexual orientation/identity, census data serves as a self-disciplining factor in defining sexual citizenship through self-reporting at the household level” (Lind, 2004). For the purposes of data collection in the Current Population Survey [CPS], the U.S. Bureau of the Census defines “family” and “household” as two separate categories (2003). The government defines a “family” as a “group of two or more [one of whom is the householder] related by birth, marriage or adoption, living together”. A “household,” differs from “family” and “consists of all people who occupy a housing unit” (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). A “household” is then further stratified by the government into “family-households” [as defined by law, marriage, birth and/or adoption] and “non-family households”

[same-sex couples, roommates or living alone]. Perceptibly, the institution of marriage is maintained at a higher status level than any other living arrangement. Thus, there exists a belief within the queer community that somehow queer marriage will level the playing field and grant equal status to the LGBTQ partners.

Judith Stacey concurs, and responds that “gay marriage is taking on an air of inevitability” (2001), quoting an *NBC/Wall Street Journal* poll that endorsed the legalization of same-sex marriage. Sixty-five percent of those polled predicted that some kind of legislation would be enacted to ensure the rights of LGBTQ couples during the new millennium (Price, 1999). Yet, discord surrounding state or religious sanctioned marriage still exists within the queer community.

While the United States is eroding the civil rights of LGBTQs by the passage of recent American legislation such as DOMA [The Defense of Marriage Act], more progressive countries have taken major steps to legitimize relationships between same-sex couples. France enacted a national registry for partnership. Denmark extended child custody rights to same-sex couples. The Supreme Court of Ontario, Canada ruled that same-sex couples were entitled to all of the rights and privileges of heterosexual families, and in 2000 the Netherlands became the first country to comprehend the inequity of their past and granted same-sex couples full and equal access to marriage and family rights under the law. While these recent world developments provide some security to

new variant familial units, the schism in this country represents some of the most extraordinary and fiercely contested developments in the politics of family the United States has ever encountered. Private issues of procreation and determining who is - or is not - worthy of parenting have become central issues of political debate in recent election cycles.

Queer Marriage & the Law

Queer partners constitute a maligned social class that the law has defined in many cases as criminal, deviant, or even irrelevant and undeserving of the basic legal protections and rights of heterosexual married couples (Gerstmann, 1999; Hull, 2003; Kaplan, 1997; Herman & Stychin, 1995; Phelan, 2001; Stychin, 1995). This second-class citizenship, for some, is arguably the defining element that establishes community for a LGBTQ identity, negating any differences created by race, class and gender. Legal consciousness has been defined as “all the ideas about the nature, the function and the operation of law held by anyone in society, at a given time” (Trubek, 1984, p. 592). Simply stated, legal consciousness is “the ways people understand and use the law” (Merry, 1990, p. 5). While some studies of legal consciousness have focused on socially oppressed or marginalized actors, such as poor women and racial minorities, a focus on LGBT or queer expands this

analysis to consider the consciousness of another set of actors, whose disadvantage is reinforced by the law (Hull, 2003, p. 630).

Ewick and Sibly, in “The Common Place of Law” (1998, p. 20) demonstrate the problematic slippages of law and legalities as sources of authority, and cultural practices that are prescribed and proscribed socially, though not necessarily legal. Yet, they posit that social roles and statuses, relationships and obligations, prerogatives and responsibilities, even our identities and behaviors all bear the imprint of law (1998). According to Ewick and Sibly, there are three main frameworks of legal consciousness: “before the law, with the law, and against the law” (1998, p. 46). While actors may express different forms of legal consciousness at different times and in differing situations, the socially marginalized are most likely to express a consciousness of resistance to the law (1998, p. 235).

Toward the end of the past century, two seemingly unrelated pieces of national legislation were passed. In 1996, PRWORA [Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act], a law that expanded welfare-to-work programs, restricting public access to public assistance as it broadened and restructured public/private boundaries (Lind, 2004), and DOMA which defines marriage as a legal union between a man and a woman. Combined, these two pieces of legislation constitute a national policy in which legal and cultural definitions of the “family” are restricted to a “traditional American norm” (2004).

Social Policy & the Queer Agenda

Social Conservatives have and continue to spend millions of dollars espousing a claim of a non-existent "Gay Agenda":

SAME SEX "MARRIAGE", HOMOSEXUALITY, AND THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

A Statement of Purpose: By Mission America

The legalization of same sex liaisons as "marriage" in the U.S would drastically alter the nature of what is taught to children in schools, community groups, camps, churches and in the media.

Currently, a high-pressure campaign by homosexual activists, supported by the National Education Association, is underway to promote acceptance of homosexuality among children, and a great deal of headway has already been made through the establishment of homosexual clubs, adoption of pro-homosexual school policies, the showcasing of homosexual literature, special occasion speakers, and so-called anti-bias programs. This revolutionary approach has received little mainstream publicity, but is rapidly gaining acceptance in educational circles as the "norm." Recent laws enacted in California have basically mandated pro-homosexual teaching in state schools...⁸

Contrary to much of the public rhetoric, LGBT or queer individuals are not involved in any organized fashion that might render the previous statement believable. In fact, LGTBQ families suffer a disproportionate share of the consequences from policy decisions because we do not retain full citizenship, nor can they access the same much needed public resources.

LGBT or queer Americans have been excluded from civil rights and equal protection under the law. Legislation has been challenged or blocked on "moral and ethical" grounds by law-makers owing favors to

⁸ www.missionamerica.com/agenda.php.

fundamentalist PACs [Political Action Committees] and the influence of lobbyists on the payrolls of social conservatives. Although social scientists and scholars from other disciplines have studied and commented on the gendered and racialized scope of social welfare formations, few have addressed how institutionalized heterosexism works to restrict access and citizenship to those who do not live within sexual and gender norms (Gorden, 1994; Gordon & Frasier, 1994; Mink, 1999; Moller, 2002; Napels, 1998; Phelan, 2001). Fewer, according to Lind (2004), have discussed the ways in which gender identity discrimination intersects with heterosexism, negatively affecting the lives of transgendered and inter-sexed queer individuals. Even fewer researchers, let alone policy makers, have made significant contributions to queering the American family by examination and analysis of the heterosexist basis for American policy. Those who have dared are yet to be taken seriously, even within mainstream academic circles (Butler, 1990; Cahill & Jones, 2002; Gittins, 1995; Sedgwick, 1992; Stacey, 1997; Weston, 1991). In fact, the triangulation of public discourse and policy struggles over the meaning of family, recent political attacks on the LGBTQ communities and the need to expand the meaning of equality and civil rights have gone hand-in-hand.

The Structure & Functions of Family

The family is not declining, it is just changing

- David Popenoe, 1993

Since the beginning of time, the family as a concept has been in constant flux. Emile Durkheim theorizes that the family evolved through an evolutionary process: one that is arguably still changing the landscape of the family today. While I agree that the structure of the family unit is in transformation, it is not as clear cut as functional arguments would have us believe, i.e, that changes are evolving in a forward fashion. Rather, I would argue that the family structures of today are as diverse as the people who have chosen to form familial units - not only in their structure but their function.

Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako (2000) ask the rhetorical question in their article – “Is There a Family?” While functionalists will argue that the family is a universal human institution consisting of a male father and a female mother responsible for the care and nurturing of their own children, I side with contemporary theorists who argue that the concept of family is both socially constructed and culturally relative. In their treatise, we find Malinowski’s *The Family among the Aborigines* (1913), subjected to the strict scrutiny of post-modernism. The assumptions - based on a Western heterosexual hegemonic norms and

patriarchal values - are heavily questioned, such as whether the presence and identification of a single father figure is needed to constitute conjugal familial kinship.

Malinowski posits that the sole universal function of family is to nurture children. This would give pause to query whether a childless married, heterosexual couple is a valid family unit if they cannot conceive children or chose not to do so? The common flaw present in functionalist arguments is “because a social institution is observed to perform a necessary function [it] does not mean either that the function would not be performed if the institution did not exist or that the function is responsible for the existence of the institution” (Collier, Rosaldo, & Yanagisako, 2000, p. 73).

Emile Durkheim, known as the father of functionalism theorized that an evolutionary process, which ends, he argues with the “modern family,” progressed in five stages. Although Durkheim is discredited from a post-modern perspective, it remains important to examine the family with Durkheim’s ideas in mind. According to him, the clan familial unit was the first stage - not necessarily bound by blood relations. Durkheim argues that clansmen were both kinsmen and fellow citizens. Society was communal and egalitarian and blood relations were “de facto” (Davy, 1925, p. 84-86). Organized and interdependent, this fictive unit showed evidence of both organic and mechanical solidarity. It wasn’t until clans began to form attachments to their land that clan and family

became separated. The clan ceased to become solely a familial organization (Durkheim, 1905) and became a unit of mechanical solidarity. Totem-focused, large and amorphous clans became political organizations that evolved progressively into vast groups of exogamous and agnatic kinships (Durkheim, 1921, p. 6; Davy, 1925).

The clan family, claims Durkheim, gave way to the “joint agnatic” family. This familial unit differed in that it is not centered on totemic ritual. Nor was this unit comprised of all extended kinships. Somewhat more limited in size than the clan-family, it remained large due to the nature of its political and defense systems in rudimentary societies. “Because of its smaller size and because kinship is often based on real consanguinity, ties are closer than the clan-family” (Davy 1925, p.103 – 110).

Durkheim subsequently posits that the simple or “joint agnatic” family advanced to be a true paternal hegemonic organization best characterized by the Roman Patriarchal familial unit. Much smaller in scope and size, the operating principle of this classic institution was not marriage but patriarchal power. “The entire life of the family was absorbed in the sovereign personality of the father” (Durkheim 1902, p. 343).

The wife and children were essentially property of the father, as the head of the household. The wife was subordinate to her husband in much the same way the children were. The goods, property and means

of production resembled economic and familial communism, power is concentrated with the autonomous father acting as trustee of the familial unit. Even when sons married and were able to have children of their own, the sons and their familial unit remained subordinate to the patriarch until his death.

This family structure finally gave way and was transformed into a conjugal patrimony (Durkheim 1898, p. 343) when the wife's dowry gave her an economic base of independence in marriage. However, the patriarch still controlled the extended family and children until their own marriage.

To the nexus formed by the two spouses . . . are attached the children, who soon have rights to the conjugal patrimony and thus have, from thence forward, relations with their parents not previously known, now independent of all '*patria potestas*' (ibid). . . . It is impossible for us to understand the origin of the contemporary family if one does not know that it derives directly from the Germanic family and not the Roman family. For the latter, imprisoned in the narrow of the most narrow framework of the most agnatic organization that ever existed, could not get out of it by itself no matter the effort it had made to gradually free itself" (Durkheim 1898, p. 327).

The idyllic conjugal familial unit fostered around kinship reminiscent of *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Father Knows Best* does not exist nor has it ever existed in American Society. In the words of Stephanie Coontz, American family description is a history of "tradeoffs" (2000). For instance, Native American familial units were contingent upon the stability of the tribe. Some lived in permanent dwellings in extended family units, while nomadic tribes were small and marital separation was common. African-American slaves, forced to abandon any of the bonds

of nuclear familial units, constructed extended family networks in which childrearing was often co-opted by strangers and ritual co-parenting was common (p. 13).

The “Western conjugal family” is unique in its emphasis on the marital bond, lessened dependence on help from extended kin, neo-locality, free choice of mate, multi-linearity and intensity of emotionality, all of which are characteristics mentioned by Durkheim (Lamanna, 2002). However, Durkheim also reveals, “the family is not declining, it is just changing” (Durkheim, 1921). It is because of the centrality of the conjugal couple to this stage that “free unions,” non-marital cohabitating couples, and - as I argue LGBTQ couples with fictive kinships, all become unacceptable because they represent a challenge to the basic familial unit (Durkheim, 1921; Lamanna, 2002).

Emile Durkheim (1893, 146) argues that the historic development of the modern conjugal family was “rectilinear” in its development: meaning the forms of functions of family progressed in a straight line; for example, one form followed the next. I posit that rather following Durkheim’s logic, the development of family structures is “circilinear”. Given the alternative forms of family today, I posit Durkheim’s logic is flawed. The families in our post-modern world utilize a range of social structures: single parent households, married parents that require dual incomes, extended families raising children, and even LGBTQs with fictive families. These structures utilize a “circilinear” framework; they

borrow familial arrangements and forms from the past as they move forward. Forms and functions of family, as well as the evolutionary stages as identified by functionalism, simply do not exist in a clear cut form and function as Durkheim would have us believe. Post-modern familial arrangements have coalesced, in this day and age, employing several historical movements at the same time. The post-modern family unit is one of plasticity, borrowing from past social structures as it molds itself into the realities of today, diverse and always changing within and outside of the mainstream society.

We see this historic diversity and plasticity even within Colonial family units in America. Mothers in well-to-do families relegated the rearing of children to servants and/or slaves, spending considerably less time with children than the working mothers of today. Yet, high mortality rates usually meant that a disproportionate number of children were raised by step-families, if not by an unfamiliar person or family altogether. Usually these children were accepted into a household as farmhands or domestics and were expected to earn their keep. Families that remained intact often saw children leave the home at the onset of puberty either to marry and start their own families, or to find work to support them or perhaps to add to the family coffers (Coontz, 2002).

The twentieth-century saw its share of familial diversity, even though no one would know, it following the *Neo-Family Values Campaign* (Stacey 2000) of the last quarter century. Instead this has

been a time when the revisionist rhetoric constructed a social scientific stigma as political reactionaries supported by mainstream sociologists argued the universal superiority of the two-parent family. The right wing, appealing to religious and patriarchal authority for its family vision, has been actively engaged in transmitting a social scientific “truth”, i.e., that the conjugal wedded biological two-parent familial unit is always best for the rearing of children (Popenoe, 1992; Whitehead, 1993; Wilson, 1993). Their argument continues as they “identify fatherless families as the malignant root of escalating violence and social decay, claiming such families generate a lineage of unemployed, undomesticated, family-less fathers who threaten the middle-class tranquility” (Stacey 2000, p. 455).

The Family Research Council and Mission America, referring to Judith Wallerstein’s widely cited study on children of divorce states:

Children of divorce represent a diverse population at risk for subsequent psychological problems, whose interests are insufficiently understood or protected by the legal system or the mental health community. Although many children weather the stress of marital breakdown without psychopathological sequelae, a significant number show lasting difficulties. Information concerning the psychological adaptation of these children has increased rapidly during the past decade, but it remains unequal to the task of guiding family policy in this arena. Current knowledge identifies child gender and developmental stage as crucial factors that interact with the chronic stresses of post-divorce family life to produce short- and long-range impediments to the maturation of these vulnerable young people. There is a critical need to facilitate understanding and cooperation between the behavioral sciences and the legal profession on behalf of children in divorced families. The major research tasks relevant to enlightened public policy lie ahead (Wallerstein 1986).

They assert that correlation proves causation in a study that is void of control groups. In fact, the overwhelming body of research on divorce suggests that children fare much better in households where

little if no conflict exists (Patterson, 2000; Stacey, 2000; Weston, 2005; Weston & Helmreich, 2006). In fact, David Demo's research concludes "that the levels of family conflict are more important than is type of family structure for understanding children's adjustment, self-esteem, and other measures of psychological well-being" (1992, p. 104).

