



**A University of Sussex PhD thesis**

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

<http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details

Making Queer Families: Identity, LGBTQ Parents, Media, and Cultural  
Representation

Elizabeth Helen Reed

PhD Gender Studies (Humanities)

University of Sussex

November 2016

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

## Summary

This thesis investigates how lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer parents interact with media representations. I identify two significant gaps in current scholarship on this topic. One between queer theory and LGBTQ sociology, where claims about the possibility of radical politics are disconnected from studies of everyday life. The other, between media studies and sociology of the family, where the central role of media in constituting identity drops out of discussions about everyday LGBTQ lives. As a result of this mapping of the field I formulated these key research questions: how do LGBTQ parents negotiate media culture? How do LGBTQ parents negotiate visibility and intelligibility for their families and how do they experience media invisibility? And, what conditions of family and what broader social possibilities are generated by the interactions LGBTQ parents have with media?

These research questions framed the design of a project in which I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty LGBTQ parents living in the UK. The thesis takes this primary empirical material together with reference to scholarship on media culture, family formation, and queerness, and posits that media representation is a core constituent of identity formation and central to how we can understand the making and maintenance of LGBTQ-parented families. I examine how ideas about what a 'normal' or heterosexual family looks like shape the experiences and quest for intelligibility, legitimacy and visibility; how parents conceptualise their families in relation to the possibility of articulating radical identities; and the notion of generational rupture and inheritance as it is managed through media and community.

The key findings of this thesis are that LGBTQ parents employ a variety of strategies to tackle media invisibility; LGBTQ parents both conform to, and resist, narratives of family as intrinsically normative; LGBTQ parents negotiate new representations of family and produce new narratives of the meaning of radicalism. Finally, I show that media is central to the identity work of LGBTQ parents, and is strongly implicated in the construction of home and family life. I offer a thesis which contests the meaning of futurity and normativity in queer theory and interjects in the discussion on the cultural formation and meaning of family.

### Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support – both practical and emotional – of many people. First of all I would like to thank my participants who opened their homes to me and shared their experiences. The various cups of tea, lifts to and from train stations, lunches, and above all, the time and candour, offered by these people made this project possible and I am grateful to them all. In addition I am thankful for the various networks who helped me distribute my call for participants, particularly Rainbow Families Edinburgh, Time 4 T, and the LGBT Ageing listserve.

I must thank my supervisors, Sharif Mowlabocus and Kate O’Riordan, whose consistent, thoughtful, and detailed guidance and support for my project have provided clear routes forward and given me faith in my work when I was least sure of myself. The journey to having this thesis finished has been long, but the rich and welcoming PhD community in the School of Media, Film and Music has helped make that journey easier. I am grateful for the support I’ve received in the last 4 years and simply do not have space to individually list all those people who have helped in both small and large ways.

As well as academic support, a whole village of friends and family have been my unwavering cheer squad. In particular I want to thank Becky Lucas, Sandra Duffy, Holly Chard, Hanna Cesek, Carrie Phillips, Richard Mills, David Bradford, Matt and Nic Baxter, and Kat Gupta, who variously provided advice and support during my research and as I concluded my writing up. Also, I offer a huge thank you to my massive ‘Manics family’, especially Sim Burton, who have provided love, belief, support, and pictures of Nicky Wire’s legs to get me through, when I most needed it.

Finally I want to thank all the people who helped me believe it was possible to pursue this project, who made me proud to be queer, and who have inspired and encouraged me to study and push myself since I first embarked upon higher education. For this I am indebted to David Bowie, Manic Street Preachers (especially Nicky Wire’s politics degree), my peers on the 2007/2008 MA course in Sexual Dissidence in Literature and Culture, and my parents.

## Contents

### Chapter One

Introduction .....	1
Context .....	4
Scope of Thesis and Language Used .....	14
Research Questions .....	16
Structure of the Thesis .....	17
Conclusion .....	19

### Chapter Two

Methodology .....	20
Selecting the Research Tool .....	20
Participant Demographics, Recruitment, Challenges, Solutions, and Limitations .....	23
Ethics and Participant Involvement .....	27
<i>Managing Risk and Conflict</i> .....	28
<i>Participant Involvement</i> .....	29
My Role as Researcher .....	30
Issues of Power .....	33
<i>Reciprocity</i> .....	33
<i>Sharing Knowledge</i> .....	35
<i>Gender and Rapport</i> .....	37
<i>Locations and the Role of Place in Interviews</i> .....	38
Analysis .....	40
Conclusions .....	42

### Chapter Three

Looking 'Normal' .....	43
'Passing' as Straight .....	45
Becoming Visible .....	48
Resisting Gender Norms and Gendered Roles .....	52
Appropriate Visibility .....	56
Reading Queerly .....	60
Not Fitting .....	67
Disidentification in Responses to Media .....	69
Conclusions .....	73

## Chapter Four

Being 'Radical' .....	77
Against Assimilation .....	81
The Necessity of Connectedness .....	86
Happy to be Homonormative .....	93
Expanded Families and Unintelligibility .....	97
Crafting Hybrid Identities .....	104
Conclusions .....	110

## Chapter Five

Hierarchies: The Sorting of Identities and Value by Audiences and Through Representation .....	113
Hierarchies of Identity Encoded in Media .....	116
Hierarchies of Audience Identities and Media Contexts for Visibility .....	130
Audience Media Hierarchies .....	136
Sorting Contexts and Considering the Use of Representation .....	145
Conclusions .....	153

## Chapter Six

Inheritance: Generational Rupture and Passing-On Through Media .....	156
Generational Succession or Generational Rupture? .....	158
Negotiating Parent Identities and the Language of Family .....	164
Community as Resource and Community Inheritance .....	170
Geographical Isolation, Community, and Class .....	174
Passing-On Media .....	179
The Neoliberal Turn? .....	186
Conclusions .....	189

## Chapter Seven

Conclusion .....	192
Summary of Findings .....	192
Limitations .....	196
Implications .....	197
Concluding Points .....	199

## Bibliography

Primary Materials .....	201
Secondary Materials .....	201

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions.....	218
Appendix 2: Information Sheet.....	220
Appendix 3: Consent Form.....	222
Appendix 4: What is the best thing about your family? .....	223
Appendix 5: List of Media Cited in Interviews .....	234



## List of Figures

Figure 1: Participant Information.....	25
Figure 2: Panel from Vaughan & Staples (2012) <i>Saga</i> . ....	61
Figure 3: 'The Egg' (1970) <i>The Clangers</i> .....	64
Figure 4: 'Schooled' (2012) <i>Modern Family</i> .....	118
Figure 5: Phil and Teds Buggy Advert. ....	124
Figure 6: Buggy Advert featuring Same-Sex Couple .....	124

## Chapter One

### Introduction

In 1988 the Local Government Act was passed in the UK. It included a clause, known as Section 28, which prohibited local authorities from “intentionally promot[ing] homosexuality or publish[ing] material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” and from “the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship” (*Local Government Act 1988*: section 28). This legislation was introduced in response to the increasing circulation of media which represented and legitimated lesbian and gay relationships. Specifically, the supposed availability of a book for children which represented a child with two gay fathers, *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin* (1983), was cited by Conservative MPs as evidence of homosexual ‘propaganda’ being targeted at children (Deer, 1988). The introduction of Section 28 illustrates the way in which media can alter the political landscape, dramatically reshaping the way in which different subjectivities are imagined and having wide-ranging implications for the availability of representations of minority identities. As Silverstone says “media allows us to do different things: they provide different social and political affordances” (2007: 5). Representation, whether its restriction or diversification, is a political issue.

Media is a core constituent of identity (Kellner, 2011). It is through a complex and ongoing process of refusals, re-articulations and identifications with representation, that we can craft a sense of self (Driver, 2007: 2). Cultural representations, their restriction, availability and circulation “have real consequences for real people” (Dyer, 2002b: 3) as they try to craft stable lives and access legitimacy in society. For queer people, historically marginalised through the censorship of representation and the use of legislation (such as Section 28) to restrict the circulation of images and narratives of queer legitimacy, media is an especially important component in constituting and articulating stable identities (Dyer, 1990: 286). In a media-saturated culture, representation offers a way to locate ourselves in the social world (Silverstone, 2007: 5) and a route by which we might stake a claim in the discourses of social legitimacy. Managing negotiations of representation, and the articulation of new and emerging identities as families, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) parents are located at the intersection of politics and culture, society and family. In this thesis I will investigate the lived experiences of LGBTQ people seeking cultural and imaginative space in a landscape shaped by media representation and legislative regulation of families and intimate lives. My focus will be on the central role of media in constituting and shaping the everyday lives of LGBTQ parents.

The process of articulating and constructing a self is one which is profoundly connected to the social and cultural context (Giddens, 1991). In turn, the production of the self has a direct influence on the future possibilities for others' self-formation and the construction of social life (Giddens, 1991: 2). Identity is bounded by the possibilities of subjecthood allowed and represented in media; "identities are...constituted within, not outside representation" (Hall, 1996: 4). Media representation, and the recognition and legitimation it makes possible, shapes the experience of everyday life: "how we are seen determines in part how we are treated: how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation" (Dyer, 2002b: 1). Media acts as a repository of cultural knowledge on different groups, and a resource by which we may negotiate our own and others' identity narratives (Kellner, 2011: 7). The link between the process of forming and articulating new identities, and the reflexive shift in the cultural landscape to acknowledge these subjectivities, can be seen in the "explosion" of LGBTQ people parenting since the 1990s (Bankowski and Hesla, 2013; Perez, 2012) and the attendant surge in visibility for some of these family forms in media and in schools (Moritz, 2004; Streeting, 2012). In addition, the various, significant legislative changes in the UK (detailed below) which formalise recognition of LGBTQ-parented families and establish channels for the recognition of intimate relationships have brought the lives and families of LGBTQ people firmly into the public arena. The increasing media visibility for non-heterosexual parenting and the space created for dialogue about the meaning and use of family in society is one indication of the timeliness of this research which locates the experiences and identity building practices of LGBTQ parents in relation to media representation.

In 2003 the legislative landscape of the UK began to change significantly for LGBTQ people. First, in 2003, section 2a of the *Local Government Act 1986* (which was the section amended by section 28 of the *Local Government Act 1988*) was repealed, opening the way for non-heterosexual family relationships to be represented and discussed freely in schools for the first time in 15 years (*Local Government Act 2003*; section 122). In 2004 the *Gender Recognition Act* was introduced, allowing transgender people to acquire a gender recognition certificate and a new birth certificate and with it, full legal recognition of their gender (*Gender Recognition Act 2004*). In 2008 the *Human Embryology and Fertilisation Act* made provisions for women in civil partnerships to be recognised as the legal parent of the child their partner conceived, and made additional provision for people in marriages, civil partnerships or "enduring family relationships" to be identified as a child's parents after birth to a gestational surrogate (*Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008*; section 42 and 54). Finally, in 2013 the UK government

legalised same-sex marriage (*Marriage [Same Sex Couples] Act 2013*), building on the existing civil partnership legislation of 2004 (*Civil Partnership Act 2004*) and further securing parental rights of couples in same-sex relationships. These pieces of legislation, all passed in a 10 year period, provide a political and legal backdrop to the changing representation of LGBTQ people and their experiences in the UK.

The public debate which accompanied these reforms was represented in media; of particular concern were the meaning of family, how family is changing, what children will learn about non-heterosexual lives in schools and through broadcast media, and an anxiety to identify and represent who LGBTQ parents are (see for example Carpenter, 2013; Carrie, 2012; Dickinson, 2008; Grant, 2003; Higginson, 2008; Morgan, 2013; O'Brien, 2012). Gabb and Fink caution that whilst the above legislative changes have "afforded parental rights and legitimacy to lesbian and gay couples in the eyes of the law...on the ground, heteronormative understandings of family are harder to destabilise" (2015: 102).

In this thesis I will explore how LGBTQ parents living in the UK today experience, or destabilise, "heteronormative understandings of family" by looking at the stories they tell about their families through and in response to media; their reported [un]ease in building and sustaining families; and the relationship they have to representations of family across a range of media. As I have indicated above, LGBTQ people have been made newly visible in society through legislative change and increasingly diverse media representation. Media orientates individuals in culture, and orientates others toward or away from us: "we are continuously hailed [into place] by various ideological apparatuses...including the mainstream media" (Muñoz, 1999: 33). The centrality of media in modern life, continuously locating and placing us in relation to power as well as helping us locate and describe ourselves will, therefore, cause "some obvious social patterns of organization as a result" (McLuhan, 1964: 22). McLuhan and Muñoz's evaluations of the role of media suggest that it is through media that different social possibilities can be enabled and various life courses given meaning. As "social actors become progressively dependent on the supply of public meanings and accounts of the world in attempting to make sense of their own" (Silverstone, 2007: 109), I will ask; what are the experiences of LGBTQ parents in finding and using media representation to develop their family identity narratives? How do media contribute to, or inhibit, the circulation of narratives and images of non-heterosexual families? And, what other resources are implicated in generating meanings and locating LGBTQ-parented families in the world?

The existing literature on families, identity formation in media society, and LGBTQ subjectivities, fails to offer a comprehensive address to these questions. I propose to offer a thesis which draws together these strands and, with rigorous focus on the lived experiences of LGBTQ parents in the UK today, offer an intervention on the debates around meaning, formation, and the possibilities of, LGBTQ-parented families in a media culture. With close reference to the reported experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ parents I will argue that existing theorisations of queer family are limited by a focus on radical politics disengaged from the lived experiences of LGBTQ people. And that, additionally, the role of media representation in family life is more central, and is generative of greater ambivalence, than previous research suggests.

### Context

Family is one of the key ways in which social life is organised (Althusser, 2001). Whether estranged or intricately connected, our relationship to family comes to figure a crucial point by which we are orientated (Gillis, 1997:80), and by which we locate ourselves in the world. Due to the frequency with which familial structures are produced across cultures and time, it has long been a key site of sociological and cultural investigation. In 1949, Murdock confidently proclaimed that:

the family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults. (1949: 1)

In the explosion of scholarship on the family in the post-war years, social anthropologists scrambled to offer definitions of family, and taxonomies of its structure and function. Successful family structures were defined as being hierarchical (naturally headed by the male breadwinner) and requiring distinct division of roles along gendered lines if they are to endure and if society is to “succeed” (Parson, 1949:190-191). Such work insisted on the permanence and enduring nature of (usually nuclear) family organisation (Anshen, 1949) without, apparently, any concession made to the relatively recent development of the privatised and domesticated home, the division of family from work, or the different organisation of work and family life in working-class families (Alwin, 2004: 144; Budig, 2004: 417-418; Lamb, 1982: 2). Homosexuality and associated gender transgression (“transvestites, effeminate men, and masculine women” [Murdock, 1949: 318]) were considered antithetical to the social organisation of family. LGBTQ people were therefore explicitly excluded from the conceptualisation of family life. Media representation at this time, through to the late 1960s,

echoed this sociological endorsement of a single model of family, offering images of ideal families in happy, heteronormative homes (Taylor, 1989: 29-32). Taylor notes that the discrepancies between “the social worlds inside and outside television seem startling”, especially during the 1960s when television represented families as increasingly homogenous, even as social and political conditions diversified and destabilised (1989: 32). Representation participated in the ideological regulation of the meaning of family. As media increasingly offered studies in “domestic distress”, expanded families and step-families (Taylor, 1989: 65), the “family identity produced on...television [was] much more likely to include your dog than your homosexual brother or sister” (Bersani, 1989:203).

Despite the essentialising narratives of family offered in the early scholarship, family has always been and remains an amorphous institution (Bernades, 1985). Nonetheless, attempts to control and direct the discourse of family emerge throughout the history of its study and its representation. In the late twentieth and early twenty first century, parenting, and its success in turning out ‘healthy’ children, became a key paradigm through which family was studied (Alwin, 2004: 146-147). This work reemphasised the family as the central site of production of a desirable future society and the family was increasingly represented as the source of, and solution to, a myriad of social problems. In 1987, then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher suggested the solution to the AIDS crisis did not lay in greater education of [presumed gay] young people, but in a [re]valuation of the family as the place where such “problems” could be “solved”; “you are denying the solution unless the family structure continues” (Thatcher, 1987). Homosexual subjectivities were cast as not just anti-social for their failure to take their proper place in the system of producing and raising children, but also as the diseased problem which could be solved if only they returned to families and away from hedonistic, individual, non-reproductive lifestyles. The rhetoric of the family as a moral good and force for social cohesion, established in opposition to the dangerous, diseased, disruptive, and non-reproductive queer reinforced the process of exclusion by which queerness came to stand against the family, and be characterised as a moral threat, and risk to society at large (Bersani, 1989; Hicks, 2011: 3).

The threatening, disruptive queer was ever-present in media at this time. The Bermondsey by-election of 1983 was a striking example of this trend in representation, branded by *Gay News* ‘the most homophobic by-election of all time’ because of the nature of the coverage on (and party in-fighting over) Labour candidate, Peter Tatchell (Robinson, 2007: 155). Tatchell came to figure the very heart of the debate about the place of homosexual people in society. His explicitly socialist political position was linked to his sexuality to ‘confirm’ the emerging

construction of the homosexual as a threat to social order. In the wake of attacks on his competency and suitability as a MP in the press and from both Labour and the Conservatives, Tatchell lost the by-election (Robinson, 2007: 157-164). His widely-reported, thoroughly public, defeat underlined the political discourse which held that LGBTQ people had no place in public life.

With such moralising and essentialising discourses on what family 'is' and with repeated disavowals of the possibility of LGBTQ people participating in family and social life circulating in politics and media, what does it mean to establish family outside of the preferred model? What does it mean to inhabit a family which does not match the prescribed, and widely represented, structure of a nuclear or even heterosexual family? What are the experiences of making family for those parents whose identities have historically been represented as antithetical to creating and sustaining family?

These questions were first broached in scholarship on the family in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards when feminist critiques identified family as a site of struggle for power between men and women (for a fuller review of the evolution of feminist thought and activism on and about the family, see Budig, 2004). This feminist scholarship, along with increasing divorce rates, and greater visibility of radical alternatives to family making, illuminated the nuclear family as one of many models, rather than a natural or original production of kinship relations. Whilst non-nuclear families and family organisation after divorce were increasingly studied and represented in sociological and cultural literature, this was usually in the context of how they constituted a problem, and threatened the institution of family with total collapse (Gordon, 1972; Simpson, 1997). Alternative perspectives on the fixity of family began to gain prominence in this period with scholars increasingly questioning the idea that the nuclear family had an original referent or accurately described the lived experiences of *any* families (Bernades, 1985). From this position, "the assumption that [non-traditional] families are deviant and are likely to have adverse effects – especially on young children growing up in them" was challenged (Lamb, 1982: 1-3). Additionally, the supposed 'naturalness' of traditional family organisation was deconstructed with reference to the social and "environmental" circumstances, including the possibilities for family represented in media, which impelled individuals to reproduce traditional family forms (Lamb, 1982). This work cautiously deconstructed the previous binary of family vs queer other and increasingly opened space for academic discussion of non-heterosexual parenting as a valid iteration of family. Concurrently, media represented families as increasingly diverse constellations (Skill and Robinson, 1994), whilst the family itself was presented as being in crisis (Harwood, 1997). The

ideological dominance of the happy, hetero-patriarchal nuclear family began to be unsettled, although by no means dislodged (Needham, 2009). By the 1990s, representations of lesbian and gay people became increasingly nuanced and intended for consumption by a queer, rather than a straight, audience. Whilst media no longer solely produced the queer subject as a threat to the social order, they frequently achieved this through a slavish commitment to images of queer conventionality and respectability (Woods, 2009: 111-118).

Whilst the theory behind the meaning and production of family increasingly supported the idea there was no one 'true' form of family, how far did this echo the experiences of gaining legitimacy and intelligibility for non-nuclear and non-heterosexual families? My own experience in a so-called "blended family"<sup>1</sup> offers some indications. My family is made up of my mother, her two sons, my father and his son, and me. Growing up, people could not make sense of how everyone in my family was related. Incomprehensibility was typical of the way my family was received; how could my brothers be half-brothers to me, but step-brothers to one another? How could my father be step-parent to two of them but 'full'-parent to me? A common question friends would ask to establish biological parentage was "but who does your brother belong to? Whose are you?" A number of people also suggested I was functionally an only child given the age gap between me and my youngest brother was 10 years. Clearly they were not really brothers at all – not in the way it 'counted' anyway. The message was clear: we did not make sense; we did not fit the scripts of family.

If sociological work on the family was confidently affirming the validity of non-nuclear families, and media was increasingly acknowledging alternative models, where did the normative notions of family, which rendered my family and others unintelligible, come from? At what level does it "become hard to describe new relational forms adequately" (Hicks, 2011: 14)? How do ideas about what family is circulate? Daly says families "draw meaning from the cultural matrix of which they are a part and express meanings about the kind of family they wish to appear as" through the use of this "cultural tool kit" (2003: 774). The media and political context in which families are produced is therefore strongly implicated in the ease (or difficulty) in which family arrangements can be imagined and the potential for them to be made intelligible.

---

<sup>1</sup> Blended family describes a family formed by two adults with children from previous relationships who marry or cohabit. Blended family is increasingly used in literature on families in order to "highlight an emphasis on the process of integration or reorganization that characterizes the development of this family form, in contrast to more pejorative labels such as 'stepfamily', 'reconstituted family', 'reconstructed family', or 'second chance family'" (Baxter, Braithwaite and Nicholson, 1999: 292).



Again, my own experiences of the UK's social and media landscape are instructive when considering the possibility to imagine different family organisation and access legitimisation for non-heterosexual families. I began school in 1989, a little over a year after the introduction of Section 28 in May of 1988 (*Local Government Act 1988*). Lucy Robinson argues that at the time Section 28 was passed there was "a shared sense [in Government] that education was one of the key areas where children needed to be protected from homosexuality" (2007: 171) so, from the 1990s onwards when broadcasters and children's authors increasingly began to represent family models which diverged from the nuclear norm (Padva, 2008) school books and teaching materials remained restricted to images of families which were heterosexual, and nuclear in shape. In institutional contexts, families like mine, and families with non-heterosexual parents, were still largely invisible. The legislative regulation of the meaning of family by the Conservative government generated specific cultural conditions in which the possibilities of articulating family identity were severely curtailed by the restrictions placed on representations of family and non-heterosexual identities. Without representations of families like mine available in the authorised "cultural tool kit" of meaning, representing my family to others was a frustrating and frequently unsuccessful task. Without a fully stocked toolkit of representations, how were LGBTQ parents narrating their family identity? What resources were they drawing on to enable their children to explain to their peers and teachers how their families were organised? Where did they point to say; "we're like that, that's our kind of family"?

The 1990s brought:

a slew of pioneering innovations [including] the first gay kiss on TV, the first gay wedding announcements, the first gay parents in public view...1994-2005 brought queerness into the family home largely through the familiar tropes of friendship, coming out and...the politics of community. (Walters, 2012: 918)

The non-heterosexual family, and LGBTQ people, were clearly breaking through into the mainstream imaginary, but the usefulness of these images to the lives and identity narratives which LGBTQ people crafted is less clear. Family and queer scholarship from the 1990s onwards was increasingly focused on exploring LGBTQ lives in families and numerous studies offered accounts of the legitimacy and success of these arrangements (Breshears, 2010; Gabb 2005a, 2005b; Goodfellow, 2015; Goss, 1997; Kentlyn, 2008; Levine, 1991; Lewin, 1994; Luzia, 2013; Stacey, 2004; Taylor, 2009; Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2004, see also Hicks, 2011: 5-9 for fuller list of works to this end). These works broadened the field of family studies with a wealth of material on the numerous ways family could be formulated. They offered detailed

accounts of the ways in which dominant notions of family were negotiated and reworked in order to deliver the structures of kinship and intimacy for non-heterosexual people.

In addition to studies concerning how LGBTQ people organised parenting responsibilities, Weston (1997) and Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) offered accounts of 'families of choice', a formation of family distinct from traditional family, produced by non-heterosexual adults as a way to stabilise lives and provide a sense of location and security for individuals often estranged from their families of origin or biological kin. This work, collectively, offered evidence for the notion that the nuclear family was neither a natural nor distinct family formation. Moreover, it suggested that LGBTQ parents were not forming families as 'alternatives' to the heterosexual norm. Weston decried the use of 'alternative' as a modifier for families saying; "any alternative would be an alternative *to* something, this formation presumes a central paradigm of family shared by most people in society" (1997: 6, emphasis from original). The available theoretical literature strongly suggested that forming non-nuclear and non-heterosexual families was a choice broadly available to all and, in a landscape of ever-increasing representation and mounting global legal recognition for non-heterosexual family arrangements, was a choice which could be made with ease (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001; Garner, 2014; Halberstam, 2005; Sardadvar and Miko, 2014; Schacher, Auerbach and Silverstein, 2005; Taylor, 2009). Other studies sought to locate unique potentiality in LGBTQ families; Ducharme argued that gay families were pre-disposed to actively seek out new iterations of family because "there's not necessarily a model" (quoted in Weston, 1995: 93; see also Taylor 2009:19). Breshears similarly argued that "stigmatization of lesbian and gay parented families had resulted in societal pressure/challenges to family identity that traditional families do not face" and that such pressure increased the likelihood of gay and lesbian parents investing heavily in producing and sustaining new family narratives (2010: 80).

The above studies lack a close focus on how specific representations enable or frustrate the attempts of LGBTQ people to imagine and narrate their families. There is little attention given to the different location of LGBTQ parents in the terms of social and cultural capital and without this, the conditions which enable more radical or resistant productions of family cannot be adequately considered in relation to questions of choice and agency. In particular, the above studies tend to reproduce a binary narrative of LGBTQ parents either being predisposed to radically resisting the "oppressive" traditional, heterosexual, nuclear family (Weston, 1997: 21), or being unconsciously assimilated into a normative life course with its attendant depoliticised and de-queered implications (Hicks, 2011). Similarly, reviews of the availability of representations of non-heterosexual families fail to consider the degree to which

these images facilitate (or inhibit) individuals modelling their intimate lives differently, or enhance the understanding of mainstream society for these diverse families (Phelan, 1993: 7).

Queer scholarship in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century focused on critiquing the centrality of the child in the ordering of intimate lives, troubling the historical characterisation of queer subjects as a threat to the family and social order, and challenging the structures of social and ideological regulation facilitated by the centrality of the family in social discourse (Ahmed, 2010; Bond Stockton, 2009; Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011). Whilst this work acknowledges the increasing prominence of LGBTQ people in mainstream representations, it also notes that visibility does not correspond with the enhanced social and political power required to make choices outside the dominant order (Phelan, 1993: 1-10). Media images of LGBTQ families often offered “novelty in the service of normalcy”, providing titillation through difference rather than legitimisation for families which diverged from the norm (Walters, 2012: 924, see also Needham, 2009; Woods, 2009: 110). The discursive positioning of families which do not conform to the dominant heterosexual model as outside of social and cultural power is perpetuated rather than disrupted through apparently inclusive media images.

Queer work offered suggestions of how such stigmatising, disempowering, and delegitimising characterisations of queer lives could be combatted. Edelman (2004) calls for queers to reject the promise of a future through reproductivity. He locates the site of this rejection and resistance as challenging the notion of connectedness through, and for, reproductive family organisation. He argues that only by rejecting wholesale the existing systems of connectedness and intimate life structuring can queer lives fully realise their radical potential and refuse “the absolute privilege of heteronormativity” (Edelman, 2004: 2). Halberstam similarly suggests that it is destruction, and not reordering, of social institutions which will generate liberation for queer subjects:

We must be willing to turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange in order to embrace a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite. (2011: 110)

These critiques are concerned with the disruption of ‘normalness’ and locate queer potential in life courses and choices which are made outside of, beyond, or in the wreckage of, pre-existing structures of social and intimate life (Ahmed, 2006). The emerging narrative in this work is exemplified by Warner (1999a) who argues that participating in normative institutions of family and marriage actively harms those queer subjects and reproduces the conditions of oppression for deviant subjects (see also Bernstein and Reimann, 2001: 13).

Subsequent queer theorists delved deeper into the proposition that producing any iteration of family, regardless of radical intent, threatened to inhibit queer potentiality. Duggan (2002) proposed the term ‘homonormative’ to describe those LGBTQ people seeking to return to a pre-political position, distanced from disruptive or radical social arrangements in favour of assimilation to the dominant order. This term was used to critique the arrangements of lives which did not actively or visibly challenge dominant ideologies; in particular it came to bear on LGBTQ people doing family (Warner, 1999a, 1999b). These works produced a number of new knowledges on what queerness means and what constitutes failure to be queer. Firstly, they lauded difference by celebrating as important only those life courses which are judged to be radically different than the norm. Secondly, they reiterated the idea that family is a single and stable formation through their insistence that inhabiting family structures assimilates individuals to a normative life course. Finally, they critique as non-queer and non-radical those LGBTQ people who do not seek to overthrow the dominant social order or articulate different life courses than the ones associated with family. This is achieved through the discursive labelling of these life courses and choices as ‘homonormative’ and therefore depoliticised.

The contemporary media representations of LGBTQ people parenting do seem to broadly correspond with Duggan’s theory of homonormativity. Walters describes this current trend in LGBTQ representation as the “third phase” following the first phase which was characterised by absence and “subterranean” coded images, and the second phase of the 1980s and 1990s which made LGBTQ people visible, but primarily concerned representations of disease, disorder, and creating a “public spectacle” (2012: 918). The third, and current, phase is one of “banal inclusion normalisation, assimilation, everyday unremarkable queerness but also, of course, continued abjection” (Walters, 2012: 918). There is a long history of the representation of queer people and the responses to representation which queer people offer – for example through queer or camp readings of media which “avoided and repressed explicit representation” – being criticised for being apolitical (Creekmur and Doty, 1995; 2-3). In this sense, the description of certain life courses and images of LGBTQ people as homonormative, and therefore indicative of a depoliticised, anti-radical stance, is part of a long tradition in which mainstream representation is always judged to have failed according to queer radical standards. I suggest that the above work, rather than exploring and deconstructing the norms by which LGBTQ subjectivities are rendered as deficient, contributes to a concretising of the meaning of queer which is used to shame or critique individuals for being insufficiently queer, thus reproducing the same hierarchy of subjectivities as the heterosexual norms it seeks to critique. Further, given the well-documented and lengthy history of queer people responding

to media images with resistant and negotiated readings (Creekmur and Doty, 1995: 2-6; Gross, 1994) it seems reductive to conclude that the dominant representations [of normalised, assimilated] LGBTQ people are received passively by an LGBTQ audience of “cultural dupes” (Gross, 1994: 154) who willingly accept the ideologies presented. Some theorists do offer alternative evaluations of the meaning of normalised representations of LGBTQ people. Sullivan (1995) suggests that family offers more value to LGBTQ people than any amount of alternative or resistant social organising ever could. Whilst Taylor critiques the work which assesses LGBTQ lives as either queerly radical or assimilationist for impressing value judgements on life choices which are either “recognised as legitimate, even revolutionary” or “rendered a deficit” indicating much more nuance is required when contemplating LGBTQ lives (2009: 63). Similarly, Browne (2006) argues that queer radical flexibility can never be adequately performed in everyday lives and a new way of conceptualising the lived, apparently conformist, experiences of LGBTQ people is needed. Despite these initial gestures toward more nuanced responses to everyday LGBTQ lives and the meaning of representations of ‘normative’ LGBTQ people, there is a lack of scholarship relating to how emerging trends in representation shape, or do not shape, the way in which LGBTQ parents conceptualise everyday family life and organise their homes<sup>2</sup>. It is in the context of these gaps in scholarship, that my project is situated. I will offer analysis of the way in which lived experiences of LGBTQ parents intersect with, and respond to, the various homonormative and heteronormative images of family. In particular, I will ask: how far does the assessment of family as a normalising and depoliticising force describe the experiences of LGBTQ parents? How do LGBTQ people conceptualise their life choices in relation to narratives of assimilation, normalisation, radicalism and social change?

Some work has been done to begin to address the above questions; queer scholars point to previous work on the production of family to illustrate that it is a fundamentally flexible form which can be [re]crafted innumerable times to produce different possibilities and arrangements of lives and identities (Berlant, 2008: 3; Daly, 2003; Goss, 1997; Halberstam, 2005). Furthermore, numerous studies affirm the value of ‘normality’ as something which stabilises and protects, and “transgression” as something which is differently available to individuals according to their racial position, and their classed and gendered resources (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001; Muñoz, 1999, 2006, 2009; Skeggs, 1997; Taylor, 2009). The questions that remain underexplored regard these later points; in what context do LGBTQ

---

<sup>2</sup> Whilst some work has been done by theorists on the role of media in helping constitute the identities of LGBTQ people (Driver, 2007; Dyer, 2002a; Gray 2009) these studies do not offer analysis of the role of media in crafting LGBTQ *parent* identities, which remains an under-examined field.

people make their choices about family and kinship organisation? What resources or contexts – cultural, representational, legal, and social – are needed and used to articulate family identity and stabilise these narratives as legitimate and valuable? Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan caution us not to strive for simple answers regarding the processes by which identities are formed and subjectivities articulated, suggesting that these take place in “increasingly complex social circumstances” (1999: 84). I argue that it is these complex social circumstances, the lived experience of LGBTQ parents, which lack full exploration in existing literature.

Making family is an ongoing and reflexive process in which individuals pick through “the detritus of pre-established forms of family life” in order to restructure kinship ties and produce new forms of family life (Giddens, 1991: 177). Any recreation or reshaping of family is intrinsically tied to what has come before (Giddens, 1991); choices in how to structure family are therefore “inevitably constrained” by the “dominant discourse on kinship” (Weston, 1995: 93, see also Bernstein and Reimann, 2001: 14). This dominant discourse is, as I have already suggested, accessed through and represented in media. Whilst family making might involve choice, and strategic inclusion of pre-existing or established arrangements of family – such as those varied possibilities represented in contemporary media, and in the legislative provisions detailed at the beginning of the chapter – the need to order family in an intelligible and socially legitimated way inhibits the possibilities for the arrangement of this element of social life (Hicks, 2011: 66; Taylor, 2009: 15-17). How like, or unlike, the families represented in mainstream media LGBTQ parents’ families are, strongly influences how they are received, understood, and how its members are treated. I take, as a foundational tenant in this thesis, that family is a flexible formation which is consciously and reflexively created. But I also acknowledge it is a formation bounded by an established vocabulary (circulated through, and given meaning by, media representation of families) which dictates function and limits its form.

Organising family outside of the frameworks of the nuclear family and full genetic relationships between siblings and parents can be challenging. As I experienced in my family of origin, anything other than full biological kinship is frequently rendered a pretend or unreal relationship. Negotiating identity narratives from the complex but regulated vocabulary or repository of representations offered through media is a challenging task, and one which I will explore through the reported experiences of LGBTQ parents.

### Scope of Thesis and Language Used

In this thesis I do not seek to provide a comprehensive taxonomy of non-heterosexual families, or to offer a conclusive evaluation of what queerness is, or how one may be successfully evaluated as queer or not. Rather, I offer a snapshot of the various arrangements and meanings of family offered by LGBTQ parents in the UK today. From this snapshot, I will draw links to, and offer critical evaluations of, theoretical literature which offers definitions of queer family and queer subjectivities. I locate the lived experiences of LGBTQ parents at the heart of the debate on what family means, who family includes, and what families do. Central to this discussion will be the role of media in constituting, describing, directing, and representing LGBTQ-parented families.

Rather than seeking to produce an exhaustive review of the representations of non-heterosexual families available in media today, or offer a statistical report on how visible and diverse representations of LGBTQ people are (something already offered by US organisation *GLAAD* [2015]), I focus on the lived experiences, values, and needs of the LGBTQ parents I interviewed and refer to the representations which they identified as useful and meaningful. This decision guides the tone of this thesis. I rely on LGBTQ parents themselves to report the conditions of their visibility, their experience of establishing family, and their sense of where they are located in relation to normativity, radicalism, social change, and meaning-making.

My approach to this project is not neutral. With reference to the numerous studies already available on non-heterosexual family making (see previous section) I note that monogamous couples comprised of lesbians and/or gay men, in isolation from other non-heterosexual parents, are the focus of the majority of research. I intend to address that inequality by exploring the experience of bisexual, trans, queer and other non-heterosexual parents alongside the experiences of gay men and lesbians with the aim of exploring how parents in the former group experience this second level of invisibility (i.e. firstly from mainstream media and secondly in academic literature on non-heterosexual families). Additionally, I seek to reveal as arbitrary the divisions imposed on LGBTQ parents according to single identity markers (such as 'lesbian' or 'gay') and show how broader notions such as shared values and life experiences allow a fuller exploration of LGBTQ family-making. As Butler says:

identifications are invariably imbricated in one another...the pluralist theoretical separation of these terms [sexuality, gender etc.] as 'categories' or indeed 'positions' is itself based on exclusionary operations that attribute a false uniformity to them. (1993a: 116)

Further, Barker and Langdridge note that failing to speak outside of, or trouble, the dichotomies of sexuality and gender, further silences and elides bisexual voices and those experiences of other sexual and gender minorities included under the LGBTQ umbrella (2008: 391). In order to acknowledge and allow space for the multiplicity of identities and experiences covered by the blanket term 'LGBTQ parent', and fully explore the points of convergence between different experiences and subjectivities, I arrange this thesis thematically rather than by identity categories.

At the centre of this project is a desire to acknowledge the complex and multi-faceted experiences of LGBTQ parents as far as possible within the context of a 'snap-shot' study. The various ways in which I have worked toward this are further detailed in the methodology chapter. There are, however, a few linguistic choices I have made in this thesis which require brief explanation. Firstly, the terms I use to describe relationship arrangements: the available language tends toward a division of couples into either 'heterosexual' or 'same-sex' pairings. These terms both collapse gender and sex, and allow no room to acknowledge non-heterosexual identities of individuals in opposite, or different sex couples. Additionally, same-sex is increasingly used interchangeably with 'gay' or 'homosexual'<sup>3</sup> and this risks erasing the non-binary, multiple, and non-homosexual attractions of bisexual, queer and non-heterosexual parents who are in same-sex or same-gender relationships. In the interests of clarity, I chose to refer to couples who are in relationships with someone who describes their gender in the same way as them, as being a 'homogendered' couple; and to describe couples whose gender identities are different as a 'heterogendered' couple. Where the specific sexual identity or orientation of a participant is relevant, this will be offered in addition to the description of their current relationship arrangement.

Throughout this thesis I make reference to trans and cis identities. Cis, or cisgender, refers to people whose gender identity matches the gender which they were assigned at birth. Trans, transgender, and transsexual, refer to people whose gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. I did not ask participants how they would describe their gender identity but I did actively recruit trans participants. In order to most accurately represent individuals' identities, I use trans and cis only in relation to participants who explicitly

---

<sup>3</sup> This was most evident in the reporting on the Marriage [Same Sex Couples] Act (2014) where headlines and articles used 'same-sex' and 'gay' interchangeably (see Bingham, 2014), the Prime Minister reinforced the idea 'same-sex' was the binary opposite of 'heterosexual', and used 'same-sex' interchangeably with gay in his commentary on the introduction of the Marriage Act (Cameron, 2014). 'Same-sex' continues to be conflated with 'gay' and monosexuality in successive reviews of marriage equality laws (see Dabhoiwala, 2015).



described themselves with reference to those terms. I also note that whilst I am conscious of a debate around the use of 'trans' versus 'trans\*', the latter being increasingly used to denote trans identities beyond the binary of male/female and gender fluid individuals (see Reed [no date] and Titman, 2013), I have chosen not to append an asterisk to trans. This decision is primarily informed by the fact that none of my participants indicated they had non-binary identities or discussed the use of an asterisk in their self-description. Further, this decision is in the interests of consistency whereby I did not want to switch between 'trans\*' and 'trans' according to whether I was speaking about a participant's identity or a representation of a trans person in media. As Reed (nd) and Titman (2013) both argue, 'trans' does not inherently indicate an exclusion of non-binary identities and I acknowledge here my implicit inclusion of all trans[\*] identities under the term 'trans' in this thesis.