Fictive Kinships & Coupled Relationships

According to Chatters, Taylor and Jayakody (1994), a growing body of research has documented the existence of extensive kin networks within minority communities (Aschenbrenner, 1973; Hill, 1972; Martin & Martin, 1978; McAdoo, 1980; Stack, 1974) as well as those that are elderly. Though scant research is readily available, fictive kinships are now part of the LGBTQ experience. The importance of these networks as sources of formal and informal social support cannot be overstated (Taylor, 1988; Hatchett, Corcoran, & Jackson, 1991; Taylor & Chatters, 1991; Stack, 1974). Ethnographic research reveals that fictive kin relationships are an integral component of networks of both the sexually and racially marginalized minorities (Anderson 1976; Aschenbrenner, 1975; Kennedy, 1980; Martin & Martin, 1978), and indeed, extending kinship status to friendship relationships is a means of expanding social and support networks. Persons who are chosen as fictive kin are unrelated by either blood or marriage, but they regard one

another in kinship terms (Sussman, 1976) and employ a standard cultural typology - likened to blood-ties, socio-legal or marriage ties, and parenthood - to describe these non-kin associations (Rubenstein et al., 1991). As a consequence, friendships that are regarded in kinship terms undergo an intensification of the bonds of mutual obligation in what normally would be identified as an informal and casual relationship (Aschenbrenner, 1975; Stack, 1974). With the designation of fictive kin status comes both respect and responsibility, and fictive kin are expected to participate in the duties of the extended family. Despite the importance of fictive kin ties in the maintenance and functioning of extended family networks, little is known about fictive kin, generally and quantitative evidence as to the pervasiveness of these ties is under ongoing research.

Much of the literature suggests that many LGBTQ mothers and fathers have become parents in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship or marriage. Yet, both men and women are increasingly undertaking parenthood within the framework of existing LGBTQ identities and relationships (Beers, 1996; Crawford, 1987; Gartell et al., 1996 & 1999; Patterson, 1994 & 2000), and they are forming fictive kinships as support mechanisms both for their children and themselves. While a plethora of research exists on heterosexual individuals and couples who decide to parent, little research exists on LGBTQs who parent from pre-existing heterosexual relationships and little more exists

for those who parent as “out” LGBTQ individuals and their fictive support systems.

Stacey and Biblarz (2002) identify twenty-one such studies in “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” The authors, however, are critical of past research, as the literature reviewed tends to justify mere differences in social status as problematic. Stacey and Biblarz have found little or no evidence that any disparity exists in parenting styles or childhood outcomes between the two populations studied - LGBTQ parents and heterosexual parents. When comparing both the styles and outcomes to a preconceived hetero-normative parenting method, they argue that it is the social stigma associated with LGBTQ parenting that is at issue. To this Stacey and Biblarz respond, “If social prejudice were grounds for restricting rights to parent, a limited pool of adults would qualify” (p.178).

According to Kath Weston in her essay, “Families in Queer States: The Rule and Law of Law and Recognition” (2005), the emergence of the queer family is not an anomaly that developed in a “hermetically sealed environment, much less a vacuum” (p.131). LGBTQ families and the claims made on kinship, whether biological or fictive are intimately related to society at large, even under the renewed focus on the family and the family values campaign of the religious-right. The importance of familial relationships cannot be underestimated. Familial relationships for LGBTQs resemble those of the heterosexual

mainstream more than people think. The desire and need for family has given rise to heated controversy, debate and discourse over many unconventional parenting methods; namely in vitro fertilization, open adoptions, legal charges of fetal endangerment, and a rise in both single parent and blended families produced by divorce and remarriage - just to name a few. GLBTQ families are just one more change to an already contentious paradigm, called - the American family.

In the words of *Insight* (1994), The Family Research Council's brochure on family issues, LGBTQ couples' lifestyles are inconsistent with the proper rearing of children. They cite many factors, of which the principal is "The Instability Factor." According to their literature, queer couples, "show a high degree of promiscuity, have an unhealthy attitude toward the opposite sex, have fleeting relationships, and experience extracurricular relationships" (Knight and Garcia, 1994, p. 8 & 9). Research on LGBTQ couples has addressed many of these interrelated issues (Klinger, 1996; Kurdeck, 1995; McWhirter & Mattison, 1996; Murphy, 1994; Patterson, 2000; Peplau, 1991). Although they give credit to Garcia and Knight (1994), Stacey and Bablarz claim that "studies on the effects of homosexual parenting on children are scant" (2001). After all, "homosexual" parenting was unheard of until the last two decades, except in small social and academic circles. "The inescapable ideological and emotional nature of this subject makes it incumbent on scholars to acknowledge the personal convictions they bring to the

discussion” (Stacey & Bablarz 2001, p.160). Furthermore, that lack and that lack of objectivity is evident in the handful of studies that do exist, “because anti-gay scholars seek evidence of harm, sympathetic researchers defensively stress its absence” (p.159).

Lesbian & Gay Parents

Gay and lesbian choice to parent is among one of the most hotly contested issues in American social policy today as social conservatives have proliferated a societal hostility and antagonism. Within the discourse and literature that surrounds lesbian and gay parents and their children, it is necessary to recognize that diversity in all familial kinships exists (Kirkpatrick, 1996; Parks, 1998; Patterson, 1992, 1995 & 1997; Patterson & Chan, 1997; Tasker & Golombok, 1991 & 1997; and Victor & Fish, 1995). An important distinction must be made between families in which children were born or adopted in the context of a heterosexual relationship that is later dissolved when one or both disclose a variant sexuality and those children who are born or adopted by a confirmed “out” gay father or lesbian mother; children’s histories are likely to differ. As with any divorce or separation, children of the first scenario must deal with tensions created by a severance and restructuring that likely follow a divorce. Children of the second may not have necessarily experienced this particular transition but usually come with a host of others.

Divorced Lesbian Mothers

While societal hostility exists for both gay fathers and lesbian mothers, the literature suggests that lesbian mothers fair better than their male counterparts. Knight and Garcia (1994) and the FRC contend that much of the research and scholarship on lesbian mothers is less critical (Stacey & Bablarz, 2001) than it is of gay male parenting. Much of the research in the area of lesbian parenting has come from judicial concerns resulting from custody disputes and the judicial apprehensions over child welfare of fatherless children. The courts' trepidation in matters such as these tends to fall into three main categories: 1) a child's sexual identity, 2) social relationships, and 3) other aspects of a child's personal development (Gibbs, 1988; Green & Bozett, 1991; Patterson, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1998 & 2000, Perin, 1998; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). Though few credible academics today oppose such parenting, some psychologists - Paul Cameron among them - still subscribe to the archaic notion that "homosexuality" represents a mental illness⁹ and continue to pen and submit pessimistic and often exaggerated amicus briefs on the ills of LGBTQ parenting for the court's consideration.¹⁰

⁹ See DSM IV.

¹⁰ See Cameron and Cameron 1996; Cameron and Landess 1996. Even though The APA expelled Paul Cameron and the ASA denounced him for willfully misrepresenting research from the FRC headed by Paul Cameron, they continue to be cited in amicus briefs, court decisions and policy hearings.

Children of divorce are likely to share many of the same issues regardless of the parent's sexual identification. According to the research of Charlotte Patterson (2001), the greatest number of custody disputes among formerly wedded lesbian mothers correlates to that of divorcing heterosexual mothers. Patterson suggests that the children of custodial mothers, whether heterosexual or lesbian, have common ground in that both groups have undergone parental separation and divorce. Thus she uses the children of divorced, but heterosexual mothers, as her control group in her research.

Social conservatives are steadfast in their belief that children must have a heterosexual mother and father to adequately develop socially. Quoting *Insight* (1994), "Children need both a same-sex and an opposite sex parent in order to have the best chance to develop healthy sexual identities." To examine the possibility that children, in the custody of lesbian mothers, experience disruptions in sexual identity, research has addressed three major determinants: development of gender identity, gender role behavior, and sexual orientation.

Kirkpatrick et al., (1981) compares the development among the children of lesbian mothers with same-aged children of heterosexual divorced mothers and found that there were no differences. Additional research on gender identity has failed to identify any divergence in the development as a function of a parent's sexual orientation (Green et al., 1986; Golombok et al., 1983; Patterson, 2000).

Several investigators (Bozett, 1997; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Gottman, 1990; Huggins, 1989; Patterson, 2000) studied the third component of sexual identity, sexual orientation. A group of teenagers were interviewed, half of whom were offspring of lesbian mothers, and the other half was not. Not one child of a lesbian mother self-identified as LGBT, while one in the control group did. Studies on the children of gay fathers yielded similar results. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) add to these studies by arguing that virtually all published studies claim that there are no differences in the sexuality of adult children of LGBT parents, the most politically sensitive issue of this debate and discourse.

Divorced Gay Fathers

Unlike the aforementioned studies on divorced lesbian mothers, there are none that compare gay divorced fathers and their heterosexual peers. Patterson attributes this deficit in the literature to the greater role of judicial decision-making with regard to the custody cases involving lesbian mothers (Patterson & Redding, 1996; Patterson, 2001). It is no surprise that custodial decisions are biased toward mothers and heterosexual parents. In truth, gay fathers are unlikely to even pursue child custody of children during divorce proceedings and they are less likely to win if they do. Consistent with this reality, only a very few divorced gay fathers are living in the same households with their children

and providing the primary care (Binger & Bozett, 1990; Bozett, 1989; Patterson & Redding, 1996; Patterson, 2001).

LGBTQs who want to become parents challenge assumptions about gender, sexuality, and family from both the heterosexual and the homosexual communities. First, because parenthood and heterosexuality are so entwined in the United States, the mere suggestion of queer parenthood seems atypical, uncharacteristic and even impossible (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Lewin, 2006; Mallon, 2004). Second, for many living in the United States and in the Western world, parenting is equated with nurturing and is seen as the domain of women, thus making the gay father an even greater anomaly.

Fathers in the United States are very often regarded as a secondary care giver (Levy, 2006; Mallon, 2004). Accordingly, queer people who choose to parent - especially gay men - must cope with the challenge of societal hostility on both sides of the aisle. However, since the 1980's LGBTQs have been exploring their options when it comes to parenting. In addition to heterosexual intercourse from a past heterosexual relationship, many have begun the challenge of gaining access to an array of both emotionally and financially taxing options: foster care, domestic and international adoption and surrogacy. In addition, vast assortments of kinship arrangements are now being explored.

Summary

The sexual liberation movement pushed past the spoken code of “sex only for reproduction” to the unspoken reality, “sex is also for pleasure,” thus reframing the role of sex and sexuality in our culture. The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender or queer movement further challenged not only male/female gender dichotomy but also the normative rules that reinforce the imperative that “you need a father and a mother to make a family.” The LGBTQ movement also has also played a most significant role in the questioning of marriage as the sole source of the “family” construct, and the benefits to and for it. This would support the motive behind the religious-right fight for DOMA, and challenge to each and every state court decision to include same-sex recognition with a proposed constitutional amendment. Whether or not marriage - as argued by many - is a draconian construct that limits individual freedom and personal agency - LGBTQs should not be barred from the choice.

These recent movements has contributed substantially to important policy and legal shifts in the dynamic of defining family - as a group of people, not always related by conjugal kinship, who love, support and care for one another - regardless of race, class and gender, sexual orientation, or marital status. Fictive families do indeed co-exist outside of the bonds and structure of marriage and conjugal kinship.

Similarly, functional parent-child relationships do indeed coexist outside of biological relationships. In fact, the new norm seems to be found in the diversity of familial structure and form, not the one-size-fits-all structure of marriage and kinships. It is this framework and perspective that have most shaped the LGBTQs' approach to familial recognition.

However, Stacey and Bablarz (2001) state that “perhaps the most consequential impact that heterosexism exerts on the research on lesbian parenting lies where it is least apparent – in the far more responsible literature that is largely sympathetic to its subject” (p.162).

A Rapidly growing and highly consistent body of empirical work has failed to identify significant differences in between lesbian mothers and their heterosexual counter parts or their children raised by these groups. Researchers have been unable to establish empirically that detriment results to children from being raised by lesbian mothers” (Falk, 1994, p.151).

A review of a body of literature that exists on fictive-families and LGBTQ parenting presumes to explore sameness. Perhaps we should also be exploring differences, and how and why LGBTQ parents are oppressed, the effects of the oppression, and how can this be changed. I agree with numerous other researchers (Baumrind, 1995; Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Bozett, 1998; Stacey & Bablarz, 2001) that the hierarchical models used in social science research imply that differences indicate deficits. Perhaps we need to investigate, current how variances in adult sexual orientation lead to meaningful discourse that shed light on how individuals parent their children and construct familial units. Research designs tend to negate this kind of effort, and in

fact burden LGBTQ parents with demonstrating that they are no less successful or less worthy than their heterosexual counterparts. Too often academics presume that this approach precludes any attempt to acknowledge heterosexism, negating differences in parenting, child outcomes or the importance of fictive-kinships that may serve as a possible advantage to LGBTQ parents and their children.

Chapter Three

Research Methods

Purpose

Data for this study was gathered through an internet survey and IM (Instant Message) interviews. Subjects recruited for this study were eight-teen years of age or older and self-identified as: gay men, lesbian women, bisexuals, inter-sexed and the transgender or queer (LGBTQ) The term *queer* by my definition ranges from the GWM (gay, white male) readily recognized through media-produced stereotypes to the heterosexual-cross dresser, to those who admire them, ethnic gays and lesbian women and everyone in between. They are individuals who, for varied reasons I cannot adequately or fully qualify,¹¹ do not ascribe to the well-established American institutions of hetero-normative lifestyles. They were enlisted for the purpose of collecting survey data and in-depth interviews. These subjects have access to computers, the world-wide-web and readily log on as a matter of course to any or all of the seventeen websites¹² targeted specifically to a LBGTO audience. These sites were selected with the help of Google “AdWords” and www.craigslist.org.

¹¹ Sexual and gender identity is not for the researcher to assign, rather a personal choice of group identification.

¹² See Website Selection.

My goal is to reach 350 volunteers to conduct the survey and subsequently conduct fifty in-depth interviews from my survey pool.

I used an opt-in quantitative web-based survey, followed by a qualitative opt-in open-ended IM (instant message) interview. The survey and interview are attuned to as wide and as diverse of a queer population as can be targeted utilizing the internet. The websites were chosen with specificity and diversity in mind (See “Sampling Strategy”). The aim was to reach as varied a population without regard to race, class and gender as possible. In addition to basic demographic data, respondents will be asked about their personal experiences and understanding of family - nuclear, biologic and extended - as well as their feelings, beliefs and experiences concerning marriage and childrearing.

The importance of this research on the family values of queer Americans cannot be understated. Widely propagated misstatements and erroneous information seemingly become social fact. Many of the negative beliefs, myths and fallacies about LGBTQs proliferated through the media, are a fabrication of ideologies and rhetorical statements espoused by the religious-right, social conservatives and their pundits, having little if any foundation in reality. According to Judith Stacey (1996), The Neo-Family-Values-Campaign, appealing to religious and patriarchal

tradition, advocates in their literature “the truth” about family in general and LGBTQ families specifically stating that:

- ❖ Married two parent families of the opposite sex are always better.
- ❖ Fatherless families are at the root of all escalating violence and social decay.
- ❖ “Broken” families are the cause for all social ills.
- ❖ Communities that allow large numbers of young men to grow into adulthood in broken families or those families headed by women ask for and get chaos.
- ❖ The breakdown of the “traditional” familial unit is responsible for child poverty, declining educational standards, substance abuse, increasing homicide rates, AIDS, infertility, teen pregnancy, even the Los Angeles riots.
- ❖ The collapse of the “traditional” family unit has brought about the creation of feminism, the sexual revolution, gay liberation, excessive welfare policies and the escalation of demand for social rights for the maligned and sexual marginalized.