### Research Questions

In summary, I will ask in this thesis: in a perfect storm of legislative change, media visibility (both the academic representation and study, and mainstream media depiction, of LGBTQ parents), and increasing social acceptance (suggested by a number of studies, including Park and Rhead, 2013), what are the experiences of LGBTQ people in parenting and building families? To fully explore this question, I propose the following research questions;

#### **RQ1.** How do LGBTQ parents negotiate media culture?

- a) How do parents use media to build their family-identity narratives and locate their families in the world?
- b) What values, needs, and experiences shape LGBTQ parents' evaluations of, and engagement with, media?
- c) What relationship do LGBTQ parents have to media representations of families like theirs?

#### **RQ2.** How do LGBTQ parents negotiate visibility and intelligibility for their families, and how do they experience invisibility in media?

- a) What strategies do parents employ to use media which does not ostensibly represent them?
- b) How is media used to articulate visible, public family identities?

- c) How does media representation inhibit, frustrate or limit the possibility for recognition and validation of LGBTQ parents' families?
- d) How does media representation facilitate or enable the possibility for recognition and validation of LGBTQ parents' families?

**RQ3.** What conditions of family, and what social possibilities, are generated by the interactions LGBTQ parents have with media?

- a) How does use of media at home and in family-making relate to a sense of community?
- b) Does use of media in family identity-making facilitate broader social engagement?
- c) What role do geographical location, class, emotional and social resources, and gender play in the engagement LGBTQ parents have with media representations of families like theirs?

### Structure of the Thesis

In the following chapter, I outline the methodological framework of my research with reference to considerations of participant anonymity and the ethical handling of qualitative research interview data. I locate myself as a researcher in terms of queer and feminist methodologies and acknowledge my presence in the data presented in subsequent chapters.

In Chapter Three, the first which deals with my empirical data, I will look at how LGBTQ parents who feel they are not visible in media representations, negotiate their visibility. In particular, I consider the experiences of parents who are positioned as 'normal' or made nominally straight by their invisible or heterogendered sexual object choice. I argue the need for these parents to negotiate visibility and to make decisions about when to make themselves visible as non-heterosexual is the result of the limited scripts of representation which cannot and do not offer diverse or multi layered representations of parents. I expand on this by examining the motivations of parents who choose to remain 'invisibly queer' and locate these decisions in relation to the stated desires of participants to stabilise their families and protect their children from a hostile heteronormative world. In conclusion, I present the ways in which parents whose queerness is not recognised or represented seek to offer routes to queer-world-making and invest radical motivations in their family narratives.

In the fourth chapter I ask what radical anti-normativity looks like in lived experience. Loosely structured around the question of what it means to occupy a subjectivity represented as

radical, I examine the [normalising] demands of parenthood (Lamb, 1982: 10) and ask how parents locate themselves in relation to discourses of activism and social radicalism. I trace the various rejections and cautious uses of traditional narratives of family and parental roles which participants made when building their families. I reject the notion that structuring intimate lives around normative frameworks produces a depoliticised homonormative position and point to the various investments parents have with activist subjectivities and their conscious, critical, and reflexive engagement with family building. I conclude by suggesting that representations of LGBTQ people which insist they occupy inherently radical positions from which they fail to produce sufficiently 'queer' life narratives, erases the multiplicity of identities and roles LGBTQ parents occupy, and denies parents agency in the decisions they take to craft liveable lives.

In Chapter Five I look at the hierarchies which inform the content of representations of LGBTQ people in media and the values which direct audience responses. In a landscape of media representations which fail to offer equal legitimation to all LGBTQ people, I will ask how parents negotiate a relationship to available representations, and how they reconcile themselves to persistent under-representation or abjection. Drawing closely on participant responses, I look at the evidence for their evaluation that wider social inequalities, and an anxiety about the existence of non-heterosexual parents, inform representational choices in media, and I identify what meanings about LGBTQ parents circulate as a result. Concluding by considering the anxiety and ambivalence both under-representation and the possibility of greater representation generate, I argue that the power of representation to fix and institutionalise knowledge on minority groups is a point of continual [re]negotiation for LGBTQ parents.

In the penultimate chapter I ask what 'inheritance' parents are crafting, both for their children and for wider communities. I explore how parents use media representations to build and support lasting family-identity narratives and how these narratives work to locate their families in society and in LGBTQ community. I argue that in addition to aiding generational succession of social and cultural capital, working to craft inheritances helps to alleviate anxiety and isolation, strengthen families' sense of legitimacy, and generate a sense of meaningfulness to the labour of family-making by the linking of these inheritances to social and cultural change.

## Conclusion

As I will show in the subsequent chapters, LGBTQ parents negotiate their individual identities as queer subjects, and their group identities as families, through media. The processes of negotiation and resignification involved in developing these socially situated, culturally intelligible, media-informed identities were not necessarily conscious ones, but, through interviews, I opened a space in which LGBTQ parents were invited to review their media work and the construction of their family narrative. I seek to continue to open that space in the analysis that follows, situating theories of family, media, and conceptualisations of radical queer potential, in dialogue with the everyday lives and experiences of LGBTQ parents.

In this thesis, I seek to bridge the gap between queer theory and LGBTQ sociology where claims about the possibilities of social radical politics are disconnected from the studies of everyday life, and between media studies and the sociology of family, where the central role of media in constituting identity drops out of discussion about the everyday LGBTQ lives.

## Chapter Two

### Methodology

This chapter aims to explore and explain the methodology used to produce the research that underpins this thesis. Specifically, I will look at the ethical and methodological choices I made, including reflection on the challenges and successes of the research instrument and of my approach to conducting this qualitative research.

My methodology, like the analysis chapters which follow, was a collaborative production between me and the participants. I decided on this way of working in response to feminist and queer critiques of traditional social research methods. It was an attempt to avoid reproducing top-down hierarchies of knowledge production which risks reproducing the marginalisation of minority groups (Browne and Nash, 2010: 47; Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 7-8). Whilst my planning of this project was done in isolation from participants, the final methodology was shaped and developed by the responses I collected from participants. The needs of participants informed the length, location, and tone of our interviews, whilst my personal sense of responsibility toward the stories and experiences which were related to me in 24 interviews inflected my handling of the data after I left the interviews. This reflexive approach was a response to the historical conceptualisation of the researcher as able to observe the world objectively (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 13); I acknowledge my own subjectivity within this research and the flexible methods I selected allowed me to continually evaluate and respond to the emerging voices and needs within the research.

I will begin by describing how I selected the specific research tool from available qualitative methods, and developed my methodology in response to my key research questions. In the second section I will discuss the recruitment methods and the limitations of my sample before considering ethics and how I managed consent and participant involvement. The fourth section will reflect on how I was located within the research and the issues of an insider/outsider researcher position which emerged as I conducted interviews. The fifth section will examine power within the research process and how this was managed, responded to, and mobilised within the project. Finally, I will briefly outline how I managed interview data and approached analysis.

#### Selecting the Research Tool

The core research questions of this enquiry emerged in response to literary queer theory which often reproduces subjects as passive, uncritically reproducing normative frameworks (Warner

1999a, Edelman 2004). Rather than accepting this theoretical conceptualisation of the lives of LGBTQ people as comprehensive, I wished to investigate the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and explore their stated motivations, desires, and choices. Interviewing offered a research instrument which allowed me to centre LGBTQ people's experiences in the research and invest my analysis with the voices of LGBTQ people describing their own "social reality" (Dunn, 2005: 108; Thompson, 1992: 15) which is absent in the aforementioned theoretical work. By offering media analysis, I will work to document the social and cultural contexts from which participant comments emerge. This scoping work will allow me to acknowledge the processes of mediation which inform and background participants' experiences. This will result in analysis which both values the integrity of participants' reports of their opinions and experiences whilst also acknowledging there is not an 'original' or unmediated experience.

In order to address my key research questions, it was necessary to collect the accounts of LGBTQ parents in relation to media culture and family making. I chose to use a semi-structured interview method which allowed flexibility in the direction the interview took and could be tailored to the interests of the participants. The flexibility of this type of interview allowed me to keep the methods focused on addressing the key questions of investigation, rather than being led by a narrow set of questions which may not have elicited sufficiently detailed answers, or allowed for the research to be led to new themes or ideas according to the priority participants placed on them (Dunn, 2005; Kvale, 1996). My prepared, or core, questions could be answered in around 20 minutes but I advised all participants that interviews would last around 90 minutes depending on how much they had to say. This allowed sufficient time for our interview that participants could respond in detail to any topics they felt had higher priority. It also ensured we had sufficient time to return to topics discussed earlier in the interview if participants later felt they had more to say. This flexible approach to interview structure prioritised participants' interests, allowing them to focus on certain topics over others, and it worked to acknowledge and respond to the non-continuous, multiple, and unstable characteristics of lived experience (Browne and Nash, 2010: 4-6).

These methods allowed me to respond to issues raised by participants and to develop my interview questions as the research proceeded (Appendix 1). For example, I included a question about how parents felt they were perceived in public as a family, after one participant expressed high levels of anxiety about ensuring her family behaved well in public, lest a negative impression of them was taken to be indicative of all LGBTQ families. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews are well suited to model- and theory- building approaches

(Wengraf, 2001:61), and the flexibility of the method allowed me to further consider developing themes, such as the aforementioned one.

The writing on reflexivity which characterises feminist and queer methods (Browne and Nash 2010, Burns and Chantler 2011, Filax et al 2011) shaped how I approached my project planning, but I did not fully appreciate, until I began interviewing, that reflexivity and collaborative knowledge production is not achieved through strict adherence to a set of actions or methods. Rather, it is a way of working which is constantly in flux; being a reflexive researcher means responding to, and reshaping your practice around, the emerging needs, themes, pressures and priorities of participants, their reported experiences, and the evolving content of the interview data (May 1997). With this in mind, I set aside a minimum of 30 minutes after each interview to reflect on the experience, note down any non-verbal content from the interview which may be useful in the analysis stages, and consider how I could improve in my interview technique in future (Wengraf, 2001: 38)

My methodology was an iterative one. Each time participants identified a piece of media as containing a representation of a person or family like them, I reviewed it after the interview as part of my reflection. Additionally, I considered whether my core questions enabled or prompted future participants to speak about similar media. I designated media representations which were mentioned in multiple interviews as culturally significant (Riggs, 2014: 160). Specifically, these significant shows were *Modern Family*, *Orange is the New Black*, and *The L Word*; my response to their repeated citation in initial interview was to begin seeking opinions on those shows from participants, using them as a prompt for participants who said they could not think of any representations of LGBTQ people on television. In analysis, I used the responses of participants to key texts to compliment close textual readings of these media, this represents the mobilisation of queer and cultural studies interpretative paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 24-25).

Additionally, using prompts of specific media texts which emerged early on in the data collection process, allowed participants who blanked at the broad scope of a question asking them for their knowledge of media representation, to contribute their opinions and perspectives on these shows. This participant-led prompt helped subsequent participants to go on to identify additional shows which included representations of LGBTQ parents.

Using a prompt of participant-identified shows to facilitate discussion indicated the appropriateness of the semi-structured continually reviewed methods to this inquiry. Rather than generating a large number of researcher identified sources, I felt it was important to allow

participants to lead the conversation in order to mediate ‘observational reactivity’ (Kimmel, 1988: 28) by aiming to, as much as possible, remove my own judgements on what media is valuable by asking participants to generate a library of media representations which I could then analyse. The further advantage of not having a good familiarity with all the media participants spoke about was that it allowed me to prompt them for descriptions of the content and invite comments from them on what elements of the representation particularly appealed. In turn, this led to participants explaining to me the reading practices they employed when negotiating media in their lives. Whilst my research questions anticipated a varied engagement with both mainstream and subcultural media, I had not anticipated that participants would value media which does not ostensibly include specific representations of LGBTQ people, parents or families. The flexibility of the method and the emphasis on being led to media by participants has thus delivered original and unexpected results allowing me to better examine the negotiation of media by these parents.

#### Participant Demographics, Recruitment, Challenges, Solutions, and Limitations

The participant criteria which I circulated sought the following:

People who are over 18, self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, intersex, trans\*, genderqueer, non-binary, or queer, and are a parent living in the UK

I restricted participant recruitment to those living in the UK given the culturally specific nature of media representation and reception. By narrowing my focus to UK residents I was able to interview all participants face-to-face rather than relying on Skype or telephone interviews. In particular, I wished to interview participants in locations of their choosing so that, as far as possible, they were at ease and felt confident going into our interview. I will return to the significance of the location of interviews later in this chapter, in the section on power.

Participants were recruited through a combination of snowball sampling and targeted recruitment. Initially, I recruited participants through LGBTQ studies mailing lists, community organisations, a community-focused radio show, and Twitter. These participants then passed on my details to their friends and networks. However, after 10 interviews with 15 participants I moved to more purposive snowball sampling method, targeting gay and bisexual men, bisexual women, and lone parents (Arcury and Quandt, 1998). Using personal networks and appeals on twitter for more men to participate, I was able to recruit 7 men across the subsequent 14 interviews. Despite reaching out to community organisations in Wales, and making direct appeals through personal networks and twitter for Welsh participants, I was unable to make any connections there and so, despite aiming to speak to parents from across the UK, my



sample was drawn only from people living in England and Scotland, although some participants did describe themselves as Welsh.

I chose to collect demographic data verbally, at the end of interviews. I asked participants if they could describe their class, race and ethnicity, and indicate their age to whatever degree of precision they were most comfortable with. Participant age varied from 26-56. In terms of class, race and ethnicity, my sample was more homogenous. Only 6 participants described themselves in another way than middle-class, with 3 of those acknowledging they lived a largely middle-class life despite coming from a working-class background. All but one participant described themselves as white. Taylor cautions that too often white middle-class experience is produced as the universal queer subjectivity because of the over-representation of people occupying this position in research such as this (2010: 70). I do not suggest this study represents all LGBTQ people, or even all LGBTQ parents (achieving this is, Weston explains, impossible for a “population [which] is not only partially hidden or closeted but also lacks consensus as to the criteria for membership” [Weston, 1997: 9]). It is a snapshot of the lives, experiences, and media interactions of a given group of people who are a diverse group in some respects (age, location, nationality, experience) and homogenous in others (race, class).

I believe two key elements contributed to recruiting fewer working-class participants than middle-class. Firstly, the snowball sampling method inevitably drew from socially homogenous groups, and groups with high cultural capital (as indicated by their extensive, organised personal networks). Secondly, the majority of participants created their families through IVF or adoption, both of which require considerable economic capital. It is useful to note these factors as I asked participants for narratives of their family identity and in responding to and understanding these narratives, one must take account of the “cultural conventions and contexts within which they occur” (Cortazzi, 2001: 385). As such, I refer back to the subjectivities of participants during analysis. For quick reference, a table listing participant pseudonyms and age against the interview type and location, their children’s pseudonyms and ages, and participant class and race and ethnicity is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Participant Information**

<b>Participant (age)</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Interview type</b>	<b>Interview Location</b>	<b>Children (age)</b>	<b>Home location</b>	<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity</b>	<b>Class</b>
Charlie (36)	Bisexual	Couple	Home	Harley (5 months)	London	White British	Middle
Jamie (35)	Bisexual					White British	Middle
Mary (35)	Bisexual	Couple	Home	James (17 months)	London	White British	Upper Middle
Paul (35)	Bisexual					White Chinese	Upper Middle
Carol (35)	Lesbian	Individual	Home	Lyla (8 months)	Leeds	White British	Middle
Amy (30)	Lesbian Trans	Individual	Coffee shop	Carrie (7) Joe (3)	West Midlands	White British	Working
Joanne (36)	Lesbian	Individual	Home	Molly (15 months)	Brighton	White Irish	Middle
Emily (48)	Bisexual	Couple	Home	Lucy (11)	London	White British	Middle
Isabel (48)	Lesbian					White British	Middle
Eva (36)	Lesbian	Individual	Home	Noah (2)	London	White American	Upper Middle
Sarah (56)	Heterosexual Trans	Couple	Hotel	Son (23) Daughter (19) Grandchild (6 weeks)	South West	Welsh	Middle
Daniel (48)	Heterosexual cis			None – Sarah's partner	America (visiting Sarah)	White American	Middle
Martha (40)	Lesbian	Couple	Home	Amy (18 months)	Brighton	White English	Middle
Paige (44)	Lesbian					White Irish-American	Middle
Harriet (49)	Lesbian/ Queer	Individual	Home	Olivia (17) Freya (14)	Brighton	White British	Middle
Dylan (33)	Queer Trans	Individual	Community Centre	Morven (5)	Edinburgh area	White Scottish	Working
Rose (36)	Bisexual	Individual	Workplace	Mia (3) Faith (3)	Edinburgh	White British	Middle
Julia (26)	Queer	Individual	Various public	Niamh (21 months)	Edinburgh	English in Scotland	Prefer not to answer
Hannah (46)	Lesbian	Couple	Home	Lexi (8½) Becca (4½)	London	White British-Irish-Jewish	Middle
Jelena (43)	Lesbian					White European-Jewish/Catholic	Middle
Seb (32)	Gay	Individual	Workplace	Step-Son (11) Step-Daughter (14)	London	White British	Working-Middle
Lynne (50)	Bisexual	Individual	Home	Zoë (16)	Nottingham	White British	Middle
Ivy (39)	Lesbian	Individual	Café	Alfie (3½) Theo (9 months)	South West	White British	Middle
Luke (49)	Gay Trans	Individual (daughter present)	Café-bar	Fran (24) Toby (27) Sophie (25) Anne (25) Ryan (21)	South West	British Mixed	Working-Middle

				Mads (7, granddaughter)			
Emma (32)	Queer/ Non-heterosexual	Individual	Home	Grace (4) Erin (2)	South West	White British/ Welsh	Middle
William (49)	Gay	Individual	Café	Ethan (12) Jack (8)	London	White Scottish	Working-middle
Darren (not collected)	Gay	Individual	Workplace	Ollie (11) Lacey (14)	London	Not collected	Not collected
Mathilde (33)	Lesbian	Individual	Café	Rory (3)	Edinburgh area	White European	Middle
Fiona (36)	Lesbian	Individual	Café	Scott (5½)	Edinburgh	White Scottish	Middle
Sam (48)	Gay	Couple	Home	Oscar (7) Jessica (3)	South coast	White British	Middle
Ian (45)	Gay					White British	Working-middle

As evident in the table above, my sample was not representative, nor did I intend it to be. There is sparse data on the number of people in the UK who identify with non-heterosexual identities and even less on how many of those people parent. Without this data, it would not have been possible to design a representative sampling method. Instead, my approach to determine the number of participants was to recruit and interview participants until I reached ‘theoretical saturation’; this happened around the sixteenth interview and I continued with a further eight interviews to confirm that no other distinct themes emerged (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

I sought to interview LGBTQ parents in order to discover their relationship to media, including both disidentifications and enthusiastic engagement; in this respect a self-selecting sample who all have an interest in the topic of discussion will likely deliver responses with greater depth than a representative sample who are selected by demographics rather than engagement or interest in the topic at hand. This is not to say that all participants had a high level of knowledge of the production and distribution of media; on the contrary, many participants lamented, during our interview, their ignorance of media which may represent their families but wished to contribute to a project which they hoped would draw attention to the paucity of representations in mainstream media or could introduce them to media they had neither the time nor resources to discover. In the section on power later in this chapter I will explore the effect of different knowledges on interviews.

I did not place any restrictions on how many people could take part in each interview and a number of participants chose to be interviewed with their partner. In total I conducted 7 ‘couple’ interviews with 14 people and one interview where a participant’s adult daughter was present and contributed to some parts of the interview. I found it useful to employ some of

the techniques of focus group interviewing to manage and promote interaction within the interview and incite contributions from the individual in each couple who was quieter<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, when speaking about the development of family identity and narrative, speaking to two members of the family provided an opportunity for “insights into the practice of knowledge production” (Cameron, 2005: 117) as participants explored their perspectives on their family and its place in a wider social context.

### Ethics and Participant Involvement

My project was rated as high risk according to the Arts and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee at the University of Sussex; this was an automatically generated status resulting from the project being classified as concerning sexuality and sexual identities. I feel this was indicative of the heteronormative framework through which projects are assessed and did not, in any way, acknowledge the familiarity LGBTQ people have with discussing their sexuality as a consequence of discourses which produce non-heterosexuality and non-monogamies as positions which must be explained. I argued, successfully, that my project should not be classified as high risk because of its focus on LGBTQ lives; I reasoned that participants were prepared to disclose their sexuality or they would not have agreed to take part given the priority non-heterosexuality was given in the recruitment criteria. Further, I argued that I was not seeking to uncover trauma or experiences of discrimination or abuse in relation to these identities which the classification as high risk implied, given the review form grouped sexuality with these themes. I included in my information sheet and consent form (appendix 2 and 3) the advice that participants could choose not to answer any questions without explanation and could request the interview direction be changed if they were uncomfortable with the line of questioning. Some participants explicitly declined to respond to some questions, including providing demographic data or using their children’s names; I suggest this is evidence that participants were sufficiently empowered within interviews to control what was disclosed (Kvale, 2006: 485). Despite not seeking to record negative or distressing experiences, I did record stories of discrimination and trauma relating to forming LGBTQ families. I reflect on how I managed these disclosures in interviews in the following sub-section.

---

<sup>4</sup>Cameron recommends inviting disagreement and agreement after one person states their opinion, using questions such as “is that how you feel too?” and “do you have a different view?” Keeping on track by returning to a point the previous speaker made; “that was an interesting point, could we just come back to that?” And encouraging exploration of an idea “do you have anything you’d like to add to that?” and “when [X event other person described] happened, what did you think?” (Cameron, 2005: 127)

Upon receiving email enquiries from parents who had seen my call for participants, I responded by emailing them an information sheet and a brief summary in the body of the email explaining in simple terms what taking part in my research would entail. I also offered to call would-be participants at a time convenient to them to respond to any further questions, queries or concerns they had. Of all the emails I received from participants enquiring about participating, about half did not reply to my email containing additional information on participating. I believe this rate of reply suggests that the information I responded with in both the email body and attached information sheet was sufficiently detailed that people were able to make an informed decision about participating. All of those who replied to my informational email went ahead with participation and I was able to book interviews with them, indicating information was sufficiently detailed in the first instance for them to commit to participating.

– *Managing Risk and Conflict*

With the potential for distressing or sad recollections a possible component of my interviews, I deliberately included a question which was designed to help redirect discussion, or offer an opportunity for happier reflections and allow participants to celebrate the positive experiences connected with forming families. The question was, “What is the best thing about your family?” and the answers I received have not featured in the following analysis chapters (although I have included the collected responses in appendix 4). The value of this question was in helping shape an interview environment which reassured participants I was seeking to celebrate, and not problematise, their family forms. Additionally, in interviews conducted with couples, I found it a useful tool to diffuse disagreements between the participants.

Whilst hearing participants debate one of my questions between themselves, and contribute two conflicting views on one aspect of parenthood, representation, or family making was useful, these discussions on occasion turned into unproductive restatements of entrenched positions. When I felt discussion between participants was becoming redundant I chose to interject, acknowledging that I was about to ask a question unrelated to the last, and then asking participants to tell me what the best thing about their family was. This is an established technique for semi-structured interviews where the role of an interviewer remains interventionist (Dunn, 2005: 88). With participants who seemed nervous about our interview, I chose to use this question early on, investing their unique experience and values at the heart of our continued conversation and indicating the importance of their family to my research (Dunn, 2005: 86). This was a guiding principle in my research, informed by the feminist research notion that “the everyday, personal experience of every woman has worth and should

be understood in all its complexity and richness” (Thompson, 1992). Finally, I used this question to change the tone of the interview if the conversation had become entrenched in negative reflections on under-representation or social prejudice or to help us move on to the next stage of the interview from negative or traumatic recollections. This question was received positively by every participant, signalled at the very least by a smile, and on one occasion by the exclamation “Oh, that’s a very nice question!” (Emily, 2013).

Whilst participants were happy to answer this question, they rarely found it easy, with a large pause following my posing the question in almost every interview. This moment of consideration served two purposes, firstly, it increased the gap between tense or anguished prior discussion, and secondly it gave participants an opportunity to conduct a mental inventory of the elements of their family which they most valued. It also functioned well to remind me of the value of silence in research and how it can be generative (Schwartz 2011: 56, Dunn 2005: 93-94). The answers I received often led to more in depth discussion of how such happy or positive elements of their family came to be established, or the answers were something I could refer back to in order to establish understanding when participants were describing what they liked to see, or wanted to see, in media representations of families like theirs. In particular, being able to link participant’s media interactions back to the material conditions of their lives in families was a valuable way to indicate to participants the aims of this project and help them see why the focus of my enquiry was media representation.

#### – Participant Involvement

At the point I took the data away from the interviews, my power as a researcher to determine meaning was most acute (Cotterill 1992: 604, Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002: 160, Kvale, 2006: 485). To try and reinvest the research with the reflexivity which shaped the interview methods, I employed a technique of ‘membership research’ (Kvale: 2006: 485) and returned to participants in the final months of the project, one and a half to two years after interviewing them, to allow them to read an overview of my findings and to ask for their comments on the way I introduced their subjectivity when presenting their comments. I chose to present participants with summarised findings rather than extracts from my thesis in order to mediate the limits of membership research where interviewees’ understanding of theoretical content may impede their ability to respond to the content (Kvale, 2006: 485). This summary was circulated 3 months before the submission of this thesis. Seven participants responded and all indicated they felt positively about the research outcomes and several expressed thanks that I had offered them the opportunity to review the conclusions and share the findings. One participant also asked if she might quote sections of the findings in a forthcoming presentation

to a local council on supporting trans parent adoptions, indicating that she felt the research findings had real life application.

### My Role as Researcher

I began targeted, or purposeful, sampling after I had conducted a small number of interviews. It became clear to me in the conversations I had with those participants when scheduling interviews that they all sought to know more about me as individual; who was I? Why was I interested in the experiences of LGBTQ parents? Therefore, for those organisations (Rainbow Families, a LGBT parenting website, an LGBTQ families magazine, Time4T Radio Show, two 'lifestyle' mailing lists) and individuals (whose details had been passed to me by mutual friends) whom I initiated contact with, I included some brief biographical details which I found had reassured the participants I had spoken with already. Specifically in these biographical notes, I attempted to invoke my 'insider' status as a queer woman. Time4T, a transgender radio show<sup>5</sup>, were happy to share my call for participants on air but declined to have me on the show to briefly speak about my research on the grounds that I was not trans myself. This illustrates the way in which my position as a non-heterosexual woman did help facilitate access to participants but that I was, at different times, only granted "partial insider status" (Nash, 2010: 136).

When I wrote my brief biographical information to circulate with my call for participants I was conscious that my preferred descriptor 'queer' has politically charged meanings. Whilst this is a reason I chose to use 'queer' as descriptor for myself in my personal life, I was mindful that it may be alienating to individuals with different political views and impede me in recruiting a multi-generational sample. Balancing disclosure with practical issues of getting access to people is a common ethical consideration (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 157). I decided to describe myself as bisexual. I felt this represented a practical compromise as I had identified as bisexual for many years, commonly use it when completing forms which request demographic information, and am out to my family and in workplaces as bisexual, as I have found bisexual to be more readily comprehensible to people removed from LGBTQ activism and politics.

As the negotiations detailed in this and the previous section attest, ethical practice and disclosure are not absolutes with fixed rules. May suggests researchers can only aim to be guided by an "internalist concept of ethics" which "depends on the values of the researchers and their communities" and what is "right or just" for both the project and participants (1997: 54-56). I felt my linguistic juggling of my identity represented a justifiable decision motivated

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.radioreverb.com/shows/Time-4-T>

by a desire to open up the research to alternative perspectives and positions than my own. Additionally, I included the information that I was from a non-nuclear family and that I wished to become a parent in the future; these disclosures were intended to address the question of why I had decided to research this topic. This disclosure also functioned to invest value in the knowledge of participants as 'experts' to my 'novice' position and thus value the knowledge which participants could offer (Thompson, 1992). I found participants did not seek further information from me than these basic demographic points which corresponds with Cotterill's observation that "although most respondents ask questions about the interviewer in order to 'place' her, they do not always want information about her private life or to hear her views on interview topics" (1992: 596). Being conscious of that, I only offered further information if participants explicitly sought it in order not to prioritise my identity in the project.

As my interviews progressed I became aware of the importance of my own identity as a non-heterosexual woman to the participants. Most of the women I spoke to included me in their discussion of what life was like as non-heterosexual woman in a heteronormative society by using 'us' and 'we' when they spoke. Martha and Paige identified our 'sisterhood' – a shared position of femaleness and gay identity - as the key reason they participated:

getting the email about [taking part in the project was] like 'oh! We can help!' we can, we're really excited about helping your project and *helping a sister*...if we need a plumber we'll always default to, find out from our female friends if we know any female plumbers, even better if she's gay...but I think [making that choice is] just about being aware how hard life can be if you're a woman, as a gay woman. (Martha and Paige, 2013, emphasis added)

I found participants often made assumptions about my identity (namely, presuming I was a lesbian) despite the fact I consistently described myself as bisexual in any written material, or in response to direct questions about my sexuality. Barker and Langdrige write about the importance of making visible bisexuality in queer work in order to create space for bisexual subjectivity to be spoken (2008: 391-392). As I elaborate below, strategic [re-]disclosure of my sexuality did work to draw out accounts of bisexual subjectivities.

When I was interviewing Isabel and Emily, Isabel briefly left the room and Emily immediately confided in me that she identified as bisexual but, because of her long term monogamous relationship with Isabel, did not feel she could fully articulate this identity. When Isabel returned, Emily invited her to comment with her thoughts on bisexual identity:

Emily: Just talking about bisexual identity which you're very scathing about with me.  
Isabel: No I'm not! [laughs]  
E: [laughs]  
I: Oh well I never believe you!



E: She doesn't! She doesn't seriously!  
 I: But I'm not scathing about bisexuality.  
 E: You are about me.  
 I: You never lust after men.  
 E: I do! I do occasionally!  
 I: Never!  
 E: Johnny Depp!  
 I: Very effeminate men, it's not real is it. That's a David Beckham. She loves David Beckham; I don't think that's a true reflection of bisexuality!  
 (Emily and Isabel, 2013)

At this point, it seemed pertinent that I [re]disclosed my own sexuality and Emily went on to make more comments about her identification with bisexual identity, describing it as "subsumed" within her 25 year long relationship with Isabel. Emily was concerned that Isabel's comments may offend me; I reassured them both I was not offended and we continued the interview.

I meditated on this experience for some time after the interview in relation to the ethics of [non]disclosure. I have experienced biphobia from lesbians in the past and have rarely had lesbian friends; did my fear of being rejected from the reflections on living in a heteronormative world which other lesbian participants implicitly included me in through their language, constitute the real reason I had failed to correct their impression of me? Certainly when I interviewed bisexual, queer and non-heterosexual identified participants, my own experience of bisexuality was implicit in the expectations participants had that I would understand the disclosures they made regarding their experiences of biphobia and invisibility within both queer/LGBT and straight communities; if my frankness about my own position was central to the information bisexual participants revealed, was it ethical to allow incorrect impressions of my sexuality go unchallenged?

I felt that correcting a participant's throwaway comment which incorrectly included me in an 'us' or 'we' in relation to lesbian identity represented an unnecessarily heavy handed response which served only to interrupt the flow of the interview and centre me in the discussion instead of remaining focused on the identity and experiences of participants. Ultimately, whilst I may share some subject positions with my participants, I am always located differently from them (Dowling, 2005: 25-26). All participants implicitly acknowledged my differences from them with regards to my not being a parent, being there as a researcher, being of a different age, and simply having had different life experiences. I did not continually restate my differences with regard to frequently expressions expectations of what family means or how parenting should be done; omitting corrections of my sexuality falls in this same category.

I believe that what participants were doing, when they included me in the 'we' of lesbians, was to signal their recognition that I shared a community identification and that I had 'expert' knowledge of the issues of discrimination and subcultural subjectivity that allowed them to speak about the topics we did without lengthy discussion of the social context, and cultural habituation which led them to view an event in the way they did. Ultimately, clarifying my distance from participants was unnecessary since there was little evidence any of them felt we were 'the same', rather, linguistic choices suggested that I was being invited into social intimacy for the duration of the interview (Cotterill, 1992: 600).

### Issues of Power

An interesting effect of the different knowledges which participants brought to interviews was that I found power relations between me and the participants were constantly changing. Whilst all the parents I spoke to could be authoritative on their own experience of being parents and developing parental identities alongside LGBTQ identities, they were all differently placed when I began asking them about their interaction with media and opinions on it, as I explore in the analysis chapters. Several participants expressed concern they would not have sufficient knowledge to contribute usefully to my research whilst others said they felt like they should have 'revised' before our interview. I reassured all participants that not being able to identify media representations which appealed to them was as important to my project as their being able to list a hundred; indeed, this sense of an absence of representations is something I look at in Chapter Five.

Reassuring participants of the value of their knowledge was a central element in my methodology and one way in which I attempted to empower participants within the research. As I explore below, there were several other ways in which I negotiated power within the research in relation to my needs, participants' needs, and the issues which emerged as interviews progressed, which required me to think again about my role within the research and the balance of power in interviews.

### – Reciprocity

One of the ongoing elements of my methodology is managing participant expectations in regards to the likely outcomes of this research and the impact (or lack thereof) it will have on their lives. Several participants spoke about wanting to contribute to this research because they hoped it would have a positive impact on the visibility of parents of families like theirs and draw attention to what they described as persistent under-representation in media. Other participants hoped my research would draw attention to the work they, or others, were doing

to redress under-representation of LGBTQ people in media. This placed me in a potentially difficult position where I seemed to be viewed as having considerably more power to influence and shape media responses and representations than I do. On a number of occasions I also felt I was being asked to use what influence I had to recommend media to parents, and assist in networking LGBTQ parents through websites and magazine publications.

Interviewing participants who were editors or creators of LGBTQ focused media presented new challenges. The most intractable of these was managing their needs and desires from the interviews with my ethical responsibility to ensure anonymity for participants. I contacted both Carol and Ivy to invite them to participate in my research because I had identified their website and magazine, respectively, as media which seemed to address the needs of participants as collected in my first few interviews. This created a power dynamic in which my need for them was clearly greater than their need for me. Cotterill suggests that “often the interviewee is ill at ease and the interviewer, burdened with the responsibility to establish confidence, may feel the same” (1992: 600). Whilst these women, like all other participants, were happy to be interviewed, “levels of motivation varied” and, like Cotterill, I did not always feel in control (1992: 601). I worked to develop these interviews as I had all others, beginning with shaping questions such as: “who is in your family?” and “when did you decide to set up your magazine/website?” I adopted the ‘pyramid structure’ of interviewing where an interview begins with easy to answer questions on the participant’s “involvement in an issue [which] allows the informant to become accustomed to the interview, interviewer, and the topic before they are asked questions that might require deeper reflection” (Dunn, 2005: 86). This structure functioned well in these interviews where motivation was lower and drew participants into greater engagement with the research via their individual experience and knowledges.

I felt in both these interviews that there was a sense Ivy and Carol’s time should be recompensed by my sharing information on the data I had collected so far. Specifically, how many parents were already familiar with Ivy’s magazine, and what other participants had said in response to my question on what they wanted from media about and for them. Carol spoke about her hope of finding sources of funding in order to develop and expand the website and assist with existing running costs. I felt conflicted in how to respond to these comments and questions. Whilst my information sheet and consent form (appendix 2 and 3) make clear there was no compensation available for participating in the research, I nonetheless felt a sense of debt toward participants who offered their time, knowledge, homes, and hospitality to me. Ivy, for example, offered me a number of copies of her magazine to pass on to other

participants. I consented to take the magazines and offer them to subsequent participants with the proviso I would not be endorsing or recommending the publication. I chose to offer the magazines to parents at the end of interviews so that it did not unduly skew the content of our conversation.

Offering participants the opportunity to read summaries of my analysis and conclusion and inviting them to make any changes they wished was a way in which I tried to manage expectations whilst providing a sense of reciprocity. Cotterill acknowledges that being subject to disclosures of personal, emotional complex life experiences frequently results in researchers feeling they “must *do* something for them” but reminds us that “to assume respondents need anything done for them is an extremely patronising stance” (1992: 598, emphasis from original). In this case, participants’ expression of a desire for greater reach with their publications, and assistance with funding, was likely an expression of frustration rather than a coded call for me to act. I reflected on this after these interviews and, as I went into later interviews, reminded myself that “apart from a sympathetic ear, I had very little to offer” (Cotterill, 1992: 598).

#### – Sharing Knowledge

A sense of responsibility or of ‘owing’ participants something was not restricted to interviews with participants whom I had initiated contact with, as above. In later interviews in particular, where participants were aware I had already interviewed more than 20 other parents, they often responded to my questions about what representations of families like theirs they had seen in media, by asking me what other participants had said. I felt that I was regarded as a travelling repository of cultural knowledge on LGBTQ family representations. Whilst several parents expressed their belief in the model of the ‘good enough mother’<sup>6</sup>, an anxiety remained regarding how they were viewed by heteronormative society. In soliciting representations from me, to which they could compare their families, parents may have been attempting to mediate this anxiety and mobilise an opportunity to accrue more evidence that they are good parents in the face of homophobic narratives which insist they are inadequate.

On the first few occasions participants asked me for recommendations I was hesitant to answer, as a novice researcher who, like Cotterill (1992: 604) “did not believe herself to be an expert on anything”, I felt vulnerable, concerned I would give the ‘wrong’ answer and alienate

---

<sup>6</sup> Proposed by Winnicott in the 1950s, the ‘Good Enough Mother’ theory suggests that normal and healthy child development is predicated on imperfect parenting which prepares the child for the ‘real’ world in which disappointment and failure are inevitable.

or offend the participant by making recommendations that were too obvious or which did not suit their tastes and values. I was also concerned that I would ‘contaminate’ my findings by facilitating the sharing of this media knowledge. This sense of unease “illustrates the changing nature of interactions in research relationships and the delicate balance of power between research and researched” (Cotterill, 1993: 604).

I attempted to record participants’ knowledge of media representations before providing them with a summary of the books, television programmes, and films other participants had identified. The concern I had of contaminating participants’ responses with the knowledge I had collated from other parents proved to be largely unfounded. For example, Rose told me the only books she had been able to find had come from recommendations on the Stonewall website<sup>7</sup>, but when I listed some other books participants had identified in response to her entreaty for recommendations, she was already familiar with several of them (including the Julia Donaldson book *Tabby McTat* which I look at in Chapter Three), although she had not previously viewed them as containing LGBTQ representations.<sup>8</sup>

My discussion on managing reciprocity and knowledge sharing is incomplete without also acknowledging that I have benefited, on a personal level, from my research. My own interest in the topic, and perpetual search for media representations of people like me, has meant that I have engaged with the media participants reported. From revisiting *the Clangers* for the first time since childhood, to buying children’s books to read and pass on to friends’ children; from becoming immersed in television and comic series which participants praised, to subscribing to a LGBT family magazine; my media consumption has taken a clear shift towards the media which I discovered through these interviews. Ultimately I was not, and could not be, merely a conduit through which information circulated between participants. My own interests shaped which pieces of media were most memorable to me and therefore what I passed on when participants asked for recommendations. My evaluations of what types of media were useful to LGBTQ people inflected how I responded to Ivy and Carol’s disclosures of needs for their publications, choosing as I did to be sympathetic to the drive of participants to connect with more media resources and distribute a few copies of Ivy’s magazine. I am as much a part of the research data as any of my participants.