Queering the American Family involves different ways of knowing that have been prominent in feminists' peace research and feminist politics. An understanding of the complex ontologies, faced

by the sexually marginalized based on a lifetime of accepted prejudices is an important aspect of this research. Limits to political power, loss of familial support and learning to navigate the complexities of life without the benefit of role models are just a few of the elements to be addressed in this facet of my research.

Recruitment

Survey participants will be recruited using the help of Google “Adwords,” an online marketing tool that, for a fee, selects and places advertisements on targeted websites. Seventeen websites have been selected that represent a large cross section of the LGBTQ population and advertisements will run for a period of three months. In addition, the same advertisements will be placed on www.craigslist.org, a free site that covers the entire United States. The advertisements on www.craigslist.org will run for two weeks in each major city and/or market selected. The advertisement reads:

“The family that you acquire once you leave your own family is sometimes even more special because you really get to choose these people.”

- RuPaul, 1998

For the past two decades the media has been speaking on your behalf; the LGBTQ and inter-sex communities, your lives, your values, your hopes and dreams. The University of Illinois is conducting a survey in which we ask you;

LGBTQ and Inter-sex individuals questions about your lives and your feelings about family, marriage and childrearing.

By clicking the link provided, you will be asked to read a statement about the research and your rights as a participant. Then, you will be asked to provide some non-identifying information about yourself. You will then be asked a series of questions and asked to identify an answer, as best you can. You will be also asked to read a series of statements and asked to rate your level of agreement or disagreement. You may withdraw your participation at any time and there will be no record of your involvement.

The entire process should take about thirty minutes.

Thank you in advance for your interest in this research.

Although a probability sample is needed to obtain a representative sample, desired for statistical comparison, the advantage of random sampling has to be forfeited in lieu of an opt-in sample. Probability samples for an LGBTQ population, as of yet do not exist, and at this juncture they would be impossible to obtain. In addition, it is clear that self-selected samples pose problems of statistical inference and generalization. Such samples allow research on rare and marginalized populations that would otherwise not be conducted. Non-probability sampling techniques have been used to study such subgroups as Vietnam veterans (Rothbart, Fine & Seidman, 1982), members of Alcoholics Anonymous (Fortney et al., 1998), Mexican - American gang members (Valdez & Kaplan, 1999), and fundamentalist and

rural Christian congregations (Jelen, 1992, 1993; Wald, 1988).

Presumably, most social scientists would agree that it is preferable to conduct research with admitted limitations rather than to ignore certain topics altogether because of methodological difficulties.

There are several reasons for the use of web-based surveys when targeting marginalized populations (Koch & Emrey, 2001). First, LGBTQs still have many reasons for protecting their privacy even though the United States Supreme Court struck down *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) with *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003),¹³ invalidating a State's anti-homosexual sodomy laws and invoking a constitutional right to privacy. Secondly, social scientists are increasingly interested in studying the attitudes of subgroups whose members are not easily identified. The use of standard survey research methods is not always feasible, especially when reliable sampling frames of certain subgroups are difficult or impossible to acquire. In such situations, purposive samples must be relied upon (Andres et al., 2002; Duffy, 2002; Koch & Emrey, 2001; Zhang, 2000).

¹³ See *Bowers v. Hardwick*.

One of the most significant of all legal decisions having to do with sodomy laws is the infamous *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986). 478 U.S. 186, 106 S.Ct. 2841, 92 L.Ed.2d 140.

Michael Hardwick was a bartender in a gay bar in Atlanta, Georgia who was targeted for harassment by a police officer. In 1982, an unknowing houseguest let the officer let into Hardwick's home after an anonymous robbery report. The officer went to the bedroom where Hardwick was engaged in oral sex with his partner. The men were arrested on the charge of sodomy. Charges were later dropped, but Hardwick brought the case forward with the purpose of having the sodomy law declared unconstitutional.

Bowers was a response to a particularly insulting police action and repeal advocates had hoped that the case would put an end to sodomy laws in the United States when it reached the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, the 5-4 decision found that nothing in the Constitution that "would extend a fundamental right to homosexuals to engage in acts of consensual sodomy."

Historically, the Internet has not been considered a good source of survey respondents because of selection effects. However, internet surveys are an extension of survey research techniques (i.e., purposive samples) that although not optimal in the classic textbook sense, are used quite frequently in sampling populations where adequate sampling frames are not available.

Although on-line surveys have been in use for a number of years, problems of self-selection have precluded the calculation of response rates and degree of selection bias. To date, no self-selected, easily accessible on-line survey has reported response rates and degree of selection bias (Duffy, 2002; Koch & Emrey, 2001; Zhang, 2000).

Koch and Emrey's (2001) study specifically addresses these problems by examining population data for a group of sexually marginalized Internet users who responded to online surveys, enabling them to provide a calculation of both response rate and selection bias. They found that participants in the online survey are nearly indistinguishable from non-participants and are demographically comparable to their nationwide cohort. The overall response was slightly more than sixteen percent, similar to response rates for non-targeted, mass mail surveys. In short, they argue that on-line surveys should not be dismissed as a research tool for difficult-to-reach populations.

Building on the seminal work of Lisa Duggan (1998), I developed a web-based survey entitled *Queering the American Family: Belief, Fallacy and Myth*. Sexual minorities have historically been reluctant to participate in any research that could undermine their anonymity, which could expose them to additional bigotry and pose a threat to their physical and mental well being.

Web-based surveys have been characterized as an unobtrusive method for data collection and will enable me to gather information while minimizing the risk to participants of this study who are members of sexually marginalized and vulnerable populations (Andrews et al, 2003; Koch & Emrey, 2001; Zhang, 2000). In addition to the data derived from the web-based survey, one-on-one IM interviews were administered to examine the family lives of GLBTQ individuals through the perspective of "the lived experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The Problematic Indicators of Quantitative Research & QOL

In an atmosphere of coercive universal moralism and the regulation of power that exacerbates the institutionalization of hetero-hegemony, traditional Familial QOL (Quality of Life) indicators are extremely difficult to adequately operationalize as methodological frameworks to describe systems and functions of

populations marginalized due to a sexual classification. One of the major indices of QOL in surveys is that of marriage. This is a QOL indicator that all but a very few, who were married in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine and Vermont but unrecognized by any other state with the exception of New York State¹⁴, do not have access to marriage. In spite of historical assumptions, LGBTQs do not by definition represent a coalesced community. Queers are as stratified by race, class and gender as any other maligned group. The failure of classical theory to inform contemporary scholars in the manner that the sexually stigmatized live, let alone predict any future changes, has yet to contribute to the creation of a unified and ongoing theoretical context for academic study. While debates and discourses continue to capture the human imagination, they distract from meaningful political debate, divert public policy and thwart academic scholarship. Meanwhile, the central and most important ambiguities regarding human sexual desire still remain unanswered.

Build It & They Just Might Come

There is a great disparity between SES and demographic data on the LGBTQ community and the general population. The demographics that are available come from alternate sources such as

¹⁴ In addition, same-sex couples in New Jersey and New Hampshire are able to enter into state-level civil unions, and there are broad domestic partnership laws in California, Oregon and the District of Columbia. In New York, after a 2008 court ruling, valid out-of-state marriages of same-sex couples must be legally recognized.

the *Advocate* whose readers do participate in survey research. Their readership indicates an average income twice that of the general population. The *Advocate* also reports that 86% of their readers are college graduates. In addition, a sexual bias exists, since 15% of subscribers identify as women, while 85% are men.

SES conducted in the U.S. by Simmons Market Research Bureau (2004) shows the annual value of the gay and lesbian market is in excess of \$514 Billion (U.S). Simmons found the average household income for gay men to be \$52,624 or 41% above national average. Among lesbians it was \$42,755 (26% above the U.S. national average). 15% of the male households polled had an income over \$100,000. 62% of the men polled were college graduates, and 47% held managerial jobs. The poll concluded that the gay and lesbian community represented the ultimate DINK (double income, no kids) market.

The online gay and lesbian community is growing at a much higher rate than the overall Internet population due to the privacy, relevant information, and virtual communities that are available online and are particularly attractive to gays and lesbians, said *Computer Economics* senior research analyst Catherine Huneke (365gay.com, 2005).

Additionally, a Harris Poll (2000) conducted on home computer ownership, usage and Internet access suggested that the United States' GLBT community is amongst the most computer savvy population in the world. Choosing a web-based survey seemed

like the most effective method with which to proceed. According to Wesley Combs, President of Witeck - Combs Communications, "These results confirm that gays, lesbians and bisexuals and queers in general have a profound presence online." Furthermore he adds, "This also validates the strong focus on the Internet by many companies as one of the most effective channels to the gay consumer market" (Harris Interactive & Witeck - Combs, 2000). In addition, the publication *Computer Economics*, projected that between 2001 and 2005, the number of gay and lesbian Internet users would grow from 13.5 to 22.4 million.

As predicted, the online population of users affiliated with the gay and lesbian communities has grown rapidly. In 2001, *Computer Economics* estimated that computer ownership of the family, friends, co-workers and others affiliated with gays and lesbians totaled 28.5 million. That number grew to 46.1 million by 2005 contributing greatly to computer availability and usage within the queer community today.

Given the limits of social science literature on LGBTQ populations (Berkhus, 1996; Greenberg & Bystry, 1982; Jenness, 2004; Konik & Stewart, 2004; Kurdek, 1998; and Smith, 2003, to name a very few), I argue that modernist QOL theoretical frameworks are limited in their scope and are inadequate for this important endeavor. Academia and public policy, when daring to

even discuss homosexuality, will juxtapose it to an elusive heterosexual "norm" that cannot be adequately theorized. Claims for a sexual dichotomy with heterosexuality and homosexuality existing as polar opposites are myopic at best, refusing to acknowledge the gradations within both sexuality and gender. Social narratives and discourses must take into account human agency and moral intent, rather than looking for an elusive, universal epistemological rationale. Most Sociologists do not begin to consider the ethics and the social consequences of a compulsory hetero-normativity, until the introduction of feminist theory and the lesbian continuum. A new emphasis was placed on the "politics of sexual shame" (Warner, 1999), more readily constructing a universal framework for social inquiry. Given the local, the spatial and the open-ended circuitous political climate of the past two decades combined with the power stranglehold of the hetero-homophobic conservative elite, an open-ended meta-theoretical approach is indicated.

Queering the American Family employs and combines existing and accepted social science research methodologies and reconstructs them such that they negate a sexual and/or gendered agenda. Shifting to a more sexual/gender benign study allows this research a conceptual glimpse into the everyday lives and attitudes of LGBTQs. By utilizing a multi-method quantitative and qualitative framework I have begun to develop a more ontological understanding

of the queer experience. Existing labels and classification systems are not only inadequate, but they counteract the validity of the queer being faceless to many, and without the stratifications of race, class, and gender. The qualitative component of this study examines the queer experience from the micro level. The relevant issues include childhood experiences, psycho-social relationships with parents, age of first consensual sexual encounter and other variables. These might have an influence on the variations in the construction of sexual orientation, gender identification and behavior and familial construction, and they are explored in-depth from the subject's point of view. I ask, "Is there a familiarity within the experience[s] of the queer in America?"

My objective is to ask questions that had not been tainted by traditionalism and/or fundamentalism in order to better understand the lives and attitudes of a marginalized group of socially contributing individuals. In short *Queering the American Family* looks to solicit an unadulterated understanding of a population of individuals whose only linkage is a shared experience of same-sex attraction and desire.

Sampling Strategy

Since there is little if any accurate demographic data on queer households in the United States, it is impossible to expect a truly representative sample. The demographic data offered by the US

Census (2000) was obtained three years before *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) was ruled unconstitutional. Unlike the GSS and more accepted social surveys, the method for obtaining samples is a non-probability, opt-in or volunteer sampling from websites that represent a cross-section of the LBGT and queer communities.

Website Selection

In an attempt to provide dollar estimates for advertising the survey on the largest and most popular GLBTQ websites, I contacted Rob McGuire, Vice - President of Advertising and Marketing for *PlanetOut*. After reading a draft of my proposal, Mr. McGuire contacted me, placing a conference call with four of his colleagues from competing websites; *Advocate.com*, *365gay.com*, *gay.com* and *outandabout.com*. These advertising executives from the major LGBTQ news and information websites and magazines suggested - both for budgetary reasons, and to facilitate reaching a greater cross-section of the LGBTQ population - that I target membership sites with a link directly to the survey. The websites suggested were, but not limited to:

- Lesbian specific sites
- Bisexual specific sites
- Sites that serve specific agendas
- LGBT or queer families
- Queer military veterans both active duty and discharged

- Political sites
- Queer affirming religious sites
- Trans-gender sites.
- Sites that profess not to be GLBT specific, but are queer non-the-less
- Inter-sexed sites
- Sites for cross dressers

The Web Based Survey

The method of this survey was an anonymous snowball and opt-in web-based survey. This study utilized a non-probability sample. Response was solicited through www.craigslist.org and Google “AdWords” to target specific LGBTQ websites. In addition, the interview component of the study was acquired from the same survey with respondents asked to "opt in" for a more comprehensive and in-depth set of open-ended questions. The snowball sample was drawn from national queer “communities” of LGBTQs and their list serves, and was used as a focus group to test both the questionnaire and the interviews as well.

Survey Details and Specifics

The survey web-site was created on OPA Web Services Toolbox (see <https://webtools.uiuc.edu/toolbox/O.navigation>). The survey went live as www.queerinamerica.com on May 28, 2007 and it was maintained by UIUC, Office of Public Access until July 31, 2007.

Survey questions were divided into four sections or themes; “Basic Demographic Data,” “Family and Childhood,” “Marriage and Children,” and “Society and You,” (See Appendix A). The survey totaled seventy-nine questions and took approximately twenty to thirty minutes to complete. The final question was whether they would submit to a more in-depth interview. This was done by indicating an email address for further contact.

Once the survey is taken down on August 1, 2008, the report of responses will be downloaded into an Excel spread sheet and the questions will be coded into variable names for loading into SPSS version 15.0 for Windows for analysis. The variable for “future contact” will then be cut from the spreadsheet and saved as a separate word document for the interview portion of the study. Cases that (for whatever reason) opted-out will be deleted from the Excel workbook.

Upon loading the survey data into SPSS for analysis, frequency tables and cross-tabs will be run for all variables, and demographic data to ascertain basic statistical inferences.

Data Analysis

Data will be entered into SPSS version 15.0 for Windows.

Descriptive statistics will be conducted on demographic data.

Descriptive statistics included frequency and percentages for nominal (categorical/dichotomous) data and means/standard deviations for continuous (interval/ratio) data. Standard deviation measures statistical dispersion, or the spread of values in a data set. If the data points are all close to the mean, then the standard deviation is close to zero. The arithmetic mean is defined as the sum of scores divided by the number of scores.

Results

A survey was administered to two-hundred and nineteen individuals. Follow-up interviews were conducted with fifty participants. The respondents were asked to self-report on several demographical characteristics. According to the responses, when asked to identify sex, 129 (58.90%) respondents reported Female, and 82 (37.44%) reported Male. The other eight respondents categorized themselves as either

Inter-Sex or Other. When asked about Gender, 125 (57.08%) reported Female, and 76 (34.70%) reported Male. The other 17 respondents considered themselves to be a Gender other than Male or Female. The majority of respondents were under the age of 24, (76 or 34.70%), and reporting having at least Some College (60 or 27.40%). The results are summarized in Table 1.

Demographic Data Analysis

Due to the sampling method, a disproportional number of women answered the survey. This in no way does not reflect the percentage of lesbian women to gay men, nor does the sample represent the proportion of men to women in the United States. Of the 219 valid responses, the sex of the participants was identified as follows:

Table 1***Frequency and Percentage of Demographic Characteristics***

		<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Sex	Female	129	58.90
	Inter-sex	5	2.28
	Male	82	37.44
	Other	3	1.37
Gender	Female	125	57.08
	Inter-sexed	2	0.91
	Male	76	34.70
	Other	5	2.28
	Post-op Female to Male	1	0.46
	Post-op Male to Female	1	0.46
	Pre-op Male to Female	3	1.37
	Transsexual Female to Male	1	0.46
	Transsexual Male to Female	4	1.83
Age	<20	38	17.35
	20 - 24	38	17.35
	25 - 29	30	13.70
	30 - 34	23	10.50
	35 - 39	20	9.13
	40 - 44	30	13.70
	45 - 49	17	7.76
	50 - 54	13	5.94
	55 - 59	5	2.28
	60 - 64	2	0.91
65 +	1	0.46	
Education Level	9 - 11 years	4	1.83
	College Graduate (B.A. or equivalent)	57	26.03
	High School Graduate	13	5.94
	I am still in school	19	8.68
	Master's Degree	33	15.07
	Professional Degree (MD, PhD. etc)	18	8.22
	Some College	60	27.40
	Some Graduate work	14	6.39

The respondents were also asked to self-identify their race/ethnicity and to indicate whether or not they were of Hispanic/Latino origin. The majority of respondents indicated being White and/or Caucasian (170, 77.63%), and indicated that they were not of Latino/Hispanic origin (187, 85.39%). The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage of Race and Ethnicity

		<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Race	African - American	10	4.57
	Asian and/or Indian	6	2.74
	Mixed Race	15	6.85
	Native American/Pacific Islander	2	0.91
	Other	12	5.48
	Refuse to answer	3	1.37
	White and/or Caucasian	170	77.63
Latino / Hispanic Origin	N/A	3	1.37
	No	187	85.39
	Refuse to answer	1	0.46
	Yes	26	11.87

The respondents were asked to answer several domestic questions surrounding marriage/partnership. The majority of respondents were single (116, 52.97%), while 60 (27.40%) were with a same sex partner. Of those who indicated having a partner, 29 (13.24%) indicated that they had lived with the partner for more than nine years. More than half of the respondents indicated that they did not have children living with them more than 50% of the time (149, 68.04%). Approximately one-fifth of respondents indicated living in a metropolis of more than 1,000,000. See Table 3.

Respondents were then asked to answer a series of questions regarding their sexual orientation and lifestyle. The majority of respondents indicated that they are “Out” most of the time, but guarded (92, 42.01%) and 58 (26.48%) said that they were “Out” all of the time. Almost one-third of respondents indicated that they have been “Out” between one and five years, while nearly one –fifth (40, 18.26%) indicated that they were not “Out”. Two-thirds of respondents (133, 60.37%) indicated that they were “Out” at work and/or school, and nearly half of the respondents (104, 47.49%) indicated that they did not feel discriminated against while at work or school, and nearly half indicated that being GLBTQ does not affect their career (108, 49.32%). See Table 4.

Table 3.
Frequency and Percentage of Domestic Issues

		<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Marital Status	Divorced	5	2.28
	Married - Opposite Sex	7	3.20
	Married But Separated	2	0.91
	Never Married / Partnered	1	0.46
	Other	4	1.83
	Partnered - Opposite Sex	4	1.83
	Partnered - Same Sex	60	27.40
	Partnered But Not Living Together	18	8.22
	Single	116	52.97
	Widowed	1	0.46
Time Living with Spouse / Partner			
	< 1 year	20	9.13
	1 - 2 years	12	5.48
	3 - 4 years	5	2.28
	5 - 6 years	9	4.11
	7 - 8 years	8	3.65
	8 - 9 years	1	0.46
	10 + years	29	13.24
Children Living 50% with One Parent			
	N/A	27	12.33
	No	149	68.04
	Yes	42	19.18
Where Do You Currently Live?			
	A metropolis (1,000,000 +)	47	21.46
	A large city (250,000 - 999,999)	42	19.18
	A medium city (50,000 - 99,000)	36	16.44
	A small city (10,000 - 49,000)	30	13.70
	A suburb (100,000 - 250,000)	42	19.18
	In or near a small town	19	8.68
	On a farm	2	0.91

Table 4.
Frequency and Percentage of Sexual Orientation Issues

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
"Out" in Most Situations		
Almost Never	18	8.22
No	18	8.22
Sometimes	33	15.07
Yes, all of the time	58	26.48
Yes, but guarded	92	42.01
Length of time being "Out"		
< 1 year	16	7.31
1 - 5 years	64	29.22
6 - 10 years	32	14.61
11 - 15 years	38	17.35
All or most of my adult life	29	13.24
I am not out	40	18.26
"Out" at work or school		
N/A	17	7.76
No	67	30.59
Refuse to answer	1	0.46
Yes	133	60.73
Discriminated against at work or school		
Decline to answer	1	0.46
I'm not out at work or school	34	15.53
N/A	7	3.20
No	104	47.49
Yes	71	32.42
Impact of Being LGBTQ on Career		
Harmful	14	6.39
Helpful	9	4.11
I'm not out at work or school	32	14.61
N/A	8	3.65
No Effect	108	49.32
Somewhat Harmful	28	12.79
Somewhat Helpful	6	2.74
Very Harmful	3	1.37
Very Helpful	10	4.57

Cronbach's Alpha

Respondents were asked, how their parents would respond to a question that would rank their answers from liberal attitudes about LGBTQ lives to conservative attitudes. The categorical answers were then condensed and recoded, 1 = liberal and 0 = conservative attitudes. Next the respondents were asked how their parents would respond when asked about premarital sex, using the same scale. These categorical answers were re-coded as a dummy variable using the same process. Once I had two variables measuring liberal attitudes I created a single variable using Cronbach's Alpha, with reliability score of .786 (Attitude One).

I next created a similar variable using the respondent's sibling's attitudes. I was able to create a single variable using a Cronbach's Alpha reliability score of .644 (Attitude Two), an accepted score for experimental data.

The Interview

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the interview is perhaps the oldest form of data collection, and it can be traced back to the ancient Egyptians (Babbie, 1992). Social scientist and philanthropist Charles Booth is generally credited with the modern interview as a social survey (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954). Using comprehensive

survey methods, Booth's research was centered on the social and economic conditions of people living in London in 1886. Published as *Life and Labour of the People in London (1902-03)*, Booth triangulated unstructured interviews with observational techniques which gave rise to modern and post-modern ethnography.

One of the latest directions being taken in the post-modern interview is related to new and changing technologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interview as a data-gathering form has recently expanded to electronic outlets to include the World-Wide-Web. According to Schafer & Dillman (1998), estimates suggest that in the United States, 50% of all households have and have access to the Internet. Software is now available to allow researchers to schedule interviews via IM. Limited access to computers, the Internet and IM makes general population surveys impracticable; however, web-based or IM interviewing can reach a substantial portion of specialized populations.

Respondents to the *Queering American Families* survey were asked in the final question, if they would consent to a more in-depth interview. Participation was indicated by the respondent supplying an email address for further contact, in which case an IM account with [Yahoo.com \(uiucqueerinamericasurvey.com\)](mailto:uiucqueerinamericasurvey.com) was set up.

All survey participants who indicated a desire for further contact were sent a blind email, asking them to reply with a date and time in

which they would be available for an hour long IM interview. The informed consent document was sent as an attachment. Upon response, a confirmation email was sent to each respondent with the Yahoo.com IM address and a date and time were set.

The interviews were conducted using a questionnaire of forty-two prepared, open-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into three sections or themes entitled: "Passing for Straight", "Life Experiences" and "You and Society" (See Appendix B). The questions and order asked were altered for each individual as the interview progressed to best accommodate and obtain the interviewee's life and experiences.

I chose an IM interview for several reasons. (1) It allowed for complete anonymity. I had no knowledge of the participants or how they would respond to the survey questions. (2) The respondents could participate by using a familiar technology in comfort of their own homes or offices. (3) Total anonymity and the open-ended format allowed them to share past histories, ideas and opinions that they may have felt have felt uneasy about in a traditional interview setting. If the plethora of existing sex related chat rooms are any indication, people feel more comfortable sharing intimate details with a computer screen than with an actual person. (4) It allowed me to conduct interviews with participants from all regions of the country without the added expense

of traveling. (5) A transcript of the completed interview could be preserved for coding and analysis.

Coding

The ultimate goal of coding the subjects' responses was to produce a coherent, focused analysis of the recorded social life of LGBTQ subjects who responded to the IM interview. This was completed in several phases. In the first phase, thematic coding was utilized to organize the respondents' answers from open-ended questions back into a series of cohesive case-studies where themes and central topics became readily apparent and easily identified. These central topics or themes were then turned into questions regarding the meanings of the answers offered: "A single word or a short phrase or even vocal signals what is going on in a piece of data in a way that links it to some more general analytic issue" (Emerson et al., 1995).

Once I linked, and after discovering central topics or core themes, I coded each interview answer as specific pieces of data and re-analyzing for common themes as well as for outliers. For instance (though not necessarily specifically relevant to my research questions) each and every interviewee, when asked what the biggest misperception the general public has about LGBTQs, responded by saying "Sexual orientation was not a choice." All fifty of the respondents indicated with

certainty that their own feelings of variant sexuality were present prepubescent.

The literature - sparse as it may be - supports the findings that children feel and explore their innate solitary sexual development, and are sexual beings from the earliest stages of life (Bancroft, Herbenick & Reynolds, 2003; Goldman & Goldman, 1998; Thigpen, Pinkston & Mayfesky, 2003). In addition, Graff and Rademakers (2006) fault most empirical studies of childhood sexuality as they focus on sexual abuse or a consequence of adolescent victimization. The literature all but ignores healthy and positive aspects of sexuality and sexual development in childhood, especially in the United States.

Since the survey and the subsequent interviews were opt-in, no correlations or assumptions can be made to a larger population of the queer community as a whole. The *Queer in America* survey which consisted of seventy-nine questions went live on May 28, 2008 and was taken down at midnight July 21, 2008. There were 219 valid respondents once the data was cleaned and participants who, for what ever reason opted-out were removed from the survey report data set. Eight-nine interviews were conducted utilizing Instant Messaging over the following two months.

Sue

There were several problems that interview participants faced when declaring a LGBTQ identity, even over the relatively anonymous World-Wide-Web. One respondent I'll refer to as "Sue", responded to the survey and asked to be contacted for a further interview. When I emailed her to set up an interview date and time, she responded that her father had "hacked" into her computer and she was afraid to have further contact with me over the internet. I asked if she would be more comfortable conducting the interview over the phone. She agreed. The only phone call from that I received from "Sue" was a message from a friend asking that I not contact her again for fear that her father had the phone tapped.

Chapter Four

Queers & Queer Relationships

The Queer Experience

There have been many long-held beliefs, myths and fallacies with regards to LGBTQ associations, relationships and familial constructions over the past one hundred years. However, not surprising to this researcher, participants in the *Queering the American Family* study are not so very different, with respect to their intimate relationships from their heterosexual counterparts. They want all of the same rights, responsibilities and privileges afforded to those who have been granted full participation in society. Respondents, both to the survey (n=219) and the subsequent interviews (n=89) indicated a lifetime of misperception – sometimes self imposed - discrimination and prejudice about their most interpersonal interactions and in the construction of their own familial units. This is simply due to a sexual orientation that is not heterosexual (Elia, 2003; Jayakumar, 2009; Martin, 2009). Heterosexism remains the greatest of concerns for study participants. Homophobia has not only been imposed on each LGBTQ person, both on a daily basis and by society as a whole, but even by their own families of origin (Martin, 2009).

Respondents to the survey were asked to answer a series of questions regarding their sexual orientation and lifestyle. The majority of respondents indicated that they are “Out” most of the time, (see Table 5) but guarded 42.01% and 26.48% said that they were “Out” all of the time. Almost one-third of respondents indicated that they have been “Out” between 1 and 5 years, while nearly one –fifth 18.26% indicated that they were not “Out”. Two-thirds of respondents 60.37% indicated that they were “Out” at work and/or school, and nearly half of the respondents 47.49% indicated that they did not feel discriminated against while at work or school, and nearly half indicated that being GLBTQ does not affect their career 49.32%, though 30.59% are still closeted while in their chosen field (see Table 5).

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Table 5***Frequency and Percentage of Sexual Orientation Issues***

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
"Out" in Most Situations		
Almost never	18	8.22
No	18	8.22
Sometimes	33	15.07
Yes, all of the time	58	26.48
Yes, but guarded	92	42.01
Length of time being "Out"		
< 1 year	16	7.31
1 - 5 years	64	29.22
11 - 15 years	38	17.35
6 - 10 years	32	14.61
All or most of my adult life	29	13.24
I am not out	40	18.26
"Out" at work or school		
N/A	17	7.76
No	67	30.59
Refuse to answer	1	0.46
Yes	133	60.73

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respondents 47.49% indicated that they did not feel discriminated against while at work or school, and nearly half indicated that being GLBTQ does not affect their career 49.32%, though 30.59% are still closeted while in their chosen field (see Table 6).

Table 6
Frequency and Percentage of Sexual Orientation Issues

	n	%
Discriminated against at work or school		
Decline to answer	1	0.46
I'm not out at work or school	34	15.53
N/A	7	3.20
No	104	47.49
Yes	71	32.42
Impact of Being LGBTQ on Career		
Harmful	14	6.39
Helpful	9	4.11
I'm not out at work or school	32	14.61
N/A	8	3.65
No Effect	108	49.32
Somewhat Harmful	28	12.79
Somewhat Helpful	6	2.74
Very Harmful	3	1.37
Very Helpful	10	4.57

Most of the interview participants indicated the original source of a queer bias or discrimination came about early in their formative years and was usually by peers and/or classmates. Later, bigotry even abuse

was at the hands of their siblings and/or parents (Corliss, Cochran & Mays, 2002; D'Augelli, Grossmen & Starks, 2005; Martin, 2009). This kind of childhood intolerance is supported by the literature - sparse as it may be (Savin-Williams, 2008; Zucker, 2008; Zucker et.al., 2009).

Children feel and explore their innate sexual development, and are sexual beings from the earliest stages of life. Heterosexuality is just one aspect of socio-sexual development. Feelings by some - the estimates range between 1% to upwards of 10% - are homosexual (Pedersen & Kristiansen, 2008). This difference is present in the self awareness in these queer individuals even as children (Bancroft, Herbenick & Reynolds, 2003; Goldman & Goldman, 1998; Thigpen, Pinkston & Mayfesky, 2003). Though not necessarily supporting the historical "disease paradigm" (Zucker et. al 2009) perspective that gender non-conformity in childhood is causative of adult homosexuality (Bemm, 2008; Bullough, 2008), many if not most of those surveyed and later interviewed "knew" that they were somehow different or even queer early on in their childhood development. 96.6% of those surveyed expressed that they as children, were also acutely aware of the societal stigma that is associated with their culturally inappropriate same-sex attractions. How findings such as these will play out in the nature versus nurture debate on homosexuality (Francis, 2008), self pronounced experts may never be prepared to say. However, this research bears to mind that those, many affected by this specific social bias side with that

of a biological predisposition. Queer being the social construction of a biological fact.