---

<sup>7</sup> See [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/stonewall\\_primary\\_book\\_list.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/stonewall_primary_book_list.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Acknowledging the possible value of the list of media resources I have collated through these interviews, I have produced a full list of ‘media cited as being of value to LGBTQ parents’ and published it on my blog, shared it through Twitter, provided participants with a link to it as part of the summary of findings I distributed, and reproduced it in appendix 5.

– *Gender and Rapport*

Not all of my interviews were easy to conduct. In particular, establishing rapport quickly emerged as a central element in whether I felt an interview had generated any interesting data. The process of reflection, transcription, and coding ultimately revealed unique and valuable content from every interview, however, I still look back over some interviews with a sense of unease or of being unwelcome, according to my experience in collecting the data.

I was particularly surprised to find that interviewing men was considerably more challenging than interviewing women. I felt, strongly, that there were distinct differences in the way the men and women I spoke with communicated. Interviews which I felt I experienced good rapport with participants were ones where there was a sense of sharing knowledge and experience which, as I mentioned above, was most acute during my interviews with women who through their language signalled their belief that we shared a perspective or identity. Whilst this rapport was not easy or immediate with all female participants, it was my experience in the majority of interviews with women. Conversely, with the men I interviewed there was not such easy rapport, as points of shared identification were not immediately clear. This is in common with the experiences of Scott who found rapport harder to build with male interviewees (1985: 74). Scott traced this difficulty to both a lack of mutual identification, and a tendency for male interviewees to make assumptions about what answers the interviewer was seeking and responding with only this information (1985: 75).

One possible issue which may have influenced the experiences I had interviewing men is stakeholder burnout (Beazley and Emew, 2006: 193). Of the 7 men I interviewed in male-only interviews (i.e. not couple interviews with heterogendered couples), 4 had been interviewed more than once, and for 3 of these men, this was the latest in a long line of interviews about their families. The closed answers and difficulty I had in prompting these participants to respond to my questions and not the questions they perceived I was investigating, certainly correspond with this theory.

The majority of women I interviewed were recruited through snowball sampling and were connected to large networks of other lesbian and bisexual mothers suggesting that they were both more accustomed to talking to other women about their experience of parenthood, and that they may have felt a clearer sense of connection to me than the men I interviewed, who were largely isolated from other participants and wider community networks. As my interviews progressed I increasingly entered interviews with men with a sense of trepidation;

would I manage to make my brief shaping questions last for an hour? Would I be able to elicit answers longer than a single word? Would I be talked down to or patronised?

In one interview I felt increasingly anxious when a participant repeatedly checked his watch during our conversation. Scott describes this specific action as an example of a way male interviewees may attempt to control the situation, “making a great issue about how busy they [a]re” (1985: 74). Whilst Scott rightly draws attention to the fact not all male participants behave in this way or are motivated by the same desire to control the power relationship in an interview, it is striking that my experience interviewing male participants was inflected with so many of the same challenges around establishing rapport and negotiating power.

In particular, meeting in this participant’s workplace, and holding our interview in his workspace (I had met two other participants in their workplaces, but we held our interview in a more neutral space of a meeting or conference room) made me conscious of our power imbalance. Sin describes how “the choice of certain sites may serve to define the respondent as having valuable knowledge to contribute, or situate them in positions of authority” (2003: 309). Whilst I sought to privilege participants’ knowledge within interview interactions – disclosing my personal motivations to learn about their experiences as I did during recruitment – this experience illustrates the degree to which I still anticipated I would have overall control of the tone and pace of our interaction. The participant’s evident comfort in the room, and the professional authority the space signalled for him likely increased his sense of ease as it constrained mine and this was borne out when I reviewed the interview data and found it to be as rich and varied as all other interviews. This experience corresponds with Wengraf’s conclusion that:

interaction [of power] is [not] always on a win-lose basis. Both interviewer and interviewee may struggle for power within an interview and both may emerge from the interview more powerful than when they started. (2001: 42)

Whilst this interview did not have the power dynamic I anticipated, or was comfortable with, it did generate data and illustrates that there can be value in different types of power exchange in research other than the ideal interaction which is anticipated or planned for.

#### – Locations and the Role of Place in Interviews

Whilst allowing the participant to choose the location for an interview was an important element of my practice, I did not allow myself enough time to consider the changing power relations of interviewing a participant in their workplace. Within the context of this project,

that choice was continually manifested by the majority participants choosing to be interviewed at home, the site of the production of family (Nash, 2010: 133-134).

As illustrated by the interview I relate above, I did not anticipate the effects of allowing participants to select interview locations which situate them in a site of intellectual authority and therefore reframe the type of power interaction from them being an authority on family, the topic of my research, to their being an authority on the production of knowledge. The latter, I now realise when contemplating the above experience, was the position I unconsciously expected to occupy. I am unsure if I could have altered the type of questions I was asking in order to redress the power dynamics at play but I could have been better prepared psychologically for encountering a participant who was located in a space which gave them professional and intellectual confidence. The above experience served to illustrate just how chimeric any sense of equity between myself and participants was; any authority participants had was something negotiated with me as researcher and not located solely with them as 'experts' on their experience.

Despite the difficulties I identify, allowing participants to select the location for our interview was broadly a successful strategy. I interviewed the majority of participants in their homes which had the effect of helping them feel at ease with our interaction. As Sin (2003) notes, being able to receive researchers in one's home indicates a degree of economic and social capital and certainly this corresponds with the demographic of my sample who were, as already noted, in the majority middle-class. With this possible classed-inequality in mind, I did not aim to interview people in their homes; participants were invited to select a space which they felt most comfortable and therefore any possible anxiety about inviting a researcher into their home environments could be controlled by the participants themselves.

Those participants with young children most frequently chose to be interviewed at home as they could attend to childcare whilst we spoke. This meant there were occasional interruptions as children were directed to different activities, fed, or put to bed. Participants who chose to be interviewed at home were also able to show books and DVDs to me when they responded to my questions about what media they used, and related to, as a family. The advantage of this methodology, whereby the interview structure was flexible to the immediate needs of participants and their children, represents a striving toward flexible, creative and original methods of response which constitute queer methodological approaches (Filax et al, 2011: 89).

I interviewed 7 participants in coffee shops and bars. There were more challenges to interviews in these locations as the environment was often noisy making it harder to transcribe the



interviews from the audio recording, and some participants had concerns about being overheard. I was conscious of the increased risks to anonymity of conducting interviews in public locations and reminded participants before we began interviews in these places that they could decline to answer any questions they wished and, if they felt they had been inhibited in replying, they could send any additional responses they wished to me via email after the interview was concluded. I also reminded participants of these alternative modes of participation again during interviews if I felt they were hesitant in answering, or if it appeared they were looking around at the people near us to assess whether anyone was listening.

One interview, with Julia, took place across three locations; we met in the Scottish National Museum and we began the interview as we accompanied her daughter around the children's hands-on area. We moved through the museum to the café, from the café to the street where we renewed her parking, and then to another café. Spanning nearly 2 hours, this was a challenging interview for me as it meant holding the audio recorder whilst we spoke and having little opportunity to refer back to my notes without significantly impeding the flow of conversation. However, moving from place to place and being engaged in various activities as we spoke led me to feel the interview was more natural and followed a format more akin to two friends meeting to chat and catch up whilst entertaining a child. It is important, as Rose (1997) says, not to project my experience of this interview as a friendly, natural interaction on to the participant and assume I understand her experience. From my position as a researcher, I did feel that this type of interview integrated the best parts of the interviews conducted in participants' homes, and interviews conducted solely in cafes or bars. Firstly, because we were continually moving around there was less chance of someone nearby overhearing large swathes of our interview thus helping deliver anonymity. Secondly, the power dynamics of this type of interview seemed to be more equitable as we both actively participated in entertaining and supervising Julia's daughter Niamh, making the interview secondary to our activity, with a sense that questions would only be answered once Niamh's immediate needs had been met.

### Analysis

All interviews were manually transcribed in full and coded in Nvivo. The 24 interviews totalled more than 33 hours. Interviews were digitally recorded on a Dictaphone and stored electronically, under a pseudonym, on a secure hard drive. Nvivo allows data to be coded at multiple top-level 'nodes' representing key themes and further coded to sub-category 'nodes' within each theme. Informed by a discourse analysis approach to identifying significant content, those topics or issues which were repeatedly commented on, or those which were

discussed at length in multiple interviews by participants were designated as having “worth and validity” (Waite, 2005: 182) and I used the topics I identified in this way as ‘top level’ nodes. Each ‘top-level’ node became a single analysis chapter. I additionally coded data which directly addressed my research questions, this drew on the immediate responses to a number of key structuring questions I introduced in every interview. As interviews were shaped by a number of questions which sought to direct participants to offer specific responses to my research questions this research was, to an extent, driven by a grounded theory approach. I did not stop coding my interview data after the key elements of the research questions had been addressed; when coding, I noted repetitions of certain prominent phrases, ideas, and meanings in the data which did not fit neatly into the top level nodes and introduced additional nodes according to the relative prominence of certain themes (Hannam 2002, Smith 1995). This allowed me to continue exploring the thematic content of the interviews and evolved a participant-led approach to handling the data which allowed me to expand my focus beyond my expectations of what participants would find important in response to my questions. Specifically, participant concerns for what greater media representation and visibility may mean for LGBTQ families, and the description offered by some parents of consensual, strategic assimilation into normative productions of family emerged in this secondary stage of coding. The evolution of the key themes of my research was driven by participant voices and facilitated by my flexible and iterative approach to coding.

The media examples which I analyse in this thesis were all identified by participants. These named texts emerged in response to questions which directed participants to list their favourite and least favourite media, and in more wide ranging discussions on the type of representation which participants found useful or valuable. Exploring the content of these media texts is important to this project because the meanings (or discourses) which circulate through such communication channels function to generate specific contexts for action and thought, and social possibilities (Van Dijk, 1996; Wetherell and Potter, 1988: 171). My approach to viewing or reading these texts was iterative, reviewing each text multiple times to identify particularly salient features of the content with reference to the key characteristics which participants suggested it contained. In subsequent viewings, I reflected on how these features contributed to the overall narrative or discursive meaning of the text (Riggs, 2014: 160). Therefore, I offer analysis of the meanings and discourses available in the media texts participants used, in order to situate their responses to representation and family possibility, and to facilitate reflection of the role these discourses play in shaping and supporting the narratives participants offered of their families (Kress, 1996; Thompson, 1988: 12-13).

Despite my meticulous approach to sorting my data, the fact remains that “making your data speak, even when you are drawing on the exact words of the researched, is a creative process” (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 159). However open and ‘organic’ the coding and analysis process is, I will produce interpretations specific to my position, aims, and expectations and whilst participants led the identification of media texts, I selected which of those texts I would offer detailed analysis of (Thompson, 1992: 13). Inevitably, there is not perfect coherence of the content of interviews with the themes I chose to examine and as I have already noted, not all of the responses generated are used in the following chapters.

Like all research, the conclusions offered in the following chapters are partial, and shaped as much by my interpretations and valuing of some content over other, as it is by the specific comments participants offered.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have explained the rationale behind the choice of research instrument, the flexible responses my methodology allowed to changing needs and priorities of participants, and the limitations and difficulties associated with recruiting and collecting research data. I have emphasised my role within the research, both as investigator and as co-constructor of knowledge (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002:15), and I have stated my belief that managing and considering my own, and participants’ emotions, within this research was as important as the content of the data generated. Finally, I point to the subsequent analysis chapters which, with an awareness of the partial and subjective nature of this data, examine how LGBTQ parents interact with media representations according to the self-reporting accounts of media-use and family collected through interviews.

In the analysis chapters which follow, I draw on the experiences and opinions of my participants, organising them according to the key themes which emerged in the interview data. I rely, where possible, on verbatim quotations to illustrate specific points and opinions, or as an example of a more general theme or trend which appeared in several interviews. When I use quotations, I indicate whether they should be understood as illustrative of a broader trend in participant responses or as an example of a just one participant’s experiences.

### Chapter Three

#### Looking 'Normal'

In this chapter I will draw on the interviews I conducted with lone bisexual and queer parents and parents in heterogendered relationships. The title of this chapter is inspired by an interview with Julia who described her experience of being 'read' as heterosexual because her queer identity was not visible whilst she was single, as indicative of her experience living in "normal-normal land" (Julia, 2013). I explore here how participants sought to articulate their identity as non-heterosexual people against the heterosexual (or 'normal') assumptions which came to bear on them as a result of their relationship arrangements and status as parents. This chapter will begin by exploring how parents managed interactions with their peers, family, and friends which erased or ignored their stated non-heterosexual identities and what counter-hegemonic values shaped the parenting strategies and family-identity narratives parents sought to craft. I will show, in the section 'appropriate visibility', how classed notions of respectability inhibit individuals in making themselves visible as non-heterosexual and what contours the continual expectation of heterosexuality imposes on the choices of visibility parents are free to make. I will consider the classed element of these negotiations with particular reference to Beverley Skeggs' (1997) work on the accrual of classed respectability through conformity to certain actions and practices.

I will ask why parents chose to engage with the task of crafting family identity narratives primarily through negotiated reading strategies of mainstream media, and what possibilities subcultural media offered parents in imagining and describing their families. By looking at the various reading techniques of these parents in the later sections of this chapter I will explore how they continually reinscribe the heterogeneity of 'family' as they explore how their identities and identifications are, and can be, represented in media.

In much of the literature on non-heterosexual families, an implicit assumption about what a non-heterosexual relationship looks like drives the discussion. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan describe the crucial difference in the experience of non-heterosexual relationship versus heterosexual relationships as "the lack of legitimacy" but they go on to tie this to the lack of formal institutional channels by which lesbian and gay relationships may be recognised (2004: 348). Reviewing the existing literature on families of choice, and gay and lesbian families, they conclude that "the appropriation of the language of family by many non-heterosexuals can therefore be seen as one important way in which the sexually marginal are struggling to assert the validity of their own way of life" (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2004: 343). What is not

acknowledged in this piece, or in the work of other researchers they review, is how non-heterosexual parents in heterogendered relationships - whom Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2004) imply society has legitimated as family because they 'appear' heterosexual - negotiate the heteronormative implications which the language of family bestows upon them. The figure of bisexual, queer, and non-heterosexual parent casts light upon the failure of queer and sociological studies to step outside of "the heteronormativity of the social imaginary" (Roseneil, 2005: 243). Despite attempting "to pluralise notions of 'family' [by embracing] the study of lesbian and gay families" theorists continue to classify parents as part of one of two homogenous groups - heterosexual or homosexual (ibid) and continue to conceptualise the traditional or heterosexual family as a stable and distinct formation which it never has been (Bernades, 1985: 196-210).

Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan argue that "as same-sex relationships are constructed and maintained outside of conventional institutional and legal support systems and structures, they are less likely to be characterised by predetermined assumptions and past histories than traditional [i.e. mixed gender] family relationships" (2004: 348). However, the parents discussed in this chapter, whose primary relationships cast them on the "traditional family relationships" side of this binary, were acutely aware of the assumptions and histories of the institution of family as a direct result of the challenges they faced in articulating identities and making themselves visible as different from that framework. As almost all individuals have some experience of a traditional family arrangement regardless of their sexual identity (Jackson, 1997: 324), Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan's contention that individuals in same-sex relationships are uniquely able to reject their pre-existing understanding of family is puzzling in its arbitrary separation of individuals by sexual object choice and not their ability, or desire, to critically respond to the production of family relationship structures. As I will show, occupying a position close to the heteronorm is not, as Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan imply, equivalent to uncritically reproducing it.

Warner, in *The Trouble with Normal* argues passionately against assimilationist politics of lesbian and gay activist groups, with particular critique focused on the de-politicising, de-queering power of marriage (1999a:41-147), but he does not acknowledge the position of those queerly-identified persons who already broadly conform to the heteronorm. Many people look 'normal' by virtue of their choice of partner or, in the case of lone parents because the presumption of heterosexuality comes to bear on individuals whose sexual object choice is not visible, but these people still seek to articulate a queerly resistant position. The work of Warner, and others (Butler, 1993b, Dollimore, 1996, Schlichter, 2004) offers an increasingly

narrow framing of what queer means as they link it to specific identity positions (lesbian and gay), disavowing the potential for non -lesbian and -gay individuals to occupy queer subjectivities or enact queer resistance.

A theory of queerness which turns on occupying a position entirely divorced from the imagined “monolithic heterosexual hegemony” reinforces the heterosexual/homosexual dyad (Eadie, 1993: 154). The self-sustaining logic of this dyad must vigorously reject bisexuality and any other ‘intermediate’ positions in order to protect the symbolic order which produces lesbian and gay subjects as uniquely dissident and singularly oppressed (Eadie, 1993:154-165; Hemmings, 2002:9). This theorisation, which suggests queerness is the sole preserve of lesbian and gay subjects, and that bisexual and non-heterosexuals are inherently normative, fails to account for the explicitly anti-normative positions, relationship structures, values, and aims which my participants indicated were central to their identity formation and family-building. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to reinvest diversity in the term ‘queer’ by looking at the “heterogeneity of contemporary intimate lives” (Roseneil, 2005: 243). And, through this focus, I will demonstrate how resistant and counter-hegemonic practices can emerge between heterosexual and homosexual imperatives, and in dialogue with existing representations of traditional and alternative family forms. As Biddy Martin says:

Queerness is not always where we might expect to find it, and more devotion to the fundamental perplexity of all lives – rather than contempt for those who appear *only* to reproduce norms – seems particularly urgent. (1996: 14, emphasis from original)

### ‘Passing’ as Straight

Charlie and Jamie live in London with their 5 month old child, Harley who they are raising as gender neutral (using gender neutral pronouns [they/their] and not disclosing Harley’s sex to friends or family). Charlie and Jamie both identify as bisexual, Charlie uses female pronouns and light-heartedly describes herself as ‘queering the cis/trans binary’ whilst Jamie uses male pronouns and is happy to describe himself as ciscgender. Mary and Paul are another heterogendered couple who are raising their 17 month old son, James, in London, they also describe themselves as bisexual. Both couples describe themselves as ‘poly’. Poly is short for polyamory, a term which describes having multiple concurrent consensual sexual and romantic relationships (Sheff, 2014:xiv-xv). At the time of our interview Charlie and Jamie were not currently in any other relationships. Mary and Paul did have other relationships when we spoke; Mary had a second partner, Matthew, who lived with her and Paul. Matthew also has

another partner, Sandra, who often visited their shared home. Neither Matthew nor Sandra co-parent James.

Jamie spoke about how having a child has caused some of his friends to regard him as having reached the end of his "bisexual phase" and agreed with Charlie that parenthood had compounded their experience of "the normal bisexual problem, which is of invisibility" (Charlie, 2013). Mary and Paul also felt their experience of bi-invisibility intensified when they became parents. As well as discussing their experiences of appearing straight to strangers, both Charlie and Jamie, and Mary and Paul spoke about how their poly identities inflected their sense of invisibility and informed their search for different types of media representation. Paul described his perception of how his family was misread: "when we're just out and about with just James [it] looks like a straight, monogamous, het[erosexual] relationship, you know...it's a bit like we have to try a bit harder to make sure we're talking about diversity." (Mary and Paul, 2013)

Mary acknowledged her relative privilege in being read as a 'normal' heterosexual monogamous family but suggested this privilege was an ambiguous one:

Yes [passing] is absolutely a privilege, it means you can, you don't have to always be fighting fire. On the other hand, it sucks! People stick labels on you that are not your labels and without going round with a little banner on, you know, you can't work against that explicitly which is frustrating. (Mary, 2013)

Exploring this idea of 'passing privilege' further, Lynne, a middle-class lone parent living in the East Midlands, described how she felt that becoming a parent eclipsed her identity as a bisexual woman, but as it did so, actively identified her as a mother; a woman who is taking her 'correct', respectable role within the hegemonic, patriarchal order (Skeggs, 1997: 120):

Parenting makes you invisible in all sorts of ways. I did feel more confident just going out and about and out as a woman who was also a mum, because I quite like that invisibility gave me confidence in a sense that people weren't going to be looking at me if I was pushing the buggy along. So in some ways you can make it work for you. (Lynne, 2013)

Lynne's experience corresponds with Gabb's findings that "the presence of a child obscures [lesbian] signifiers beneath the opacity of the heterosexual reproductive narrative" (2005b: 422). Whilst Lynne enjoyed a new found sense of safety on the streets as a mother, her experience paradoxically reinforces a sense of difference; it is only because her position outside the heteronorm had previously negatively shaped her experiences on the street that the experience of invisibility, or sameness, was noticeable. Pallotta-Chiarolli and Lubowitz similarly conclude that 'passing', rather than providing a sense of security or sameness, instead

highlights the way in which bisexual people move between “categories of specificity” but are ultimately “outside the dominant constructs of gay identity and gay community” (2003: 58). Lynne’s sense of confidence comes from her temporary moment of ‘fitting’ in a culture which cannot find a space for her non-monosexual or fluid desire in either heterosexual or gay community. But ultimately, it is not a stable space or one which will continue to shelter her if she steps outside of the narrow codes of behaviour and desires it permits or recognises.

Julia was a lone parent to 21 month old Niamh and lives in the Edinburgh area. She described herself as queer. She was frustrated by the assumptions other mothers she met made about her:

They’ll all be discussing their husbands...or [they’ll say] ‘you’ll be looking for a nice man’ I’ll be thinking ‘no...’ [laughs]...That’s the thing I find frustrating, this constant assumption that this is how you are...it’s that always feeling like you’re the first and only one. I feel like [having] someone to identify with – [being able to say:] ‘yeah that’s pretty much how it is for me’ – you know, would make me feel a bit less ‘the only one’ at the playgroup, as the only person that doesn’t fit into the norm. (Julia, 2013)

For Julia, having no other visibly queer parents to identify with, or point to, resulted in her feeling both invisible as a queer woman and acutely aware of her difference from the norm she was presumed to inhabit. Julia’s wish for people “to identify with” echoes Valentine’s summary of the strategies employed by lesbians in heterosexual environments, who “consciously seek out other gay people...to affirm their own identity and right to be there” (1993: 244). The concern for being recognised as non-heterosexual which was expressed by the parents I spoke with indicates an anxiety that the fitting-in - the ‘passing’ - they experience is chimeric, and the social legitimisation they receive as (apparently heterosexual) parents would be withdrawn if their ‘true’ identities were known.

For all the parents discussed in this chapter, the experience of being presumed straight served to heighten their consciousness of queer identity, to underline, and not erase, their sense of difference. Their primary response was to seek out others like them, and find representations of families like their own. This can be understood as an attempt to “creat[e] pockets of gay time/space” (Valentine, 1993: 244) in which they are both confident to speak about their identities without being regarded as exceptional, and they are legitimated as parents who are explicitly non-heterosexual. As I examine below, creating these ‘pockets’ and having their differences acknowledged was not a straightforward task of simply rejecting the labels and assumptions placed upon them. Consciously inhabiting positions of difference within an apparently homogenous institution prompted parents to use queer strategies, such as the



ones described by Valentine, to articulate and validate their experiences, identities, and to ease social isolation.

### Becoming Visible

For Mary and Paul, the invisibility which caused the greatest frustration was the erasure of Mary's important relationship with Matthew. Mary recalled her frustration when her author's biography on a book publication was edited: "partners plural got edited out...I was furious! [I said;] 'you're erasing one of my most important people!'" (Mary, 2013) The expectation of monogamy is so strong that her editors read 'partners' as an error and attempted to rationalise Mary's explicit self-description into the dominant relationship framework. Whilst Mary went on to challenge this error in future texts, exercising authorial power to compel editors to leave her reference to multiple partners intact. This type of visibility was something both she and Paul found hard to negotiate in other contexts where power and authority were less clear cut and often balanced against them. Mary was conscious that visibility meant social services may become involved, as they had in the families of some of her poly friends:

I'm really struggling whether to write more about queer, bi, poly parenting and what that means to me, or whether I'm going to bring a shit storm on my own head and the heads of those I love. (Mary, 2013)

Mary described the way in which this experience of tactical, or chosen invisibility began to impact on her; "as a bi parent in a het relationship, not only can you feel highly invisible, but you can start feeling a bit like you're cheating somehow - or I do anyway." The lack of representational channels by which bisexual people may become known "invisibilises" bisexual relationships (Pallotta-Chiarolli and Lubowitz, 2003: 56-57). Eadie offers further support for this, saying that the sense of "not being bisexual 'enough'" is a common anxiety in the bisexual community given there is not an available model of "normative" bisexual identity against which bisexual subjectivity can be weighed (1993: 144). Eadie suggests that this flexibility of meaning around bisexuality can instead enable "the growth of communities where a range of sexual subjectivities are articulated with one another" (1993: 144, see also Loftus, 1996: 210-211). This indeterminacy, whilst offering the theoretical possibility for a radical change in the structuring of communities and expressions of identity, did not translate to an uncomplicatedly positive potentiality, as Lynne and Julia's experiences testify below.

Lynne described how challenging it was to make herself visible as a bisexual parent, given the expectation of her friends and family that sexual identity could be neatly categorised against dominant, definitional models of subjecthood. Lynne compared trying to make bisexual identity visible to the relative simplicity of being read as straight or gay:

I think being bisexual possibly that identity more than being lesbian is a really difficult one...I just think bi identity is hard, if you're in a relationship with a woman you're constantly saying 'I'm not [a lesbian]', if you're in a relationship with a man, you're constantly saying 'I'm not heterosexual'. It gets a bit exhausting. (Lynne, 2013)

Lynne hoped, instead, that family and friends would 'read between the lines' of her life, pointing to her openness about using self-insemination to become pregnant, and her professional research on lesbian motherhood. Whilst she thought these things "were pretty big hints," her family rationalised and dismissed these narratives; "they just thought I was trying to be different." (Lynne, 2013). Mary's experience was similar, she said: "people tend not to listen to those sorts of words...so I say [I'm queer and poly], but I'm not always sure what they hear all the time." (Mary, 2013). Pallotta-Chiarolli and Lubowitz suggest that the frustration Mary and Lynne experience in trying to make their multiple, intersecting identities visible is a result of "homogenised representation" where "diversity within...sexual categories is not presented" (2003: 57) and this seems to concord strongly with Lynne's suggestion that diversity is more available in representational resources which address heterosexual men.

For Julia, crafting the family identity she wanted was strongly linked to space and patterns of living, rather than explicit recognition of her family by outsiders. Like those parents looking for recognition of their identities from outsiders, this was still a precarious position, as Julia recounts:

When we conceived...we were living in a housing co-op, there was 10 of us, various different alternative lifestyles on the go, 7 dogs, it was this big old beautiful house, loads of land that we all shared, it was absolutely wonderful and exactly what I wanted to bring my daughter into and we ended up leaving there and...suddenly we're just in normal-normal land and I'm a single parent raising her by myself, completely frustrated, and how did this happen?! (Julia, 2013)

The community Julia lived with, in a co-operative house, served to strengthen and validate the model of family she wished to build, but when her relationship with Niamh's father broke down, circumstance forced her to a more traditional community. In this community she found she was presumed to be heterosexual and felt she had no opportunity, or mechanism, by which she could sustain the queer narrative of family she had been building. Just as Lynne's previous declarations of connection to non-heterosexual models of parenthood were swept away if they were not continually restated or reinforced by a homogendered relationship, so Julia's physical location came to be the sole channel through which she was understood, despite her continued rejection of dominant heterosexual narratives of family.

Heterosexual, monogamous narratives of identity are so pervasive that even direct articulations of difference are dismissed. What Klesse describes as "the widespread belief that

bisexuality cannot be a proper identity" (2011: 233) can be seen at work in how Lynne's family dismiss her identity and Mary's concern that her difference becoming invisible makes her a 'cheat'. Articulations of bisexuality are denied, dismissed, or rationalised, and the erroneous belief that bisexuality is not a stable identity sustains itself.

In the above examples, it is monogamous heterosexuality which replaces bisexuality or queerness as the sexuality which parents are presumed to conform to. Whilst coming out from a presumed original position of heterosexuality is a negotiation and articulation all non-heterosexual people have to manage (Butler, 1990, Rich, 1980) bisexual and queer parents also faced complex negotiations of their identities from and through homosexuality.

When I asked Mary and Paul which media representations of families like theirs they presented to their son James, they referred to a mixed set of media representations which were dominated by homogendered representations. The immediacy of the visual depiction of difference to the heterosexual family was a key element for them in describing and reinforcing the value of the queer narrative of parenthood and family they were crafting. Visible difference from the heteronorm, which these parents are so conscious they cannot demonstrate in their own relationships, was the first consideration in the type of media they wish to show to their children; they aimed to offer "diverse little pictures", as Mary put it. Describing their affection for *Tabby McTat* (Donaldson, 2010), a children's book which depicts the journey of a stray cat who finds a home with two adult, co-habiting women, Mary and Paul characterise their understanding of these two women as lesbians as "a fairly obvious reading". There is, however, no direct indication of the sexuality of, or relationship between, these two women. The difficulty of representing bisexuality is made explicit in Mary and Paul's reading; without a description marking bisexual identity, images of couples are rationalised as either heterosexual, or in this case, homosexual. Mary and Paul's selection of this text signals their broad rejection of the undifferentiated heterosexual family representation in favour of any kind of queer representation which might help James think about and describe his family.

The representations which parents identified as useful in articulating explicitly non-heterosexual family identities were most often of homogendered parents in monogamous relationships. As Mary and Paul's reading of *Tabby McTat* above illustrates, one problem of relying so heavily on representations of homogendered parenting, particularly for lone parents whose sexual object choice is unmarked, is that bisexuality is subsumed by assumptions of homosexuality. Mono-sexuality is so pervasive an organising principle of relationships and identities that even bisexual parents struggle to break free of its logic when reading images.

Lynne spoke about how her work researching LGBT communities, and past work on lesbian self-insemination, led people around her to make:

the assumption that I must be somewhere under [the LGBT] umbrella since I'm doing that research, or why else would I be doing it?!...I think people assumed I was lesbian because bisexual doesn't seem to figure as much, it doesn't seem to be visible as a possibility somehow, even though it's in the LGBT acronym. (Lynne, 2013)

In using explicitly non-heterosexual images of family, parents come no closer to making their bisexual or queer identities visible, or to helping their children identify [with] images of families which visually correspond with their own. Once again, bisexuality is not marked as a possible identity for parents. The conundrum of teaching children that families look different, whilst reinforcing the idea this difference is identifiable exclusively through visual cues, was one which Lynne reflected on:

It's not all about same-sex relationships, it's not just about relationships, how do you show images of people who are single and bisexual? You take a picture of me, who would know? So I think it's really hard to find and depict visually. (Lynne, 2013)

Lynne concluded that to offer representations of non-heterosexual identities without relying on signifiers of same-sex relationships, children's books would need to "tell the story" of who the people they showed were. As I will explore below, strategies of resistant and negotiated reading offered parents a route to 'tell the stories' of families, parents, and other characters whose representation was otherwise undifferentiated from a binary of heterosexual/homosexual identity.

Before moving on to discuss queer reading, it is important to note that the desire to reject established understandings of family and parent identities was not shared by all the parents I interviewed. In particular, trans parents repeatedly expressed a desire to be represented and understood as 'normal' or 'ordinary' in response to media portrayals of families like theirs as either exceptional or entirely invisible. Whilst bisexual and queer parents spoke about wanting to move from a position of presumed normativity to one of explicit queerness, the trans parents I spoke to who transitioned after building their families and having children, found themselves thrust into uncomfortable and unwanted queer visibility.

Amy was a trans woman with two children whom she had with her cisgender wife; they were working-class and lived in the West Midlands. She reflected on the experience of moving from a position of unacknowledged privilege to one of unintelligibility:

When you're a heteronormative family you identify as a heteronormative family, you look like one, you don't really need to explain yourself...when more and more people

know [that I'm trans] then we'll have to explain it and it'll get, not more difficult or interesting, but just more unusual. (Amy, 2013)

Unlike the parents discussed so far, Amy no longer has the freedom to 'pass' as heteronormative, she experiences discomfort at being thrust into the spotlight of non-heterosexuality. Rather than deciding when to make herself visible as non-heterosexual, she must now respond to the questions and demands of those outside her family who interrogate her identity as a parent. It is striking also that Amy describes herself and her family as working-class; her movement to a new position where outsiders demand she continually explain her family is a strongly classed one. Skeggs says, working-class women "feel their lives are very public, very social and hence open to scrutiny." (1997: 162) The predominantly middle-class parents I look at above therefore enjoy the passing privilege not just because they 'look' heterosexual, but also because middle-class lives are subject to less scrutiny. Moreover, when their lives do come under scrutiny, they enjoy "class privileges [which] shield them from some of the potential impacts of nonconformity and provide resources to deal with disadvantages or discrimination" (Sheff, 2014: 31). This is illustrated in Mary and Paul's comments above regarding their continual evaluations of how and when to disclose their various identities in relation to their awareness of the potential risks, and the knowledge shared from the poly community (itself, largely middle-class [Sheff, 2014: 31]) of the possible implications of visibility for sustaining family life. There is an indication in this cautious management and evaluation of bisexual and poly identities as "border positions" which are never comfortably incorporated into the gay or straight, monogamous subject positions which otherwise offer security (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2011: 567; Pallotta-Chiarolli and Lubowitz, 2003: 58). There are, clearly, considerable challenges to being immediately visible as non-heterosexual as there are to being wholly or partially invisible and the option to negotiate both visibility and invisibility is tied up in issues of class. I will examine this further in this chapter in the 'Appropriate Visibility' section. I will also return to further consider the pressures of visibility in Chapter Four.

As I will explore in the next two sections, parents did find ways to make their non-heterosexual identities visible through strategic rejection of specific parenting and gendered norms. The emotional labour associated with this 'balancing' of family legitimation and queer visibility underlines both the complexity of this negotiation and the high stakes at play.

#### Resisting Gender Norms and Gendered Roles

One of the first points which Charlie and Jamie, and Mary and Paul brought up in interviews was their experience of outsiders to their family assuming that they were heterosexual,

monogamous couples because they 'looked like' them. In describing the ways in which this assumption was inaccurate, Charlie spoke about her rejection of the title 'Mother':

I have no connection to the identity of Mother. I'm Charlie to Harley...I don't really identify with it generally because for me Mother is a gender identity and it's not a gender identity that I would identify with. (Charlie, 2013)

For Charlie, her experience of gender and rejection of the title 'Mother' was one which she found difficult to make visible to strangers. Her invisibility in this respect was "quite jarring, [being called Mother] feels like being called someone else's name?...it's not offensive, it's not insulting, it just...feels a bit weird." Charlie and Jamie went on to discuss some of the strategies they employed within their homes and relationships to find solutions to the problems and frustrations of being presumed heterosexual by default. Charlie and Jamie described the "semi-serious", "non-gendered parent terms" they made up during Charlie's pregnancy; "vessel parent and fetching parent". Just as they acknowledge the difficulty of confronting strangers who misnamed Charlie as 'Mother', there was an understanding that these terms were hard to share and implement in the wider world (Charlie and Jamie, 2013); instead, these terms acted as personal sites of resistance and change in lieu of being able to shift wider attitudes and assumptions.

Charlie and Jamie's private renaming of parental roles can be understood as a way of telling a new story, a survival tactic "in a hostile atmosphere where most of us can do little to alter social conditions" (Jenkins 2006:112). Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan argue that "latent assumptions" of how relationships and family roles should be arranged, structure all hetero[gendered] relationships (2004: 348), but Charlie and Jamie demonstrate in their conscious and reflective construction of their family that this is neither accurate nor inevitable. Gabb describes lesbian parent families as "troubling...gendered roles and identities" but ultimately reinscribing the centrality of traditional gendered divisions in parenting through their cross-gender identification (2005a: 592). Unlike Gabb's lesbian parents, Charlie and Jamie seek to highlight that parenting roles are not gendered-inevitabilities, but purely performative categories. By queering the presumed naturalness of the terms 'Mother' and 'Father', Charlie and Jamie aim to create a family environment which can facilitate Harley's understanding that gender roles and parenting are not intrinsically linked. Their hope that their linguistic choices can help model a different way of thinking about gender in families was prominent in their minds, as Jamie explained: "I want Harley to understand that Dad is a role that I have and it's how I stand in relation to Harley and it's not who I am as an individual" (Jamie, 2013). What Jamie, and Charlie, describe is a disinvestment with both the hetero- and homo- norm. Their

comments indicated a conscious recognition that both the traditional and the disrupted vocabulary of family do not work for them, and so they model family roles and relationships through both practice, and creative linguistic choices.

Julia also had concerns about how traditional ideas about gender, women's roles, and mothering may impact on her daughter's understanding of the world as she grew up. Rather than rejecting the vocabulary of motherhood, she embraced the title of 'Mum' and insisted on representing that role to her daughter as one which is occupied by strong and empowered women. Julia was willing to make significant life changes to ensure that the people she was surrounded by did not negatively sway her daughter's understanding of women and mothers. Speaking about her relationship with Niamh's [now estranged] father, she recalls realising that:

[Niamh]'s growing up with this stereotype that the woman does all the work, all the cleaning, the woman does all the childcare and he [the father] sits around drinking beer, smoking weed and playing computer games. [I thought] how could this happen to me? This is not the life I had planned, which is why we [split up]. (Julia, 2013)

Whilst Charlie and Jamie were greatly concerned with how parent-identities disguised or obscured their other identifications and sought to rename parenting roles in order to disentangle themselves from the hegemonic expectations of 'mother' and 'father', Julia found herself empowered by becoming a mother to leave a heterogendered relationship, which she felt had enforced conformity to binary gender roles, and instead sought to assert a feminist, queer identity as a mother.

Julia's use of the term 'mother' corresponds with Thomson et al's suggestion that motherhood is a fundamentally flexible institution which is "reconfigured by successive generations of new mothers", whilst the title 'mother' can be used to ascribe "authority to the self as...expert at the centre of a unique female choice biography" (2011: 137 and 156). Julia discovered an established identity in being a mother which offered her a strong but flexible foundation from which she could articulate a queer identity which informed and facilitated her preferred approach to parenting. However, like Lynne and Charlie and Jamie, Julia still felt constrained in expressing to outsiders how she chose to inhabit parental identity.