“Children can be cruel” was a statement made by one interviewee, but children are also intensely responsive of the societal norms and mores by which they are reared in this American culture of blatant heterosexism. They are also unfettered in their disapproval of those that go against these proscribed sexual or gendered norms. They will often, if not always verbalize their own insecurities by buy calling out, labeling or naming the social anomalies in others’ (Bancroft, Herbenick & Reynolds, 2003; Goldman & Goldman, 1998; Thigpen, Pinkston & Mayfesky, 2003).

Carl

One interviewee, Carl recalled the homophobia he experienced in the third grade.

They say that children can be cruel. But they can also have an innate sense of knowing the truth and are unafraid to speak about it. I knew that somehow I was different from the other boys, even at a very young age. It wasn’t until walking home from school in the third grade, that Martin Beckman... I can still recall his name some thirty years later... and some other boys started taunting me with verbal slurs and I was called a “queer” for the first time. It was then, and for the first time that I had a word for who I was and what I was feeling. That was me; the queer third grader outed before my time.

Warren

Warren had the opposite experience while in school. Knowing he had a secret and afraid to be one of those he saw exposed or labeled as

a queer, he over compensated, became a bully, eventually becoming his high school's football star. Taunting those he thought might be queer or somehow less masculine in their appearance or mannerisms than he, himself was taught or learned to be, became his method of coping with his surreptitious identity.

It took me 20 years and three marriages to finally to reconcile with my feelings and to come to terms with my sexuality. I was never straight, from my very first perception of my sexuality; I knew that I was gay. But, even as a boy, I just played the game the same way a straight man would... Yet, all the time living a lie... having secret affairs with men, ashamed of myself and afraid of getting caught. I just couldn't seem to stop. I ruined the lives of three great women... my only consolation is that there were no children for me to damage because of my lies and deception...

...One day I had just had enough. I told my third wife and went into counseling to get rid of my homosexual feelings. When that didn't work, I went back into counseling and found the proud, accepting gay man that I truly am. Of course it did not come without cost. I lost both lifelong friends and my (biological) family will have nothing to do with me.

I now have a partner of ten years, we have a great and supportive group of friends... in many ways they are more like family... best of all I can look myself in the mirror. I no longer live a lie.

These two separate and distinct experiences - though opposite ends of the spectrum are not atypical. They suggest that the forty years that have followed the Stonewall riots has done little if anything to contradict the negative social connotation to a queer or homosexual label, especially among men and boys. It is still unsafe for those, both physically and emotionally; whether queer or not, who do not ascribe to the "typical" male stereotypes or norms (Carnaghi & Mass, 2007; Bryant, 2008).

Even in youth, there is no acceptable social equivalent of a “tom boy” – a term generally socially accepted for girls or young women that assign themselves to a more androgynous and not an overtly feminine role – for boys or young men that either do not or cannot assert a single masculine social position.

Stability & Queer Relationships

There continues to be a great deal of discourse surrounding stability - in terms of the number of partners and the length of time spent in committed queer relationships. Yet, researchers find it nearly impossible to study this social phenomenon. There are many reasons both political and personal - there are those still living with the fears for their personal safety and professional security, some blame a heterosexual bias in research – whatever the reasons accurate population data simply does not exist for LGBTQs.

A review of the empirical findings of this study, others cited throughout this research and the interviews conducted by me, suggests that LGBTQ couples are just as capable of entering into and sustaining long-term intimate relationships as are their heterosexual counterparts (Gottman et. al., 2003; Kurdek, 2006; 2001; & 1994), although, as discussed later in this chapter, the divisions in labor often vary. My research indicates that whether or not “marriage”, as a social label is used, 48.33% of those respondents to the interviews indicated that they

were in committed relationships (n = 84). 34.52% of those remained with their partners for at least nine years, often more. This finding was just as true for those that would opt for State sanctioned marriage as a social label as did for participants who did not; whether they reported that they were currently living together in a committed relationship or presently romantically involved.

Table 7
Frequency and Percentage of Years in a Committed Relationship

	n	%
Time Living with Spouse and/ or Partner		
< 1 year	20	23.8
1 - 2 years	12	14.2
3 - 4 years	5	5.9
5 - 6 years	9	10.7
7 - 8 years	8	9.5
8 - 9 years	1	1.1
< 10 years	29	34.5

Heidi & Carol

Heidi and her partner Carol had been together 18 years at the time of the interview. Heidi has an adult daughter from a previous heterosexual marriage. The daughter, “Chloe”, was raised by Heidi and Carol since she was three years old. When asked about the stability of LGBTQ relationships she responded...

...As opposed to what, heterosexual relationships? My mother was divorced three times, married four. I have no idea who my

biological father is... even my daughter is from a broken heterosexual marriage... God help me! Relationships change, people change... sometimes for the better, oftentimes for the worse.

What I do know is for the last 18 years Carol and I have lived together, raised a daughter, and built a home... built a life together. We argue, we laugh... but no one is going anywhere without the other.

It was Carol who was there for me when I went through breast cancer five years ago. It was she who took care of our daughter when I was too sick to be a mother to our daughter. When I couldn't work, it was Carol who supported us on her salary alone... isn't that what committed couples do? Show up when no one else will?

I remember the oncologist asking me about my support system. When I told him that I had Carol, he responded that most married couples have a challenge getting through a cancer diagnosis in tact, as a couple. He wondered if we could make it without the "stability" of a State sanctioned marriage.

Married or not, I'd put our relationship up against any married couple... we are as stable as any couple on the face of the earth, maybe even more.

Heterosexual relationships and marriages are fraught with a history of instability. According to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 1995 – the last year reported by the United States government - while marriage rates may be on the decline, as reported by the HHS over the past 20 years more than 47% of all marriages in the United States ended in divorce. Yet, other studies report that the numbers are in fact climbing. In an average year, about 2.4 million marriages and 1.2 million divorces occur in the United States (Kreider & Fields, 2001). What most researchers agree upon is that the reasons for divorce are as seem to be as varied as are the reasons for marriage. However, in the contemporary context, Coltrane and Adams (2003) have

examined how social science experts have often been misused to portray children as the sole victims of divorce and how such images legitimate the political objectives of specific interest groups and mask real underlying issues of failing marriage such as gender inequality, a characteristic not shared in same-sex relationships.

The Queer Relationship

There was Scott an interviewee and graduate student, who reminded me of several differences between straight or heterosexual relationships and/or marriages and those relationships of committed queers. Foremost, “In straight marriage there is a historical and innate inherent inequality,” or as Coltrane and Adams (2003) refers to as “the mask of underlying issues of gender inequality” and a historical division of labor.

Unlike a traditional marriage with its millennia of hetero-normative social traditions, institutions, customs and mores, same-sex relationships must be negotiated and renegotiated, sometimes on a daily basis. Nowhere is there a socially accepted arrangement - if you will as outmoded and archaic as it may be for a traditional marriage between the opposite sexes, for a relationship between those of the same sex. It is openness and honesty, when discussing differences which facilitate longevity in intimate LGBTQ relationships (Diemer, Mackey & O'Brien,

2004). Researchers and interviewees alike posit that the trust and understanding developed during the ongoing process of negotiating domestic roles, has been instrumental in developing communication and satisfaction in same-sex relationships (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Kirurdek, 1988; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984; Rempel, Holmes & Zenna, 1985). No modern history documented or otherwise, exists for the relatively new phenomenon of queer coupling, as one couple interviewed stated; “were just feeling our way along.”

Where these differences do occur between straight and queer couples, they are striking. As Mignon R. Moore reminds us, the literature on gender inequality in relationships and families concludes that historic gender ideologies and the heterosexual men’s greater earning potential are the primary mechanisms through which power in heterosexual relationships are defined and gender stratification is maintained (2008, pp 335). Even today, traditional gender-based divisions of labor, where wives still out perform husbands two to one on the home front, are commonplace. Women often do twice the domestic chores as do men (Artis & Pavalko, 2003). Since gender stratified roles do not typically exist in queer relationships this disparity is almost moot (Kurdek, 2007). There exists a more egalitarian distribution of labor that is negotiated and renegotiated, sometimes on a daily basis. This research, supported by that of Artis & Pavalko (2003); Kurdek (2007) and Moore (2008) indicates that at least for some, there is a more

equitable distribution of housework; work for hire and - as discussed in the following chapter - childcare.

Keith & Therry

Keith and Therry have been in a committed relationship for ten years, living together for the last seven. Keith is a social worker for an AIDS advocacy agency in a large metropolitan area, while Therry is an M.D. They are both in their early-forties and have no plans for children. They both set in for the interview.

Keith: We have really never given much thought to who does what and why in the house. Therry does make a considerably more money than I do, but we tend to share the household tasks pretty equally.

I hate to go to the grocery store and do laundry so Therry does those things... I tend to clean the house more often and go to the dry cleaners. We share equally in the cooking and dishes.

Interviewer: Did you negotiate this before you moved in together?

Therry: Pretty much, but then again the more mundane things just fell into place. Even though Keith hates... no, detests the grocery store, doesn't mean that he doesn't go with me or even by himself sometimes... We both just pitch in and do what needs to be done and without too much discussion... I mean we never fight about it or anything like that... Although I do find myself walking his dog more than he does...

Interviewer: How do you handle your money?

Keith: We have separate accounts and joint accounts. I have my money, Therry has his... We have ours... The joint account pays for all of our joint household expenses. We contribute equally to this account even though Therry is the primary bread-winner.

Therry: I pay for our vacations, dinners out, theatre tickets and things like that. I know that Keith cannot pay for these things on his salary, but he's my partner and I... we both like to do these things together and I can afford it.

Studies may suggest that there is a slight difference between the ways gay male couples and lesbian female couples (Kurdeck, 2007) allocate domestic labor. Carrington (1999) posited that even though both gay and lesbian couples involve partners of the same sex, “Lesbians – as women and gay men - as men - they may have different socialization experiences relevant to household labor as woman’s work” (Kurdek, 2007; pp134). This proposition is dismissed by Kurdek and none of these differences were found in the subsequent interviews.

Joan and Carla

Joan, 35 and Carla, 28 have been living together since the first met five years ago. Joan is a litigator and Carla is a graduate student. They share a home together in a major metropolis in the southern United States. They currently have no children, though have not ruled out parenting in their future plans.

Joan: With our busy lives; I, with my law practice and Carla with her studies, neither of us really have the time or the patience for the major domestic issues that go along with home ownership. We actually have a cleaning man that comes in two days a week. We found him through the Gay Yellow pages. He does the house work, goes to the grocery store and does the laundry for us. I do the cooking, because it is my passion. Cooking and a good glass of wine wind me down at night after a long day at the office.

Yes, it is an added expense for me, but even if I wasn't with Carla, my life, making partner in the firm would dictate the same kind of arrangement for me. I just cannot give the house the attention it deserves and Carla certainly doesn't have the time... or for that matter the inclination. She's kind of a slob especially during the school year.

With the exception on Carla's schooling, I do end up paying for all of our expenses. But we look at it as an investment in our future. We expect to be together for the rest of our lives and it won't be long before Carla is able to participate in the joint expenses. That is of course unless we decide we are ready to start a family and have children.

Carla wants to have a baby when she is through with her studies. This is something we are still discussing though. I'm still not quite sure I want to go down that road immediately after making partner and Carla just finishing her studies. Seems like a lot of added stress for us at this particular point in our relationship.

Gary and Zack

Gary and Zack are two gay men that met while Zack was visiting Chicago. They are both in their mid-forties and dated for a year, long distance and on weekends before they decided to move in together and call Chicago home four years ago. When interviewed, Gary had this to say about domestic bliss.

For us household chores and who does what can change almost on a weekly basis. We both were very busy outside of the home. When we first moved in together I worked a full-time job. Zach taught part-time for a university here in Chicago while he finished his dissertation.

He seemed to have more time at home so naturally he did more of the housework and cooking. I did the laundry and the grocery shopping on weekends. But as in life things change and with this recession I lost my job last November. Zach finished his dissertation and now works full-time, night and day at a university.

Besides my volunteer work outside of the home, I now spend my days at home looking for work. Now I am responsible for most of, well probably all of the housework,

the grocery shopping and the laundry as well. Zack does pitch in from time to time, but in his first years as faculty he has little extra time. We do what we have to do to get by.

What these three, seemingly unrelated interviews have in common is that none of these same-sex couples adhere to the same gender based hetero-normative social roles as found in traditional marriage. They do not do they mirror each other in form nor in function. These couplings simply exist in support of each other as individuals and in hopes of building productive lives together.

Past Discrimination & Queer Relationships

There were several other societal factors that were of interest to me that seems to affect the stability of queer relationships. Chief among them were past discriminations, mere tolerance over acceptance of LGBTQs' lives and living out (Elia, 2003; Jayakumar, 2009; Martin, 2009). During the interview process, there was a great deal of discussion about the unadulterated acceptance of LGBTQs over mere tolerance. Contrary to the fallacies and hyperbole both by and through the media and usually during peaks in election cycles, queer is about more than sex and sexuality. It is more than just a lifestyle, it is a life.

The literature indicates, a review of the empirical findings of the survey and the interviews in *Queering the American Family* suggests

that LGBTQ couples are capable of entering into and sustaining intimate relationships. The research indicates that whether or not marriage, as a social label is used, LGBTQs are not that very different from their heterosexual counterparts as some would have us believe. Given that those who disclose their LGBTQ identities to their families of origin are still at risk of a changing dynamic that lessens the biological bonds associated with family, 76.3% of all respondents indicated that they have constructed fictive families, from their community to replace or replicate the loss of nuclear familial bonds. Finally, many participants equated tolerance with a hidden or concealed form of homophobia. Stating that mere tolerance over acceptance of their lives and familial organizations was a more insidious form of covert heterosexism. Social equality for LGBTQs is not based on a meager tolerance of differences, but recognition of the sexual diversity that has existed historically as well as today.

Les & Susan

Several of those interviewed expressed the opinions shared by many of the participants for reasons of intolerance of queers and the lack of social acceptance in the United States. Many believe that sex and sexuality are still the puritanical taboo and any discussion of queer only adds to a socially imposed illicit nature of queer lives.

When “Les” was asked about intolerance replied:

Of course we are not accepted within greater society... We are, after all just about sex ... Sex-sex-sex, oh and drugs. What I think people don't see are the professional jobs we have, families, community service ... the same old “boring lives” as everyone else. I just see TV showing the extreme variables within our community ... which all communities have. I personally being gay is just one aspect of who I am ... not really the defining factor about how my life should be lived ... that's what I want people to see.

Susan added:

I think the answer for me is three fold. First we live in a pluralistic society, tolerance is sometimes all we can ask for, rather than acceptance especially since there are a lot of religious opinions on homosexuality, and we live in a country that prides itself in freedom of religion. Second, we also live in a culture that is very ... hesitant ... to embrace sexual difference. Sex is difficult in our little City on the Hill. I think it is simply easier to give a passive tolerance and move on. Third, and more personally, I am not interested in assimilation, which in my mind has a lot to do with acceptance. I want to push the boundaries. I want to have my own space to identify and define. With acceptance come limits, limits I don't want ... I am queer and will always be queer ... accepted, or merely tolerated.