Describing an occasion when she and Niamh were invited to a children's pool party, Julia recalls she did not attend:

because I don't shave my legs and I wasn't comfortable going with all these other mothers that would look at me like 'ok, we thought you were a bit weird but you don't shave your legs, that's too much!'...And I shaved them. Afterwards, not even to go, afterwards! Because I felt guilty that my hang ups about not shaving my legs were

ruining this normative world where [what] everyone else does meant that I had not done something with my daughter I would have loved. (Julia, 2013)

Julia's newly discovered shame about her unshaven legs corresponds with her changing class position; by disentangling herself from a relationship with a man who exhibited behaviour associated with negative performances of working-class masculinity she moves into a newly respectable class sphere and physically moves into a traditional housing arrangement (from a queer housing co-operative). She is no longer explicitly queer, nor explicitly working-class. Meeting other mothers through home-schooling networks, Julia moves into a middle-class community and at the swimming pool party with these middle-class mothers, classed notions of respectability come to bear on her body. In the moment of shaving her legs Julia realised her actions betrayed her feminist and queer values and, importantly, that this action would not "guarantee acceptance [rather, it] just generate[d] more awareness of how 'wrong' [her] practices [and] appearance...actually are" (Skeggs, 1997: 14). However, unlike Skeggs' assessment of how attempts to conform to middle-class notions of propriety generate visibility for an original working-class position, Julia feels out-of-place or 'wrong' as a result of her unmarked and unwelcome assimilation into middle-class community. Engaging in classed practices, such as ensuring bodily conformity to notions of good grooming and feminine attractiveness, may generate acceptance by the middle-class, but it is not acceptance on Julia's terms. In the same way that parents were uncomfortable being accepted if that acceptance was based on being inaccurately read as heterosexual, Julia was uncomfortable being socially accepted if that acceptance was predicated on her presumed middle-class membership. Julia experienced a shattering, emotional moment of realisation at the compromise she was making:

At this point I hadn't shaved them in seven years. I was absolutely devastated. I cried. I was like 'what am I doing?!'...Yeah! Ridiculous. But I stopped again, so it's ok. (Julia, 2013)

Ultimately, Julia has chosen to reject the practices of [middle] class conformity and to articulate her queerness through her body and its potentially confrontational 'unrespectable' performance of femininity. Julia's decision to decline to describe her class position to me at the end of our interview must be considered in relation to her determined articulations, in all areas of her life, of non-heterosexual identity and non-traditional family making.

Julia's experience of articulating difference should not be understood to have been resolved in this one, emotionally trying, incident. Transgressing expectations of identity and behaviour is a continuous activity, moving across and against "normal times":



Those can be the hardest times, the normal times when suddenly you're identifying yourself as different when you really didn't want to right now. When I first cut my hair, when [my] alopecia got unmanageable I couldn't cover it anymore and I couldn't bear the amount of time I was spending trying to cover it...I [would] spend the whole time wondering 'is it ok?' and I had this hat on and I'm sitting on the bus and [Niamh]'s going 'hat, hat hat!' and I thought 'actually, at some point, she's just going to yank this hat off, so just let her. Let her.'...it's the same as my experience with breastfeeding...I'd rather that you can just see my whole breast...look, get over it, look away. Because the whole time that I'm like this trying to expose one millimetre of flesh to get the nipple out for her I'm creating this scene of 'don't look, don't look, don't look'. (Julia, 2013)

Julia's conscious response to her own discomfort at being unexpectedly made visible as different, as queer, is to confront it with absolute visibility and thus destroy the spaces which she would otherwise create for herself to hide in, as she did by discarding her hat. Julia moves from and against 'normal time' by rejecting conformity to norms of gendered appearance (and the safety this is imagined to ensure) to a queer space/time of "nonnormative logics...sexual identity, embodiment and activity" (Halberstam, 2005: 6). Pallotta-Chiarolli and Lubowitz suggest that "border existence," where subjects do not comfortably or neatly fit into existing categories, "opens up space for experimentation: reality is confronted with liberty and possibility" (2003: 74). Julia's responses to her experiences of not fitting can therefore be considered experiments which, through trials with conformity (shaved legs, discreet breastfeeding) lead her to liberatory choices which help her reject gender norms and prohibitive standards of respectability.

Whilst Julia consciously rejects conformity to norms which appear to guarantee respectability, not all parents found this transaction – visibility in exchange for renouncing respectability – one they were free to choose. As I will explore further below, concerns of 'appropriateness' when articulating non-heterosexual identities have strongly classed connotations; the potential to make chosen identities visible is differently enabled according to an individual's background and cultural capital. Julia's decision to decline to describe her class to me at the end of our interview suggests something of her different position in relation to class than many of the other parents I spoke with. I will evaluate now, with reference to the frameworks of class and respectability, how parents were constrained by their class positions from making their non-heterosexual identities visible.

#### Appropriate Visibility

Emma was middle-class and described herself as 'not queer but definitely not-heterosexual', she lived in the South-West with her husband and their two daughters. Emma felt her choice

to be out was restricted by her sense of how people around her family would view her and her husband, Harry:

It unsettles people, and they think you're going to leave your husband for a woman and I'm in a monogamous relationship that I want to last the rest of my life...being out is a lot more difficult, also it's out of respect for Harry because I don't want people to think I'm some sort of flighty floozy who's going to go off and leave him and leave my kids because I'm not...[so] I don't sort of challenge the assumption [that I'm straight]. (Emma, 2014)

Emma presents her decision not to continually articulate and reinscribe her sexual identity as one which simplifies her interactions with those around her family. However, she went on to describe how presumptions of her heterosexuality meant people felt comfortable making homophobic comments in her presence, unaware of the personal resonance they had for her:

I occasionally will challenge some stuff with [Harry's Grandparents] if they do make slightly homophobic comments...But again, I sort of pick my battles and don't want to make people uncomfortable or put myself in a vulnerable position either so it's a tricky one. (Emma, 2014)

By having children in a heterogendered relationship, Emma is placed, with or without her consent, firmly within the realm of acceptable heterosexuality in the hegemonic imaginary. By articulating a different identity she comes into conflict with persistent stereotypes that "bisexual women are promiscuous, temporary, mercurial – impermanent" (Lingel, 2012:196) which threaten to destabilise her family identity and her respectability as both mother, and woman. The persistent "misrepresentation [which] occurs via media and popular culture stereotypical constructions" (Pallotta-Chiarolli and Lubowitz, 2033: 57) appears to considerably shape and restrict Emma's choices in how she articulates and makes visible her identities.

Emma's position is one of absolute ambivalence; uneasily positioned between remaining 'safe' whilst she 'passes' and a continual wish to celebrate and express her identification with queer identities and family formations. Emma inhabits a complex position of simultaneous refusal and reproduction of heteronormative family and her experiences and difficulties in that position demonstrate the way "the 'looking-glass' language of sameness and difference" obscures a necessary "focus on the possibilities and impossibilities which (dis)allow transgression" (Taylor 2009: 17). With an acknowledgement of the subjectivities which, as for Emma, both conform to and refuse different elements of traditional nuclear family forms it is possible to avoid the "reading and reduction of lesbian and gay parented families as [either] transformative or assimilative" (Taylor, 2009: 17) and open the way for more nuanced discussions on producing different narratives of family. Emma's disinclination to confront narratives which would produce her non-heterosexual identity as unsuited for parenting may

also be understood as a refusal to enter the debate on the supposed “pathology” of “gay parenting” versus the “normalcy” of heterosexual parenting on the terms established by [homophobic] critics (Butler, 2004: 129). Her strategic and considered silence can therefore be regarded as a queer refusal and act of resistance against the framing of discussion around non-heterosexual identities and parenting. Rather than fitting a binary evaluation of ‘queer’ or ‘not queer’, Emma’s experience points to the need for queer-family-making studies to embrace many iterations of family change, resistance and reproduction, not merely an evaluation of their form.

Whilst Emma struggled with questions of confrontation and challenging assumptions of those around her family, Paul found that even introducing his preferred words to those he interacted with was a significant challenge on the way to achieving visibility as a queer parent. Describing occasions when he responds to people who have assumed Mary is his wife, he says:

You take a breath and say 'my partner's doing very well thank you'... It's like there's a huge iceberg, there's a huge amount of stuff behind that particular choice of word but at the same time *you want to be proportionate about it* because it's actually just an offhand comment someone's made and you don't want to stand there explaining all the gory details of your life while this person stands there looking faintly shell-shocked half an hour later...*it's kind of hard to deal with it in a socially acceptable way without being too much of a weirdo.* (Paul, 2013, emphasis added)

Mary expressed similar concerns about the possibility of rejecting strangers’ readings of her family in a ‘socially acceptable’ way. Describing her rejection of strangers’ need to establish a baby’s gender when they first meet them, she laments:

What I would like to say is 'it doesn't matter, it's a baby' but that's very difficult, that's quite an aggressive thing to say to somebody you've met in the supermarket queue who is making polite conversation. (Mary, 2013)

These parents’ disinclination to step outside the terms of normal social interaction in order to explicitly refute the assumptions which absorb their different experiences into a homogenised, heterosexual, nuclear family narrative is revealing of the classed notions of respectability which are not easily shaken off. Mary, Paul, and Emma all described themselves as middle-class and by making themselves visible as non-heterosexual they risk (as they implicitly identify in their concern to communicate in “socially acceptable” [Paul, 2013] and “polite” [Mary, 2013] ways) losing the aura of respectability which heterosexuality consolidates (Skeggs, 1997: 135). What Skeggs identifies is a closed loop in which middle-classness (coded as and by respectability) and heterosexuality are reciprocally assured. The concern parents express at appearing inappropriate should be understood as an expression of anxiety that by rejecting heterosexuality, they will be cast as unrespectable and with it, pathologized as unsuitable

parents (Skeggs, 1997: 1). Parents' comments point to a dilemma where, in order to successfully repudiate assumptions of heterosexuality they must also renounce claims to middle-classness by rejecting the social behaviours and conventions which assure respectability. Without rejecting a classed position and the social capital which accumulates around it, heterosexual assumptions cannot be decisively rejected; "work[ing] to be recognised as caring and respectable...has repercussions for how they refuse and mis/recognise and dis/identify as sexed (hetero) and gendered" (Skeggs, 1997: 164).

The structures of classed inequality and power remain largely invisible to subjects positioned in dominant locations – such as the middle-class. When these parents negotiate and articulate alternative family identities, they draw on their classed privilege; the stark reality being that "the ability to achieve familyhood is differentially distributed...and the affluent more easily, and more frequently, achieve this status for themselves" (Taylor, quoting Carrington, 2009: 38). Sacrificing respectability and middle-classness in order to realise validated non-heterosexual family identities may cause the articulation of non-heterosexual family identity to be refused because of the lack of social capital attendant with non-middle-class positions. Returning to Mary's comment in the earlier section, we see the slide into unintelligibility and silencing which forceful statements of non-heterosexual positions produces; "people tend not to listen to those sorts of words" (Mary, 2013).

Visibility is not just something which is read from a subject, but something which emerges as the result of an articulation an individual must make without being 'inappropriate'. Further, the legitimacy of non-heterosexual parents can only be assured if they seek visibility for their families without disruption to (classed) social interaction norms. Valentine argues, in her study of lesbian women, that "many women are fearful of openly expressing their sexuality because they are aware that as the 'negative other' they are likely to encounter hostility, fear and victimization" (1993: 240). This concern is echoed in the comments discussed above where 'inappropriate' visibility can be understood as shorthand for visibility which draws hostility or conflict. Parents continually evaluate their environment to make a decision about the safety of asserting non-heterosexual identity, demonstrating Valentine's conclusion that coming out "is more complex [than a simple duality of being in or out of the closet] with individuals maintaining multiple identities in different space and in one space but at different times" (1993: 246). This idea of strategic outing is applicable not just to individuals negotiating lesbian identities, but to any person identifying outside of heterosexuality. Despite participants' stated desire for family to be understood as a flexible and permissive institution and their own discussions about how to realise that at home, "identity remains a source of

contestation, as it represents a balancing act that requires diligence and effort lest the wrong part be revealed at an untimely moment” (Gabb, 2005b: 430).

Parents’ attempts to explore and negotiate the mechanisms of conformity were predominately expressed through a project of countering heteronormative, and not classed, expectations. I argue this is because middle-class resources enabled them to challenge and resist heterosexual imperatives in representation and cultural knowledge (see Morley, 1980:171-173). Conversely, rejecting respectability assured through classed conformity would undercut the resources and support available to parents and destabilise their family as they shifted position from one of middle-class worth to a lacking and out-of-place other (Taylor, 2012: 2 and 74). The methods by which parents challenged heterosexual dominance took the form of continued readings, and re-readings of media texts in order to produce new narratives of family and identity which represent “challenge and refusal” of the “mediated symbolic” (Silverstone, 2007:133). In the next section, I ask what type of discursive spaces parents were able to create within, and with, media representations.

#### Reading Queerly

Charlie and Jamie both enjoyed the family represented in the sci-fi/fantasy graphic novel *Saga*. *Saga*’s central characters are an interspecies heterogendered couple - Alana and Marco - on the run with their new born child from the opposing armies they deserted (Vaughn and Staples, 2012 to present). Charlie described her relationship to the text to me; “while it’s ostensibly quite heterosexual...you can read it as very queer and it’s obviously sort of about family, and it’s about challenging family norms.” (Charlie, 2013). Stacey Donovan describes how lesbian readers “look for meanings that lurk behind the text’s apparently heterosexual surface, knowing that lesbian experiences, whether in fiction or reality, are rarely overt [these readers] actively disassemble the dominant heterosexual plot” (quoted in Innes, 1997:123). Rather than reversing, or disassembling *Saga*’s heterosexual plot to create a homosexual one, Charlie and Jamie read the overwhelming cultural, political, military, and evolutionary challenges facing the couple in *Saga* as an allegory for the challenges they experienced in actively resisting normalising practices of gender, rejecting narratives of bisexuality as irrelevant or impermanent, and dismissing narratives of love and parenthood which insist on what Heckert (2010) calls “compulsory monogamy”.

One panel (see Figure 2) shows Marco’s father asking Alana a direct question about her inter-species daughter for the first time – ‘is it normal?’ Charlie and Jamie recounted interactions with Charlie’s family where her mother expressed fears that raising Harley gender neutral

Figure 2: Panel from Vaughan & Staples (2012) *Saga*.

would prevent them from growing up normally. *Saga* is, Charlie says, “about being in a scenario where everyone, including your own family, is opposed to your family choices” (Charlie, 2013). Queerness survives in this text as the “ambiguous gesture” or “small smile”, inviting multiple readings (Jenkins, 2006: 105). Charlie and Jamie exhibit their familiarity with seeking such gestures and an understanding of the flexibility of texts for a reader when they describe how visual notes such as Alana’s gender presentation signal intentional points for queer identification: “I think there are lots of queer themes to it, it talks quite a lot about similar issues even though it isn’t ostensibly about queer issues” (Charlie, 2013). As I indicated in the previous section, the knowledge of how to challenge and re-read texts in support of individual family identity-making, is a classed skill enabled by educational and cultural capital (Lawler, 2004: 116-117, Skeggs, 1997: 162). Making texts work to support narratives of family, and gaining consolation and reassurance for the emotionally-trying labour involved in asserting a queer family identity from a text, is differently available to parents from different class backgrounds. This may mean that achieving “legitimate[d] subject positions” in an evolving social landscape (Taylor, 2012: 2) is more easily achieved for middle-class parents who can engage in these reading strategies, and whose identities are more closely linked to mainstream positions (Driver, 2007: 9), than for those parents who lack these resources and diverge from the mainstream in more ways.

Lynne described a similar reading strategy to the one detailed by Charlie and Jamie, in relation to a different text. Her approach to this text was borne out of her wish to help her daughter, Zoë, learn that absence of explicit markers of sexuality and gender identity did not automatically mean a person was heterosexual. In this case, Lynne’s work to read and query the content of media was work towards not only securing a legitimated identity for herself, but also passing on skills to her daughter which may aid her in narrating and locating her own identity:

You could have a story book about a single parent and they might be bisexual but it’s not stated. I think I would sometimes say those sort of things to Zoë, she’ll roll her eyes at me for saying those sort of things, like: ‘that person, who knows? They might be bisexual, they might have a trans history, we don’t know do we?’ It’s not explicit but it might be in there. So sometimes books were – probably it’s not been in the author’s mind – but I would put it in there. (Lynne, 2013)

Lynne’s reading strategy works to “repair gaps” in the text and make it cohere to her own life experiences, ideology, and needs (Jenkins, 2006: 111). In a media landscape which most often offers binary representations of homosexuality or heterosexuality, Lynne discovers space for non-monosexuality to exist, and invites her daughter to work to open up those spaces as well.

Bisexuality, in the reading strategies of Lynne, and Charlie and Jamie above, is “everywhere and nowhere” (Hemmings, 2002: 47); always available in the gaps and spaces in a text, but never explicit, never clearly marked. Finding bisexuality in texts is an active process where texts are continually evaluated and questioned in search of material to support evolving and flexible family and personal identity narratives.

For Mary and Paul, texts which offered flexible narratives of gender, reproduction, and family were a valuable part of the media they shared with their son. *The Clangers* was a popular choice for both James and his parents. In *The Clangers* episode ‘The Egg’ (see Figure 3) the Clangers rally around the Soup Dragon to create a Baby Soup Dragon and ensure the Soup Dragon “is no longer the only Soup Dragon in the universe” (‘The Egg’, 1970). In our interview, Mary spoke about a lesbian friend she had supported through pregnancy and birth and continued to support as a lone parent. She also clarified that whilst her other partner Matthew did not take on a parenting role towards James, he did support Mary and Paul in having and looking after their child. In this respect, Mary and Paul’s family, and their friend’s families found representation in *The Clangers* which cheerfully narrated a community-centred family analogous to the one which James was being raised in. Mary and Paul celebrated *The Clangers* for its representation of Tiny Clanger and Small Clanger, gendered female and male respectively, as being “equally adventurous” and that if the method by which the Baby Soup Dragon was created “is sending some sort of message about gender roles I don’t think it’s a particularly clear one!” (Mary and Paul, 2013). Like Driver’s ‘queer girls’, their reading of a popular text also offers the possibility of meaning-making which is “convoluted” and multiple, offering little clear “narrative closure” (2007: 13); something indicated in Mary’s concluding comment on the unclear message about reproduction ultimately offered in this episode. The use of *The Clangers* therefore helps open up space for family identity to be constituted through unclear and obtuse narratives of formation; something which corresponds to Mary and Paul’s rejection of binarised mother/father roles and their desire to model expanded notions of family, relationship arrangements, and families of choice.

What Mary and Paul, Charlie and Jamie, and Lynne sought from media was enough space to find, or read-in representations which echo their own experiences of and feelings about gender, sexuality, and family formation. This practice of reading can be understood as performative family practice which Weeks, drawing on Butler’s theory of performativity, argues is central in the construction of family (2004: 345). The accounts discussed above illustrate how queer reading strategies can be used in the service of family identity making. Family is made through reflections, discussions, and challenges to dominant narratives. This



Figure 3: 'The Egg' (1970) *The Clangers*



1. Small Clanger, with the help of the other Clangers, collects all the items needed and places them in the iron egg



2. Small Clanger places the egg on the macaroni nest the Soup Dragon has made



3. The Iron Chicken fires a laser at the egg



4. The Soup Dragon sits on the nest after the Iron Chicken has fired a laser on the egg



5. Baby Soup Dragon hatches



6. Major Clanger, Mother Clanger, Small Clanger, Tiny Clanger, and Granny Clanger all celebrate the hatching with the delighted Soup Dragon

suggests that availability of media which either represents LGBTQ parents, or which allows space for points of LGBTQ identification to be read in, are vital in facilitating the process of family [identity] formation. As Silverstone says, audiences appear to need “a range of mediated cultural supports” which will enable the recognition of their identities and location in the social world (2007: 97). Media offers such ‘cultural supports’ and the reading strategies detailed above show how work towards fully articulated family identities can be built upon limited representations.

It is interesting that the parents discussed above frequently chose to [re]negotiate representations from mainstream media rather than engage with queer, or subcultural media which could deliver explicit and clear representations of alternative family models. Very few parents spoke about subcultural media as something with which they engaged. Mary was one parent who identified subcultural media as a key source of representations. Speaking about fanfiction, Mary suggested it was a genre which delivered the queer resolutions and family representations which she felt were missing from the canonical, mainstream media she consumed.

Mary spoke in particular about fanfiction resolving what she felt was a problematic and “cruel” ending to a storyline in the BBC sci-fi drama *Torchwood*, where Ianto, the bisexual partner of omnisexual/pansexual Jack, was killed-off shortly after disclosing his relationship with Jack to the show’s other characters. Mary described one fanfiction, ‘Get Loved, Make More, Try to Stay Alive’ (Sudis, 2009) as particularly satisfying. This story used ‘mpreg’<sup>9</sup> as a way to produce a family of biological children for Ianto and Jack, and rejected Ianto’s canonical death. In terms of fanfiction, this sort of production is typical; it occurs within the ideological framework of the programme, is borne out of frustration with the primary text, and negotiates a more open ended resolution for the characters it concerns (Jenkins, 2006: 105-111). Fanfiction is a record, not of a straight rejection, assimilation or repudiation of popular images, but an engagement in which queer subjectivities can “imagine themselves otherwise” (Driver, 2007: 11). Fanfiction is a record of a queer reading and a mode by which queer readings can be circulated.

---

<sup>9</sup> In *Torchwood: Children of Earth* (2009), Ianto and Jack (who were bisexual/queer and pansexual/omnisexual respectively) explicitly acknowledged their relationship for the first time. Ianto then died in the fourth episode of the five part mini-series. Fanfiction including ‘Get Loved, Make More, Try to Stay Alive’ (Sudis, 2009) offered alternative endings to Ianto’s character arc in which he did not die, and – as a result of canonical technology – he became pregnant with Jack’s baby. This trope is known as ‘mpreg’, short for ‘male pregnancy’.

Mary indicated such media was capable of altering her outlook on parenting and society more generally, concluding her comments on 'Get Loved, Make More, Try to Stay Alive' she said; "fandom makes me much more cheerful about queerness and parenting actually." (Mary, 2013). Mary's description of fanfiction as creating a space in which she feels "more cheerful" about queer parenting, illustrates Jenkins' idea that fanfiction models a world which corresponds with fans wishes for a queer[ed]-world future (2006:95). The possibilities of reproduction disentangled from sex, and parenting removed from heterosexual frameworks which are explored in this text offer Mary confirmation that she is not alone in hoping for a different type of future. They provide a rallying point, a framework on which action, thought and community identity can be mapped, transmitted and perhaps realised (Jenkins, 2006: 92, Silverstone, 2007:17)

Jenkins argues this type of reading, which resolves the queer-utopian refusals of mainstream texts (even texts like *Torchwood* which canonically acknowledge the possibility of queer identities but refuse to represent lasting queer relationships), "can sustain [a group's] own activism, can become a source of collective identity and mutual support" (2006: 111). However, there are limits to the possibilities which stem from such media:

Precisely because it is a subcultural activity that is denied public visibility, resistant reading cannot change the political agenda, cannot challenge other constructions of [queer] identity, and cannot have an impact on the ways people outside of the group think about the issues that matter to the[se groups]. (Jenkins, 2006: 111-112)

The positive associations which Mary has with the resolution offered by fanfiction as an alternative to the canonical frustrated queer storyline are, Jenkins seems to suggest, naïve. However, as I showed above, parents including Mary are struggling to establish the validity of their identities within a hostile world where their subjectivities disappear within both queer and heterosexual conceptualisations of parenthood. Texts and [re]readings which circulate within a subcultural sphere offer the opportunity to solidify the sense of self and shared values this group have before contemplating a more interventionist approach to 'change the political agenda'. In relation to Mary specifically, fanfiction offers a route to become confident about the queer values she holds which shape how she parents.

Media which is produced and circulated in subcultural spheres, then, offers space for explicit representation of queer [im]possibility rather than only offering indicators of spaces for queer allegory to be 'read in'. The circulation of this type of representation in subcultural spheres does ultimately indicate the lack of space in the mainstream for such images. It also further underlines the overall evaluation of media which participants offered; that LGBTQ parents

simply did not fit into the dominant narrative of family and parenting. Bisexual, queer and other non-heterosexual parents were positioned, by their deviant and uncontrollable identities, outside of the mainstream imaginary and excluded from participation in the discourse of family making.

### Not Fitting

The availability of representations in subcultural media of the sort Mary describes are limited, it also reinforces the location of non-heterosexual parents as outside of discursive power. The ideological limitations of subcultural media offer some indication of the priority parents placed on inclusion in mainstream representations. Additionally, as Driver indicates, queer subjects do not “mimetically construct their identities” from images which address sexual minority positions, but seek out points of identification and difference, establishing connections through which they can speak their identities according to various intersections and multi-textual readings (2007; 13). Lynne’s comments correspond with Driver’s evaluation of identity formation through difference and the resignification of mainstream images. She described how she felt her identities were not represented anywhere (including subcultural media) and instead, she worked to create collages of representation in order to ‘find’ herself:

I think I could find myself as a bisexual woman, I could find myself as a feminist, I could find myself as a single parent, I could find myself as a mum, I could find myself as an academic, all those aspects of my identity; a white woman who’s moved from a working-class background into middle-class...but I can’t find it all together, it’s all in bits. Maybe that’s everyone’s experience, I don’t know, but maybe if you throw sexual identity into the mix there are more bits to pull together, you could be married, white heterosexual, academic and find yourself more cohesively in one place, in one piece of writing. (Lynne, 2013)

Lynne felt that her identity did not neatly correspond with any available representation; but she indicated she was conscious this was an inevitable experience given the mainstream biases of dominant media forms (see also Driver, 2007: 135). However, Lynne’s experience of feeling out-of-place was strongly inflected by her sense that subcultural media, ostensibly aimed at people like her, whose identities fall outside the dominant order, failed to represent her. With reference to representations of lesbians, Lynne spoke about how these images emphasised to her the ways in which she did not fit the available *alternative* narratives of parenthood:

I do remember sort of thinking ‘maybe it would be easier if I was lesbian, then I would fit here’ but I didn’t fit, and I couldn’t make myself fit. There was nothing on bisexual parenting that I could find. (Lynne, 2013)

Whilst Lynne was able to assemble a collage of representations which addressed her experience, the knowledge of who parents are and where they are located is limited by the

binary relationship of media images where parents are either heterosexual or homosexual. Anyone who falls between these two categories may feel a sense of being adrift within representation, of being, as Lynne says, fragmented: “I can’t find it all together, it’s all in bits”.

Julia had a similar experience, whilst she acknowledged she had some points of identification with mainstream heterosexual representations of parenting, these images did not offer a representation on which she could pin her diverse identities. Julia suggested her sense of not fitting, not having a strong sense of identification with any media images, left her feeling uneasy and frustrated that her everyday queer identity appeared so exceptional in comparison to what was represented in pregnancy and parenting literature:

I was in a heterosexual relationship, a monogamous heterosexual relationship, even then [pregnancy books] just made me go ‘this shouldn’t be what everyone [has to use]’ It’s one of the things that I found really frustrating because [these] outdated traditional things are still, for many people, very much the assumption of normal but to me, is like so last century! (Julia, 2013)

Julia and Lynne’s comments suggest that it is not simply non-heterosexual identity which results in a sense of media invisibility, but it is non-monosexuality in particular which is uncontainable and unknowable in mainstream media, and in many alternative and subcultural representations.

Ahmed says that the sense of not-fitting is:

A form of queer discomfort; but a discomfort which is generative...discomfort is hence not about assimilation or resistance *but about inhabiting norms differently*...Queer is not, then about transcendence or freedom from the (hetero)normative. Queer feelings are ‘affected’ by the repetition of the scripts that they fail to reproduce and this affect is also a sign of what queer can do, of how it can work by *working on* the (hetero)normative. (2004: 155, emphasis from original)

The generative result of this ‘not fitting’ for Lynne was that she read multiple sources for suitable representations and assembled her identities through a mosaic of media; Lynne and Julia’s uncontainable identities hint at the potential of queer positions to disrupt the presumed universal applicability of mainstream media, and, in Lynne’s experiences, also disrupt the increasingly homogenous way in which queer and subcultural subjecthoods are imagined.

The responses of these parents to their perceived under-representation suggest they may experience the “possibilities of [a life] that do[es] not ‘follow’ norms through” (Ahmed, 2004:155). By finding themselves in the space between dominant scripts of life course they discover alternative ways to constitute their identities through and in relation to media. Mainstream media fails to represent parents like Lynne and Julia; their work to find

themselves by queer reading or critique is literally a *working on* the heteronormative knowledge which produces those images. In the next section, I will consider how far parents' use of media corresponds with José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentificatory practice, in order to map out the scope of the queer possibility enabled through 'not-fitting', or 'disidentification'.

#### Disidentification in Responses to Media

Muñoz argues that disidentificatory practice (and its attendant utopianism) is the only available response to a media world which does not fully represent the experiences and identities of minority subjects (1999: 12). Muñoz draws here on a canon of work which explores, primarily, gay male audience reading strategies (Doty, 1993; Dyer 1990; 2002a;; Medhurst, 1994; see Chapter Six for further discussion of these works). This work considers how queer reading strategies produced not only new meanings from media texts, but helped to build a sense of gay male identity linked to a specific form of media consumption. As I have shown, the parents I spoke with produced queer readings of texts in order to support their identity narratives and heal experiences of cultural invisibility. Muñoz's work brings together these perspectives on the role of mainstream media texts in producing alternative schemas of meaning and building identity, to consider how such queer readings constitute a distinct, and future-facing response and model for cultural engagement. What I wish to explore now is whether the management of media texts through reading strategies which my participants reported can be considered, corresponding with Muñoz's theory of disidentificatory practice, an interjection into cultural narratives of parenthood as only connected with monosexuality. Can theories of disidentification offer a way to value the discovery of bisexuality and alternative models of parenting and non-monosexual relationships in mainstream texts, and denote the reading strategies which produce them as culturally significant, resistant acts?

Muñoz describes disidentificatory practice as the process by which an object, person, or action is reconfigured from the "pathetic and abject spectacle that it appears to be in the dominant eyes of heteronormative culture" (1999: 3). Disidentification is:

descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship. (Muñoz, 1999: 4)

Muñoz's definition presents disidentification as fundamentally queer. I take as my starting point in this section, that the productions and narratives of family which participants offer *are* disidentificatory performances. This is primarily informed by the narratives parents presented

of their families as striving toward new social relationships (Muñoz, 1999: 5). The performance of family by non-heterosexual subjects is, the theorists discussed in the introduction to this chapter argue, an inadequate strategy of resistance because it is not sufficiently pronounced, and risks being assimilated back into the dominant social order without its differences and ambitions – its queerness – being acknowledged. However, I argue that this modest, and at times subtle, queering of dominant scripts of family is one of few available strategies of resistance; following an apparently conformist path by producing a largely recognisable social grouping “is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously” (Muñoz, 1999: 5). The apparently conformist productions of family delivered by parents who ‘appear’ to be heterosexual but offer queer narratives of their choices illuminate how the fine line between assimilation and resistance can be navigated through reflective [re]production and queering of normative scripts.

Although these families are [mis]hailed as heterosexual, the path through representation and family-identity making which these parents narrate, is indicative of “identities-in-difference”. “Identities-in-difference emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere” (Muñoz, 1999: 7). The failure of these parents to fully identify with subject positions made available to them in the dominant sphere is the result of “the ideological restrictions implicit in an identificatory site” (Muñoz, 1999: 7; see also Dyer 1990). Parents I spoke with pointed to specific media sites which, because of the ideology implicit in the representation, refused them full identification.

Mary and Paul grappled with parenting guides which assigned rigidly gendered roles to the father and mother; unable to negotiate a queer reading of the text, Mary described how she ‘fought’ with the text in search of the information she needed to care for a new-born baby, continually finding the text “really...throws you out.” (Mary, 2013). Paul found it harder to condemn media which assumed he, as a father, was incapable of enacting caring or traditionally maternal duties:

On the one hand, yeah, it is kinda annoying that people assume that as the father you can't have anything to do with the whole thing, on the other hand, there's always this thing at the back of my head that says 'hey! this is probably what it's like to be a woman all the time!' (Paul, 2013)

Jamie also felt the need to preface his critique of representations which exclude or ignore him with an acknowledgement of his privileged position in other areas:

I come from a position of privilege, so there isn't in fact a lack of depiction in the popular media of people who are ostensibly like me, but there are really *no* depictions of families like mine. (Jamie, 2013, participant's emphasis)

The responses of these parents and their continued engagement with these texts despite their stated difficulties identifying with them, conforms to what Muñoz describes as the primary conditions for a disidentificatory subject. They do not have “an easy or magical identification with dominant culture” (Muñoz, 1999: 12) but also acknowledge, as Jamie and Paul do in highlighting their partial insider status, that they are not outside dominant ideology. They are still hailed into place as normative subjects in some areas and their identities do not exist outside of, or before, the dominant order (Muñoz, 1999: 12).

The narrative of family that Jamie and Charlie, and Paul and Mary offer is both celebratory of the possibilities of family, and fundamentally opposed to the essentialist categories represented as the building blocks of family (such as monogamous relationships, binary gender roles, and proper socialisation of children as heterosexual through binary gender). As non-heterosexual subjects, these parents are not expected to ‘connect’ with the monolithic notion of heterosexual family (as evidenced by the persistent representation of the threateningly anti-reproductive queer man [Edelman, 2004]) but nonetheless, they read their social, kinship structures into the family object. Thus far, the experiences, position and narrative of family these parents offer corresponds with the definition of the disidentifying subject which Muñoz describes.

The final element in disidentificatory performance which Muñoz identifies is the production of a new text or object which is at once connected to that object which the subject does not fully identify with, and an entirely new production which offers “an active kernel of utopian possibility” (1999: 19-25). In this respect we must look to the family narrative which parents produce. Is the script of family, decoded from the dominant sphere, and used to produce a new performance of family, successful in shifting the way in which family is understood? To address this I turn to the readings of media texts which parents offered to their children, and shared between one another, in order to narrate their family identity. Whilst this process of narrating and reinforcing family identity could be dismissed as complicit with the [re]production of heteronormative family, the specific identity-possibilities and values which are central to these narratives should be understood as a “partial disavowal of that cultural form” (Muñoz, 1999: 28).

Lynne described how she sought out information on parenting as a bisexual woman and support for self-insemination from a range of sources. She found that on the one hand NCT classes left her feeling isolated “I remember going to maternity, anti-natal group feeling a bit



fraudulent really”, whilst lesbian self-insemination guides<sup>10</sup> were “about lesbian parenting – and it was lesbian parenting, it wasn’t lesbian and bisexual parenting, but it was useful to some extent”. Lynne described her route to pregnancy as “bi self-insemination”, and finding no clear representation of that in any sub-cultural or mainstream literature, she set up a local support group:

I did set up a self-insemination support group at the women’s centre in Nottingham so that was another space I used to talk about...some of the issues and dilemmas, and anticipating homophobia, biphobia and how that might impact on children, that was space for me. (Lynne, 2013)

Lynne is prompted by these texts to take control of her own fertility and reproductive choices, but she resists their “encoded directives to...identify as heterosexual” (Muñoz, 1999: 28) or as lesbian (in the subcultural, lesbian self-insemination texts she refers to). Lynne instead produces a new script which she circulates through a community group. The space of this group works also to legitimise and reassure Lynne of her connectedness to a distinct community of women accessing motherhood in this way but not necessarily occupying a single identity position. The texts encode a narrative of alternative access to reproduction but fail to impress upon Lynne the need to occupy a specific subject position to do this, and so, Lynne remakes their enabling narrative as one disentangled from specific identity positions. Linking back, again, to other theories which explore resistant reading, Lynne’s practice represents bricolage, “a fragmentary activity of reconnecting cultural signifiers in changing contexts to create contingent individual and subcultural meanings” which produce a common mode of engagement with media and cultural material (Driver, 2007:15). In this way, through disidentificatory practice, these parents “open up and complicate symbolic meanings and embodied performances” (Driver, 2007: 15) to produce a new set of cultural touchstones or anchors.

What remains unclear in Muñoz’s description of the power of disidentification is how the local struggles, which are fought and won through disidentificatory practice in the private space of the home and the local community centre, ultimately translate to a shift in norms and a transmission of these representations and readings to mainstream consciousness.

---

<sup>10</sup> Lynne listed a number of books from the early 90s which she read that concerned lesbian parenting, including literature produced by the Women’s Health Group in London, Lisa Saffron’s book *Getting Pregnant Our Own Way: A Guide to Alternative Insemination* (1987) and April Martin’s book, *The Lesbian and Gay Parenting Handbook* (1993).

If the queer possibilities discovered by parents through their disidentificatory practice are not represented, how can the types of family they are modelling be transmitted to other, would-be, queer parents? Can queer possibility be created only from positions of alienation? Can queer lives only be crafted through highly individual, isolated work to reshape media?

The media which these parents are adapting, queering, creating, and rereading, whilst taken from the mainstream, is circulated through fundamentally subcultural channels, or limited in distribution to their own homes. Although it is in the public sphere that these parents experience invisibility and frustration at being denied the opportunity to name and describe their own family arrangement or route to family, it is only in the private sphere that they resist and reshape those elements of mainstream media and society which challenge or deny their family and the validity of their identity narratives.

I will return, in Chapter Six, to consider what the implications of this type of media usage are, and to explore how the hopes and wishes of parents for family and social change shape the way they view their media engagement.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have shown that conceptualisations of family life offered in both queer and sociological work on the family, and in media representation, reproduce a binary of sexual identity which recognises parents as either straight or gay. These images, and the knowledge they offer on who parents are, generate ideological restrictions in who can be identified as a parent, and how parenting by different people is understood (for example, resulting in parenting by individuals in heterogendered relationships being classified as heteronormative). In particular, the dominance of images showing parents as either heterosexual or homosexual, meant that parents with non-monosexual identities struggle to be recognised as non-heterosexual and find it difficult to articulate the associated queer choices associated with this position. Media is therefore strongly implicated in the experience of everyday lives for LGBTQ parents, particularly for those with identities which do not neatly fit into binary categories used in representation.

Like all queer subjects, the parents I refer to in this chapter experience failed interpellation when they are hailed as straight by mainstream media. But for bisexual, queer and non-heterosexual parents, they also experienced that same failure to be hailed by subcultural images addressing homosexual subjects. The lack of address, or interpellation, through media for non-monosexual identities, is experienced as invisibility by these parents and they all report feeling a pressure or drive to make themselves known in response. This sense of

needing to make one's choices and queerness visible was partly concerned with combatting the idea that bisexuality is an unstable, dequeered position which lacks coherence. Work by Eadie (1993), Loftus (1996) and Ahmed (2004) argue that it is in unknowability, fluidity of desire, and the experience of tension in making one's identities visible that the possibility for radical queer action lays. Whilst these conceptualisations acknowledge the experience of discomfort and difficulty in "speaking" queerness or bisexuality (Loftus, 1996: 210) they do not allow space to consider how the additional labour required in crafting identity from less-culturally-intelligible positions may weigh heavily on bisexual and queer people. The pressures of safety and responsibility which accompany child rearing and family-making and the differently available resources needed to resist and articulate rejection of heteronormative life courses all complicate the possibilities for [the recognition of] radical action and resistant or creative social practice.

Parents did not universally report that invisibility for their queer identifications was a negative experience. 'Passing' as straight was an uneasy privilege which parents in this chapter reported allowed them to make decisions to remain invisible and secure stability and safety. Passing, when it was not marked by a choice to remain invisible or unknown, did contribute to the aforementioned pressure parents experienced to continually restate or 'prove' their identities through narratives of resistance and affirmations of queer sensibilities. Warner (1999a) and Edelman (2004), discussed in the introduction to this chapter, suggest that queerness is only realised through continual and absolute refusal of the structures of heterosexual hegemony. As I have shown, this insistence on a stark division between assimilation and resistance fails to acknowledge the complexity of non-heterosexual identities and generates additional pressures on subjects whose identities fall between these binaries. By fitting and failing to fit the available narratives of homosexual or heterosexual parenting, bisexual, queer, and non-heterosexual parents expose the internal limits of the homo/hetero binary and reveal the failure of queer theory to scrutinise, what Feldman calls, its internalisation of an essentialist division (2012: 70, 82).

As I showed in the second half of this chapter, parents worked on [in]visibility by employing a range of strategies to respond to media representation, reshape and resignify media images, and articulate their position in relation to queer narratives of resistance and social change. Parents managed considerations of how their non-heterosexual identities would impact on their social position with regards to notions of respectability and reliability. I traced the way in which concerns about nonconformity to gender roles, and transgression of the norms of social interaction, when making family arrangements and identities visible, generated fears for

disruption to family life. The anxieties and considerations of parents which I examined in this chapter point to the very personal and continual level on which emerging and evolving norms and dominant discourses about parenting identity, queerness, and family, inhibit parents from freely telling their own stories of [queer] family.

I showed in the sections on queer reading and disidentification that it was in the experience of not-fitting existing scripts of family, and in seeking to alleviate pressures and anxieties, that parents were prompted to explore the *generative* possibilities of life outside the pre-ordained responses to family. Whilst all subjects must work to craft their identities from, and become known through media images (Dyer, 2002a: 15-16, 2002b: 3) if they wish to be legitimated and acknowledged (Butler, 2004: 105-107), the parents I discussed faced additional pressures to engage in this work because their identities did not fit the binaries on which representations are predicated and by which subjects are interpellated (Hall, 1996: 3-6). By making use of the images and vocabulary available in media to describe family, parents found ways to craft individual narratives of queerness and choice. Media was central in the work parents did to facilitate dialogue and open up space for articulations of alternative formations of family. Parents including Lynne and Mary and Paul used media as a starting point for discussions with their children about what possibilities could be found within the dominant narratives of family, Mary acknowledged that “we’re going to have to spend a lot of time talking about ‘does our family look like that? Do other families look like that?’” (Mary and Paul, 2013). Identity making, whilst always an active, iterative and discursive process, is also a response by these parents to their experience of symbolic annihilation (Gross, 1994: 143). Invisible distance from the idealised heterosexual nuclear family “has effects on the contours of everyday existence” (Ahmed, 2004:154) as illustrated by the various anxieties, pressures, and wishes for intelligibility expressed by parents and discussed above. Parents [re]read media, questioned cultural knowledge about what parenthood and family requires and means, and developed new language to describe their roles as a result of their sense of being outside of both the dominant and alternative narratives of family. They opened space between the existing discourses of family to discover who they could be as families and how they could model or explain this choice for their children. Family and parenthood are not simply institutions which cause bisexual and queer people to become invisibly queer, they are sites which offer an established framework for intimate lives and an intelligible, flexible vocabulary of meaning (provided and reflected through representation) through which numerous subjectivities can be spoken (see Dyer, 2002b: 85). Family can make the articulation of different queer

subjectivities possible and offers space to reshape and expand the boundaries of what resistant life courses can look like.

Media and cultural invisibility for families who do not fit the heterosexual/homosexual binary is the catalyst which prompts bisexual, queer and non-heterosexual parents to find new, flexible articulations of queerness which describe their experience, and address their needs. The multiple formations of family, and explicit statements by the parents quoted in this chapter of their commitment to resistant positions, strongly indicates the importance to ordinary people of maintaining 'queer' as a signifier of resistant or dissident subjectivity and of disentangling it from specific, static, identity positions.

## Chapter Four

### Being 'Radical'

In the previous chapter, I argued that occupying and representing ostensibly queer subjectivities, including gay and lesbian identity positions, does not automatically produce radical narratives. I demonstrated how the possibility of being read as non-heterosexual was limited by the dominance of homogendered couples being used to represent all queer subjectivities across cultural productions. I concluded by drawing attention to the fact that 'looking normal' or 'looking heterosexual' did not preclude the production of radical identity or family narratives, or reduce commitment to crafting new family and social practices. In this chapter I will shift my focus slightly from looking at media texts, to an engagement with theoretical and conceptual literature in order to consider what it means when your identity and relationship broadly conform to the model of the presumed radical or resistant subject (Halberstam, 2008:141-143). How do notions of radical relationality relate to the experiences, or describe the process of family-identity making, in the everyday lives of LGBTQ parents?

I will explore how parents relate to conceptualisations of radicalism, with reference to the prominence in the social imaginary of a single type of action which constitutes radical activism. To explore how radicalism relates to LGBTQ parents, I turn to the conceptualisations of radical queer subjectivity offered by anti-relational theorists including Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman. The work of these theorists in particular has significantly structured ongoing discussions within the academy about what queerness constitutes and means (Caserio, 2006), however, this work has been developed within a theoretical framework without clear focus on, or links to, the lived experiences of LGBTQ people (Wiegman and Wilson, 2015). As such, it invites urgent review to explore its applicability to, and usefulness in understanding the lives of LGBTQ parents and their families. How does this work structure the understandings we can develop of LGBTQ family making, and how do its assumptions and conclusions affect the way in which LGBTQ parents conceptualise their relationship to queerness?

Edelman contends, in his 2004 book *No Future*, that embodying queerness as a cultural practice requires "disidentification from the promise of futurity", meaning, specifically, that queer embodiment requires disengaging from the processes of reproduction and child rearing. He argues the only route to "the properly political sphere" is through the "abjuration of the future-negating queer" (2004: 26). Edelman says that queers attempt to disentangle themselves from the image of the future-negating queer through explicit acts which signal their commitment to futurity: by having children (2004: 26-27). Edelman dismisses the idea

that “with patience, with work, with generous contributions to lobbying groups or generous participation in activist groups...the future will hold a place for us” (2004: 31). Instead he argues that the only position available to queer subjects which will empower and enfranchise them in society is to:

delight in...mortality as the negation of everything that would define itself, moralistically, as pro-life...pronouncing at last the words for which we’re condemned should we speak them or not; that we are the advocates of abortion; that the Child as futurity’s emblem must die...so what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist...that the future stop here. (2004: 31)

Other theorists dub this an ‘anti-social’ or ‘anti-relational’ politics which has been rightly critiqued for being anti-feminist as it fails to account for the different positions from which women and non-binary individuals may begin political and social engagement (Halberstam, 2008). This anti-relational stance also presumes all subjects have access to considerable cultural, economic, and social capital in order to establish life courses radically outside of existing, and institutionalised, norms (Halberstam, 2008: 154).

Edelman’s work builds on that of Leo Bersani (1989, 1995) and of Lisa Duggan who coined the term ‘homonormativity’ to describe:

a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (Duggan, 2002: 179)

Duggan identifies marriage and the private domestic sphere, most particularly in the form of the family, as the key totems for the homonormative ‘movement’. Edelman (2004) expands this to suggest that the family is the site which homonormativity aspires to occupy, and says that all families are inherently normative and inevitably sustain hegemonic values. For this reason, Edelman calls for the family, along with the culture of futurity, to be disassembled in order for queer potential to be fully realised. This conceptualisation of the family as a largely oppressive structure corresponds with a great deal of historical LGBTQ activist campaigning; the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), for example, sought to model new ways of living together which deconstructed the centrality of the reproductive family in everyday life and offered new sexual and community possibilities (Gay Liberation Front, 1978 [1971], Robinson, 2007: 86-87, 174-175).

The idea that the family norm automatically (and only) oppresses and assimilates is fundamentally problematic as it requires belief that there is a monolithic outside to each norm, and that individuals can only ever occupy one position and not both reject and conform

to different elements of the expected script of family at different times (Wiegman and Wilson, 2015: 11-13). Whilst Bersani and Edelman acknowledge that homosexuality has not, historically, been a consistently radical subjectivity (Halberstam, 2008: 146), they nonetheless produce a deeply prescriptive narrative of radical anti-relationality. This narrative refuses space to acknowledge the identities and resistant practices of LGBTQ people who inhabit families, or are otherwise connected, as indicative of radical change and resistance to norms. In addition a single image of a radical, activist-engaged subject dominates the cultural imaginary which frustrates the recognition of other types of engagement. Blee describes how radicalism “evokes images of men who make public claims on the state” and points to the invisibility of women (in particular) who are engaged in radical action within the domestic sphere or otherwise outside of “formal institutions such as labor unions, political parties and social movement organizations” (1998: 2-4). It is the invisibility of radical action within the domestic sphere, and radicalism conceptualised as opposition to the domestic sphere and family (Medhurst, 2014: 256), which I will consider as I look at the responses of LGBTQ parents in this chapter.

Jose Esteban Muñoz argues that Edelman’s assessment of queerness is fundamentally inaccurate and that queerness, rather than being about a rejection of a forever deferred future, is instead “about a rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (2009: 1). Muñoz calls us to “dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (2009: 1). Muñoz contends that living, with or without an explicit orientation to the future, still results in a shaping and creating of future possibilities. As Butler says; “to live is to live a life politically, in relation to power, in relation to others, in the act of assuming responsibility for a collective future” (2004: 39). Refusal of the future and rejection of relational ways of living still generate a future with a specific shape. The meaning of that future is the sole factor which remains undetermined and perhaps, as Muñoz says, it is only by dreaming and enacting ‘new and better worlds’ that we may hope to shape the relational forms and power structures which are reproduced. Halberstam suggests that the antisocial turn which queer theorists such as Edelman espouse does not have to mean destruction of old ways of living (2011: 110-120). Rather, anti-social politics could be a prompt to celebrate difference from the heteronorm, a celebration a “failure” which may “produce generative models of failure” and allow new modes of relationality to emerge which are based on difference and divergence, not conformity and commonality (Halberstam, 2011: 120-121).



In the first half of this chapter, I contrast the above theoretical frameworks which describe 'becoming' queer and what constitutes [homo]normativity when compared to the narratives of queer resistance *and conformity* which participants offered. I also evaluate the significance of the [queer] radical in the cultural imaginary by considering the reluctance of participants to describe their family productions as intrinsically or consciously radical. I ask: how might the various bond of sociality and the material needs of family, reshape or trouble the dominant narrative of what it means to *be* radical? How might the hopes and motivations parents invoked, when describing how they approached and conceptualised their family making, trouble the image of the discrete, homonormative subject? Does the social history of LGBTQ activism and the associated images of public protest figure in the production of narratives by parents of their resistance or radicalism?

In the second half of this chapter I ask what narratives parents offer to locate themselves in relation to the production of radical and resistant family identity. We can never wholly be who or what we are represented as, but this representational limitation is at odds with the various needs of LGBTQ people to produce comprehensible identities in culture (Dyer, 2002b). I argue there is a paucity of representations which map a route between family, radical subjectivities, and social activism, and conclude that parents are prompted to engage in various media and identity work in order to find ways to describe their subjectivities and negotiate radical meaning for their family arrangements. In a cultural landscape which insists on radical activist subjectivities as being firmly separated from the home and domesticity (Blee, 1998:1-5), where and how can parents locate their queer families? What elements of their identities are deployed in narratives of resistant family practice and what anxieties and dislocations drive the production of family identities? I will explore parents' work with partial and competing representations of queer radicalism and family throughout this chapter with a particular focus on the individual experience of balancing these elements in the final section.

This chapter is not about the politics of oppositionality (straight versus queer, radical versus normal: see Wiegman and Wilson, 2015: 14); it will not be about who or what is 'most' queer. Rather, it is about how the lived experiences of LGBTQ parents, and their identity work between essentialising narratives of radical and conformist subjectivities, can reveal the challenges of integrating existing narratives of queer radicalism into family identities made in contemporary media culture.

### Against Assimilation

I invited participants to reflect on whether they felt the demands on their time and experiences of being parents had generated an interest in social activism and political change in them, or, if they had been engaged in such activism before having children, if their new status as parents had altered the nature of their engagement. I explained to participants that the rationale for this question came from theoretical and academic discussion which argued it is harder to hold a critical, radical stance after becoming parents. Several participants initially agreed that this described their experience, citing the inflexible demands of parenthood which imposed traditional shapes and routines on their lives (see also Lamb, 1982: 10). I asked parents to elaborate on how their previous activist or political stance had altered after having children. As they continued to speak about their feelings about social justice, change, LGBTQ activism and liberation, all participants began to identify ways in which becoming a parent had solidified the importance of supporting work to effect social change.

In some cases, having children had prompted them to identify with a political position which they had not previously had a connection to. Jelena, a lesbian woman who lives in London with her partner Hannah, and daughters Lexi and Becca said this:

I feel protective and I want a better life for my children, not just for them now but for the generation, I feel more responsible as a human being than I would have done when I was doing my single life, my childless lifestyle. (Jelena, 2013)

Jelena's statement encompasses both sides of Edelman's anti-futurity argument: she has an engagement with futurity (undifferentiated in this respect from her heterosexual peers) in which she imagines a better future for the next generation from a previous position of hedonistic disengagement from futurity. But, importantly, Jelena also wants to commit to making [queer] changes, to create new ways of living and understanding family in the present. Jelena's stated hopes show that the dyad of concrete social change in the present versus a forever deferred better future is far more slippery and much less distinct than anti-relational theorising allows. As I will continue to explore in this chapter, the messy, non-continuous, uncontainable identities and choices of LGBTQ people's lives direct us to a far more nuanced understanding of what radicalism and conformity may mean. As I will show, conformity and resistance can be articulated simultaneously through a single production of family (Shacher, Auerbach and Silverstein, 2005: 44).

Jelena moved to the UK from an Eastern European country to escape an oppressively homophobic culture and told me that it was seeing just one family, headed by a lesbian

couple, when she first arrived in the UK that persuaded her she could live as she wished as a lesbian woman in the UK. Jelena is an immigrant from a country which denied her the freedom to live as she chose; anti-relational theory does not sufficiently account for such subjectivities and the additional vulnerabilities and needs which can be addressed, as they were for Jelena, through sociality. Much anti-relational theory pre-supposes that all subjects have choice and access in relation to discourses of reproduction and family (Halberstam, 2008:140, 151). Disengagement from discourses of family and futurity had not empowered Jelena to live freely but had limited the options available to her in organising her emotional and social life. Jelena and her partner Hannah are not simply expanding the boundaries of the family norm and affirming the necessity of “ritual reproduction” of futurity through family (Edelman, 2004: 30); they are redefining narrow productions of family by confronting and taking ownership of that which had been denied to Jelena in her country of birth.

Jelena and Hannah’s desire to have a family is “not an assimilationist strategy of finding respectability...[they] are queering the notion of family and creating [a] famil[y] reflective of [their] life choices” (Goss, 1997: 12). This was underlined by Hannah who identified the opportunity to choice in deciding how to organise one’s life as a fundamentally radical one; “just being a gay family, there’s a radical act in that really. Being visible in a school, I guess that’s more radical than going out demonstrating” (Hannah, 2013). Hannah’s comment indicates an evaluation of her experience and actions against an unspecified but established sense of what radicalism means. Hannah alludes to the image of the traditional radical – the protestor on a march or picket line – and locates her experiences in dialogue with this. She refers backwards to past queer activism in order to trace forward a new notion of radicalism which incorporates her life choices and queers the notion of a single approach to articulating dissident subjectivities.

Amy, a trans parent of two from the West Midlands argued that being ‘radical’ was highly subjective; “if you’re like us, a trans parent, or a gay parent, or a single parent, or a male parent, they are all going to seem radical to somebody” (Amy, 2013). Amy’s comments suggest her framing of radicalism drew on the use of ‘radical’ by right wing political positions as well as harkening back to a social history of LGBTQ liberation campaigns where radicalism was strongly associated with the public visibility of non-heterosexual identities (see Robinson, 2007 on the evolution and visibility of gay liberation in relation to identity politics, also Blee, 1998). Amy and Hannah’s experiences illustrate the complexity with which norms are reproduced and consciously inhabited (see Wiegman and Wilson, 2015: 16-18). These women do not simply evaluate their position in reference to the dominant, insider, heterosexual

family, but also with reference to outsider and radical locations, producing a new iteration of family which both affirms and rejects the conceptualisation of relationality as inherently normative.

Edelman describes queerness as something which can only be shifted to someone else but not removed because “the structural position of queerness...and the need to fill it remain[s]” (2004: 27) but in the experiences above, queerness is not shifted from these parents to non-parents; it persists. LGBTQ parents remain queerly different from heterosexual parents and continue to feel that difference shaping their interactions. The persistence of the experience of outsiderhood even when a subject is ostensibly occupying structures of insiderhood illustrates the issue with conceptualising queer as a persistent and absolute opposition to normativity (Wiegman and Wilson, 2015). Rather, in lived experiences, resistance and outsiderhood is more often experienced as a sense of discomfort (Ahmed, 2004: 155; Schacher, Auerbach and Silverstein, 2005: 46; see also Chapter Three) and a moving against *as well as within* existing structures of family.

The limitations of Edelman’s theory, and the anti-social thesis more generally, in exploring and explaining the lives of LGBTQ people (and specifically in the above example, women) relates to different histories of anti-social organising and resistance for women and feminist groups as compared to the “gay male archive deployed by Bersani, Edelman and countless others” (Halberstam, 2008: 151). Put simply, the anti-social thesis simply cannot account for the intersections of class, gender, sexuality, and many other identity positions because it is built on a “very well defined canon of gay male aesthetic production” which does not acknowledge such additional pressures and stressors (Halberstam, 2008: 140) and tends toward the production of a simplistic binary of insider/outsider, radical/assimilative, abjected/preferred.

Fuss asks “does inhabiting the inside always imply co-optation? And does inhabiting the outside always and everywhere guarantee radicality?” (1991: 5). Considering the first part of Fuss’ question, several parents argued against their apparent insider position as parents and families co-opting their queer identities. William, who lives in London with his male partner and two sons, spoke passionately on this topic; “I want people to know that just because [I am a parent]...I, or even lesbian parents, should [not] be assumed to be de-gay, or de-sexualised, or less of a cultural threat.” (William, 2014) William seems to directly respond to the first part of Fuss’ question with an unequivocal ‘no’. William is proud to see himself as “a cultural threat” which he argues he cannot help but be given “my attitudes, my behaviours, my history, my sex life, all continue to be markedly different” than his heterosexual peers

(William, 2014). William delights in investing queer meaning in his sexual and social past and refuses absolutely the suggestion that a choice (to have children) should or could alter the investment he has in counter-cultural and resistant practices.

Harriet lives in Brighton with her two teenage girls; she argued that the long established tools by which social change is demanded simply did not work. Referring to protest rallies she said; "I don't march anymore...I don't know if I ever really believed it would change anything." (Harriet, 2013) Harriet's comment suggests weariness in attempting to affect radical social change, but she went on to trace her belief in larger liberation projects to her family. She described the way her children (Olivia and Freya) enjoyed three homes: hers, their other mother Abigail's, and their biological father Jason's. Harriet expected them to craft different life courses as a result of this:

They get more choice about how they can live their lives. Olivia said that to me a couple of years ago, you can see Abigail runs her house one [way], I run mine one [way], Jason runs his one way and they've kind of got more of a choice of how they want to be than other families would, other kids would...they genuinely are...thinking 'I don't have to do it one way'. (Harriet, 2013)

She concluded that these models of family meant her children would have new narratives of family to share and she linked the distribution of this knowledge to her commitment to 'change the world':

there's not one way to change the world...the fact [my daughters] will go out and be confident saying 'I came from a gay family' will touch upon people that gay activists won't touch on. (Harriet, 2013)

Harriet's children bring her into new proximity with heteronormativity and through these interactions Harriet believes her family will directly challenge assumptions about queerness and its relationship to family. Harriet's conceptualisation of what change her children could effect describes a 'facilitating ideology' and confirms Goss' argument that having children can be resignified from 'reproduction of the same' to "the contributions made for renewal and transformation of society" (1997:12). Schacher, Auerbach and Silverstein suggest this combination of ideology and social arrangement can generate new behaviours and narratives of family (2005: 46). Certainly, Harriet's narrative of family is strongly inflected with a sense of difference: where family itself can stand as the figure of radicalism, and where family narratives help circulate new knowledge about who LGBTQ people are and what parenthood can involve.

Lynne, a lone parent from Nottingham, described how her 17 year old daughter Zoë, and Zoë's friends, spoke about gender and sexuality; "[Zoë] knows I'm bisexual, she thinks that's cool, her friends talk about being pangendered and pansexual and all kind of stuff now" (Lynne, 2013). William proudly recounted an encounter with a man who was flamboyantly, theatrically cross-dressed; as they walked away after a brief conversation with the man, his son's only comment was "Daddy! That man said 'init'!" (William, 2014) For his son, gender possibilities were unlimited and unremarkable and only linguistic idioms were worthy of remark. Both Lynne and William felt that these examples showed that their children were living with expanded horizons of gender and sexual identities. These parents suggested it was through the attitudes of their children that evidence of their effect on social discourse could be evidenced. Parents do therefore appear to continue to subscribe to notions of futurity, although the meaning of this futurity is shifted from the heterosexual imagining critiqued by Edelman.

Raising children does appear to be a key way in which "desiring subjects assume a stake in [the] future" (Edelman, 2004: 53), but that is not *all* it is. Lynne and William acknowledged they still lived within an often homophobic and transphobic society, but they felt they were successfully modelling a different way of living together and developing social relations which may have longer reaching effects on their children. Parents' evaluation that significant social change may happen over a period of generations, rather than within a few decades, is likely connected with life experiences and the social position parents occupy. How much social change an individual thinks is necessary to achieve a just or equal society is highly idiosyncratic (see Green, 2010). Lynne and William's comments suggest that their conceptualisation of what social change means is strongly linked to existing discourses where liberation is tied to revaluing and shifting of the terms of inclusion, rather than a radical reordering of society. Later in this chapter, I will look at a number of factors that led parents to invest their psychic energy in modest change and local-scale activism, and not in the type of substantial, world altering social change which is often represented as synonymous with 'queer'.

The comments made by parents suggested that their life courses conformed to expected narratives of family (indicating conformity to existing scripts), but their experiences within family point to a different use for structures of family. As an educational institution and proto-utopia they offered a site of resistance to assimilation into heterosexual life courses. Parents hoped for a different future whilst also expressing satisfaction with the changes which have happened in the present, in their lifetimes. Muñoz says "the present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of

majoritarian belonging” (2009: 27). However, these families can be seen as sites of difference in the present, heterotopic, or proto-utopic spaces of belonging.

### The Necessity of Connectedness

What Edelman’s proposal returns to, again and again, is that queers should embrace anti-relational, profoundly isolated ways of living. This denies what Tim Dean describes as the “orgy of connection” which exists beyond and before any notions of selfhood or regimes of social order (2006: 828). Muñoz argues the anti-relational stance of Edelman is primarily an attempt to distance “queerness from...contamination by race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference” (2006: 825). Participant comments indicate that it is this ‘contamination’ - the messiness of the lives of queer subjects - that is central in how they organise their lives and which drives their sense of being different from dominant heterosexual positions. Being radical and challenging existing structures in society and social inequality is not a single issue fight; the multiple identities and competing pressures which shape and drive the experiences of LGBTQ parents demonstrate the complexity and perhaps impossibility of anti-relational positioning. I wish to continue by exploring queerness as intrinsically linked to and constituted by the interaction of gender, class, and other social factors, as Muñoz proposes, and assess whether this presents a framework which more closely corresponds with the narratives parents offered of their families as active, thoughtfully produced queer structures.

I spoke to Dylan, a trans man and father to 5 year old Morven, about whether he felt being a parent had changed the type of activist engagement he could make. Dylan wryly acknowledged “you don’t get as much time to sew banners and bake casseroles and do protest marches” as a parent. But he also argued this did not preclude the choice to be active; “you can be as radical as you chose to be,” citing his ongoing campaign for his daughter’s rural primary school to update their library to include books on diverse families as an example of his choice to be active against normativity (Dylan, 2013). Dylan’s husband Edward is disabled and often unable to leave the house, Dylan’s self-described activism focused on endorsing and expanding practices of family within his local community. His day to day life as an unemployed, working-class parent and carer to his disabled husband significantly shaped the access he had to activist and radical spaces, and he lacked the emotional, social, and economic resources needed to make his voice widely heard in opposition to heteronormativity. Dylan’s family included his husband and daughter, his mother, and siblings; he told me his favourite thing about his family was that:

they [are] there for me and because we're quite a small family we tend to be really aware of each other and then if somebody needs something then...we tend to be quite responsive to each other and quite supportive in whatever we're doing. (Dylan, 2013)

Dylan's family offer him support, and his priorities are to reciprocate that support whenever needed. The activist-described actions Dylan took were family-focused; Dylan's priorities were not to create a brave new queer world in which structures of family and futurity would be forever rejected, but to engineer an environment in which he and his husband could parent effectively and happily, and their daughter could feel loved, supported, and comfortable. These priorities are at odds with the dominant image of the radical who is located in the street, "not at home getting the children dressed" (Winegar, 2012: 67). Dylan therefore faced a negotiation: to transform the meaning of domestic actions in order to support his narrative of queer radical action.

Dylan uses traditional modes of living – within a family, in a group bonded through shared kinship, which offers emotional support within a domestic arrangement – and generates from these bonds the possibility for resisting oppressive narratives of good [non-queer] subjecthood and the established organisation of intimate relationships. These acts of resistance and rejection were made possible (as well as perhaps necessary) by Dylan's connections to a wider heterosexual community. Dylan described how he challenged discrimination and heteronormativity on a local level by pressuring the local school, and by trying to create a queer opportunity out of the unavoidable visibility of his own family:

I don't have a choice [not to be out] because everyone in the village knew me before transition; it's a small place, everyone knows everyone else's business... so because there's not much in the media representing us I'm like 'well, if I'm out, and I like writing, I might as well combine those two things and write something about us [in my blog]'. (Dylan, 2013)

Blogging, like petitioning the school to widen their selection of books, were ideal methods of activist engagement for Dylan because they could be done from home at minimal cost allowing him to continue to care for his daughter and to support his husband without encountering any additional financial hardship, which was an increasing concern whilst he was unemployed. His blog, and his family's visibility, contribute new representations, and affirmations of domesticity as containing radical potential, to the cultural landscape.

Dylan described his family as being socially isolated and related an experience which had made him conscious of his family's inequality in the community. It was a striking experience for Dylan and is worth quoting at length:



we haven't had an organised birthday party for Morven until this year and we invited her whole class and sort of 5 people came and it's like 'oh, oh you're trying to tell us something? Because there's no way that 30 of you were that busy all on the same day' and every time I recount something like this to my sister she's like 'why the hell are you putting up with this and why are you staying in that village? Because they're jerks.' And they are. There's quite a bit of me that says I should just move to Edinburgh where we would probably be in a much more mixed school but because of Edward's health where we are staying is really good, we have a very good GP who puts up with a lot of crap from him and Morven's used to the place...But the times we're most successful is when we're not trying to fit in with everyone else actually. If I'd stuck to my guns – because I said I didn't want to have this big birthday party with the whole class round like everyone else... - we probably would have been happier. It's when we try to be just like everybody else but still fail miserably because they know we're not just like everybody else that it's worst, then it's a mess. (Dylan, 2013)

Dylan's feeling that he has been identified by the local community as an outsider because of his family's divergence from the heterosexual family results in distress and anxiety. Conversely, he identifies how embracing his family's difference offers a sense of security and happiness. Butler says a possible response to the constraint of norms which queer individuals cannot ever fully inhabit is "savouring the status of unthinkability...a site of pure resistance unco-opted by normativity" (2004: 106). Dylan's enactment of 'pure resistance' describes his decision, informed by the needs of his husband Edward and daughter Morven, to remain in a community which is hostile to their family, to make choices regarding how they act and what they do based on their needs alone. Dylan is pushed to make this decision by the specific circumstances of his family; his choice to reject normativity is not freely made. Dylan's family repeat the [normative] action of organising sociality around kinship and reproduction, but fail to reproduce the heterosexual narrative of family which is the condition for assimilation into the local community. This "repeating [of] some gestures and not others" results in a structure which is "twisted into shapes that enable[s] some action *only insofar as [it] restrict[s] the capacity for other kinds of action*" (Ahmed, 2006: 91 emphasis from original). Resistance, and new conceptualisations of family and social connectedness, are enabled by the need to negotiate a workable narrative of family. The multiple pressures and needs of various family members drives both Dylan's commitment to family and his critical reflection on what it can mean and how it may fit into wider [heterosexual] communities.

Family becomes both the source and effect of disorientation from heterosexual conformist life courses. In disorientation there is "the condition for the possibility of another way of dwelling in the world" (Ahmed, 2006: 20, 178). For Dylan, this possibility translates into a mode of queer living which prioritises the needs of individuals within a family over the demands and restrictions of heterosexual society. Enacting this possibility celebrates an ostensibly nuclear,

traditional family (biologically related, two parent model) whose needs and identities expand beyond the boundaries of existing family narratives, prompting a narrative of critical resistance, of 'unthinkability'. Dylan is thus engaged in "queer world-making...where one is allowed to cast pictures of utopia and to include such pictures in any map of the social" (Muñoz, 2009: 40). Dylan's firm location in the heterosexual social world (ensured by Morven's links at school to their geographical community) allows Dylan to articulate his family's picture of utopia through his blog, through his pressure on the school that families like his be represented, and through his family's conspicuous presence in the village. Queer-world making can be seen to exist in, and alongside, the heteronormative: a space which anti-relational modes of living could not access.

Luke, a trans man from the South West, described how his granddaughter's understanding of him had demonstrated her willingness to integrate two pieces of information about him which his children had not as easily been able to reconcile. His 5 children (3 of whom he birthed and 2 who are step-children from a second marriage) continued to call him 'Mum' after transitioning, but granddaughter Mads saw him as "totally male":

occasionally [Mads] says 'how many children did you give birth to? Which ones?' and I'll say and she'll go 'ok!' [but then] she'll say 'oh you men!' or something, she sees me totally as male. (Luke, 2014)

Fran, one of Luke's adult daughters, was present during my interview with Luke and commented "it's weird because Mads, she knows [Luke is trans], but she treats you, you're completely male...Even though she knows, it's interesting" (Fran, 2014). Edelman dismisses gay and queer parents' desire to have children as bowing to heteronormative pressure and attempting to secure "the one true access to social security" (2004: 75), but Luke's experiences suggest that children do not automatically produce this 'security'. Additionally, Luke's experience of transitioning after having children (and so moving from the 'proper' position of heterosexuality with a clear commitment to reproductive futurity) disrupts Edelman's conceptualisation of identity as a stable formation which does not change, and which is not resignified over the course of an individual's life. In common with the other trans parents I spoke to, Luke's experiences of transitioning with children reveal that children can present a constant sign of an individual's queerness. Concurrently, Luke's experiences indicate how the articulation of queerness later in life can disrupt the supposed social security of heterosexual relationships, and of child rearing.

Fran's comments suggest that for her, Luke will never be "completely" male because he is her biological mother; her relationship to him insists on his distance from the heteronorm because

of his queered reproductive and parental role. However, Mads' relationship to, and view of, Luke seems to have prompted Fran to reflect on the integrity of Luke's identity as "completely male" in relation to him being the person who birthed her. By working together as a family to communicate to Mads information about Luke's trans identity and his relationship to his children, they created a space where, although the 'social security' of their family wasn't altered, all the members of the family were confronted (by Mads) with the possibility of recognising reproductive roles as separate from gender. Fran and Luke's experiences demonstrate how a combination of dialogue and long-term, inter-generational, familial relationships can produce a continually evolving conceptualisation of parenting and family which directly impacts the experiences of those within the family.

Dean describes Deluze's notion of 'Becoming' as a queer action which troubles normative conventions through "a ceaseless movement of being...that never results in anything resembling an identity" (2006: 827). This movement – like the understanding Luke and his children and grandchild have of their family relationship which continually evolves through their connections and communication – "trace[s] new forms of sociability, new ways of being together, that are not grounded in imaginary identity" (Dean, 2006: 827). Luke worked with his children and grandchildren to create a family which offered them the support and recognition they jointly needed and which is based on roles, actions and mutual support rather than strict adherence to distinct identity categories and performances. Luke underlined this, describing how he enlisted friends to act as aunts to his children according to their needs, not dictated by blood-kinship bonds.

Luke's experience of moving across the expected roles, actions and identities of a parent, required an evaluation of what elements of traditional family identity were useful or valuable. Through this questioning of the rigid categorisations of gender and genetic-kinship, he collaboratively opened a space in which more fluid and responsive expressions of family were possible. Within this more open performance of family, Luke discovered new pleasures of legitimations and recognition, as indicated in the pleasure he expressed when describing Mads' understanding of him as "totally male". In this moment of queer family unity, Luke's family create a concrete utopia: a space which describes "the hopes of a collective...emergent group" and offers an evolving "not-yet-conscious" map for a better future (Muñoz, 2009: 3). Luke's delight in Mads' view of him offers an implicit "critique of the present, of what is" and in describing the success of his family in embracing and celebrating their shape, Luke's family casts "a picture of what *can and perhaps will be*" (Muñoz, 2009: 35, emphasis from original).

Individuals who live at the intersection of multiple minoritarian identities experience more than one pressure from heterosexual society. As I briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, not all queer people are free to choose when and how they become visible as non-heterosexual. Against the unpredictable consequences of visible queerness, Amy, a trans woman with 2 biological children, said that connectedness to family and community represented security. Again, this indicates the ability of LGBTQ parents to pick out elements of family which offer something useful before incorporating them in a broader narrative of family identity. Amy described the intelligibility which came from having inhabited a heterosexual family form for so long before beginning her transition as an important way in which her identity was recognised and her family continued to be validated:

I'm part of a community, people know me, you'll see people in the shop, someone you've known for years...and they'll be like 'hi!'...people know me and see me with the kids so it's fine. So I think it's a real help, and I can see why that's a real advantage compared to some other people. (Amy, 2013)

Amy's comments suggest that conformity to family scripts provides a challenge to transphobic and homophobic discourses which would otherwise produce her identity and homogendered desire as 'unnatural' and a threat to social stability and could, she certainly feels, result in social isolation. It is precisely this fear of being cast out and abjected which Edelman demands queers should shrug off; criticising those who bow to such fears for sustaining the system which produces their identities as aberrant (2004). On the other hand, Martin argues passionately that this position is not compatible with the reality of queer lives:

radical anti-normativity throws out a lot of babies with a lot of bathwater; family...psychological health...responsibility to what is given...in the effort *to destabilize what has incorrectly been considered unchangeable essence*. Implicit in these constructions of queerness...is the lure of an existence without limit, without bodies or psyches in history, or by the circumstances in which we find ourselves with others. An enormous fear of ordinariness or normalcy results in superficial accounts of the complex imbrication of sexuality with other aspects of social and psychic life and in far too little attention to the dilemmas of the average people that we also are. (Martin, 1996: 70, emphasis added)

With specific reference to the emphasised section above, Amy's family is evidence of how the heterosexual family is erroneously conceptualised as an unchangeable essence. It is, like Dylan and Luke's families above, flexible enough to change and reshape around her queerness, and it is changed by her queerness. In the flexibility of family, Amy gains security and support during transition against the presumed hostility of heterosexual hegemony. Amy has responsibilities to her children and family which pre-date her articulating a non-heterosexual identity and fulfilling these responsibilities alongside expressing her individual identity constitutes some of

the ‘dilemmas’ which attend her continued life as Martin’s ‘average person’ which she neither wants nor needs to disentangle herself from. In this way, the foundational tenets which are presumed to prompt radicalism are redrawn.

Radicalism does not have to exist in opposition to family, rather it can work within and on such structures to expand and resignify their meanings. Emily and Isabel described themselves as living in “straightville” but said that they felt by making themselves visible in their [straight] community as gay, they could work toward a sense of disruptive queerness. Many parents, like Emily and Isabel, said they did not feel they could embody or practice radical queerness in every element of their lives for numerous and complex reasons, but that they try to contribute in small ways to activist work, often revaluing the work that was open to them as socially significant. Isabel says of [what she felt were] her modest contributions to social activism “we’re doing something that will be brand new to a lot of people” (Isabel, 2013). It is this micro level activism and change, working on a person-to-person, or family-to-family basis, which theories of homonormativity and queer radical change fail to account for in their macro level assessments of queer lives.

Bersani states that small challenges and changes to the meaning and production of family is merely “resignification, or redeployment” of existing forms and “will [n]ever overthrow anything [as] these mimetic activities are too closely imbricated in the norms they continue” (1995: 51). Like Amy, who sought to be accommodated within a revised narrative of family rather than strike out alone, few of the parents I spoke to suggested they wished to ‘overthrow’ existing social organisation and in the practices and changes participants made in describing and shaping their families, the implication was that they were seeking ways to make life *liveable* for themselves, their partners, and their children. Charlie had strong criticism for the proposal that LGBTQ people should dedicate themselves to revolutionary action above and before all other commitments:

[LGBTQ people] may feel that actually as normative an existence as possible is what makes their lives more functional. And I don’t think it’s right to criticise that, I think everyone has to find a way to live comfortably, I don’t feel people are somehow letting the side down if they’re not being as radical as possible all the time and I think assuming people should be is unfair, and again I think it does come from a position of privilege where people don’t have other things that are bigger problems in their lives. (Charlie, 2013)

Butler argues that “in the same way that a life for which no categories of recognition exist is not a liv[e]able life, so a life for which those categories constitute unlivable [sic] constraint is not an acceptable option” (2004: 8). The categories of recognition which constitute unliveable

constraint here are, I propose, the narrow categories LGBTQ parents feel define queer subjecthood. Parents, in trying to establish liveable lives (which require “various degrees of stability”, Butler, 2004: 8) find that a greater or lesser degree of conformity to structures of family can mean they achieve recognition, negotiate liveability, and stability, from the destabilising forces of intersecting oppressions (which include, as identified above; disability, economic and class disadvantage, and trans identities). Family opens spaces of liveability from where emotional energy can be conserved in readiness for negotiating other sites of oppression and struggle.

Butler says the space created by resignification of the terms of family offers the possibility of “a more enabling future” (1993a: 137). Whilst resignification and discursive construction of the family may do little to alter the structure of heterosexual society, it can offer space and empowerment for those who experience multiple intersections of discrimination and marginalisation and enable them to create better conditions for living in the present. Certainly for Amy, Luke, and Dylan, their connectedness, their use of family, provides them with the support they need to negotiate transphobic society.

What the parents I spoke to had in common was that they were all able to describe some small sites of resistance which they and their family occupied. Occupying the broadly intelligible site of ‘family’ allowed them space to enact more permissive and queer performances of kinship and support which an outsider queer radical position would not have as easily enabled. These actions and negotiations describe a reworking of what radical relationality can mean, at the same time as they point to different and flexible meanings of family structures. These parents were not satisfied to defer wholesale a new form of society which would work for them, or to accept the heterosexual nuclear family model as satisfactory. But they also did not expect their life courses to generate a total revolution in the social understanding of family, reproductive futurity, and non-heterosexual identities in the next few years. This middle way they craft, between two narratives – one of radicality and one of conformity – is, as Butler says “neither an efficacious insurrection nor a painful resubordination, but an unstable coexistence of both” (1993a: 137). And instability, both Edelman and Muñoz agree, is precisely where the potentiality of queerness lies as well as being the opportunity which queerness creates.

#### Happy to be Homonormative

For many of the parents I spoke to, the suggestion that occupying queer subject positions must involve challenging the established structure of family was problematic; homonormative lives offered them precisely the security and support they sought. As Goss concludes: “families

appeal to many queers because we came from families” (1997: 12). Family is not simply a mechanism by which the dominant order is reproduced, it may also produce – as evidenced by Goss’ reminder that queer people are themselves the product of heterosexual families – queer[ed] subjectivities. The idea put forward by Duggan that institutions including family sustain “dominant heteronormative assumptions” (2003: 50) is problematic in this respect. Duggan’s theory suggests that meaning-making is a passive process and families automatically become what dominant discourses signify them as, rather than acknowledging the active element of identity and narrative making where new meanings and ideologies may be invested in old structures. In interviews with parents who felt they occupied ostensibly normative positions, I sought to explore how far they felt their families ‘sustained [hetero]normative assumptions’ versus producing an apparently conventional institution underpinned with queer, or radical values. Where did parents locate themselves in relation to notions of conformity and assimilation?