Stanley

When “Stanley” was asked about the biggest misnomer the general public has about him and his relationship, he replied:

.... We are not the enemy! We are more like you than you would ever even imagine. With the exception of our economic status ... We are DINKs. (Double Income No Kids) Sometimes I just think they are jealous because we have disposable income. Homosexuality is not just about sex ... Sex, drugs and rock 'n roll.

They don't stop and think about two individuals who despite all odds decide to share their lives and love for each other. The commitment we share, doing the best that we can do in this life to get by. The seemingly insurmountable obstacles we encounter in our daily lives, labeled as different and somehow deviant, just to

be together to share the ups and downs that come with any committed relationship.

Though you wouldn't necessarily notice it the public arena when all that the media portrays are the fringes – drag queens and leather daddies... we are no different than any other couple, gay or straight, just trying to do the right thing and getting by doing it.

Queer is a political statement that is more about the hegemonic hetero-sexists institutions than any kind of deviant sexuality.

Queer Marriage

Much of the recent debate, both within and outside of the LGBTQ communities has centered on the legalization of queer marriage. Many queers believe that State sanctioned marriage is the only to guarantee full societal recognition and participation. Yet others, queer as well, resist marriage as a form of social assimilation that they want no part of – concurring with many that marriage per se, is an outmoded hegemonic institution. According to the Human Rights Campaign, currently, same-sex couples are entitled to all of the State-level rights and benefits of marriage in Massachusetts. In addition, same-sex couples in New Jersey, New Hampshire, Vermont and Connecticut are able to enter into State-level civil unions and there are broad domestic partnership laws in California and Oregon. California voters banned gay marriage in November of 2008, an issue that was recently settled against gay marriage by the California Supreme Court. In the State of New York,

after a 2008 court ruling, valid out-of-state marriages of same-sex couples must be legally recognized. New York's legal recognition of gay marriage was quickly followed by the District of Columbia. Finally, on April 3, 2009 the Supreme Court of the State of Iowa unanimously ruled that the State's ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional and the State legislature was enjoined to write new law that would ensure equal marriage rights to all citizens of Iowa.

The survey found that 58% of all respondents to the *Queering the American Family* survey were in committed relationships. 55.7% of those surveyed saw their intimate relationships as something that must be recognized by the State. 58% of those surveyed also wanted to be married; while 33.8% did not want the title of "marriage" assigned to their intimate relationships, but wanted all the same rights and responsibilities as guaranteed by State sanctioned marriage. 14.6% saw marriage as a form of social assimilation, while 3.2% proposed that marriage was a form of social transgression. 21.5% indicated that their relationship was a commitment only between them and wanted no part in State recognition.

When asked if marriage was the only way to validate their intimate relationships, 60.9% equated marriage with social equality and must be recognized by the State. While, 33.3% agreed that marriage was an outdated institution that they wanted nothing to do with.

This rift in opinions on State sanctioned marriage was apparent in the interviews as well; 48% for marriage, 42% against. Most of the interviewees in favor of marriage stated that it made them more politically aware and active.

Deborah & Maria

Even though John D’Emilio believes that the marriage debate is setting the LGBTQ movement back (2005), it is also creating a new cohort of political activists. An interviewee, “Deborah” didn’t become politically active until the marriage debate hit home for her. Her partner of 16 years asked her to marry and there weren’t even domestic partnership rights in their home state. They instead journeyed to Canada to have a civil marriage ceremony performed and their relationship sanctified if not in the United States, in Canada and in their own minds. Deborah said that she would not rest until her commitment to her wife would be recognized within the United States.

Another interviewee, I’ll call Maria, reported a social phenomenon I was not aware of until then – GLBTQ couples marrying each other several times in different jurisdictions. Each time in a different state or country that recognizes their union. Since there is no reciprocity guaranteed to gay marriage across country, or State lines – except most recently in the State of New York and the District of Columbia - this is

done so that if a marriage might be nullified in one jurisdiction – as with California’s Proposition 8 – it will not necessarily invalidate the marriage in other socially more progressive areas within the United States, Canada and Europe.

The respondents to the survey were asked to answer several domestic questions surrounding marriage/partnership. The majority of respondents were single 52.97%, while 27.40% were with a same sex partner. Of those who indicated having a partner, 13.24% indicated that they had lived with the partner for more than nine years. More than half of the respondents indicated that they did not have children living with them more than 50% of the time 68.04%. Approximately one-fifth of respondents indicated living in a metropolis of more than 1,000,000 people 21.46%. The results are summarized in Table 8.

Carol

Carol was not on the fence when asked about her perspective on queer marriage. In fact she was adamant her prospect of marrying her “spouse” in their home state of California.

We were prepared to get married in California before Proposition 8 and the Supreme Court decision. Not only had we discussed it at length, we had made plans for a traditional wedding ceremony with all of the bells and whistles.

We had sent out 100 invitations, hired a caterer, and even rented a hall. Then it just came crashing down all around us. How could they do this to us? What did we ever do to anyone? If California is not ready for gay marriage, than who is?

Table 8***Frequency and Percentage of Domestic Issues***

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Marital Status		
Divorced	5	2.28
Married - Opposite Sex	7	3.20
Married but Separated	2	0.91
Never Married/Partnered	1	0.46
Other	4	1.83
Partnered - Opposite Sex	4	1.83
Partnered - Same Sex	60	27.40
Partnered but not living together	18	8.22
Single	116	52.97
Widowed	1	0.46
Time Living w/ Spouse/Partner		
< 1 year	20	9.13
1 - 2 years	12	5.48
3 - 4 years	5	2.28
5 - 6 years	9	4.11
7 - 8 years	8	3.65
8 - 9 years	1	0.46
9 + years	29	13.24
Children Living w/ one parent 50% of time		
N/A	27	12.33
No	149	68.04
Yes	42	19.18
Where do you currently live?		
A metropolis (1,000,000 +)	47	21.46
A large city (250,000 - 999,999)	42	19.18
A suburb (100,000 - 250,000)	42	19.18
A medium city (50,000 - 99,000)	36	16.44
A small city (10,000 - 49,000)	30	13.70
In or near a small town	19	8.68
On a farm	2	0.91

All we ever wanted to do was to confirm and share the love we have for each other with those we care about. Even Evelyn's mother was starting to come around and said that she would give Evelyn away on our special day. All we ever wanted to do was to confirm and share the love we have for each other with those we care about. Even Evelyn's mother was starting to come around and said that she would give Evelyn away on our special day.

Now we are working tirelessly to repeal proposition 8 in the next general election. We have spent every dime we were going to spend on the wedding in support of the new initiative. Until we are allowed to marry we will continue to be just another gay couple with second-class citizenship.

Allen

One interviewee who was adamantly against gay marriage per se, but wanted his long-time relationship with his partner recognized by a State sanctioned domestic partnership agreement, recalled how their lives are really no different than their straight counterparts:

Here we were on a typical Friday night laying in bed together, my partner with his book, me with mine, our two dogs lying between us. Larry King was on the television and there was a discussion between a moron from the Family Research Council and a representative from the Human Rights Campaign debating gay marriage. This woman from the FRC, who apparently had never known any gay people, was pontificating about the hedonistic gays ... well, I looked at my partner, and he looked at me and we both just laughed ... If they only knew just how boring we really are, they'd just leave us alone and let us be together.

While much of the recent debate, both within and outside of the LGBTQ communities has centered on the legalization of queer marriage, many queers believe that State sanctioned marriage is the only to guarantee full societal recognition and participation. Yet, others still resist marriage. They argue that State sanctioned marriage is a form of

social assimilation that they want no part of – preferring to live their lives in the periphery of society where they have been relegated to live. They argue if they marry, they will somehow lose their queer identity, while continuing to concur that marriage is an outmoded and hegemonic institution. The commonality found in the *Queer in America* survey and subsequent interviews is that a method, where by LGBTQ relationships would be recognized and afforded all of the rights and responsibilities of heterosexual marriage. New laws need to be enacted now to guarantee that LGBTQ relationships and families will be protected.

In the wake of the 2008 passage and the California Supreme Court refusal to reverse California’s Proposition 8 - effectively nullifying the legal marriages of LGBTQ Californians, protests are popping up all over the nation – and so are the comparisons between queers’ and African-Americans’ fight for equality. “Is gay the new black?” asks the *Advocates’* Michael Joseph Gross (2009), as he examines the similarities of the two struggles for civil rights – calling queer marriage “The last great civil rights struggle”. Unfortunately it is becoming evidently clearer that LGBTQs must have access to the equal rights and protections offered under the safeguards of State sanctioned marriage.

Chapter Five

The Construct of the Queer Family

Nuclear & Fictive Families

Parental knowledge of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation will often change the dynamic of the parent-child relationship (Martin, 2009; Muraco, 2006; Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998). While 30% of the survey respondents indicated that their parents remained open and welcoming upon the disclosure of their sexual orientation, 67% of those that had come out to their families of origin indicated that their relationship changed in a significant way, and usually not for the better. 4.9% of those surveyed indicated that they were estranged from their parents solely because of their sexual orientation.

John & Jeff

An interviewee, I'll call "John", a 22 year old college student, came out to his family over a Thanksgiving dinner. Returning to the family home three weeks later for the winter break, John found the locks changed, curtains drawn and all of his belongings set out for the trash.

Another college student “Jeff”, after he disclosed his sexual orientation was given, by his parents, an all expenses paid “vacation” to a religious deprogramming camp that guaranteed to cure him of his homosexuality. It did not.

Patrick

While the aforementioned examples may seem extreme, the evidence suggested by latter interviews confirmed that many of the same issues were identified by the majority of participants. Given the fact that those who disclose their LGBTQ identities are at risk of changing the family dynamic in a way that often lessens the bonds of biological family, 76.3% of all respondents to the survey indicated that they have constructed fictive families to replace or replicate the loss of nuclear familial bonds (Muraco, 2006; Savin-Williams and Dubé, 1998) “Patrick” spoke for a majority of respondents when he said ...

...I am out to my family... although actual discussions have only taken place with my immediate family members, it appears that everyone knows. I come from a Southern Baptist family in a town of about 600 people in east Texas, so that will give you some kind of perspective. I would consider them supportive. I can talk more openly with my sisters than my parents. I have taken guys home with me that I have been in relationships with. There are always welcoming, but there is always some tension... likely theirs and mine. I would say that they are supportive of my happiness, although they disagree significantly with how I achieve it.

Interviewer: Have you created familial type relationships outside of your biological family that serve as a support system?

“Patrick”: Definitely. I think that this is something that I have always tried to do. I am at a point in my life where I feel that I have done this

successfully. I have great friendships with people who feel very much like family to me and we operate as such in most ways.

40.4% of survey respondents indicated that their chosen or fictive families have replaced their nuclear or biological families altogether while 18.2% revealed that even though they are still involved, at least peripherally with their nuclear families, intimate or personal details of and about their lives can only be shared with their constructed familial unit. But, 23.6% of those surveyed found that they now have two blended families; one biological and one chosen.

Fictive family units serve to fill the void often felt by those who have disclosed their sexual orientation to be other than heterosexual and have suffered a loss because of such a revelation. Interviewees reported that besides the social networking that intrinsically comes with these newly chosen family units, it is often a safety net, both emotionally and physically. With fictive families comes a support system based upon the shared experiences that come with social and familial ostracization. Fictive familial arrangements are also safe-havens to explore both intimate non-sexual and sexual relationships (Muraco, 2006).

Gregory

It is not uncommon to meet a perspective partner and date within a... as you call it "fictive family" network. Upon coming out all I had were my friends. They were the ones I went to with my problems. We spent holidays together, celebrated each other's birthdays. Not only were they my social network but my new family.

When I decided that I was seriously ready to date and settle down it was my new family that I turned to for advice... and men as well. Everyone knew someone who knew someone that "was perfect for me." I went on a lot of dates and was set up at just about every party I went to for over a year.

Then my friend Chuck introduced me to his friend Jack and we've been inseparable for the past 15 years... And no, Jack wasn't an ex-trick of Chuck's, they were just friends. It is a big problem for the straight community. They think that all gay guys have slept together. We can have guy friends who are just that, friends. I doubt any group of women, gay or straight have the same stereotype hanging around their necks.

Fictive family networks are often the only safe space, out of the closet and into the sun for LGBTQs to be themselves and to explore a new kind of social acceptance, usually unknown to them before.

Queer Families

The construction of the queer family unit is a fairly recent phenomenon. Recent changes in the adoption and foster care laws in many states and the use of invitro-fertilization and surrogates have opened up a plethora of options and possibilities for LGBTQ individuals and couples to parent children. In addition, many queers have children from past heterosexual relationships. Of particular interest to my research are the roles of biological familial attitudes and support, the establishment of fictive or non-related family members and the roles these types of familial relationships play in the construct of queer marriage and families.

Martin & Alex

Many of the interviewees who decided to start families after maintaining relationships lasting years, expressed how the process of becoming parents not only changed their lives, but their outlook on the systems in place for LGBTQs to become parents. They were all in agreement... becoming a parent was no accident. It took a great deal of commitment, planning and money for queer partners to parent children.

Martin and his partner, Alex after living together in a committed relationship for over ten years, spoke of the purposefulness of their decision to parent. "There was no accident in our decision to parent. We spent years and thousands of dollars to adopt Jerry," their six-year-old son.

We spent three years researching every adoption agency in our state. Once we found an agency that was open to our situation, it took another two years to be approved. After a lot of consideration and planning on our part Jerry came to us at three years old; neglected, seriously addicted to crack cocaine, undernourished and very sick. His biological mother was a cocaine addict who prostituted herself to get drug money. Due to Jerry's special needs, I decided that because Alex was the major bread-winner in the family that it would be better for me to become the stay at home dad... he didn't even sleep through the night when he came to us and could barely talk. Jerry was still in diapers.

Now just three years later, Jerry is flourishing. He is an active, now healthy six-year-old... There are two things I want people to know, first, Jerry was wanted by us, not an accident... he was planned. Second, even though I am the primary care giver, under state law Alex is the only legal parent.

Tom, Geoffrey & Suzy

Tom and Geoffrey have shared joint custody with Tom's ex-wife Suzy since their divorce in 1980. The two children, minors at the time spent the school weeks with their mother Suzy and weekends and holidays with their father Tom, and his partner Geoffrey.

I had the opportunity to interview Suzy as well for this project.

There was a lot more wrong with our marriage than Tom's sexuality but we managed to stay good friends with each other originally for the sake of the kids. Geoffrey became like another mother to them never missing a recital or play. Geoffrey would make their Halloween costumes, since I could not thread a needle. He would even attend their sports games with me when Tom was out of town on business. Throughout the years I grew to love Geoffrey as a brother and the caretaker of my children. It was as if he was an extension of me.

Now that the children are grown and in college, we spend every holiday together with Tom and Geoffrey's extended gay family. This simply a dynamic that works for us and the children are now grown, happy and well adjusted.

Tom states...

I always knew that I was gay, but it seemed that the only option open to me back in the 1970's was to get married and have a family. I don't regret it for an instant. It wasn't until I met Geoffrey that I knew I had been living a lie and had to change my life. I was afraid of devastating Sandy and the kids.