As she considered what ‘queer family’ might mean, Joanne concluded that her practice of family did not challenge normative understandings of family. Her response was informed by her awareness of radical queer theory and the anti-social thesis and in this way the insistence of the theorists discussed in this chapter that queer relationality has a specific shape, strongly influenced how she located and imagined her family. However, she did acknowledge that no matter how happy she was to be regarded as assimilated through her production of family, she still encountered resistance to having her family accepted as ‘normal’:

We are still non-normative in lots of ways but sometimes we are really normative and actually that’s fine, you know. But sometimes we’re not, are we? I mean even the fact that we have to show [non-LGBT people] how to deal with us in order to be [considered] normal, [shows our family] is working at the fringes of normativity. (Joanne, 2013)

This conceptualisation of family as something which cannot be fully inhabited but which individuals can be differently positioned in proximity to, illustrates that there is no exterior to norms (Green, 2003; Wiegman and Wilson, 2015: 17-18). Labelling any person or structure as intrinsically normative is problematic because it presumes a stable outside against which they are positioned, rather than, as we see in the responses of Joanne and others in this section, understanding a norm as something which touches all subjects and to which everyone may conform in varying degrees.

For parents like Joanne, who lives in Brighton with her partner and daughter (and describes herself as middle-class and White Irish) social connections, ethnicity, economic status, and

geographical location placed them and their families within a fundamentally 'normal' sphere of other white, middle-class, socially empowered lesbian and gay parents who live within a diversity of family forms. Joanne still hints at a sense of discomfort – a degree to which her family still does not fully fit into a heterosexual world; “we have to show [non-LGBT people] how to deal with us”. However, Joanne’s statement demonstrates her continued investment in the heterosexual world; rather than refusing it entirely she and her partner work to make their family intelligible and integrated. In this respect, Joanne’s family can be seen to inhabit norms differently than her heterosexual counterparts; family is achievable and liveable, but some additional work must be done to realise that. Conformity or assimilation is something which is worked at and for, rather something passively conferred upon a family.

Eva, a lesbian parent, said that becoming a parent meant she felt “more conventional than I’ve ever been” (Eva, 2013). However, she also expressed a desire to share with her son celebrations of queer difference and, in these comments, indicated how making a choice to invest queerness in conventionality was still available to her:

I want him to be familiar with the freedom that comes with being gay because everyone gets so preoccupied with how [it] is more difficult than being straight...but it’s also freer because all of a sudden you are the worst thing to be...in some people’s eyes anyway. And you can kind of have your sexuality as you want it and sexuality is integrated into living and the book stores where you get your intellectual books are the same places you get your sex toys and I like that it’s not puritanical and I like that [it] is very open. (Eva, 2013)

Eva incorporates the sexual cultures which made ‘lesbian’ and ‘queer’ valuable identities to her into her production of family and her parenting practice. Eva offers a new narrative of family which is stabilised by apparent conformity to a two-parent, privatised model, but which reiterates “the strength and joy of difference” (Foulke and Hill, 1997: 246) as an available choice.

Ahmed argues that it is in the space between fully validated heteronormative families and socially-radical queer modes of living that queer potential resides:

Queer is not...about transcendence or freedom from the (hetero) normative...The failure to be non-normative is not the failure of queer to be queer, but a sign of the attachments [to existing normative structures] that are the condition of possibility for queer. (2004: 155)

In order to evaluate how this ‘failure’ to be non-normative was experienced by parents, I asked participants if ‘queer family’ was a term they would use to describe their families. Jamie, a



bisexual parent in a heterogendered relationship, reflected on his ambivalence of using the term given his feelings about radically rejecting traditional understandings of family:

I don't know whether I'm interested in queering family norms strongly...to me being a queer family is not just about taking the existing normative family and 'being all queer about it!' But also taking the idea of queerness and the political element and building into that a healthier family life. (Jamie, 2013)

Jamie expressed a degree of anxiety about how his family structure may be viewed; prefacing his comments above by saying he was not "as deeply radical as some members of the queer community" even though he felt "our queer identity is not just about who we fancy, it is a political identity, it is a community identity" (Jamie, 2013). Similarly, Joanne did not feel she could claim the term 'queer family' to describe her family:

because I don't feel queer enough, because I know...that queer is supposed to be this resistant, non-normative, non-homonormative...it doesn't marry with the way I run my life, in a kind of monogamous relationship with marriage everything that good queers don't do [laughs] I'm a good gay but a bad queer! (Joanne, 2013)

These comments suggest Ahmed's claim that the "failure to be non-normative is not the failure of queer to be queer" is not indicative of how queerness and conformity are experienced by individuals. Conceptualisations of queerness which insist on radical responses to, and rejections of, existing social structures, function to concretise queer as something which one either achieves or fails to achieve, and not as a continuum along which different articulations of resistance and conformity can be offered according to the needs and motivations of non-heterosexual subjects. This results in reluctance amongst parents to conclude that their various experiences of not fitting, and critically reflecting on family structure, actually constitute queer responses. Participants appeared to draw their sense of what queerness 'should' look like from a number of sources. As already mentioned, Joanne was conscious of academic queer theory and made explicit reference to the anti-relational thesis in her evaluation of her own queer conformity. Jamie's indicated his sense of what queerness 'should' or 'must' look like in a family was related to his consciousness of social history in relation to liberation campaigns and the collapsing of public/private boundaries in radical activist movements. Parents seem to evaluate radicalism in relation to a value-hierarchy where those "members of the queer community" (Jamie, 2013) who use their home and personal lives to "model" queer "ways of living outside of the heterosexual family unit" (Robinson, 2006: 465) are viewed as closer to the established (and therefore authorised) version of resistant activism historically enacted by LGBTQ people. Those LGBTQ people who seek to model resistant life courses primarily in the privatised space of home, and incorporate

queer ideas into their [re]production of family, find few representations which can support the narrative of these actions as socially significant or queer. Without such cultural support, parents find it difficult to signify their actions as indicative of a queer engagement.

Schacher et al in their study of gay fathers suggest that “going against cultural *and subcultural* norms is anxiety producing [and] required a social support system that helped to manage the anxiety that accompanies [becoming a parent]” (2005:46 emphasis added). Social support – or connectedness – as explored in the previous section, is most easily accessed through established channels of community making which can accommodate children, various interpersonal needs of emotional support, and the demands child-rearing places on individuals. Community made by LGBTQ parents offers social support to other LGBTQ parents who may experience anxiety and discomfort at both failing to fully inhabit heterosexual family norms *and* failing to fulfil the expectations associated with queer subject positions. Embracing homonormativity may, therefore, represent not identification with depoliticised positions but rather alienation from practices of radical resistance which, instead of liberating LGBTQ parents, actually add additional pressures.

In this first half of this chapter I have shown that LGBTQ parents have an uneasy relationship to notions of radical relationality. In particular, the emphasis on separatism and breaking down the structures of family which promote connectedness offered in the anti-social queer thesis sit uneasily against the complex needs and multiple identities of LGBTQ parents. A single notion of what constitutes radicalism dominates the cultural imaginary through the social history of lesbian and gay liberation movements and is further signalled in the work of Duggan and Edelman. This significantly shapes the way in which LGBTQ parents locate themselves and their families in the social and political landscape. I have also shown that, within these complex contexts for speaking queer subjectivity, normativity is a problematic way to label life courses as it erases the numerous negotiations LGBTQ parents make, and allows no discursive space to acknowledge critical relationships to broadly conformist structures. I now wish to look at the ways in which parents develop narratives which affirm the value of radical thought and resistant action in producing families. In particular, I identify the resources to which parents turn in order to negotiate these narratives and to place themselves in relation to various discourses of radicalism and family.

#### Expanded Families and Unintelligibility

Darren was a gay man who had two children with his partner and a lesbian couple in a co-parenting arrangement. At the time of our interview his children were 11 and 14 and, since

their birth, he and his male partner had separated and both of them had subsequently found new partners. In all, 6 adults were involved in his children's lives in parent, or step-parent roles, and their family spread over three households. Darren described how he presented images of homogendered parenting to his children and expected their identification to be with these images. However, his children rejected these representations in favour of identification with families who shared domestic arrangements which stretched over multiple homes:

When the kids started school, this was in Stoke Newington, there were other lesbian and gay kids, kids of lesbian and gay parents in the school...in both of their classes... I asked my daughter 'what's your family most like?' and it was interesting because...she didn't say initially that her family was most like the other child who had lesbian parents, she identified it with a child who had divorced parents and related it to having two homes. (Darren, 2014)

This apparent cross-identification over lines of parental identity, to a sense of shared experience based on the arrangement of a family over multiple homes indicates how illusory notions of distinct classifications of family are, and how flexible children's responses to family-meanings can be. Indeed, the persistent rejection, by all parents, of the idea that any of the representations of family which they identified with were 'like them' is typical of the way in which the family is imagined:

Individuals feel no discomfort about describing their own family life as 'unusual', and yet believing that they are seen by other people as having a 'usual' family life, and finally asserting that most families conform to a [single] pattern or type. (Bernades, 1985: 203)

Bernades is describing here the relationship heterosexual individuals have to the idea of a nuclear family, but in considering how LGBTQ parents narrate their families we can see several of the same reflexes. Parents describe their families as conforming to a common production of LGBTQ-parented family, but they then offer qualifications to their conformity. They list ways in which they differ either ideologically or structurally to other families, but ultimately conclude that representations of LGBTQ-parented families, although not indicative of their own experience, do have validity. This chain of reasoning and exception signals parents' belief in a coherent, original form of (LGBTQ) family. Mainstream media depictions of LGBTQ parents which claim to be representative of this new family shape perpetuate the cognitive dissonance individuals must manage wherein they "simultaneously hold 'general' and 'specific' concepts of 'the family'...in order to reconcile personal family 'reality' with public family ideology" (Bernades, 1985: 205). The idea of family as a stable production with an original referent dominates the cultural imaginary and contributes to the anxiety parents' experience preventing them from offering an authoritative narrative of their family as queer.

The anxiety of authority over family narrative making, which parents indicated, appeared to inform their continued search for diverse representations which more closely mirrored their own experiences. Rose spoke about how she found the lack of representation of different routes to and productions of family, constraining, as she and her partner tried to conceptualise how to do family in the best way for them; “there was nothing that allowed me to see what it could be like as a working parent.” (Rose, 2014). Being able to use a representation to make your family intelligible provides reassurance of having experiences in common with other subjects, this is essential to generating a “sense of a ‘communality’ or a sense of the social” (Bernades, 1985: 206). Rose’s comments indicate that a sense of belonging is a key step in imagining or creating more radical or original productions of family. Queer worlds, queer utopias can only be imagined or glimpsed through a collaborative social act (Muñoz, 2009). The stability which comes from accessing dominant discourses of family and generating a clear location in the social world, emerge as prerequisites to producing radical social change.

Picking up on the discussion of making sense of family through representations (however ill-fitting) which I began above, several parents spoke about encountering incomprehension regarding their family structure when they spoke to outsiders and many more found their families were judged to be non-radical. In addition to Darren, whose family arrangement I outlined above, I spoke to several lesbian and gay parents whose families were arranged around co-parenting agreements. Harriet co-parented with a gay male friend and her ex-partner (Abigail) giving their children (Freya and Olivia) three homes. Martha and Paige co-parented with a gay male couple so their daughter Amy had two homes. Seb was a step-parent to two children who were co-parented by a lesbian couple, Seb’s husband, and Seb’s husband’s ex-partner, giving their children three homes, whilst Jelena and Hannah co-parented with a gay male friend giving their two daughters two homes. These participants described how their families were usually read as complete at the lowest level – the children plus one or two parents being understood as a whole unit, necessitating an explanation of the expanded boundaries of their parenting arrangements. These experiences point to the strength of the nuclear norm of family organisation, something which is still supported and normalised by legal reforms which seek to recognise the families of non-heterosexual parents<sup>11</sup>.

For Harriet and Seb in particular, the idea of a blended, or step-parent family, in addition to co-parenting agreements proved too complex for many people they interacted with to

---

<sup>11</sup> Recent UK legislation guarantees same-sex couples equal parental rights with heterosexual couples but these pieces of legislation limit parental rights to the maximum-two-parent model associated with the nuclear family. The two key pieces of legislation which enshrine the two parent model are *Adoption and Children Act, 2002* and *Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008*

understand; “I always joke that our family tree is a nightmare and no one will ever get the hang of [it]” (Harriet, 2013). For Harriet, the limits of intelligibility for families arranged outside of the heterosexual nuclear norm were exposed in the aftermath of her relationship breakup from Abigail:

Things people said to us at that time [when we split up] were...like ‘so will Freya go with you and Olivia go with Abigail?’ and we were reeling from the implications...like ‘fuck! Is that how people see us?’ That was hard, that was a hard time. But... you have to kind of swallow that and say ‘no, that’s not how it works, they’re sisters and we’re a family and we’re like any other family and you don’t split the siblings off and one takes one, not usually, it’s not usually like that.’ (Harriet, 2013)

In Seb’s case, it was often his position as a step-parent which people struggled to understand to position him in his family:

People really struggle to understand the set up because there isn’t any point of reference for it. People always assume my partner’s children are from a previous heterosexual relationship, always, and then kind of ask...‘when did he become gay?’... [I have to tell them that] co-parenting isn’t to do with sexual relationships, that isn’t to do with previous relationships, isn’t to do with people being infertile, isn’t to do with adopting, there isn’t much representation of that or any points of reference for that. So people get really, really confused and I find myself having to explain it once, twice, two or three times before they get their heads round it and even then they look a bit bemused. (Seb, 2013)

The reports of the responses these parents encountered from people outside their family make clear the difficulty of making families *make sense* beyond and outside the dominant model. A lack of representations which support the different stories of legitimacy and coherence families seek to tell about themselves complicates the ease with which they can move within heterosexual family culture or develop sustained queer narratives.

The disbelief or misunderstanding Seb describes encountering was also shared by children of LGBTQ parents who attempted to narrate their family identity. Lynne described her daughter Zoë’s experience; “She tells people the story [of our family] but sometimes finds it difficult when people don’t quite get it – I think their assumption is ‘have you got this quite right Zoe?’” (Lynne, 2013). Like Rose’s report that she found it difficult to articulate her chosen route to parenthood and consciously crafted family arrangement without representation of people who had steered that course before her, Zoë found it difficult to generate understanding for her family and Lynne’s decision to form family outside the bonds of romantic, heterosexual partnership. Both hetero- and homo-parent representations reiterate the nuclear family arrangement, inviting us to define family through the parenting dyad. In forming families

beyond the two parent, romantic, heterosexual model, parents are faced with incomprehensibility.

The incomprehension parents report was expressed about their families indicates their position in “nonplaces [sic] where recognition...proves precarious if not elusive, in spite of one’s best efforts to be a subject in some recognizable sense” (Butler, 2004: 108). The only route to recognition available to these families, as they are unable to expand “the lexicon of legitimization” (Butler, 2004: 108), is to make use of a dominant narrative of family which ignores their uncontainable, or incomprehensible reality. The representational references which parents cited indicate their use of this dominant narrative. Texts including as *King and King*, *If I had 100 Mummies*, and *And Tango Makes Three*, were widely cited by participants as offering representations of ‘families like ours’ for children to grow up with. However, these families refuse to be entirely silenced by the limited lexicon of family and continue to share a narrative of family which celebrates and legitimates their unique circumstances. Like the parents discussed in Chapter Three, they offered commentaries on these texts when presenting them to their children, emphasising the expanded possibilities of their family in relation to the narrower model presented in the book.

Martha and Paige described their response when they found children books were limited to images of two parent families:

I realised that anything we read, most books obviously have Mommy and Daddy but she has Mommies *and* Daddies so it’s actually not a problem, um, I mean the book we’re talking about, the page says ‘some kids have two mommies and some have two daddies’ and I always say to her ‘and you have two mommies *and* two daddies!’ (Paige, 2013, participant’s emphasis)

Martha and Paige acknowledged that whilst they reinforced the multiple parents involved in their family when they read to their daughter, this did not alter their family being most often understood by outsiders as a two-parent same-sex family. Their legitimization as a two-parent family came with some advantages; increasing representation of lesbian parented families meant organisations they interacted with (such a nurseries and pregnancy-related health care providers) understood and acknowledged the validity of their family. Conversely, when their full co-parenting arrangement become visible, the legitimization they otherwise enjoyed offered little protection or security.

Paige described the additional costs and time delays they faced because the NHS fertility clinic insisted on a quarantine period before their donor, Max’s, sperm could be used. She explicitly

linked these delays to the co-parenting arrangement and the lack of channels by which it could be legitimated:

If you're a straight couple and you have fertility issues...its fine – HIV? Not a problem. Hepatitis? Not a problem. Whatever, not a problem, *because you're a couple*. Not necessarily married, but a heterosexual couple, you don't have to wait for a quarantine period, you just sign some things and say 'this is my husband, he's HIV positive or he's got hepatitis and I want to have a baby with him' and they say 'absolutely!'. Max, our donor, has hepatitis, B or C, I can't remember...So we said 'oh, he's our donor' and [the clinic said] 'absolutely not, you can't use him as a donor, you could if he was your boyfriend, [if you were] a couple'...so I said 'if we presented, if me and Max just walked in this door and said "we've been trying for a couple of years and we can't get pregnant and we want to pay you £5,000 to do IVF, by the way, he's got hepatitis B"' they'd say "ok great!" but because they could only view him as a donor and not a father – and I said 'but he's going to be a father!' – They just couldn't get their heads around it. (Paige, 2013, emphasis added)

Reproduction continues to be authorised only for two parent couples, something which can be rigidly enforced for couples in co-parenting arrangements who seek reproductive assistance. Paige concludes that the fertility clinic just “couldn't get their heads around” their chosen family arrangement; this incomprehensibility generated “significant suffering and...disenfranchisement”, something which Butler suggests accompanies living without recognition (2004: 115). Families which are arranged in queered forms and which expand beyond narrow boundaries of heterosexual family are in a ‘nonplace’ where lack of comprehension, and a lack of resources to generate intelligibility, frustrates the possibility of them realising families according to their wishes. Martha and Paige were able to find another [private] clinic which was willing to allow them to use Max's sperm without a quarantine period, so they did not have to sacrifice their consistent narrative of who would be involved in parenting their child in order to conceive (i.e. by Max and Paige presenting as a heterosexual couple, as Paige indicates they considered). Whilst they avoided having to accept invisibility for their parenting choices in their reproductive health care, their experience indicates how normalising narratives of family are privileged over, and used to suppress, the unique voices and stories of families; obscuring from cultural view sometimes radical parenting choices and original organisational strategies. Paige and Martha's active engagement with representation to narrate their family as both similar to dominant representations and as having elements which differ represents a “challenge [to] the very norms of recognition supplied by state legitimisation” (Butler, 2004: 115). Martha and Paige invoke the same dominant representations of who can form families (and how many people may be involved in this process) which very nearly prevented them from making their family, in order to craft new narratives of meaning.

As Martha and Paige's experience of having to navigate incomprehensibility for a radical or queered arrangement of family indicates, generating narratives through representation and locating families in relation to dominant and radical discourses is key when forming a family. Darren discussed the values and expectations of access to family making which shaped his family according to the experiences and knowledge of all the co-parents in his family:

When we did a naming thing for the kids and we each said something and they thanked a kind of radical lesbian parenting history and foremothers who had blazed a trail in a sense and opened up the possibility in their conceptual terms whereas I thanked, I very much felt what I was doing was part of my own family tradition which was you have children, you have more children! So I think in a sense what we did...could be seen as both radical and rather conformist! (Darren, 2014)

Darren's reflection on how family came to figure as an imaginative possibility for him and his co-parents indicates the way in which representation, which explicitly links radical organising and resistant practice to parenting, can enable stable, validated family identity-making. Making family make sense as a radical or queer practice is strongly associated with the availability of images which represent it as a valid way to practice queer resistance and enact activist subjectivity. Whilst Martha and Paige described a desire for their family to be assimilated ("we don't want to make a big issue about being a gay family, we just want to be integrated in") they also linked the possibility of imagining their family in this way to a history of lesbian women who had come before them and had "been having children for many, many generations" (Martha and Paige, 2013). The dominant images of family, which signify it primarily as a heterosexual institution and one which produces conformity, can be troubled not only by the narratives of identity parents produce in response to these representations, but also through the linking of the production of family by LGBTQ people to a specific history of radical social organising and feminist and lesbian movements to expand meanings of family. In the comments of both Martha and Paige, and Darren, it is possible to see the emergence of family as something which happens between two discourses; one of conformity to heterosexual family models, and one of radical action and queer world-making. Both enable family in different ways but ultimately help stabilise emerging narratives of queer family by providing links to longer histories of both radicalism and traditionalism.

Whilst production of family itself is framed as a freely made choice, and parents frequently emphasised their close relationship to normative family arrangements, the possibility to narrate ones family in this way is differently enabled according to the relationship individuals may have to social histories of radical and activist movements, and the resources available to them to locate and stabilise their families within society (Blee, 1998: 5). The freedom to



choose, and to present it in this way, indicates the middle-class capital of these parents. Their classed capital provides them with the resources to locate themselves as 'normal' (Taylor, 2012: 2 and 74) – something exemplified in Martha and Paige's freedom to switch to a private fertility clinic when their family was initially refused by the NHS clinic. By continuing to negotiate ways through family and ways to inhabit family, these parents continue the political work of those LGBTQ parents who have come before them by reiterating the possibility of queer modes of family making.

Neither conceptualisation of family – as either radical or depoliticised – wholly describes the experience and identity-narratives which parents offered. Those parents who aspire toward assimilation trace their desire to have families to a sense of generational succession, whilst also identifying their links to historically radical action. Alongside acknowledgement of their conformity, parents offer signals of their difference and a narrative of the choice and critical reflection which has gone into constructing their family. Parents often straddle the space between intelligible families, known through mainstream images of two-parent, heterosexual, and co-habiting families, and the unintelligibility of radical or queer organisation of family according to bonds of LGBTQ community (exhibited in the numerous co-parenting arrangements I recorded between lesbians and gay men); feminist and lesbian activism (illustrated in Darren's reports of his lesbian co-parents testimony, and Lynne's choice to build a family through self-insemination); and the various changing needs of family generated by relationship breakdown and step-parenting (as in the experiences of Seb and Harriet). In this space, parents must work to discover representations which can help make their families known and which, through repeating and retelling identity-stories, may circulate new knowledge about the possibility and coherence of queer family.

### Crafting Hybrid Identities

Participant comments reveal that it is primarily sexual identity which generates a sense of difference from the dominant images of family, and parents subsequently worked to find ways to articulate queerness in family narratives. Sarah suggested that her trans identity meant her primary focus was on how to negotiate cultural recognition and understanding of her identity as a parent. Sarah and her cisgender partner Daniel, described how, regardless of their mutual identification as heterosexual, their relationship was "nominally queer" by virtue of Sarah's trans identity (Sarah and Daniel, 2013). Sarah and Daniel's experience contrasts with Bersani's claim that gayness is becoming "de-gay" as lesbians and gay men seek to disentangle sex from identity (1995: 5). The mainstream insistence that sexual object choice generates a

specific identity position (in Sarah's case, this backward logic is played out through the heterosexual matrix which insists that Sarah's non-cis gender identity must generate a non-heterosexual relationship) actually denies Sarah the opportunity to offer her own identity narrative. What Bersani's argument does not allow for is the possibility that queer people are not rejecting the link to sex because they have internalised homophobic discourses of sex as distasteful or perverse, or because they hope for integration into sexually discrete mainstream heterosexual society, but because sex is not central to their own conception of themselves. As I will explore in this final section, parents do not negotiate family identity narratives from the same starting point, and are subject to pressures from existing discourses of what their various identities mean which combine to significantly shape their routes through identity-making.

Sarah rejected calls to action on the grounds of a single shared identity position. She argued that insistence on uniformity of action as a result of queer subjectivity ignored personal autonomy and the challenges individuals faced in their lives:

It's hard enough being trans as it is without forcing everyone to become a political activist. I do some [activist] stuff, but I also work very hard to protect my family and I can't totally protect my family and be totally outrageous and out; and anyway, I don't want to be totally outrageous. (Sarah, 2013)

Sarah's reluctance to signal radicalism through her identity was linked to her experience of steering a life course frequently disrupted by transphobia and tension in her family of origin. Choosing to prioritise protecting her family over engaging in explicitly radical action was something Sarah linked to safety: "I know trans people...who absolutely don't want to be identified as trans in any way whatsoever and [they] say 'it's how I'm safe. It's how I'm protected.'" (Sarah, 2013). Considering the call to abandon individual and family needs for an ill-defined activist project of social radicalism, Foulke and Hill declare their interracial lesbian family will not "be anyone's hope for the future, rather we want to live in the present with integrity among other different people" (1997: 243). Sarah's comments suggested that she would be most able to "live in the present with integrity", if she crafted an identity with fewer clear links to radicalism and instead prioritised narratives of family-stability.

Sarah's comments illuminate the pressures to act which accrue when occupying an LGBTQ identity. The material conditions of Sarah's life reveal the limits of queer possibility and the factors which inhibit the articulation of the 'infinite possibilities' which Bersani and Edelman argue define membership of queerness. In the realm of the lived, other identities intersect, redirect, open, and foreclose the possibilities of action arising from queerness. Sarah's experiences further indicate the problem of concluding that a shared identity is experienced in

the same way by all subjects and generates the same possibilities for articulating queerness. Such insistence denies individuals agency to describe their identities and political affiliations according to their needs and values. The suggestion that any distance from the heteronorm automatically produces subjects who are willing to deprioritise stability in their lives in favour of pursuing radical social change, and modelling alternative modes of living, does not correspond with the types of negotiation and reflection which participants reported as part of their identity work.

Establishing one's identity in relation to discourses of queer radicalism and family was especially challenging for parents who came out after becoming parents. Fiona, a single lesbian parent, came out after having her son in a heterosexual marriage. She spoke about how being thrust from an insider position of apparent heteronormativity to an outsider queer position prompted her to think about how her family was now constituted. She noted that the diversity of families at her son's nursery meant she "didn't feel any barriers about talking about the new potential shape of my family [with the nursery]" (Fiona, 2014). However, Fiona did recognise the lack of representations of families like hers available to her son and felt this restriction limited the possibilities for helping her son think through their differences:

He's started reading now and I'm very aware all the books he's bringing home are male and female, mother and father...I think that would have been helpful to him to have had a bit more specific literature to look through and talk about. (Fiona, 2014)

In coming out from heterosexuality, Fiona found images which spoke about family as heterosexual failed to offer representations she could use to narrate their family's movement across the binary of heterosexual to queer categorisations of family. In seeking representations of different families and support for her son to understand his changing family, Fiona went to the local LGBT Centre which provided books, resources, and a chapter of the social group, Rainbow Families. Whilst narratives of radical subjectivities emphasise that position is guaranteed by a sense of alienation or dislocation (Blee, 1998:7), Fiona found that if she first orientated herself within LGBTQ parenting groups and community, she was then able to explore an activist position. Fiona began volunteering in service provision at the LGBT Centre; she discussed how this journey to LGBT activism was shaped by her age and pre-existing parental responsibilities rather than a sense of dislocation or isolation:

I've gone more underground in doing the nitty-gritty policy stuff by working at the LGBT centre and lobbying the Scottish parliament rather than the, you know, going on marches and things like that which you might do with a big group of friends in your twenties. I would still try and do that but I don't really have time to...What you think is the most powerful way of doing things changes with time as well. I think it's maybe

more effective for me to write and email and do petitions rather than just changing my Facebook status, or something. (Fiona, 2014)

Whilst Fiona did not make a conscious choice to take on radical activist positions and work towards social liberation aims, being thrust out of heteronormativity was the catalyst which prompted her engagement with activism. However, whilst she is visible as queerly-different compared to her previous, apparently heterosexual position, the specific action she takes towards social and political change is largely hidden. She indicates what feels, to her, like the most effective way to protest and cautiously articulates a model of resistant action which validates an alternative approach to radicalism than that offered by the dominant representation of the protestor in the street.

Visibility for different identities and political commitments may vary according to the critical work which parents do to evaluate different types of activist engagement and the subsequent decisions they make about the value of engaging in conspicuous public action. The possibility for parents to have their actions recognised as indicative of a queer radical position is contingent on the availability of representations which equally endorse both public, traditional activism (exemplified in the imaginary of British LGBTQ community by the image of the GLF campaigner, see Robinson, 2007) and more discreet engagements which are primarily located within community groups and homes.

Patton describes the “requirement to act”, which comes with identities, as a prompt or anxiety which everyone experiences. The idea that identities are generative of action corresponds with the data I collected in interviews. When I asked participants to speak about their various identities, parents all referred to their previous reflections on what queer ‘should’ be and the work they had done to produce integrated narratives of their subjectivities and to describe their position in relation to queerness. Patton concludes that it is only when refusal to act [on an identity] is rendered a deficit that identity discourses become essentialist and unhelpful in describing lived experience:

Identities carry with them a requirement to act, which is felt as ‘what a person like me does’...but that does not mean that identities are or become effectively essential: the stabilization of identities appears to be ineluctably essentialist only when we treat them in the realm of the imaginary, with its apparent promise of infinite possibilities for performance and reperformance. (Patton, 1993: 147)

The action which Patton says identities demand is the continual positioning, and repositioning, of our (subjective) identities in relation to the (imaginary, stable, and discrete) identities offered in representation (Phelan, 1993: 170). What I want to examine next is how the

essentialising narratives of queerness frustrate parents' attempts to position themselves within wider LGBTQ community. I will explore this with reference to how hybrid identity narratives, by which parents' locate themselves between discourses of radicalism and traditional family, fail to fully legitimate their presence in established, childless, LGBTQ community.

Hannah described how, whilst she incorporated elements of lesbian identity narratives into her emerging and evolving identity as a parent, her lesbian friends seemed to have less connection to her:

When I first had Lexi...I still had a lot of lesbian friends around and that group which really wanted to have an active part in Lexi's upbringing and were going to be role models for her, I guess that has drifted away. I see a lot of those women less and less...[having children] brings you into a different community. Although I still feel that I belong to that [lesbian] community, I belong – my group now – is...families. (Hannah, 2013)

Hannah's experience seems to suggest there is an essentialising narrative of being lesbian, which lacks space to accommodate the expanded and hybrid identity of a lesbian mother, with its attendant responsibilities and priorities. Certain expectations about what LGBTQ life involves, and the contours of LGBTQ community interaction, may not be flexible enough to accommodate families. This inflexibility may be traced back to the historical formation of LGBTQ identity as a distinct position through campaigns and identity politics<sup>12</sup>. Hannah's description of the relative value of the different elements of her identity are therefore strongly influenced by the degree to which members of specific identity groups recognise her and affirm her belonging through social bonds.

Sam and Ian, a gay couple from Hampshire with two adopted children, found there was a fundamental incompatibility of their lifestyle as parents versus that of their gay friends:

Sam: They were just incredulous that we were adopting – 'why would you possibly want to do that?' you know and then, just the practicalities, they both had...very uber gay beautifully pristine houses 'shall we bring the kids round?' 'mmm...' [laughs] So the invitations kind of dried up, really.

[...]

---

<sup>12</sup> As I identified in the introduction, an insistence on the opposition of gay and lesbian people to [presumed heterosexual] 'breeders', the supposed inherent violence of the nuclear family, and the central activist project to dismantle family life, defined much of the gay liberation campaigning of the 1970s (Gay Liberation Front, 1978 [1971]; Medhurst, 2014; Robinson, 2007: 86-87, 174-175)

Ian: Their lives tend to focus around the social interaction that occurs later in the day so they'll have friends round for dinner starting at 8 o'clock at night while for us now that's not an option...so there's a sort of natural, change in your social pattern really.

(Sam and Ian, 2014)

Sam and Ian's experiences indicate a binary between the cosmopolitan gay lifestyle, with its clear heritage back to the sexual communities established through GLF related-activism, and the domestic, structured life their responsibilities as parents impose. This division also played out in the media parents, across all interviews, identified as significant to them. Media which represented LGBTQ people parenting did so largely in isolation from wider LGBTQ community (*Modern Family, The Price of Salt, Friends, The Kids are All Right*) whilst media which narrated experiences of radical queer identity and positionality, was fundamentally estranged from traditional and child-centred family-making (*Stone Butch Blues, Tales of the City, Queer as Folk, Ru Paul's Drag Race*).

These binary representations of LGBTQ parents versus queer subjects emphasises the notion that parenthood is fundamentally incompatible with 'proper'-LGBTQ or radical identity. This media knowledge appeared to shape a great many of the approaches parents took to their identity work. Darren, for example, spoke about how, whilst the emphasis he placed on different aspects of his identity had changed, he did not feel this was a 'contradiction':

I suppose my activist days were very much in my 20s, interestingly I think having kids marked my slight disengagement from politics, partly because I was just busy...I suppose my engagement now is much more [through my job]...I suppose if there's a radicalism to that, that's where it is. I suppose because I've engaged in those issues [of being radical and a parent], I've actually found a kind of accommodation, I haven't found a particular contradiction. (Darren, 2014)

Darren's comments indicate his awareness of the discourses which produce parenthood and radicalism as binary, his evaluation that they are not, should be thought of as indicative of a working-through of the anxiety of having his identity rendered a deficit because of its hybridity. Participants incorporated their new identities as parents into their pre-existing identities as LGBTQ and queer, to create hybrid, intersectional positions which facilitated narratives of political engagement, and commitment to parental responsibilities. In this respect, parents seem to have been able to find a middle way between representations of the imagined queer subject of anti-relational theory whose every action is dedicated to social change, and the privatised family and parent who are represented as estranged from queer positions and separate from LGBTQ community.

This artificial binary, a division between domestic and queer, between home and the radical street, continues to shape discussion and representation of what is or is not radical at a community level (Hicks, 2011: 3; for example see Bindel, 2014). The conceptualisation of queer as something which must be wrested free of the child-rearing and established in absolute opposition to all frameworks of normative life courses sits uneasily against the needs and experiences of LGBTQ parents. The increasingly rigid representation of what queerness is, as these parents attest, frequently results in alienation from LGBTQ social community because of the prior conceptualisation of LGBTQ identity as fundamentally opposed to child-rearing and traditional family building.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have illustrated the way multiple identities and responsibilities in the lives of LGBTQ parents inevitably intersect and produce complex negotiations of the meaning of queer radicalism. As Ahmed says, “to conserve and to deviate are not simply available as political choices” (2006: 174). Making ideological resistance to normativity visible through and in the home and family is a complex undertaking, particularly when such a stance can risk destabilising the very structure produced to enable child-rearing and realise queer-kinship relations. In everyday lives, radical relationality most frequently involves not the isolation and separation espoused in the anti-social thesis, but connectedness. This connectedness facilitates new interactions between parents and children, LGBTQ people and their heterosexual peers, families and society. Connectedness allows new possibilities for exploring and representing different family organisations which was primarily illustrated in the sections on ‘expanded families’, and ‘the necessity of connectedness’. In both sections, I show through participant comments how familial bonds provided havens for parents like Dylan who found his identity was othered in heterosexual community, and offered opportunities to blend different histories and experiences in order to produce stronger narratives of family. This was illustrated in relation to Darren’s family where co-parenting prompted him to reflect on where his family fit amongst a range of models, and how the different political histories of the lesbian women he co-parented with helped build strong links to radical narratives.

Connectedness also drives the evaluations parents make of how, when, and to what extent they should seek to model radical queer ideals and challenge hegemony. The possibility for articulating resistance is significantly shaped by the access parents have to classed, economic, and cultural resources. I illustrated how parents came to build families from significantly different backgrounds, sometimes only exploring what LGBTQ identity meant in relation to

family after becoming parents, which shaped their sense of place in relation to narratives of queer radicalism and family conformity. These social factors, which sometimes generated anxiety and produced a sense of needing to protect and emphasise the 'sameness' of their families, clearly illustrate the limits of conceptualising queer radicalism only through commitment to public and anti-relational activism.

What the richly varied lived experiences of the parents I have cited show, is that dominant discourses of what 'being queer' and 'being radical' mean, produces tensions in the lives of LGBTQ parents. These discourses refuse the possibility of integrating domestic and radical positions and can result in the dislocation of families from wider LGBTQ community. Additionally, the narrowness of representation of [queer] radicalism generates reluctance amongst parents to definitively describe their political and social engagement as 'significant'. However, I have also shown that, by reconfiguring, and [re]narrating family *and* queerness, LGBTQ parents produce modes of living which provide security, emotional support, and social validation. These reimagined [queer] subjectivities allow parents the space to model different ways of organising intimate lives and resisting assimilation.

Narratives of family which circulate in media and in academic theorising insist on a discrete definition of family which produces, and is produced by, distinct and bounded identity positions. These supposedly stable categorisations, and lack of representations to indicate how families can participate in radical communities, significantly shape how parents describe and locate their families. As I showed, participants sometimes negotiate family identities which emphasise their ordinariness and broad conformity to family making; but they reject the suggestion this conformity represents failure to be queer. They emphasise the use of the structures of family, and its broad cultural intelligibility as facilitating different actions and aiding them in building alternative narratives. However, parents also restate their political commitment to imagining new forms of relationality, engaging in queer activism and critical social practice, and continually identifying points of difference between their families and the [supposedly] monolithic heterosexual family. These dual narratives generate opportunities for new responses to family and implicate the families modelled by LGBTQ parents in shifting the representational landscape by which family is known. Parents craft hybrid identities for themselves in order to make sense of these competing narratives; these incorporate both established narratives of parenting and privatised home, and radical queer narratives of public resistance and activism through display of non-heterosexual identity. The identity work parents do to locate themselves between narratives of radicalism and family underscores the



flexibility of the family form itself and the importance of recognising and emphasising the meaning of small differences and conscious deviation from dominant scripts of intimate lives.

Building on the above points, I have indicated how the labelling of families and individuals as [homo]normative limits the possibility for recognising and exploring the alternative approaches of articulating queer subjectivity and resistant social practice which these parents model. Participants agreed that parenthood does definitively change the contours of everyday life and affects changes in how LGBTQ parents encounter LGBTQ community, activist engagement, and family. However, the queer possibility of family is not frustrated by the disinclination of parents to publicly enact radical new arrangements of intimate lives, or prioritise the expression of their LGBTQ identities over their roles as parents. Rather, recognition of queer family [practice] is inhibited by the reluctance of some queer theorists to acknowledge different approaches to challenging heterosexual hegemony or affecting socio-political change, and the narrow range of representations of radicalism which insist on a separation from domesticity in favour of conspicuous public protest. Parents ultimately reject the available narratives of both family and radical relationality, crafting cautious, contextual and intersectional responses which emphasise their choice, various identities, and signal their critical consideration of what modes of living – which *ways* of being radical – will best address their needs and represent their queer subjectivity.

## Chapter Five

### Hierarchies: The Sorting of Identities and Value by Audiences and Through Representation

As I explored in the introduction, the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have seen in a steady increase in the availability of mainstream representations of LGBTQ people in Western media. In this chapter, I will examine how the parents I spoke with viewed the apparent trend for greater visibility of non-heterosexual lives, and their responses to the content of these representations.

Offering a historical overview, Weeks (1977) suggests that the visibility of lesbian and gay men in the UK has been determined by various changing social and legal conditions and he links this increase in visibility most strongly to fictional representation in media, and the development of academic study of sexuality in the late nineteenth century. The increasing visibility of lesbians and gay men in media throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century has been uneven: Weeks says “if male homosexuals are the ‘twilight men’ of twentieth century history, lesbians are by and large the ‘invisible women’” (1977: 88, see also Dyer 2002a:17). Looking more closely at this inequality, Gross states that whilst representations of gay men diversified beyond depicting “tragic AIDS victims” in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, the relative invisibility of lesbians persisted (1994: 145). Clark argues that by 1995 lesbian visibility was beginning to increase as lesbians emerged as a new potential market for capitalism to “colonize” (1995: 497). Subsequent studies lend support to the suggestion that gay men and lesbians have found greater representation within mainstream media (Doty and Gove, 1997; Shugart, 2003). The trend of increased visibility for non-heterosexual lives in media continued throughout the 20th century, with the most significant increases in media representation and social visibility of LGBTQ people taking place in the last 30 years (Clark, 1995; Gross, 1994; Shugart, 2003). These studies also note that the uneven increase in representations of lesbians, as compared to gay men, has played out across the other identities under the LGBTQ banner, with bisexual and trans people receiving proportionally less media attention (Barker et al, 2008; Halberstam, 2005).

Whilst the visibility of LGBTQ people in media has increased in recent decades, the meanings and uses of the available representations are less clear-cut (Phelan, 1993; Walters, 2012: 918). Taking up discussion of the possible effects of the type of representations which are available, Barker et al (2008) describe how portrayals of bisexual people are frequently characterised by narratives which present bisexuality as a transitory identity on the way to being ‘properly’ heterosexual or homosexual, denying the stability and coherence of bisexuality as an identity.

Similarly, Halberstam (2005) suggests that a focus on bodies and transition characterises the majority of representations of trans people, with little attention or time given to other stories about trans lives. This trope in representation reduces trans people to a collection of neuroses and contributes to the conceptualisation of trans people as victims in the mainstream imaginary, constraining the possibility for articulating alternative narratives. I will explore how LGBTQ parents experience different types of media [in]visibility, and question how LGBTQ parents participate in the process of becoming visible through media by examining their refusal, evaluation of, and demands made on, representations.

In this chapter, I will examine the relationship LGBTQ parents have to the various, and differently available representations of LGBTQ people. I will structure this discussion by identifying the various hierarchies which play out in and through representations (Hicks, 2011: 14). Namely, the hierarchies of identity which are encoded in media texts, the hierarchies which emerge with different media contexts, and the hierarchies which emerge as a result of the sorting of texts by audiences, and the sorting of identities by audiences. These hierarchies are not distinct from one another and I will attempt to articulate the complex ways in which they intersect and the responsive interactions they have. As Brunsdon says, to understand television texts and the values, meanings, and narratives they circulate, we must recognise “the creativity and competences of the audience” and how their interactions with media texts address their “needs, desires and pleasures” (1997: 123-124). With this in mind, the responses which participants offered to representation will drive this chapter, particularly the consistent reporting by parents across all interviews that LGBTQ people and families are under-represented.

In the first section of this chapter, I will look at one of the most commonly cited frustrations with representation; the relative invisibility of women and lesbians in images of LGBTQ parenting. Considering studies of representation which conclude lesbian women only become visible in mainstream media when they conform to norms of feminine gender performance (Diamond, 2005), I identify the hierarchies of identity encoded in media representations that place varying cultural value on different LGBTQ subjectivities. Continuing to explore this line of discussion, I next turn to the emerging representation of the ‘pregnant [trans] man’ and reflect on participants’ responses to relative visibility of this subject compared to images of trans women parenting. I conclude that intersections between gender, sexuality and parenting are key when evaluating how certain images gain prominence in media, and make some proposals as to what drives the different valuation of identities which informs the availability of representations.

In the second section, I consider how hierarchies of identity, which are encoded in media texts, intersect with representational strategies, and what the contexts for visibility are within mainstream and subcultural media. I use participant comments to discuss how audiences respond to representations which they believe are structurally unable to address them. I show how this work often involves audiences sorting, or hierarchizing, their own identities. Moving from a reflection on the types of representation of gender roles participants said they sought, to a discussion of the possibilities [dis]allowed by the representations of trans and bisexual people, I conclude that the belief that one's subjectivity is invisible in media is informed by both the different subject positions occupied by LGBTQ parents, and the importance parents place on visibility for their various identities.

In the third section of this chapter I build on the discussion from the previous section regarding the importance of audience sorting of identities when understanding how LGBTQ parents respond to media. A key avenue of investigation will be how audience management of their identities intersects with evaluations of how the context of representations shapes meaning and value. As I will show, media engagement amongst LGBTQ parents is strongly informed by their work to evaluate representations for their usefulness in building family stability and securing intelligibility for their families according to hierarchies of respectability, value and identity.

The final section of this chapter considers how all four of the key hierarchies I have indicated intersect with one another. I look at how parents sort texts and identities through media, and the role which anxieties about cultural knowledge and understanding of the functions media plays in producing the diverse responses which participants indicated. I draw this section to a close by arguing it is not only an awareness of hierarchies which media produce, and the sorting of texts and identities which audiences do, that informs responses to media. Rather, there is a final element where participants' evaluations of wider culture, and the use to which they anticipate media representations will be put, intersects with the other hierarchies by which media is managed, to produce an ambivalent and complex response to media [in]visibility.

Despite critiques being levelled at academic work which seeks to evaluate representations within a hierarchy of positive to negative (Doty and Gove, 1997: 86-87), participant responses indicate that evaluating quality and intent behind representations is a key way in which audiences respond to media. It is for this reason that I turn my focus in this chapter to the use and availability of representations.

### Hierarchies of Identity Encoded in Media

Almost all of the lesbian, bisexual and queer women I spoke to were united by the conviction that men were proportionally over-represented in the media and that gay men were preferentially represented over gay or bisexual women. For Martha and Paige, a homogendered couple with one daughter, what they perceived as preferential coverage of gay male parenting was part of a wider representational inequality. Speaking about a documentary presented by Stephen Fry about what it means to be gay in different parts of the world<sup>13</sup>, Paige exclaimed:

It's like 'god...Stephen Fry really? Lesbians? We're 50% of the population how can we be so [invisible] to you all?' and you think 'who is on the production crew? Who are the people supporting this programming?'...but you pull back bigger, it's the world we live in. We live in a heterosexual, male dominated, patriarchal society, so being gay and a woman, well yeah! You are pretty invisible. (Paige, 2013)

The role of Stephen Fry in facilitating visibility for gay men and not lesbians in this specific show is significant, as Biressi and Nunn say: "the very force of representation of the celebrity gives their actions and statements a kind of privileged authority" (2005: 147). Fry's status as both a celebrity and an out gay man lends "force" to this representation, authorising cultural knowledge which holds that lesbians either do not exist, or their subjectivities are not distinct from the experiences of gay men.

The belief that under-representation was primarily driven by structural inequalities in society was shared by several other respondents including Lynne, a bisexual lone parent. I asked Lynne what type of representation she would like to see of parents and families like hers; she described her wish for diverse and widely distributed representations of all kinds of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender parents, but concluded that this was "too ambitious to wish for" (Lynne, 2013). The comments of these parents indicate a critical reflection on the historical (Dyer, 2002a; Gross, 1994: 145) and continued contemporary invisibility of lesbians and queer women in media; they get to the heart of why such preferential representation exists. It is, to quote Paige, "patriarchal society", which reproduces its structures of power through media representational strategies.

This inequality in representation was also something the men I spoke with identified. Whilst many of the men felt they were hailed through numerous representations of gay male couples parenting, they went on to criticise the way in which, within the same media, lesbians were made objects of fun or rendered invisible. *Modern Family* was identified by over half the

---

<sup>13</sup> *Out There* (2013) BBC2.




parents I spoke to as successful in making LGBTQ parents visible in mainstream media and offering a 'normal' representation; it was also criticised by many for refusing to equally endorse and represent lesbian, bisexual, or trans parents:



there's an anti-lesbian thing sometimes [in *Modern Family*], which I think is uncomfortable for me, when I'm watching with the kids. Sometimes it feels like – their Mums are lesbians – so I think interestingly in a supposedly inclusive [show] actually what gets marginalised is lesbian parenthood and lesbians as a group. (Darren, 2014)

Before I continue with a discussion of the representations of lesbians in *Modern Family*, I want to pause to consider the significance of genre – specifically comedy – to the responses parents offered. Whilst a number of parents critiqued *Modern Family* they did this whilst also acknowledging their broad enjoyment of the show and recognised that its aim was broadly entertainment. The use of stereotypes within comedy functions to ensure audiences can 'join in' on the joke quickly (Mills, 2005: 100). The show's decision to offer stereotyped representations of lesbians (which are explored below) can be understood in this context. However, there was a sense amongst participants that these stereotypes were secured on or helped sustain negatively prejudiced cultural knowledge about lesbian women rather than the warmer, gently self-deprecating, stereotypes of gay men which Mitchell and Cam variously conform to and reject at different times. Henkle suggests that "comedy encourages us to understand what is masked by rigorous, sombre approaches to human behaviour" (quoted in Medhurst, 2007: 11) and the representations I explore below may offer these LGBTQ parent viewers a reminder that beneath the mask of sombre legislative change and carefully measured indexes of equality, considerable prejudice and social inequality remains for lesbian women and parents. It is an uncomfortable reminder of the challenges faced in day-to-day lives which has the effect of jarring participants out of their easy enjoyment of the show. Such representation expands beyond boundaries of comedy and is understood, by participants, to both indicate and reinforce wider social inequalities and negative knowledges.

In the *Modern Family* episode 'Schooled' (2012) Cam and Mitchell are called into their daughter Lily's school to meet with the principal after Lily fought with Connor, the son of a lesbian couple, Pam and Susan. The moment Cam and Mitchell discover that Connor's parents are lesbians their demeanour immediately changes, exclaiming in horror "lesbians!" (see Figure 4.2). Pam and Susan are portrayed as aggressive through their explosive entrance, their confrontational introduction ("whoever made our son cry has messed with the wrong Moms!") and signalled as butch (Figure 4.1). Cam and Mitchell go on to imply that these women, like all lesbians, are incapable of maintaining a welcoming home ('Schooled', 2012).

Figure 4: 'Schooled' (2012) *Modern Family*

1	<p>[Conor's parents, Pam and Susan, enter the room]</p> <p>Pam: "All right, whoever made our son cry has messed with the wrong Moms"</p>	
2	<p>Mitchell and Cam: [together, with venom] "Lesbians!"</p>	
3	<p>Mitchell: "While often lumped together gay men and lesbians have less in common than one might think"</p> <p>Cam: "Like in the Venn diagram of sexual identity; we have gay men [he makes a circle with his arms]"</p> <p>Mitchell: "And straight men [he makes a circle with his arms]."</p> <p>[their arm circles overlap]</p> <p>Mitchell: "Both the same gender"</p>	

4	<p>Cam: "Then we have gay men [he makes a circle with his arms]"</p> <p>Mitchell: "And straight women.</p> <p>[their arm circles overlap]</p> <p>Mitchell: "Both attracted to the same gender.</p>	
5	<p>Mitchell: "But gay men and lesbians?"</p> <p>[they both make a circle with their arms and repeatedly knock their arm-circles together]</p> <p>Mitchell: "Nothing."</p>	



The physical Venn diagram which Cam and Mitchell enact in order to explain their aversion to lesbians (Figure 4.3-5) represents lesbians as fundamentally estranged from gay men. Returning to Darren, who co-parents his two children with a lesbian couple and identified *Modern Family*'s portrayal of lesbians as 'uncomfortable', this representation translates into a disavowal of his children's mothers' ability to parent. *Modern Family* renders Darren's co-parenting arrangement unimaginable, stretching across the insurmountable divide between gay men and lesbians as it does. Representation can thus enact a symbolic violence on LGBTQ people denying validation and recognition of life patterns through the use of specific types of characterisation (Gross 1994: 143); it is not only lesbians who are marginalised by this representation, but any LGBTQ person who shares a connection with lesbian women.

*Modern Family* suggests there is a discontinuity between 'good' parenting and the traditionally masculine traits of aggression, domestic disarray, and lack of style, which are linked to the lesbian parents Pam and Susan. The suggestion is that [butch] lesbians are intrinsically unable to enact a nurturing, maternal role given their distance from the heterosexual feminine ideal which assures good parenting. The 'shrillness' of this stereotyped representation of lesbians:

indicates the degree to which it is an enforced representation that points to a reality whose invisibility and/or fluidity threatens the received definition of society promoted by those [in power] (Dyer, 2009: 211)

The use of this particular stereotype indicates an attempt to validate the parenting of Cam and Mitchell (offered as representatives of all gay men) as the 'new' insider against the still unknowable, still threatening lesbian. The shrill lesbian stereotype works to continually [re]secure Mitchell and Cam's precarious inclusion in the new 'modern' family: precarious precisely because of the linking in the mainstream imaginary of all sexual outsider positions. As gay men (or sexual outsiders) parenting, they are potentially threatening to the dominant order but, through the resignification of lesbians as the "constitutive outside", the show consolidates the mainstream inclusion of, and [the presumed heterosexual] audience's identification with, gay men (Hall, 1996: 3). Cam and Mitchell's description of solidarities (which place lesbian women at the bottom of the pile) offers an assurance that accepting gay male parents does not mean all the structures of hetero-patriarchal power must be undone (Rich, 1980: 657). Indeed, the assurance of their fraternity with straight men and women presents them as allies of patriarchy, champions of heteronormativity (Shugart, 2003:87-89).

The Venn diagram which Mitchell and Cam illustrate with their bodies (Figure 4.3-5) makes visible "the ceaseless conflict of social life, the multiple and irreconcilable patterns of identification within which relationships of hierarchy and solidarity must be negotiated"

(English, 1994: 9, quoted in Medhurst, 2007: 14). Cam and Mitchell offer a solution to this 'ceaseless conflict'; a clear hierarchy of identification and legitimation which grants a heterosexual audience permission to dismiss and reject lesbian parents whilst they validate gay male parents as 'like us'. Viewers are reassured that potentially threatening lesbian sexuality, itself a "rejection of male sexual control, the cornerstone of heterosexual politics", will not be admitted to the legitimated sphere of alternative family production, to which Mitchell and Cam act as gatekeepers (Shugart, 2003: 89, see also Walters, 2012: 923-924). Indeed, Pam and Susan, whilst stereotyped in attitude, stance, and their home's deviance from the domestic ideal, still wear conventionally femme hair and makeup (Figure 4.1) offering the potential for the heterosexual male gaze to consume the female body, once it has been reassuringly positioned outside of discursive power (Diamond 2005: 105, and Rich, 1980:638-640).

The conventionally feminine dress of both women ensures the representation's appropriateness for mass-consumption, whilst their 'butchness' is signalled linguistically and through their social interaction. The "possible liberating aspects" of the inclusion of lesbian representation in the show are "undermined by the narrative structures...which never allow [the characters] to break away" from existing stereotyped representation (Mills, 2005:107). The stereotyped representation offered here simultaneously produces lesbians and queer women as intrinsically unsuitable parents because of their deviation from gender norms, and denies the existence of butch lesbians whose gender presentation is visually different from the feminine norm. This management of preferred gender performance indicates a hierarchy of acceptability and desirability by which visibility is granted or denied.

Kress suggests that audiences are "habituated into adapting, transforming themselves into particular kinds of readers" (1996: 100). When watching comedy shows this means accepting complicity with negative or well-worn stereotypes. Certainly, participants indicated they were willing to accept a degree of complicity, become the ideal imagined audience for *Modern Family* at times, when they emphasised their enjoyment and continuing engagement with the show. However, criticisms of the representation of lesbians indicates the limits of this complicity. Concerns about the wider implications for how they and their friends, co-parents and children constitute their families in a culture which circulates representations which re-emphasises lesbians as unsuitable parents caused moments of rupture. The strong criticism which Darren and others offered was not of the programme as a whole, but of what they imagined was being authorised and normalised by audiences who remained complicit and continued laughing as lesbian parents were lampooned.

Why do media appear to show such a significant preference for representing gay men and neglecting to represent, or offering abjected representations, of women? Binnie and Skeggs argue the tendency toward representing gay men over gay or bisexual women and trans people relates to a middle-class desire to consume difference, but only consumption of “certain differences” which work to assure taste and respectability (2004: 52). In relation to LGBTQ difference “the gay man is frequently positioned as necessary for that consumption as a signifier of difference” (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004: 52). Skeggs argues such tokenistic representation “culturally and economically exploits” the other, offering a desirable, cosmopolitan, tasteful life via consumption of this ‘safe’ difference (1997: 11). Representation of non-heterosexual parents is permitted when they “titillate [audiences] with the new whilst simultaneously reassuring with the assertion of a universalism of a generic love [or family] story” (Walters, 2012: 923). The butch lesbian represents a threatening difference, challenging the presumed naturalness of femininity (or traditionally feminine gender roles) in relation to parenting, and failing to fit the normalising narrative of “gay families” assured through the maintenance of “recognizable gender binaries” (Walters, 2012: 921). Whilst the participants cited above conclude that lesbians are under-represented because of the structures of patriarchal power which routinely devalue the experiences and narratives of women, butch lesbians experience double invisibility as women *and* because of their unpalatable difference from the hierarchies of desirable femininity and their rejection of male sexual control (“the cornerstone of heterosexual politics” [Shugart, 2003: 89]) as indicated by their confident location in traditionally masculine roles. This ‘double’ invisibility was remarked upon by a number of participants.

Ivy, a lesbian mother of two, spoke about the advertising choices made by a buggy manufacturer. Her frustration centred on what she felt was an implicit denial in the company’s advertising choices that the products could appeal to her;

I was quite irritated by Phil and Teds doing a media campaign with a gay couple because Phil and Ted’s pushchairs actually appeal to lesbians, they are off-road pushchairs, you can go hiking, and they’re missing a fucking trick!...they’ve marketed to gay men. Gay men parenting are much more of a minority than lesbian parents and I think lesbian parents still get marginalised in that way and they get kind of forgotten about...I don’t know if I feel represented myself...if they’d done an ad with a lesbian couple going hiking, with a Phil and Ted’s pushchair, I’d have been like ‘hey! That’s me!’ because that’s why I got that fucking pushchair, not because I want to go hiking, but because it appeals to me. I’m not prissy and I like functional. (Ivy, 2014)

Ivy describes a desire to see non-traditional femininities represented in buggy advertising and the buggy to be sold for the qualities she values in it; that it is a practical, butch, lifestyle

accessory. Figure 5 shows an advert for a Phil and Teds pushchair which is typical of their advertising; despite being one of the 'off-road, functional' buggies Ivy describes, it is pushed by an immaculately turned out, femme woman in an urban environment.

The invocation of glamour represented by the pictured woman can be understood as an attempt to link buying and using the buggy to a lifestyle which "transcends the banalities of femininity" (Skeggs, 1997: 111) and with it, the mundane tasks associated with childcare and motherhood. The practical and 'functional' marketing Ivy wants, would instead serve to reinforce bodily labour. Butch or non-femme identities that visually indicate lesbian subjectivity are thus associated with toil and, as such, are not conceptualised as aspirational lifestyles.

Ivy reports that Phil and Teds chose to represent a gay male couple in their advertising rather than directly addressing lesbian consumers. The representation of gay men rather than lesbians or other queer subjectivities indicates Phil and Teds may conflate lesbian and gay male consumers as an integrated, single market with identical needs (in common with mainstream representational strategies which routinely deny lesbian existence and treat non-heterosexual female sexuality as equivalent to male homosexuality [Rich, 1980: 649]). Further, Phil and Teds choice to only address gay men as a preferred, more affluent consumer, signals their acceptance of dominant narratives of lesbian lives, which produce lesbian women as unlikely to be able to afford this luxury item (in itself, Binnie and Skeggs say this perception of lesbian consumers and preference for attracting gay male consumers is the result of the "homophobic discourse of Western gay men as hyper-mobile, affluent, and privileged consumers" [2004: 44] which is reproduced in numerous media texts and social discourse).

Ivy explicitly rejected the mainstream media narrative of butch lesbians being undesirable;

lesbian parents are [always] represented as slightly femme looking women and there's an awful lot of butch lesbians having kids and they are beautiful people too, I think that needs to be redressed really. (Ivy, 2014)

Ivy's comments on the infrequency of representation of butch lesbians, and the link she makes to her lived experience of, and connections to, butch lesbians, indicate a symbolic annihilation

Figure 5: Phil and Teds Buggy Advert.



Figure 6: Buggy Advert featuring Same-Sex Couple



of butch women in mainstream media<sup>14</sup>. This erasure or invisibility illuminates the power hierarchies at work within mainstream representation (Gross, 1994; 143): butch women are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy which privileges men above women (illustrated by the advert preferentially featuring a gay male couple, Figure 6), and feminine women above masculine or butch women (illustrated by the representation of hyper-femme woman with the buggy, Figure 5).

As discussed above, it is not just being women that generates the conditions of invisibility for butch lesbians, but also their association with perceived masculine characteristics such as strength, disregard for appearance, and aggression. Rejecting traditionally masculine traits when representing parents was something that was reiterated by gay men who had access to the control of media images. William, a gay male parent to two adopted boys, recounted how, in a meeting of the co-ordinating committee of a social network for lesbian and gay adopters when a media request for parents was being discussed, the all-male committee said; “‘nobody wants to see fat ugly lesbians on the television’, that was basically it; ‘lesbians are not media friendly’, but said in the most rude and stereotypical way.” (William, 2014) The history of LGBTQ representation is pertinent here; gay men have been represented as feminine, camp, queens who “came to stand for male homosexuality itself” (Medhurst, 1997: 277). The mainstream imaginary could therefore be said to be well disposed to receive representations of gay men as parents, given they are already conceptualised as feminised, domestic, caregivers, and as conforming to domestic ideals connected to child-rearing (Cavalcante, 2015: 468).

Whilst gay men have previously been conceptualised and represented as anti-reproductive, the increasing cultural and economic capital of some gay men, within a system which produces them as desirable and affluent consumers, allows them access to control and influence the production of media images (Berkowitz, 2007:187; Shugart, 2003: 89). This is exemplified in William’s account of the all-male adopters-group committee who determined, without consultation with or reference to the needs of female adopters, who was put forward to represent them. Gay men, falling firmly on the ‘feminine’ side of the masculine/feminine, public/private, aggressive/caring binary, which the logic of the heterosexual matrix insists

---

<sup>14</sup> Not all parents agreed that butch women are never represented. Martha and Paige discovered representations of butch women in books targeted at the children of lesbian parents (i.e. within subcultural media), but found these portrayals to be unsatisfactorily stereotypical and inapplicable to their own experiences outside of a butch/femme pairing. However, the further suggestion by Martha and Paige that these inapplicable representations were unpalatable does add further credence to Ivy’s claim that butch lesbians are never represented as “beautiful”.

individuals are categorised by, are the most obvious fit for parenting. Masculine, butch lesbians are not.

An organising hierarchy of respectable subjectivities seems to drive the conformity that various media producers exhibit when they sustain existing narratives of lesbian otherness and gay male desirability. Femininity must be displayed in order to assure the respectability (and so suitability) of a parent (Skeggs, 1997: 109) and assuring respectability was central to the media engagement strategy of the lesbian and gay adopters network that William described. Non-femme women, the logic of respectability suggests, cannot act as ambassadors for LGBT parenting; their disruption of the arrangement of heterosexual power and roles makes them unsuitable. Instead, gay male respectability – assured by their supposed feminine qualities, affluent lifestyles, and male privilege (Medhurst, 1997: 285; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004: 50) – is unquestioningly reproduced when establishing a dialogue with heterosexual society about the ‘normalness’ of LGBTQ parenting (Shugart, 2003: 68). This reproduction reinforces the hierarchical power relations which insist families “make sense” according to existing patriarchal models (Hicks, 2011: 58) and which previously excluded gay men from inclusion in the discourse on family.

In the preceding discussion, I have focused on the management of visibility for cisgender LGBTQ parents in media. The hierarchies of value for different identities and gender performance in relation to representations of trans people parenting share some similarities, but as I will show there are some additional intersections to note. Sarah, a trans woman, who was parent to two and grandparent to one, commented on how representations which emphasised the mainstream bias for traditional gender performances had specific consequences for the experience of visibility for trans women who do not conform to feminine ideals of beauty.

Paris [Lees] is young and beautiful and consequently he [sic] can get on to television whereas I couldn't, and there are many far more prominent trans women than me in Britain who also would never be on television because they're not good looking enough. Trans men might have a better time of it, of course, because the image stuff is less serious for guys than it is for women. (Sarah, 2013)

Femininity which satisfies the male heterosexual gaze appears to be a key component in the portrayal of both cis and trans women with a clear hierarchy emerging through representation which favours traditional female gender performance. Both Amy, a trans woman and parent of two, and Sarah felt strongly that representation was better and involved less negotiations of ‘acceptable’ gender performance for trans men. Green offers a similar evaluation of the relative privilege of trans men compared to trans women in being integrated into and

represented in the mainstream, citing a “cultural tolerance for a wide variety of adult male ‘looks’” (2006; 499). However, as I showed in my discussion in the previous chapter of Luke and Dylan’s experiences as parents who birthed their children causing their trans identities to become visible, images of trans people parenting are predicated on the visibility of their non cis-gender identity and queer relationship to child birth.

Amy said there was a representational inequality between trans men and trans women;

It seems [the media think that it’s] weird that you would have kids as a trans woman. I think you can find more about trans men having families...and [you see] that thing about that man who was pregnant [Thomas Beatie] but you don’t see it the other way” (Amy, 2013)

There are parallels here with the previously discussed privileging of representations of men over those of women. Amy’s argument that it is trans men, and not trans women, who are becoming increasingly visible is worthy of discussion<sup>15</sup>. Reflection on trans representation offered by Green (2006) and Halberstam (1998) states that trans men are less culturally visible than trans women. I argue the trend for greater representation of trans men, which Amy and Sarah claim, is intimately tied to the emerging representation of trans people parenting. Representations of trans men parenting require fewer linguistic indications to identify the subject as trans as this signification achieved through the visual cue of a pregnant but otherwise masculine-appearing, body. Conversely trans women parenting offer fewer visual cues of [queer] gender identity. These types of representations point to the trend for media to represent non-heterosexual parents when their difference can be visually signalled (by the homogendered parenting couple, by the gender-transgressing pregnant transman) but the meaning of their actions can be relocated within dominant discourses of reproduction and family making (see also Sedgwick, 2004). Halberstam proposes that trans bodies are used to explore “fantasies of futurity” in media, where the transgender body’s “promise of flexibility and its reality of a committed rigidity” can be incorporated into dominant culture (Halberstam, 2005: 15 and 21) Media offers representations which help differentiate heterosexual subject positions from disruptive and potentially threatening queer positions (Tyler, 2008:18). In the

---

<sup>15</sup> In the period since my fieldwork was conducted, *Transparent* (2014-2016) has been broadcast to widespread media and critical coverage. The show features a trans woman who is parent to three children. It is not possible to speculate how the high profile of this show may have inflected or altered the responses of Sarah and Amy with regards to the visibility of trans women parenting. The show focuses on how the family and children adjust to their father’s transition. Jeffry Tambor’s Maura Pfefferman is an older, and not conventionally femme woman; both of these elements certainly seem to address some of Sarah and Amy’s critiques. However, this is a fictional series and Maura is portrayed by a cisgender actor. As I discuss below, this type of representation, which is not secured against a trans actor in the role, was differently valued and critiqued by trans parents.



case of the representational prominence of the pregnant trans man, the queer, disruptive other, figured through the [im]possibly flexible trans body is reassuring relocated within discourses of bodily rigidity through the signal of pregnancy and the associated meanings of child birth and child rearing. The supposedly unbounded possibilities of bodies without limit (which figures strongly in representations of trans bodies as the “symbol par excellence of flexibility” [Halberstam, 2005: 76-77]) is reconfigured as an expanded possibility of reproduction which ultimately reinserts both trans people and trans bodies within the dominant reproductive economy (Moritz, 2004). It is possible to see this management of difference at work in evolution of the media representation of the trans man Amy identified, Thomas Beatie.

The tone of articles when Beatie first announced his pregnancy alternated between condemnation for a ‘selfish’ act of gender transgression (Clarke, 2008) and an emphasis on the resolutely conformist motivations of Beatie and his wife in seeking to build a family and centre their new child in their lives (Dickinson, 2008). Later coverage of Beatie’s subsequent pregnancies and divorce from his wife which appeared in mainstream media were increasingly focused on the ‘natural’ parental love of Beatie towards his children, and the selflessness of his decision to bear children if his new partner was unable (Warren, 2012; Jones, 2012). The pregnant trans man, and the discursive reclaiming of this previously threatening queer body, offers a route to control the boundaries of heterosexual reproductive dominance in much the same way that Mitchell and Cam’s representation in *Modern Family* functioned to offer inclusion of LGBTQ people contingent on the discursive exclusion of gender non-conforming women who threaten patriarchal power.

As I argued above, increased representation of a group previously not associated with reproduction (such as gay men) can indicate a shift in the dominant narrative of acceptability and desirability. However, the overall evaluation of trans visibility which parents offered suggests that these images were extremely limited, largely tokenistic, and characterised by a narrative of exceptionalness or strangeness. Luke, a trans man who was parent to five and grandparent to one, said he felt representation of trans people tended to focus on difference and strangeness; “it tends to be very dramatized to the extent it’s a bit sort of, you know, we’re portrayed as peculiar beings” (Luke, 2014). Other parents were similarly critical about the types of representations which were available. Seb, a gay step-parent to two, commented on what he believed drove the inclusion of LGBTQ people in media representations:

[it's always] 'Lesbian Mother of Two Robs Bank' kind of [headlines], rather than just a woman, or a mother, or 'a gay dad blah blah something awful'. It's still that kind of way sexuality is used in the negative to make a headline even more controversial...I think what they [the media] key into is people's anxieties around gay parents and they really, really strategically pull that out and make it into a headline which really is used in quite a subtle but quite a negative way. That's true of lots of other ways the media tell stories and that's something I find quite subtly but quite powerfully awful about how gay parents are represented. It's kind of in reverse really because they're trying to sell a story rather than make a comment on gay families but effectively what they are doing is making comment on LGBT parents. (Seb, 2013)

Seb felt that media relied on generating engaging content by provoking outrage and concluded this revealed the continued dominance of heterosexual ideology at the heart of mainstream representation. Narratives of "peculiarity" which continue to foreground queer identity in otherwise everyday stories indicate the uneasy location of LGBTQ parents in the mainstream. As I have shown above, the presumed inherent "strangeness" of LGBTQ people is part of what prompts media to represent them; media can offer, through representation, a space to "work-through" anxieties (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 107) about what this strangeness may do to, or mean for, the dominant heterosexual organisation of society. Whilst many representations of LGBTQ parents affirm their position as [newly] normative citizens through the discursive shifting of negative traits of queer outsiderhood (such as gender transgression and domestic-lack) onto a new other (butch lesbians, non-reproductive LGBTQ people), "traces of the 'other' invariably remain" (Cavalcante, 2015: 468). The working-through of cultural anxieties about queer subjectivities is thus imperfect. The uneasy insiderhood indicated by increasing media visibility is revealing of the limits of mainstream representation, where not all of the "troubling features of marginal identities" can be fully negotiated (Cavalcante, 2015: 468). These unresolved 'troubling features' are ultimately resignified as failures or pathologies (as indicated in Seb's imagined 'Lesbian Mother of Two Robs Bank' headline).

The hierarchies of preferred identity and orientation toward established structures of family that determine the representational visibility and validation of LGBTQ parental subjectivities indicate the operation of dominant power (Butler, 1997: 16-21). The subject becomes known, becomes visible, according to the terms established by the prevailing norms of subjecthood which may not fit or fully describe an individual's experience, or may exclude many more LGBTQ people than it validates. The visibility of certain LGBTQ subjectivities in media therefore "signif[ies] subordination and existence at once" (Butler, 1997: 20). The hierarchies of identity encoded in media largely function to reassert the patriarchal order and negotiate mainstream anxieties about the supposedly disruptive queer other.

### Hierarchies of Audience Identities and Media Contexts for Visibility

Participants' awareness of the hierarchies within media which function to shore up the hetero-patriarchal order may provide an explanation of the priority many parents placed on finding and sharing positive representations of women. This priority also indicates a second key hierarchy in the responses to media of LGBTQ parents; the management and organisation of their own identities. Participants reported they sought out representations which offered less stereotyped gender roles, ahead of representations of families like theirs. Martha was quite explicit in identifying her priorities to this end:

it's about representation...of women, that's the thing I'm feeling most frustrated at, at the moment and sadly when I found out I was having a daughter I thought 'oh god, all the things that she's going to have to go through' and what an awful position to have to think that, you know it's not whether she's gay or straight as my mum and dad were worried about, it's whether you're a boy or a girl and one road is going to be, in my view, simply easier than the other. So I'm more sensitive about being a mother having a daughter than I am about being a lesbian couple having a daughter. (Martha, 2013)

Martha's comments suggest her critical evaluation of media was closely tied to the way she conceptualised wider society, her proposal that "one road is going to be...simply easier than the other" informs her decision to seek 'better' representations of women. This indicates that Martha's use of (and relationship to) media was driven by a need to find resources to help repair social and gender inequality, and to fill gaps in the dominant cultural scripts of what it is possible to be as a girl and woman. However, following through on the decision to seek out strong, non-binary and non-traditional representations of women was not easily achieved.

Julia, a queer lone parent with one daughter, found the task of collating positive female representations very frustrating; "still in 2013 I have to make a conscious effort to hunt down programmes with a female lead in cartoons for her, still!" (Julia, 2013) Julia went on to discuss the importance of representations of feminist men; as a lone parent Julia found the lack of such images worrying:

I know she's going to grow up with at least one strong female role model because my Mum provided that for me and I'll provide that for her, what I can't guarantee is that she'll grow up with the sort of men that she should learn to respect. (Julia, 2013)

Julia's solution was to turn to a local LGBTQ families group and use the male parents who attended as models for strong, inclusive, and positive masculinity for her daughter. The representational gap and social need which Julia identified resulted in her disengaging from media which failed to deliver what she needed, and turning instead to community groups.

Parents' priorities with regard to demanding representations of gender equality was not unique to female parents raising daughters, both Eva, a lesbian mother to one son, and William, a gay father to two sons, expressed how becoming parents had, in different ways, forced them out of the gay and lesbian separatist lives they had been living up until that point. For William, becoming a parent had allowed him to access social interaction with women which he felt had been lacking in his "sexual and social" circles; "one of the interesting and nice things about parenting has been a reconnection with heterosexual women" (William, 2014). Eva explicitly stated that having a son had "changed my understanding about men and their role in society" and in turn, felt that:

having a child makes you kind of hyper-aware of the disconnect, the potential disconnect between men and women because I'm learning things about men [and the value of their experience], I mean how much experience do I have with erections?! (Eva, 2013)

The polarised representations of lesbian and gay parents in media which rarely sees them interact – as in many of the shows which parents spoke about including *Modern Family* and *The L Word* – does not correlate with the lived experience of these parents. It also indicates the way in which parenthood prompted participants to re-evaluate which elements of their lives as LGBTQ people enabled them to raise children, and which elements generated additional pressures or isolations. For Eva the availability, via LGBTQ community, of narratives of trans experience provided a useful framework to understand her young son's sexuality and his sexed experience:

I've learnt a lot from the trans community on just what it's like to have to manage testosterone and I just don't think women understand the male experience of what they're dealing with in terms of their sexuality (Eva, 2013)

Whilst media visibility of their subjectivities was important, most of the parents I spoke with used other resources to redress representational gaps through different types of identification and experience-sharing. There are parallels here to the organisation of liberation movements, such as the GLF, who tried to build more inter-related ways of living where lesbians and gay men lived communally and shared knowledge and resources. The failure of these experiments in living was linked to the limitations of living in an "island of deviant meaning within the sea of society", profoundly isolated from the structures they sought to replace (Robinson, 2007: 77-78). Both William and Eva stated they had previously had engagement with radical queer communities and I argue that their decision to turn to community only after media representations failed to address their needs is related to their knowledge of the limitations of sharing models for living only through LGBTQ community. Mainstream media is broadly

accessible to all parts of society; any support or validation it offers to alternative narratives of gender roles is likely to have more wide reaching significance than purely community-based support, and can therefore better facilitate these types of narratives for families who are profoundly connected to mainstream society by their children. I will continue to evaluate the factors that generate a hierarchy whereby mainstream media is judged as preferable to community or subcultural resources in the next chapter.

Despite its limitations in changing cultural norms, LGBTQ community offered parents' opportunities to connect across differences of gender and sexuality, to validate parents' desire for modelling gender equality, and allowed access unique understandings of embodied gender experience. As I showed in the first section, media encode specific hierarchies of identity in representations, this has the primary function of authorising only certain performances of gender amongst parents, and legitimizing broadly conventional arrangements of family. Parents identified these representations as limiting and sought more flexible models of gender in order to support their alternative narratives of family and gender. A key advantage that community engagement offered which media did not is a responsiveness to the management and emerging hierarchies of identity. Parents prioritise engagement which facilitates different narratives of gender according to their experiences of mainstream marginalisation and inequality, and responding to what they perceive are their children's gender-related needs. The possibility for media to represent the types of images and information which parents said they wanted (strong female role models, information on men's sexuality explained for non-heterosexual female audience, feminist-engaged men) is frustrated by the same cultural context of patriarchy and preferential representation of traditionally masculine heterosexual men. More diverse representations of masculinity, and information on male sexuality disentangled from heterosexual desire and sex, fall into the same category of destabilising disruption as images of butch women and LGBTQ people without clear commitment to the production of nuclear family. The contexts in which representations become available are heavily informed by the prevailing narrative of heterosexual subjecthood within patriarchy. However, as I want to explore now, other identities disappeared or were less visible in media because of the hierarchies of representational 'ease' that emerge in different media contexts as a result of different dominant cultural knowledges.

Ivy spoke to me about her personal experience as a lesbian parent, but she also offered her professional perspective as the editor of a magazine for LGBT parents. She felt strongly that bisexual [in]visibility was an issue, but was unsure how to successfully redress this through primarily image-based representation in her magazine. I want to quote her at length because

her comments reveal a number of contradictions in attempting to achieve equality in representation;

the problem is a lot of bisexuals tend to be in heterosexual units so it doesn't necessarily [look queer]...bisexuals are the least represented and the most marginalised...they get a lot of prejudice and it's important to try and combat that really because they're just people like everybody else, it's not fair that they get marginalised...I try and get something in every issue from all the different sectors [i.e. L, G, B, and T], I don't always manage it, especially with bisexuals. And it's kind of weird because you get somebody who's bi to write a piece and you want it to be about what they're writing about rather than the fact they're bisexual so to bring those two together and not make it too full on and 'I'm bisexual! I'm bisexual!' Yeah, challenging. I guess we get people to write about parenting. But I'm just like 'so and so who's bi' and in the end it's like actually, they're just a parent, why do they need to be anything? But that's the thing about representation; you have to shout about it in order for people to know what it is. (Ivy, 2014)

Much of Ivy's response suggests a verbal thinking through of the challenges facing her as a would-be inclusive editor; Barker et al say that the challenge of representing bisexual people is rooted in the dominance of "dichotomous constructions of sexuality" where "bisexuals...do not exist and must be 'straight, gay, or lying'" (2008: 147 & 153). Ivy's difficulty in finding a way to represent bisexuals indicates that this dominant construction of sexuality as dichotomous continues to structure the way in which images are read, even within LGBTQ media. Readers are habituated into categorising representations into either 'straight' or 'gay' (Doty and Gove, 1997: 92, Pramaggiore, 1996: 292) and whilst representations of bisexual parents can be included in Ivy's magazine, she has to present an explicit refutation of a presumed [mono-]sexuality. Whilst Ivy's magazine aims to normalise and celebrate all types of LGBT parenting, bisexual parents must be singled out for explanation creating 'hyper-visibility' and inequality in the modes of representation between bisexual and lesbian and gay parents.