But with all of the love I received from Geoffrey, Suzy and the kids, I knew I had done the right thing. Geoffrey helped me raise my two children when their mother was not around and when she was he was just another parent to our children.

Today we are one big extended family. On holidays we have over our fictive, as you call them, family, our children and Suzy is right in the middle of everything.

Geoffrey's recollection was not much different...

I'll never forget the first time I met Suzy and the kids. What the hell had I gotten myself into? A future ex-wife and two children under

the age of ten... I knew two things. One, I loved Tom. Two, I had to make Suzy my friend and ally if the children were not going to suffer.

With a lot of hard work, it all seemed to work and the three of us raised three children anyone would be proud of. Even though we are anything but your conventional family, we have one that works.

The Support of the Family of Origin

The survey and subsequent interviews suggests that there is a strong correlation between the acceptance of an adult child's coming out and the support of one's family of origin. The literature (Bozett & Sussman, 1989; DeVine, 1984; Pearlman, 1992; Savin-Williams and Dubé, 1998) suggests that there is a strong correlation also observed between negative parental attitudes regarding homosexuality and the construction of fictive familial bonds. 79.5 % of the sample pool indicated that they have constructed fictive families as support systems. 37.9% of respondents reported that fictive families have replaced biological or families of origin, while 23.7% have found a way to combine biological and fictive familial networks. In addition, while maintaining relationships with their families of origin, 17.8% of individuals participating in the survey, kept their fictive and families of origin separate. LGBTQs with supportive parents were more likely to combine both fictive and biological families.

Interviews indicate that coming out to the family of origin was easier when supported by a significant other or partner. Yet, this can

also be a double-edge sword. Not only are parents and siblings being asked to accept a queer family member, but a same-sex spouse or partner as well, who they may or may not like as an individual; having nothing to do with sexual orientation.

Interviewees, who came out to his or her family without the support of a significant other, indicated that they did so often with the support of a fictive familial network in order to feel more complete and whole as an individual. Prior to coming out, many suggested ingenious feelings of self; living two separate lives, with one perhaps predicated upon a lies. Most indicated a liberating feeling that came about as a direct reaction to coming out. This was true even for those whose relationships with their families of origin changed dramatically. They all indicated feelings of self-actualization and empowerment as supported by the work of Corrigan and Matthews (2003).

Childrearing & Parental Support

One of the most surprising results I found had to do with childrearing. While 12.8% of the 219 respondents indicated that they were parents, an additional 53.7% indicated that they wanted to parent whether or not in a committed relationship. 87.7% of all respondents saw parenting as a personal issue or an individual right, while 6.9% saw queer parenting as a form of social assimilation.

Controlling for those respondents who were not parents, (N=184) 91.2% felt parenting was a personal right that the State had no business in regulating. It is important to note that most of the negative discourse surrounding LGBTQs as parents is due to a proliferation of misperceptions that somehow queer parents are unstable in their relationships. “You’re damned because you can’t marry, and damned because you want to marry,” one interviewee lamented. The respondents of the survey who do parent indicated that 40.9% were involved in stable same-sex relationships, while 32.4% rear their children as single parents. 47.1% of respondents indicated that they had been in the same committed relationship five or more years, with 29.4% in the same relationship in excess of nine years. Subsequent interviews confirmed that many participants have been in their relationships that have lasted twenty or more years.

In terms of their heterosexual peers, 38.2% of LGBTQ found that parenting had a positive effect on their social status, allowing them a common bond with their heterosexual counterparts. In addition, 55.9% stated that parenting had a beneficial effect with relationships with their families of origin, again giving LGBTQs a commonality with siblings and grandchildren to parents who may feel cut-off from their LGBTQ child’s lives.

Amanda

Queer parents indicate that closer familial bonds are created when children were introduced. Most suggested that they began to feel closer family ties when their parents became grandparents.

“It is as if we were finally human again when we started talking about adoption,” one couple reported. “Finally we had a commonality. Something we could share with our parents about our lives that they would understand.”

76% of respondents with children indicated that their relationship had benefited by the introduction of children, 16% reported that their relationships became more conflicted.

Josh

“Josh”, raised Mormon, at his parent’s insistence, left Paul, who he referred to as the love of his life to marry. Six years into his marriage discovered that he was married to a seriously mentally ill woman. She took her own life leaving “Josh” with four children to rear alone. No wife, no “Paul”, and a mother who refers to “Josh” as the “Son of Satan” and to his children; her own grandchildren as “Satan’s prodigy”.

Mark & Melanie

Queer parents also indicated that their families of origin were more apt to support LGBTQ marriage after parenting became a central issue in their queer prodigy's lives. Mark said, "My parents want us to get married now that we have adopted Ted. Even though we had been together for over 14 years, it was Ted that changed my parent's minds about marriage." Mark's experience was not an anomaly. Many of the other interviewees indicated similar experiences with their biological parents and families.

Melanie, whose children were the product of a previous heterosexual marriage, wants her parents and siblings to accept of the stability that marriage to her partner, Gail would bring to the familial dynamic. She reported that they are finally "coming around" and are at least finally willing to talk about and explore the issue of gay marriage and how it would positively impact the lives of their grandchildren.

Summary

In reviewing the results of the survey and subsequent interviews, I had to ask myself, "What is it about this populace, other than their innate¹⁵ sexuality that makes them different from other populations?" Nothing other than a lifetime of misunderstanding, misperception and

¹⁵ I say innate, because it is the belief of the majority of respondents that their sexual orientation is inborn and not chosen.

prejudice makes this population distinctive from any other. LGBTQs want and desire the same things that everyone else has. Chief among them is societal recognition of their most intimate relationships, in most cases the right to parent children without State involvement, to work and learn without discrimination, and acceptance from families of origin.

LGBTQs claim first-class citizenship when it comes to societal responsibilities; abiding by the laws of the State and our society, working, paying more than their fair share of taxes, serving their country, but with their mouths closed and lives closeted. However, LGBTQs are immediately relegated to second-class status when claiming rights to privacy, in intimate relationships, childbearing and rearing, and to live free from societal prejudice.

Most interviewees said that given a lifetime of misunderstanding, prejudice, discrimination and marginalization by societal expectations to be heterosexual had, at one point or another in their lives, to seek professional help to deal with feelings of being ostracized, both familial and societal. Yet, interestingly enough most of these same LGBTQs feel surprisingly optimistic about their political future.

Chapter Six

Future & Ongoing Research

My ongoing and future research into GLBTQ issues is to expand the *Queering the American Family* study from the concept of family to encompass the perception of community. The goal is to deconstruct the notion of “community”; a perceived link that unifies and coalesces queers as a single social unit, untouched by the stratifications of race, class and gender identification. The ongoing use of the concept of a queer or gay community with a single agenda is responsible for the continued the stereo-typing, misperception, marginalization and prejudice of an entire cross-section of the human populace. The *Queering the American Family* study suggests that subjects do not always identify their sexuality or sexual orientation with a sense of the whole self. Oftentimes, as brought out in the interview process of *Queering the American Family*, the respondent was more apt to identify most strongly with their given sex or race rather than their gender identification or sexual orientation. Deconstructing the intersections of race, class and gender, combined with sexual orientation of the queer subject, calls the precept of a unified queer community into question.

Oftentimes when researchers engage in investigations of the LGBTQ, studies identify and emphasize the differences between the heterosexual and the homosexual. This work is rendered invisible in the

lives of further disenfranchised groups and has contributed to the homogenization of minority ethnic and other groups into one LGBTQ community. In this ongoing research, intersection theory is used to explore how diverse identities and systems of oppression interconnect (Fish, 2008). As a theory, Intersectionality requires a more complex and nuanced thinking about the multiple dimensions of inequality and difference. Drawing on the work of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Woman of Color*, (1993), I will use three types of Intersectionality: methodological, structural and political to explore the meanings of being LGBTQ in this new millennium may have been permeated by race, class and gender. In addition I will look at how heterosexism intersects with the lives of minority ethnic gay men and women. “Intersection theory offers possibilities for understanding multiple inequalities without abandoning the politics of social movements (Fish, 2008).

Intersectionality Theory

According to Sylvia Walby (2007), Intersectionality is a relatively new term to describe, what she calls an old “questioning theorization of the relationship between different forms of social inequity” (p. 450). In the academic literature, Intersectionality began to expand and

encompass a widened concept of critical race theory. In a social system that favors wealthy, white, heterosexual men, recent decades has seen academic feminist discourse on the de-centering and pluralizing the categories of gender and women by examining how other intersecting classifications, such as race, class, gender and now sexuality shape or constitute the social actor.

The Inter-Connectedness of Race, Class, Gender, & the Sexually Marginalized

The further one gets from the assumed center; a middle-class, urban, white, gay male, the more problematic it is to recognize a collective identity for the social study of queer. Race, class and gender not only co-exist with the sexually marginalized subject but act in concert to change the queer and his/her relationship to and with the world at large. Queer is not just an identity. It is not a sexual preference. Queer is however, an experience; oftentimes political, a de-centered relationship between the sexualized “other”; shifting between independence and association. A story if you will, that has a history, a present and a future.

Sociologists have long been complicit as the discipline has helped to shape a history of invisibility followed by an “ambivalent relationship with positivism” (Gamison p. 349) on issues of sexuality. In recent years Sociology continues to refocus, but by creating grand theoretical

discourses of constructionism versus post-structuralism has only exacerbated the objectification of the subject of study, LGBTQs. Positive cultural or political meaning has yet to be created for the queer. Nor can it, until this significance is produced through the complexities and interconnectedness of race, class, gender and sexuality. While there is ample research that has addressed the gendered and racialized dimensions of social theoretical frameworks; to include sexuality and heterosexual bias provides foundation for the exclusion from accessing forms of economic and political assistance and restricts full access to civil rights and full citizenship. There still remain few sociologists who have included sexuality and gender “norms” as another layer of analysis (Gordon & Frasier, 1994; Lind, 2004; Moller, 2002; Phelan, 2001).

While most of academia is obsessed with constructing objects for study, the discursive condition of the queer subject, both proceeds and modifies the very formation of the subject. I argue that given the fluidity of gender, ongoing racisms, and stratifications in combination with the stigma that accompanies historic marginalization, there is no essential, single object of study. Sexuality cannot be studied in a vacuum. Theories of agency and subjectivity that had been assumed with earlier studies of sexuality paint an inaccurate, often distorted, even nebulous picture of a cohesive identity or community.

Race

Lacking in most analyses of LGBTQs is the lens of color. Sexually marginalized persons of color may experience multiple layers of oppression, as they must not only contend with negative societal reactions to their sexual orientation or gender nonconformity within, but from outside of racial group. In addition to racial prejudice there exists a perception of limited economic resources, inadequate political influence and a lacking of acceptance within their own ethnic or cultural communities (Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Bridges et al., 2003; Diaz, 1998; Green, 2000; Martinez & Sullivan, 1998). Some LGBTQ people of color feel that they must choose between two different stratified identities; a racial or ethnic identity or a LGBT or queer self. They may experience non-acceptance and acts of social discrimination and marginalization from both their racial community and the greater heterosexual community as a whole. Members of various racial and/or ethnic groups view a LGBTQ identity as a white lifestyle, inconsistent with ethnic traditions, and unacceptable within their own racialized community or culture and thus may reject a person of color who embodies such a sexual identification. This may be partially based on the belief that perceptions of same-sex sexual relationships and sexual activity are violations of traditional cultural values or rules, especially those related to stereotypical gender roles. People of color may also experience

discrimination within the predominately white LGBTQ community, as they may be objectified or eroticized by LGBTQs seeking to fulfill a sexualized fantasy. Greene (2000) argues that for lesbian women of color this collective oppression is further amalgamated by acts of sexism within both their own ethnic/racial and the LGBTQ communities and Bing (2004), has expanded this by noting the additional struggles of biracial gay men and lesbian women.

Gender

To state that the study of gender is historically linked to feminist studies is not too far reaching. Tania Modleski (2002) has written extensively about the two forms gender studies have taken. The first includes work that analyses heterosexual male power and male hegemony, with a concern for the effects of this power on the female subject. She centers her work on an awareness of how frequently this heterosexual male subjectivity works to appropriate “femininity” while oppressing women. The other form of gender studies appropriates “feminism” in order to re-center the discussion on “masculinity” without an accompanying discussion of gender hierarchy. However, the “gendered queer” further de-centers this subject of study. Once again, given the overlapping gradations of gender roles, gender classifications

and gender performativities, gender cannot be discussed as a representative of any collective identity.

Academia has treated the queer as if he/she is or even can be represented within a set of fixed classifications. Kath Weston states in her book, *Render Me, Gender Me*, “Anything and anyone can be gendered in a variety of ways” (1996; p. 2-3), when centering same-sex desires and relationships. Homosexuality has historically been studied as if doubling the classifications of sexual identity was sufficient. However, the gay male, male power, and male hegemony exists only when there is an assumption of some fixed masculine role. The same would true for lesbian women if femininity was also fixed and lives outside of the constructs of race and class. Queering gender only adds to the multiple gradations and ambiguities, sometimes overlapping gendered identities that work in concert to de-center the subject of study.

Class

Class is an experience that is lived through race, gender and sexuality. There exists no universal class identity, just as there is no single collective racial, ethnic, gender or sexual identity. The notion that race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality are particular, where as class is general, not only presumes that class struggle is some sort of race and

gender-neutral terrain but takes for granted that movements focused on race, gender or sexuality necessarily undermine any class unity.

The homophobia that still exists within academia is in part a result of a missed opportunity to deconstruct class and class-consciousness. Class is comprised of peoples of differing races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, in addition to socio-economic stratifications. Within class, researchers have all but ignored the shared elements of the sexually marginalized experience. There is a lack of social commentary as conditions for potential solidarity between LGBTQs, the working class, the racially oppressed and the sexually stratified have yet to be adequately explored. This lack of academic and public discourse has allowed an existing schism to grow deeper between the sexually marginalized and other historically oppressed groups in the United States. An aggravated anti-gay bigotry within other marginalized racial/ethnic groups and the working class has been exacerbated to a point that it has become impossible to see that the idea of compulsory heterosexism which underpins the capitalist system as in direct opposition to their own self interests.

Summary

Ongoing and future research aims to dispel the myth of a single queer community, with a single identity, based on sexual orientation.

Contrary to the allegations of the religious-right; the Family Research Council its political pundit and spokesperson, there is no single LGBTQ agenda unencumbered by the rampant beliefs, myths and fallacies accompanying institutional homophobia. Community, without the stratifications of race, class gender and sexuality only exists in the eyes of those that fear a queer political conspiracy.

While queers are in total, limited in the rights and responsibilities guaranteed to all United States citizens, based on this LGBTQs do not constitute a separate and unified community full of social and political discourses. Queers exist across both the social and political spectrums. Even though there are and have been well organized political and social movements to help assuage the lack of access to the political process and to ensure equal rights and full citizenship, individuals often differ, not only in the means necessary to bring about such changes in the rights and responsibilities, but there is disagreement about whether or not all LGBTQs want change: State sanctioned marriage being just one of the issues in dispute. Many embrace their unequal status as a badge of honor living satisfying lives despite the homophobia and sexual marginalization that permeates the social fabric of these United States. My future research into the lives of the LGBTQ will include personal agency in its analysis, along with the stratifications of race, class, gender and sexuality thereby dispelling the fallacy of a unified LGBT community

and giving a multi-dimensional view of those living outside of the sexual norm.

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Appendix A

Web-Based Survey

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
CHICAGO • SPRINGFIELD • URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Queering the American Family: Belief, Fallacy & Myth

Basic Demographic Information

Choose one

1. How do you identify your sex?

- Female
- Inter-sex
- Male
- Other

2. Are you "out"?

- Yes, all of the time
- Yes, but guarded
- Sometimes
- Almost never
- No

3. Provide your age

- 30 - 34
- 35 - 39
- 40 - 44
- 45 - 49
- 50 - 54
- 55 - 59
- 60 - 64
- 65 +

6. With which race do you most identify?

- African - American
- Asian and/or Indian
- White and/or Caucasian

- Mixed race
- Native American/Pacific Islander
- Other
- Refuse to answer

7. Are you of Latino/a or of Hispanic origin?

- Yes
- No
- N/A
- Refuse to answer

Your Household

8. How many people currently reside in your household?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 +

Choose the answer that most applies to your living situation

9. Your Marital or Relationship Status

- Single
- Partnered but not living together
- Married - Opposite Sex
- Partnered - Opposite Sex
- Partnered - Same Sex
- Married but Separated due to marital or relationship problems
- Partnered but separated due to relationship problems
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Never Married or Partnered
- Other
- Refuse to answer

Indicate all that apply

10. Relationship to Respondent of Other Persons Living Full-time in Your Household?

- Husband or Wife
- Partner (Opposite Sex)
- Partner (Same-Sex)
- Biological Child/Children
- Step-Child/Children
- Adopted Child or Children
- Foster Child/Children
- Child or Children of Same-Sex Partner
- Son-in-Law and/or Daughter-in-Law
- Parent
- Parent-in-Law
- Grandparent
- Brother and/or Sister
- Step-brother and/or Step-sister
- Half-brother and/or Half-sister
- Brother-in-Law and/or Sister-in-Law
- Grandchild/Grandchildren
- Other blood relative
- Roommate
- Friend
- Other Non-Relative
- Ex-spouse/Partner
- N/A

11. If there is a significant "other"; Spouse, Partner, Lover residing with you, how long has that person been living with you?

- < 1 year
- 1 - 2 years
- 3 - 4 years
- 5 - 6 years
- 7 - 8 years
- 8 - 9 years
- 9 + years

12. Are there minor children residing with you at least 50% of the time?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

You, Your Work and/or School

13. Where do you currently live?

- On a farm
- In or near a small town
- A small city (10,000 - 49,000)
- A medium city (50,000 - 99,000)
- A suburb of a large city (100,000 - 250,000)
- A large city (250,000 - 999,999)
- A metropolis (1,000,000 +)

14. What is the highest grade you completed in school?

- I am still in school
- 8 years or less
- 9 - 11 years
- High School Graduate
- Some College
- College Graduate (B.A. or equivalent)
- Some graduate work
- Master's Degree
- Professional Degree (MD, PhD. etc)

Check all that apply

15. What is your current employment status?

- Full time (35 hours or more)
- Part-time (34 hours or less)
- Full or part-time caregiver
- Full or part-time student
- N/A

Refuse to answer

16. Are you "out" at work or school?

Yes

No

N/A

Refuse to answer

17. Have you ever felt that you were discriminated against at work or school because of your sexual orientation?

yes

No

N/A

I'm not out at work or school

Decline to answer

18. What impact, if any has being GLBT had on your job or career and/or schooling?

Very Harmful

Somewhat Harmful

Harmful

No Effect

Helpful

Somewhat helpful

Very Helpful

I'm not out at work or school

N/A

How satisfied are you with...

19. ... your career and/or job or your schooling?

Very

Fairly

Dissatisfied

N/A

20. ...the amount of money you make?

Very

Fairly

Dissatisfied

N/A

21. ... your opportunities for advancement?

Very

Fairly

Dissatisfied

N/A

22. ... the kind of work you do?

Very

Fairly

Dissatisfied

N/A

23... the people or company you work for?

Very

Fairly

Dissatisfied

N/A

24. What was your "gross" personal income (income before taxes) from all jobs, business and financial interests during the past year?

- less than \$ 4,999.00
- \$ 5,000.00 - \$ 9,999.99
- \$10,000.00 - \$14,999.99
- \$15,000.00 - \$19,999.99
- \$20,000.00 - \$24,999.99
- \$25,000.00 - \$29,999.99
- \$30,000.00 - \$39,999.99
- \$40,000.00 - \$49,999.99
- \$50,000.00 - \$59,999.99
- \$60,000.00 or more

Parents & Childhood

Check all that apply

25. Indicate the family members, if any that know of your sexual orientation...

- None
- Father
- Mother
- Biological Brother(s)
- Biological Sister(s)
- Step and/or Half Brother(s)
- Step and/or Half Sister(s)
- Grandparent(s)

- Aunt(s)
- Uncle(s)
- Cousin(s)
- Other Biological Family
- Biological Child(ren)
- Step-Child(ren)
- Adopted Child(ren)
- Spouse or Partners Child(ren)
- Foster Child(ren)
- In-Laws

Check all that apply

26. Did you live with your parents (biological/step/foster) until you were 18?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

27. If "No", why not?

- Parents Divorced
- Parents Never Married
- Father Died
- Mother Died
- Both Parents Died
- Other

28. Were you out to your parents before you were 18 or while living at home?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not out to my parents
- N/A

29. Was "coming out" a choice that you made?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not "out"
- N/A

30. If you were "out" or "outed" before you were 18, did that affect your living situation?

Yes

No

N/A

How would your parents respond to the following statements?

31. LGBT sexuality is immoral.

Strongly Agree

Agree

No Opinion

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

32. Sex before marriage is immoral.

Strongly Agree

Agree

No Opinion

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

How would your siblings respond to the following statements?

33. LGBT sexuality is immoral.

Strongly Agree

Agree

No Opinion

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I have no siblings

34. Sex before marriage is immoral.

Strongly Agree

Agree

No Opinion

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I have no siblings.

35. Before you were born, did either or both parents want you to be of the opposite sex?

Both

Father

Mother

Neither

I don't know

36. During the time you lived with your parents, how much physical affection did your mother and father show you?

- Much
- Some
- Very little
- None

37. When you were growing up, who made most of the decisions regarding childrearing?

- Father
- Mother
- Both equally

38. How much disagreement was there between your parents regarding these decisions?

- A great deal
- Some
- Very little
- None at all

39. While you were growing up, how often did your parents have a major disagreement or fight?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Not very often
- Almost never

40. As a child or adolescent, were you ever physically afraid of your father?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Almost never
- never
- N/A

41. As a child or adolescent, were you ever physically afraid of your mother?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Almost never
- Never

N/A

42. During these years, how open were you and your parents about your sexuality?

Very much

Somewhat

Very little

Not at all

43. Between ages of 12 and 18... Which word or words best characterizes the relationship between you and your father?

Loving and supportive

Amiable and friendly

Apathetic

Aloof and distant

Hostile and/or angry

44. Between ages of 12 and 18... Which word or words best characterizes the relationship between you and your mother?

Loving and supportive

Amiable and friendly

Apathetic

Aloof and distant

Hostile and/or angry

45. Between ages of 12 and 18... Which word or words best characterizes the relationship between your father and your mother?

Loving and supportive

Amiable and friendly

Apathetic

Aloof and distant

Hostile and/or angry

46. Between the ages of 12 and 18, what proportion of your friends, your own age were of the same-sex?

All

Most

More than half

Less than half

Only a few

None

47. Between the ages of 12 and 18, what proportion of your friends your age, were of the opposite sex?

All

Most

- More than half
- Less than half
- Only a few
- None

48. When considering your sexuality between the ages of 12 and 18, how accepted did you feel within your own peer group?

- Very accepted
- Somewhat accepted
- Leading a false life
- A loner or social outcast
- Independent

49. Based on the previous question, how often did you feel that way?

- All of the time
- Most of the time
- More than half of the time
- Less than half of the time
- Only a few of the time
- None of the time

50. Between the ages of 12 and 18, did your parents discourage you from relationships with people who broke with traditional gender roles?

- Often
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Never

51. Between the ages of 12 and 18, to what extent did you consider yourself "different"?

- Often
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Never

52. Between the ages of 12 and 18, were you sexually active?

- Yes
- No

N/A

53. If so, how often?

Often

Rarely

Sometimes

Never

54. If you were sexually active between 12 and 18, your partners were....?

Exclusively Same-sex

Exclusively Opposite Sex

Both Sexes equally

Both Sexes, but mostly the Same-sex

Both Sexes, but mostly the Opposite-sex

N/A

Nuclear Familial Reaction

55. Has the knowledge of your sexual orientation or the fear that your biological family would discover it changed the dynamic of your relationships?

Yes, there was or would be a giant rift in our relationship(s)

Somewhat. We speak and see each other but my personal or sexual life is never discussed

No, they are open and welcoming

56. Are you currently estranged from your biological family?

Yes, I have no contact with my biological family

Somewhat, We speak and see each other but my personal life is off limits

No they are open and welcoming

57. Have you found relationships within the LGBT community that you consider "family"?

Yes

No

N/A

58. Has this extended "family" replaced or exceeded the bonds you have with your biological family?

Yes, I am closer to my extended or chosen "family" than my biological family.

My biological is open and accepting of my life. My extended family has blended and they are accepted.

- I now have two separate families, one biological and one extended
- Somewhat. I can only share my personal life with my extended or chosen family

Marriage

59. Are you now, or have you ever been legally married to someone of the opposite sex?

- Currently
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Never
- N/A

60. At what age did this marriage occur?

- < 20
- 21 - 25
- 26 - 30
- > 30
- N/A Never legally married

61. Before this marriage did you know or suspect that you might be LGBT?

- Yes, I had 1 or more same-sex experiences before marriage
- Yes, but I thought marriage would somehow change my sexual desires
- No, but I had 1 or more same-sex experiences. That was just experimentation.... everyone does it.
- No never... it was the furthest thing from my mind
- No, but I fantasized

62. How long have/were you married?

- < 1 year
- 2 - 5 years
- 6 -10 years
- > 10 years
- N/A Never been married

63. In terms of your own happiness, how would you rate this marriage?

- Very happy
- Moderately Happy
- Moderately Unhappy
- Unhappy
- Very Unhappy
- N/A Never married

64. Did you disclose your LGBT desires to your spouse?

- Yes
- No
- He / She knew without being told
- N/A

65. What did you tell your spouse that you wish or intended to do about your LGBT desires?

- Nothing
- Quit entirely
- Seek counseling
- Continue as before
- Separate or divorce
- N/A

66. How did your spouse respond?

- Knew, without being told
- Shock / Amazement
- Anger
- Continue as before
- Separate / Divorce

67. How much impact did your disclosure have on your divorce or separation?

- It was the main reason
- Very much, but there were also many other reasons
- Somewhat
- Very little
- Not at all. We are not divorced or separated

N/A

Please check all that apply

68. How do you view LGBT marriage?

- A form of social transgression
- A form of social assimilation
- A commitment between my spouse and me only
- A relationship that must be recognized by the state

69. Are you currently involved in a relationship you would like to have legally sanctioned and protected as in marriage?

- Yes
- No
- No, I don't need nor want marriage. However I want the same rights and responsibilities

indicate all that apply

70. Do you think that a legal, state-sanctioned marriage is necessary to validate LGBT relationships?

- Yes. I equate marriage to social equality
- The State must recognize my relationship with my partner/spouse, but they can call it anything they want to.
- No. Marriage is an outdated social institution. I want no part of it
- No. Marriage is the only way to ensure equal rights and protections

Children and Child Rearing

71. Are you and/or your spouse or partner parents?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

72. If so, how many?

- 1
- 2 - 3
- 4 - 5
- More than 5
- N/A

Indicate all that apply

73. My/Our Children were the product of....

- Past heterosexual relationship
- Adoption
- Artificial insemination or IVF
- Surrogacy
- My partner or spouse's biological children
- N/A

74. Is parenting important to you?

- Yes, I have children for that very reason
- Yes, I am not currently a parent but would like to be
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Indicate all that apply

75. I see parenting as a form of ...

- Social assimilation
- Social transgression
- My right as a part of society
- No one's business but my own

76. In terms of your heterosexual peers, has parenting had an effect on your social status?

- Enhanced/Increased, Parenting gives us a common bond
- Diminished/Decreased. Parenting as a LGBT person is just one more reason for social marginalization
- Neither, I have noticed no change
- I haven't thought about it
- N/A I have no children

77. Has parenting had a change on your relationship with your biological family?

- Yes, they are more accepting of me and my "family"
- No, they are even less accepting
- I have no contact with my biological family
- N/A, I have no children

78. Has parenting changed your relationship with your spouse/partner?

- Yes, we are even more committed
- No. Parenting is an extension of our already existing "family".



- Parenting has put a strain on our relationship
- We have no children as of yet
- We want no children

79. Would you like to be part of a more extensive interview about LGBT marriage, family and parenting? If so, Please include your email address and a researcher will contact you to set a time for an Instant Message or telephone interview.

[Submit Survey](#)

Survey Builder WebTool created by the Office of Web Services

Appendix B

Interview Script

Survey # _____

Location _____

Date _____

Time _____

This interview will be tape recorded or conducted
Via Instant Message.

Passing for Straight:

1. How do you most identify?
2. When did you first notice or discover that you were somehow different from your peers?
3. In what ways would you say you differed?
4. What was that experience like for you?
5.for your family?
6.for your friends?
7. In terms of group identification, how do you most identify?
8. If your group identification changes due to environmental and/or social circumstances, how do your race, your economic class and gender play into this equation?
9. How much of a role does your sexual identity play in your overall life?
10. In your recollection, did you ever try to “pass” for heterosexual?
11. What was “passing” like?
12. How long did “passing” last?

Experiences:

13. Can you describe what it was like and why you chose to “pass”?
14. What event changed this for you?
15. Tell me about the discrimination you have experienced within your nuclear and extended family?
16. How would you describe your adolescence?
17. Your early adult years?
18. Your life today?
19. There is all of this talk about “tolerance” for LGBTs and “queers”, why haven’t we as a community demanded “acceptance”?
20. Given the fact that we as a sexually marginalized population have been ostracized by societal institutions, is assimilation something we should demand or strive for?
21. Tell me about the discrimination you have experienced within your immediate community; either to someone close to you, or to yourself?
22. What were the consequences and how did you cope?
23. How would you describe your current support system?
24. Given a lifetime of misunderstanding, prejudice, discrimination, marginalization and /or being ostracized by societal expectations, have you ever felt the need to seek professional help?
25. If so, what were the consequences and how did this experience empowers you or was this a injurious experience for you?

You and Society:

26. What role has religion played in your life?
27. Will you elaborate?
28. What is the biggest misnomer or misperception the general public has about GLBT or queers?
29. Who do you blame for these distortions?
30. How would you change these perceptions?
31. Given the current political climate, do you think that social acceptance of LGBTs or queers are even possible?
32. How would you expect positive changes in public perceptions of LGBT or queers to come about?
33. How are you involved in creating change?
34. Are you optimistic about your future as an “out” GLBT or queer person?
35. Looking back on your experience s as an adolescent, do you think GLBT or queer youth of today have it easier, more difficult or is life just different?
36. Please elaborate.....
37. When I was coming up or out, the general sentiment was “Live fast, die young ... leave a good looking corpse”. Do you find that beauty and youth is still that important?
38. Many people that I know, because of HIV and many other reasons have never planned for their elder years, what provisions have you made?