The hyper-visibility attendant in representing bisexual people is problematic because of the manner in which bisexuality is typically deployed in mainstream media. In the majority of representations of bisexuality:

the bisexual is...a marker, whose bisexuality signals that there is something – or rather, something else – of interest about them...it is not their bisexuality in itself that is significant, but rather those concerns which their bisexuality *stands for*. (Eadie, 1997: 142, emphasis from original)

For audiences, and perhaps the readers of Ivy's magazine whom she fears will find the way bisexuality is represented strange, bisexuality does not stand for itself. Rather, bisexuality is typically used as a totem, a fetishized object that works as a narrative device or prompt to action for characters or actors surrounding the represented bisexual figure (Eadie, 1997: 148-

149). Ivy's concern that making explicit the bisexual identity of those parents featured in her magazine will result in an over emphasis on sexual identity ('if it is named, it must mean something') indicates the representational logic which audiences are habituated in and which representations must function within. There is a suggestion here of a hierarchy of *ease of representation* emerging from the cultural context where subjectivities which can be simply and clearly communicated are more frequently represented and deployed without anxiety that their inclusion generates unequal conditions of representation.

Lynne, a bisexual lone parent, felt that bisexuality was simply 'too hard' to represent (Lynne, 2013) as there was not an established visual vocabulary by which it could be depicted. This corresponds with Ivy's difficulty in representing bisexuality in the same way she presents other sexualities. These perspectives point to the key predicament in representing bisexuality; representations are interpreted by audiences according to their pre-existing knowledges of different subject-possibilities. Whilst representations can contribute to the development of new knowledges on previously marginalised or invisible groups, they do not do this in a cultural vacuum (Dyer, 1990: 1). Representations which make clear they depict bisexual subjectivity must involve explicit naming, but this invokes the audience's existing knowledge of bisexuality; that it is only deployed in media to signal fluidity or change and so the possibility to generate recognition of bisexuality as stable and coherent identity is frustrated. The contemporary representational context means that, in a hierarchy of identities validated through media, bisexuality is positioned below heterosexuality and homosexuality as an identity which only becomes visible once those positions have been investigated and rejected. Bisexuality must clearly state what it is not, in order to appear at all.

In line with the studies discussed in the introduction, all the trans parents I spoke to said that they felt mainstream representations of trans parenting were virtually non-existent. Whilst Darren, a non-trans identified gay father, was able to say that he was beyond "thinking through positive images", trans parents were very much still battling with what they felt were overwhelmingly negative portrayals of trans people in the media<sup>16</sup>.

I asked Amy, a trans woman who had two children, which representations of trans people she liked; she replied "I can't think of anything...that isn't derogatory" (Amy, 2013). For Sarah, a

---

<sup>16</sup> Considering Medhurst's summation of representations that "a positive image is only a stereotype that suits my ideology rather than yours" (2002: 316) I do not suggest the following comments represent an objective evaluation of what constitutes a positive image of trans subjectivity; such an evaluation is not possible. Rather, I use participants' evaluations of what needs to be present in representations of trans people for them to call it a 'positive image' to identify what hierarchies of value and context they invoke in their response to this media.

trans woman who had recently become a grandparent, representations of trans people in the media were fairly undifferentiated, and universally negative:

it's [always] the...emphasis on the transition, it's all about the transition, not about being a person. So all of the stereotypes...mostly it's 'trans people are mentally ill' but the 'trans people are murderers' trope gets trotted out depressingly often. (Sarah, 2013)

Like those parents who prioritised representations of different gender roles ahead of representations of lesbian parenting, trans parents prioritised seeking representations of trans subjectivity over images which represented their sexuality or other identity positions. Whilst *Time* magazine declared in 2014 that we have reached “the transgender tipping point” of visibility (Steinmetz, 2014) (a pronouncement eagerly taken up by a number of other media outlets), discussion of trans representations by participants’ remained rooted in evaluations of scarce, and stigmatising or pathologising, representations against the wished for ‘normal’ representations. In this respect the experience of trans parents did not correspond with the supposed cultural shift in the visibility of trans people.

Several participants listed *Orange is the New Black* as a show which provided positive representations of both lesbians and transgender women. It is striking, considering Sarah’s comment above that these representations are within the context of criminality. The one trans character in the show, Sophia Burset (played by trans woman, Laverne Cox), is a parent. Burset’s back story reveals to us that she transitioned after having a son. Her attempts to win back her son’s affection by buying him gifts, in addition to the financial implications of surgery and hormone therapy, lead Burset to commit credit card fraud, for which she is incarcerated (‘Lesbian Request Denied’, 2013). Whilst the episode dealing with Burset’s transition does conform to the trope Sarah identifies of depicting Burset through a focus on her transition and representing trans people as criminal, it was judged by Sarah as well as other participants to be indicative of the type of representation they wanted. Partly because, as Sarah says “she’s trans and she’s in prison, but everyone else is on the show is in prison, so it doesn’t matter as much” (Sarah, 2013), but also because her transition is presented as part of her back story and after the audience had been introduced to her as an ‘ordinary’ character in previous episodes of the show.

The trans parents I spoke to all discussed how important it was for them to see representations of ‘real’ trans people in media. Returning to *Orange is the New Black*, Sarah identified the casting of Laverne Cox as an important example of “trans people [being] on television and...doing things that are not about being trans people; they need to be ordinary



people who have particular skills which make them television worthy.” (Sarah, 2013). Amy echoed many of Sarah’s comments on this point and gave the example of *Coronation Street*’s first trans character, Hayley Cropper:

much as I love Hayley, why wasn’t Hayley played by a trans woman? Why was it a [cis]woman?...if you do occasionally see trans people sometimes it’s played by a, you know, cis woman or a cis man and it’s like why don’t you get someone in who is trans who can do it?...That’s what I’d like to see, a more realistic representation of trans people [doing different jobs]. (Amy, 2013)

The concern Amy and Sarah express, regarding the identities of actors portraying trans characters, indicates one way in which representations are evaluated by trans parents, and points to the emerging hierarchy placed on the *context* of a representation. Participants indicated they sought depth from representations; tokenistic inclusions of trans characters did not satisfy their desire for visibility. Implicit in Sarah and Amy’s comments was also the suggestion that trans representation can only be successful if the actor playing a role has a direct experience of trans subjectivity. With reference to the cultural significance attached to representations in documentary and reality television, I argue the reason participants sought this from representations of trans subjectivities was because of their consciousness that audiences respond more emotionally, and with greater reflection on social [in]equality, when a representation is secured against a supposedly “authentic” subject (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 60-61). The hoped-for political and social impact of a representation according to its mainstream prominence informs audience evaluation of its quality or ‘realism’.

As indicated in the preceding discussion, relationships to media were built on more than a simple evaluation of whether a specific subjectivity is represented, or reflection on the reasons for perceived under-representation. Participants clearly indicated that they imposed their own hierarchies of value and social-significance and engaged with media according to the outcome of these judgements. In the next section, I will examine more of these hierarchies with particular reference to hierarchies of tastefulness and the anticipated cultural use of representations.

### Audience Media Hierarchies

Whilst all the parents I spoke with were able to identify some media which attempted to represent them, many, like those discussed already, found the available representations unsatisfactory. The way in which media was evaluated by its context and found to be unsatisfactory according to hierarchies of tastefulness is something I wish to look at now in

order to better understand the cultural pressures which shaped the responses and relationships to media that participants had.

Several participants said they were able to find a greater number of representations within subcultural media, but the majority of parents conceded that these representations were “just rubbish.” (Isabel, 2013) Rose’s attempts to use lesbian-centred books on parenting were frustrated by the dominance of a specific sexual and political ideology in such media:

We tried but they were all, it was all Mums and Moms, it was all American stuff and it was therefore of limited value...Some of it was a bit kooky. I mean...we do have a degree of humour attached to our sisters in the lesbian community [laughs] in the sense that there can be a tendency towards, no I won’t say madness, but there was a bit of that in some of the books that we read, it seemed to be, I mean it was entertaining but it wasn’t...In the same way if you, for example, were to delve into lesbian erotica it wouldn’t necessarily relate to your love life. It’s that kind of disconnect, basically. And so we didn’t find anything that particularly resonated with us. (Rose, 2014)

Rose’s comments suggest that feeling under-represented cannot simply be resolved by a greater number of representations. Dyer highlights how we:

cannot conclude from a person’s class, gender, race, sexual orientation and so on, how she or he will read a given text...it is also a question of how she or he thinks about living in his/her social situation. (2002b: 85)

Whilst the media Rose describe ostensibly addresses her, her unique experiences and her ordering of her own identities significantly shapes her response; seeking images which prioritise her social and cultural location, and her political stance, takes precedence over images which prioritise celebratory, counter-cultural representations of lesbian parenting. Rose’s comments indicate that her media engagement is informed by more than just an evaluation of the value of lesbian parenting encoded in a text; her subjectivities also come to bear on the representation.

Rose went on to tell me that she often felt disappointed when she watched LGBTQ-targeted films or television shows which were distributed through mainstream channels. Talking about the BBC miniseries, *Heading Out* (2013) where Sue Perkins, an out, lesbian comedian, plays a gay veterinarian who is afraid to come out to her parents; Rose exclaimed “Shit wasn’t it?!...Hammy, rubbish...I was like I’ll watch it because I feel like I should [because it has lesbians in], but it was rubbish” (Rose, 2014). Isabel also expressed this feeling “you do feel compelled to go and watch anything gay if it comes out, because you feel you must support it” (Emily and Isabel, 2013). Other participants spoke in more detail about how they felt about the available lesbian-orientated movies and other media:

Jelena: I feel annoyed and frustrated very often that there are not any good films, there are very few.

Hannah: We've tried so many lesbian films and so many of them are so rubbish!

Jelena: It is absolutely painful really, really, it's not that there isn't gay and lesbian talent or good stories it's that...some of the things done are completely just, utterly rubbish. (Hannah and Jelena, 2013)

Emily and Isabel had similar feelings on films about lesbians:

Emily: We'll buy lesbian films...Mostly really bad ones...we do want things that aren't really bad. There's a lot of books

Isabel: – Yeah, yeah, a lot of lesbian stuff-

Emily: – and films are really badly made. (Emily and Isabel, 2013)

The sorting of media these women indicate is strongly connected to their perception of the cost and care taken over producing these films and books. Brunsdon argues that quality is most often assured through public demonstration of high production costs and links to “already legitimated high- and middle-brow culture” such as [established, classic] literature or plays (1997: 113, 115, 143). The lack of such links in the broadly low budget, subcultural circulation and production of texts which explicitly concern lesbian lives leaves these women unable to confidently declare their enjoyment of this media and stuck in a cycle of anxious rejection or self-justification (“I know it's rubbish but we watch them all”) (see also Brunsdon, 1997: 133).

Taking a larger view than simply the management of evaluations of quality, the investment of these women in media which they claimed to find almost universally unfulfilling is testament to their “longing for popular representations” (Driver, 2007: 134). Like the ‘queer girls’ Driver spoke to, frustration with the narrow range of storylines and “simplistically represented ‘lesbian’ subjects and issues” resulted in a demand for new representations employing “nuanced ways of interweaving experiences of same-sex erotic relations into narratives without reifying their centrality and meanings” (Driver, 2007: 98). This longing, and corresponding disappointment with the available representations, shapes the engagement parents have with media. Parents are driven to actively seek out better ‘quality’ media which may, by its classification as such, deliver representations which speak to, and help add knowledge about, the lives of LGBTQ people (Brunsdon, 1997). This action of seeking ‘better’ media intrinsically requires the audience to impose a highly subjective hierarchy of taste on media (Brunsdon, 1997: 133).

Emily and Isabel talked about media they had accumulated which delivered 'better' quality narratives and representations. They singled out the films *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café* (1991) and *Imagine Me and You* (2005) as examples of 'better quality' films with more developed storylines which, importantly for them, excluded overtly sexual representations. Emily and Isabel sought media they felt it was appropriate to share with their 11 year old daughter, they framed these two films as simultaneously [morally] appropriate because they did not contain explicit sexual imagery, and as being of good quality. Speaking about *Imagine Me and You*, Emily and Isabel concluded:

Isabel: there's only chaste kissing in that but we just, because that's like *Notting Hill* for lesbians isn't it? [...]

Emily: actually that was really refreshing because it's Richard Curtis type quality.

I: It's still fluffy.

E: It's not deep but at least it's not clunky.

I: It's reasonable acting for a start and the dialogue is ok.

The invocation of this media as morally good suggests a possible concern that homophobic narratives of sexual excess which cohere around LGBTQ people will threaten the stability and validity of their parenting. In order to pre-emptively refute such destabilising accusations, consumption of sexually discreet media is linked to good taste and used to signal good parenting (Sender, 2003: 356, Skeggs, 1997: 45-47). Media consumption which helps secure this narrative of parenting is then discursively labelled as being of good quality. Classification of media as either sexually discreet or sexually explicit allows these parents to sort through an increasingly crowded media landscape and make swift judgements on the function which consumption of specific media texts will serve (Brunsdon, 1997: 134); can it help secure narratives of good parenting? Can it build the respectability and stability of this family?

Further, the circular logic of quality being guaranteed by media's function to accrue moral capital for consumers (Alasuutari, 1992: 562, Bourdieu, 1986b: 6) and moral capital being guaranteed through disavowal of sexual cultures indicates the intersection between an audience hierarchy of tastefulness and quality which is implicitly shaped by and responds to the hierarchy of good citizenship encoded in media where domestic, heterosexual-conforming parenting is represented as good whilst expressions of sexuality and minoritarian identities are linked to poor parenting and social disruption. Ideas of what constitutes 'quality' comes from "debate and institutionalisation of ideas" (Brunsdon, 1997: 133) and then is reinvested when audiences sort media texts in this way.

Ivy's objectives in establishing a magazine for LGBT parents seemed to be shaped by this same concern to signal respectable, tasteful subjecthood and with it, responsible parenting:

lesbian and gay magazines aren't the kind of magazines we would want our families to read, [which] is why I wanted a family magazine because I don't want my parents or...my parents-in-law, to flick through a magazine and see dildos and chat line numbers which is in all the lesbian and gay magazines...I think it's quite important that it's a UK wide magazine that anybody can read. (Ivy, 2014)

Ivy seeks to empower LGBT parents to talk openly about their lives and enter into dialogue with their extended families. She locates the barrier to doing this as the sexually explicit focus much LGBT media has. Accessing recognition and legitimation for LGBTQ-parented families requires mediation of the social position of LGBTQ people, Sender suggests that "stigmatized social groups may attempt to raise their social position with high moral capital" and that association with sex poses a risk of low moral capital (2003: 355). Further, Gross argues that the representation of lesbian and gay men is driven by a need to construct images of LGBTQ people as "non-threatening to heterosexuals" and this is assured by omitting portrayals of non-heterosexual sex (1994: 151, see also Shuggart, 2003; Walters, 2012). Negotiating desexualised representations of LGBTQ parents is therefore about participating in the repositioning of queer family as non-threatening and of equal moral value to heterosexual families. Within this logic, denial and restriction of the connection of LGBTQ parents to sex and imagined deviant acts, in favour of narratives of chaste love, family bonding, and parenting concerns, would deliver social mobility and greater acceptability and validation of LGBTQ families. The continued anxiety parents express in negotiating this shift and signalling their separation from primarily sexual identities suggest that this process is in no way guaranteed or simple.

Why are the family and sex conceptualised as conflicting interests? We may identify some possible reasons by looking at the emergence of the modern notion of family. Postman says family, as it emerged in the eighteenth century, was explicitly concerned with the management of information and the separation of adult experience, sex, and sexuality from the child, and the construction of childhood as innocence (1993: 75). The dominant tactic by which representations of LGBTQ people are signalled is by their sexuality; they are identified first by their identity as non-heterosexual and secondly by their other subjectivities. This connection is further ingrained in the cultural imaginary as a result of the discourse of liberation campaigns tracing back to the 1970s, which made 'the personal political' as a route to challenge the dominant heterosexual order (Robinson, 2007: 185). This has created a cultural knowledge about LGBTQ people that links them with sexual acts above all other

activities or interests (Berlant and Warner, 1998). William responded to the way this 'knowledge' had shaped responses to LGBTQ parenting, saying:

I think there's an awful lot of...really destructive attitudes towards us and our families...Because we're seen as being all about sex and people are so scared of sex and we epitomise the apotheosis of lives that are about sex, a lot of people are terrified of that, especially when you mix that with being a parent. As if our bedrooms don't have doors on them! Or that we cannot manage to separate our sex life from our parenting as anyone else would do! (William, 2014)

William's comments, together with Postman's conceptualisation of what 'correct' family roles demand from parents, indicate the structural pressures at work on LGBTQ parents when forming families. They feel compelled respond to the homophobic conceptualisation of them as excessively sexual which circulates through numerous media channels. In order to be legitimated, parents work to create, through the explicit policing of language and media, a 'bedroom door' that separates their children from any hint of sexuality. For William, this was a position negotiated publicly because he and his partner had to justify their suitability as parents to an adoption committee. For other parents, the effect of this cultural script, purporting to accurately describe LGBTQ lives as hypersexualised, was more subtly played out. For Ivy, and Emily and Isabel, above, like many other parents I spoke to, negotiating homophobic narratives of their sexual lives was sublimated and expressed through their stated anxiety around the appropriateness of media depicting sexuality and sexual acts.

Parents' comments here should not be misconstrued as prudishness around sex, on the contrary, parents expressed their wish to raise their children to be body positive and sex positive, and to facilitate frank and open conversation about sex and relationships. William, in expressing his frustration that people could not imagine LGBTQ parents as able to "separate [their] sex life from [their] parenting" stated that he wanted to introduce his sons to the community of gay men and discuss sexuality with them. Parents with school age children also noted that this attitude to using sexual-outsiderhood as a prompt to discussion about 'taboo' topics was a commonality in parenting by LGBTQ people; "[One teacher] is quite funny because when she does a sex education she always says 'spot the lesbian parent's child' because they're the most enlightened of the lot." (Emily and Isabel, 2013) Parents appear to create a division between the public act of media consumption (which they understand they are positioned by, and in, society) and private, one-on-one conversations where sexuality and relationships can be explored without concern for devaluing their legitimacy or respectability as parents. There is, in this respect, a hierarchy of acceptable intersections between identities and sex, and a hierarchy of contexts in which representation of these topics is acceptable to

parents. Parents' knowledge of the circulation of such images in mainstream media, and the implications they believe expressions of identification with sexually-explicit images may have on their family stability, are key elements in how LGBTQ audiences negotiate media.

After talking to parents about the media they and their children enjoyed, I asked them if there was anything they banned. Responses were largely cautious with several parents acknowledging that outright bans often resulted in the banned item becoming more appealing (Hannah and Jelena, Dylan, Joanne). However, most parents did identify certain types of representation or content which they explicitly avoided at home, most commonly sexual content and violence were deemed to be entirely inappropriate. Parents described such restrictions as common sense ("I have the larger parental concern of like extreme violence and porn, you know? But I feel like that's a given" [Eva, 2013]) but, as already explored, making clear this restriction was in place seems to be partly driven by attempts to mediate anticipated social anxieties around the 'appropriateness' of 'sexual deviants' parenting, and conformity by parents to dominant narratives of the family's function being to shield children from such themes.

Postman argues that parents fulfil the role of "guardians, protectors, nurturers and arbiters of taste and rectitude" by restricting and vetting the media which enters their home and that fulfilling this role is a condition of building and maintaining a family in contemporary society (1993: 75). However, Postman also notes that the means by which information is distributed alters the degree to which it is possible for parents to act as gatekeepers to the family in this way (1994: 76). Next, I refer to participant comments on the challenges they experience in restricting the access of their children to media which they deem of good quality and their ambivalence about censoring media at all.

Eva was concerned about the impact that media could have on her son's development. Initially she responded to my inquiry about banned media by saying "whatever he wants to watch is fine". She went on to qualify this response in relation to a specific children's show:

He doesn't watch *Spongebob* [*Squarepants*] or anything like that. I remember reading that study that said kids that watch *Spongebob* have IQs 9 points lower than kids that watch *Sesame Street*. (Eva, 2013)

Eva returned to this judgement later in our interview, suggesting that even media such as *Spongebob Squarepants* could be negotiated to become a useful piece of media. In particular, *Spongebob's* flexibility which allowed and invited queer readings contributed to Eva's sense that it could have value:

*Spongebob* actually gets very gay, I mean surprisingly gay. Bert and Ernie [from *Sesame Street*] are a little bit gay...There's nothing I wouldn't want him to watch I don't think...I feel like it's manageable, again I feel like these are things that can be talked about and worked through...you can spin anything can't you?! [laughs]...I mean even the Smurfs had [a] gay [smurf]!...any of those old programmes [like the Smurfs] they're so sexist and they're still on, I don't know, I grew up watching them and I'm a doctor, I got a PhD, it didn't stop me. So I think your influence from your family is quite, more significant. If you were being raised by the television then maybe there'd be some concern, but there isn't, no. (Eva, 2013)

For Eva, generating moments of identification or queer representation could salvage media she otherwise judged to have low value, or actively harm her child ("kids that watch *Spongebob* have IQs 9 points lower"). Media is resignified as 'good' or 'useful' when it is, or can be, used as a site of LGBTQ representation and identification that can make queerness visible within the mainstream.

Eva was quite confident that her parenting could [re]negotiate any potentially 'negative' content her son received through television programming. Postman argues that television does have a significant effect on shaping a child's understanding and relationship to learning and thinking about information (1985: 143-146). Postman's argument does not preclude the possibility of negotiating the meanings and knowledges children may take away from television programmes, but he does state that television programmes offer "a complete package" for which no additional knowledge is needed to comprehend and respond to its content (1985: 147); discussion is possible, but not necessary. Harriet's comments on the concerns she had had about the impact specific media images and representations would have on her daughters correspond with the largely closed loop of meaning which Postman argues mainstream media has. Unlike Eva, Harriet was not able to settle her concerns with the content of representation by 'working through' their meanings to discover queer space within them:

I can remember when the kids were little, you try when you have little kids to keep them pure – particularly if you are politically critical. So they don't watch telly that you don't control at that age, and you get them to watch films that will be good for them in some way. And then we realised you can't do that, you can't control any of it because billboards are out there and Olivia noticed billboards like there was no tomorrow...You can't control it unless you're going to live like hermits. (Harriet, 2013)

Harriet's experiences point to the limits of discursive responses to media representation and invisibility; mainstream ideology can bypass the queer, critical, audience gatekeeping and enter children's mediascape. Whilst audiences play an active part in making meaning with media, there are ideological limits to representation and limitations on the control which parents can exercise over the circulation of representations in a media saturated culture.



Whilst parents sought media to help them articulate their family identities, the refusals and encoded values in the texts “limit what can be said” even whilst they “make saying possible” (Dyer, 1990: 1). The hierarchies that parents impose on media thus significantly intersect with the encoded meanings and hierarchies of preferred identities present in media.

Dylan spoke about how challenging it was to generate negotiated representations of alternative families from mainstream media representations:

With the cute animal stories you could make them whatever gender you fancied [but] it's difficult sometimes because there'll be one of them slaving over a hot stove and one of them going fishing and they'll [the children] be like 'that's Daddy, that's Mummy' and it's quite hard to go 'well it could be the other way round' and they're like 'no, no it's not. Daddy's going fishing and Mummy is cooking the tea'. (Dylan, 2013)

For Dylan, the persistence of narratives which naturalised binary gender roles by-passed his attempts to offer images of alternative family arrangements to his daughter; she was already habituated into producing dominant readings of otherwise ungendered representations. Mainstream media can be seen to resist attempts to reclaim visibility or representation for alternative or queer families by virtue of the dominance of hegemonic discourses around who is in a family and how families behave which refutes oppositional or negotiated readings (Torring, 1999:211, 213-214). Dylan found that the representational limitations of much children's media refused space to read in trans-identification and this had an effect on the stability of his narrative of trans parenthood. If animal characters cannot be convincingly read as resisting or reversing domestic gender norms, then a male parent who has birthed his children is unimaginable within this representational logic, as he both disrupts reproductive norms and the presumed naturalness of the gendered process of childbearing (Halberstam, 2005: 10). Too many existing layers of 'common-sense' and regulated understandings of what parents do, when, and how, stand in the way of reading representations of trans parents from heterosexual mainstream media.

The experiences of Dylan and Harriet point to the reasons parents are so concerned with increasing the availability and range of representations of parents and families like them; work done at home, to assure children of their place in society and the legitimacy of their family by only presenting vetted media to them, can be undermined by what their children experience when they begin to notice media which continually fails to address or represent them, or when dominant discourses 'drown out' any alternative readings presented to them. Media pervades all aspects of life and negotiation of representations can never wholly subsume or resignify their dominant message (Hall, 1980). The concerns parents had for the content of

representations, as expressed in our interviews, is strongly suggestive of their awareness of the limits of their power to mediate representations and protect their children from what they perceived to be destabilising or prejudiced messages within media. This limitation sits uneasily against the continual work parents did to sort media. The hierarchies of tastefulness, flexibility of meaning, and applicability to lived experiences, by which participants broadly organised media, should be understood as attempts to mediate those elements that they could not control. Those elements were, specifically, the devaluing of some LGBTQ identities in relation to others, and the different value placed on families according to their conformity to or distance from a heterosexual nuclear ideal, which parents continually discovered encoded in media texts.

### Sorting Contexts and Considering the Use of Representation

Participant responses did not only concern media they felt had failed to adequately represent people like them. In addition to sorting media in order to mitigate its perceived negative implications or messages, participants also spoke about media which they enjoyed. However, a new hierarchy emerged from these evaluations where participants sorted their own identities and identifications as separate from their evaluation of images of LGBTQ lives as positive or useful. *The L Word*, *Lip Service*, and *Orange is the New Black* were all singled out as especially important representations for female participants, but they were offered with an acknowledgement of inapplicability to their lives:

*The L Word* is lovely to watch but they all have money and amazing lifestyles. They always look perfect and they never have to work, and it always fits in with their lifestyle and it's all easy so I don't think they represent my family very well but I still like watching it. (Mathilde, 2014)

Isabel: I don't know people like that, [like those in] *Lip Service*.

Emily: It doesn't really represent us.

I: They were all having sex everywhere! I don't know people like that.

E: I should be so lucky! (Emily and Isabel, 2013)

I'm trying to think of somebody even who would be like us, there isn't really anyone...that's funny. That's a really funny thought to think 'yeah, I'm like Bet [in *The L Word*], I'm that kind of important'. Powerful and important! Yeah, no. (Joanne, 2013)

The above comments indicate that positively-received representation is more complex than simply authorising those representations which are 'accurate' depictions of the audience. When participants celebrated *The L Word* and *Lip Service* they made clear that the shows did not represent lives like their own but they did indicate their belief that these representations circulated primarily amongst LGBTQ women who had sufficient cultural knowledge to

understand the representations were partial and not representative of the lived experiences of LGBTQ women. Participants' sense that audiences of this media would not 'wrongly' interpret images or conclude this representation was an indicative depiction of LGBTQ people's lives indicates an awareness of (or assumption about) the different cultural capital associated with audiences of different genres of television. Reality television has been conceptualised as vulgar, as generating – or just attracting – a “dumber, fatter” audience (Hill, 2005: 7) whereas [non-soap] dramas are ranked as higher in the moral hierarchy and are associated with a “more educated” audience (Alasuutari, 1992: 567-568). Participants' lower levels of anxiety about the inapplicability of these representation to their own lives therefore corresponds with the cultural capital they anticipate these shows' audiences have, which will facilitate a critical evaluation the representations and allow them to develop knowledge of LGBTQ people from a wider range of sources. Further, these different anxieties also correspond with what Brunsdon describes as “generic hierarchies” where “current affairs programmes are ‘more important’ than soaps” (1997: 135). The representations within non-fiction programming are understood by audiences to *matter more* than images found in more ephemeral or entertainment-focused shows.

Many participants' comments focused on the perceived ‘failing’ of media to represent LGBTQ lives in a way that corresponded with their own lived experiences. These critiques were targeted most often at reality and documentary genre television, rather than the fictional entertainment genre television (above). This hierarchy of judgements, where reality and documentary television is held to a different standard corresponds with the different positioning of this genre within the broader mediascape.

Reality programming is especially loaded since by definition it should occupy a more privileged position in relation to the representation of the ‘real’ than overtly fictional forms...programmes are judged to be ‘good’ if they offer convincing ‘pictures of reality’. (Birressi and Nunn, 2005: 3)

Participant evaluations of this media implicitly respond to this hierarchy of genres, where only some shows are expected to depict ‘reality’. What constitutes a ‘real’ representation is slippery (Birressi and Nunn, 2005: 3-4), but the responses of participants suggest they judged ‘realism’ by comparing a representation to their own experiences, and by considering what role a representation would play in constructing “current knowledge about what...reality might consist of” (Birressi and Nunn, 2005: 4). I am not proposing that participants did not recognise that reality television was as constructed and ‘fake’ as the previously discussed lifestyle dramas. Rather, their sense of the different promise of reality television, and their

consciousness of the different interpretative skill of the audience, led them to “look for and critique ‘moments of authenticity’ in reality programmes” (Hill, 2005: 82) in a way they did not in fiction media.

The balancing of judgement for documentary and reality television based on how similar it was to participants’ experiences *and* by evaluating the knowledge it was creating about LGBTQ people, was an anxious and cautious process. Joanne spoke about *One Born Every Minute*, a Channel 4 ‘fly-on-the-wall’ series about a maternity ward. She identified it as a show containing ‘everyday’ representation of lesbians but felt it delivered a sensationalised portrayal of lesbian women on the occasions they were featured:

Every so often [*One Born Every Minute*] would have a really horrific lesbian couple that would do something awful and was clearly there for the shock value of them being lesbians and therefore look at them argue, or whatever they were doing. (Joanne, 2013)

Joanne’s critique focuses on the ‘revelation’ of the show that lesbian couples parenting are shocking, argumentative, or otherwise unrespectable. Joanne suggested she was concerned that this representation produces and reinforces cultural knowledge of lesbian parents as excessive, as entirely like the couple featured on *One Born Every Minute*. Further, the emotional trauma routinely depicted on the show functions as a “conspicuous watermark of authenticity” (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 7) and Joanne’s anxious response to this, but not the representation on *The L Word*, which was equally inapplicable to her experience, indicate her awareness of the different way these images will be viewed (and ‘stored’ as knowledge for future use) by the [presumed] heterosexual audience (Hill, 2005: 90).

As well as contributing to the construction of knowledge, representations also circulate and reiterate existing knowledges. Again, the circulation of stereotypes of LGBTQ people in reality, lifestyle, or documentary genre media was a particular concern. Dylan recounted a feature he had read in *The Guardian*:

I really hated Yotam Ottolenghi’s interview that he had in...*the Guardian* a few weeks ago where he was describing his journey to surrogacy...he sort of made this comment, they were looking at co-parenting with a couple from Brighton, a lesbian couple, and he made an off-the-wall sort of snarky comment about how they lived in a cat-infested wooden floored hippy retreat and when they brought them [the lesbian couple] to London their shiny floors were too much for them and they could slip or fall over, I was like ‘for god’s sakes!’ (Dylan, 2014)

In the article Dylan describes, Ottolenghi reproduces a narrative of lesbians as poor homemakers and parents. This recurring narrative (identified earlier as being present in

*Modern Family*) indicates that the dominance of such stereotypes limits the narratives of lesbian parenthood that can be [re]produced (Dyer, 1990, 1 and 2002b: 1). However removed from the lived experience of most lesbian parents a “damp home with two cats, the absolute nightmare of every urban gay” (Ottolenghi, 2013) may be, it is a characterisation which fits the expected narrative of lesbian lives and further secures this stereotyped cultural knowledge.

In the two examples which Dylan and Joanne offered above, media once again encodes hierarchies of acceptability where, in the Joanne’s example, heterosexual parents are represented as heterogeneous and non-radical against the exceptional, ‘horrific’ lesbian couple who are produced as an unknowable, exotic other. In Dylan’s example, gay men are again reified as ‘normal’, rejecting domestic-chaos and any counter-cultural positioning through the language of disgust (“damp home”, “nightmare”) and an othering of lesbian lives which reasserts the connection with, and rejection of the threat to, patriarchal family order. Parents respond to media according to a hierarchy of context and genre where certain genres are perceived to have greater cultural significance and the representations offered therein are subject to greater scrutiny.

Parents were not only concerned with how representations may circulate stigmatising knowledge of the group represented. Martha and Paige discussed what they felt were negative effects on their cultural position, as a result of representations of gay men parenting in one documentary:

Paige: the two gay men who were on the documentary [*My Weird and Wonderful Family*]...the really annoying couple from Essex, and the guy’s just horrible...that’s entertaining television for the vast majority of people in terms of that’s what they chose to put on television but it really paints a gay couple, in my opinion, in a bad light. But it was entertaining –

Martha: – There’s a freak show element to it. (Martha and Paige, 2013)

The reality-documentary Martha and Paige refer to, *My Weird and Wonderful Family* (2010), depicted the Drewitt-Barlow family in a way which conformed to established narratives of gay men as camp, dramatic, and superficial. Hill argues that when “audiences watch reality TV they are not only watching programmes for entertainment, they are engaged in critical viewing of the attitudes and behaviour of ordinary people in the programmes” (2005: 90). For Martha and Paige, this critical reflection of the ‘attitudes and behaviours’ of the Drewitt-Barlow’s was a central element in their response, whereby they evaluated the likely use those images would be put to in circulating cultural knowledge. As Paige said: “you’re just so aware that the rest of the country is watching this and thinking this is what we’re all like” (Paige, 2013). Media

engagement is therefore shaped not just by an evaluation of the ‘realism’ or accuracy of a depiction, but by ceaseless deliberation on how these images will function to locate and narrate the families of all LGBTQ parents. Martha and Paige set themselves apart from the “the rest of the country”, suggesting they felt their lived experience as parents combined with their critical abilities, made them uniquely able to respond to this media.

In the context of our continuing conversation, I understood that it was the portrayal in this documentary of stereotypically camp, gay men as representative of all LGBTQ parents, and the encoded authenticity of this representation (assured by the documentary genre) that Martha and Paige most particularly objected to. In other parts of our interview, Martha and Paige expressed an awareness that representation is commonly used to generate an identifiable group to whom advertising and programming can be targeted (Sender, 2003: 332) and their comments critiquing, and distancing themselves from, this representation, can be understood as a pushback against being hailed into place as a consumer by images and practices of LGBTQ parenthood which they find distasteful or undesirable. I also argue their discomfort of being linked to conspicuously queer representation indicates a reluctance to be further marginalised within heterosexual society:

since an openly homosexual identity already puts gay and lesbian people on the outer limits, conforming to the inner circle [of normative power] in other respects...may recoup some moral capital for them, potentially gaining them broader social acceptance, access to economic and other resources, and protection from harassment. (Sender, 2003: 355)

This strategy of security through conformity is commonly seen through the abjection of lesbian lives in order to contrastingly portray gay men as preferred, insider subjects. Martha and Paige’s concern for a lowering of their moral capital, through association with an overt performance of stereotypical gay male identity, indicates the pervasive logic of the hierarchy of acceptability which insists traditional masculinity accrues more capital than effeminate or camp gender performance amongst men.

As I have shown above, lesbian identity is an already marginalised position – indicated through its [under]representation in media; Martha and Paige may therefore be especially anxious to be associated with ‘normal’ representations of parents. Their disdain for, and distancing of themselves from (rather than challenging the narrative of camp masculinity as being of lower status) can be understood as an attempt to “dissipate the anticipated *wrong* kind of difference linked with the unknown, dangerous, other ‘gay lifestyle’” (Taylor, 2009: 15, emphasis from original) which they identify as being linked with social exclusion and disempowerment in

mainstream society. Parents also appear to wish to separate themselves from the imagined audience of these shows. They make clear they can identify the ‘fiction’ of the documentary and reality show and reassert their “sense of reality” in relation to the meaning of LGBTQ parenting (Alasuutari, 1992: 573). This separation works to reassert and stabilise their classed capital as media-savvy, critical consumers, and the connected meanings that they are, by virtue of their high cultural capital, appropriate parents.

Parents who occupied what I suggest are *more secure* subjectivities in the social order, such as gay men, may be able to risk their social capital on association and identification with this ‘wrong’ kind of difference. Seb, for example, indicated he was willing to be represented by many types of gay men when he critiqued what he called a “hierarchical notion of what it means to be gay” amongst gay people:

So ‘oh he’s camp but he’s really nice’ or ‘he’s gay but he’s not effeminate’ and like ‘oh you wouldn’t know he was gay!’ [as though that is] positive...being accepting means you accept people, not just some people because of what’s seen as trendy and cool or not cool or embarrassing at the moment...The idea [of equality] is that there isn’t a hierarchy of acceptance. (Seb, 2013)

LGBTQ people are therefore sometimes complicit in sustaining hierarchies of acceptability in how they respond to certain stigmatising or othering representations (Martha and Paige) or reproduce homophobic and sexist narratives (Yotam Ottolenghi). The ability to reject the [re]production of these hierarchies can be dependent on the social and cultural capital an individual possesses. The pervasive hierarchies by which power is distributed frequently leave individuals struggling to establish solid ground on which to build their identities and respectability. Individuals become complicit with the hierarchies that categorise subjectivities as good, desirable and ‘normal’ or unknowable, abjected and other, in an attempt to access the power or capital necessary to stabilise their lives and secure their families in a hostile heterosexual world. Without representations that validate all sexualities and gender identities equally, subjects are unable to articulate their identities without reference to hierarchies of acceptability and their validated place within it.

As I have shown, the complex and reflexive responses parents had to media indicate the pressures of being denied social legitimation for their families. Whilst anxiety stemming from the pressure to make oneself intelligible prompted parents to participate in making hierarchies of identities and to attempt to locate themselves within discourses of heterosexual family conformity, not all parents were comfortable with the idea they should, or could, be located

through media. Seb linked his concerns to what he had observed during the campaign for civil partnerships;

to gain that equality there almost had to be a lot of discussion and dialogue and rhetoric around the significance of civil partnerships...but I think one of the secondary effects of that is that it's almost narrowed the idea of family down to couples. Which in a way kind of, it can be about, but then you try to expand on that or do something that's leftfield of that, or a bit different and there isn't any visibility of that...it's quite deterministic now whereas if you go back before that, the idea of LGBT families...felt like it could be a bit more creative. (Seb, 2013)

Seb indicated he feared that with each gain for equality, something must be sacrificed in terms of creative possibility in order to represent a coherent group or family arrangement that could be presented to wider society as needing legal protection or social recognition. Seb's assessment of the conditions of visibility and equality corresponds with Edelman's indictment of assimilationist queer liberation campaigns (2004: 47). The problems of visibility which emerge through the civil partnership campaigns for Seb are something which Butler explores, saying that state recognition of relationship forms (indicated through the right to marriage) is uniquely structured to limit possibilities and 'derealize' alternative relationship, and family, forms; "the state monopolizes the resources of recognition" (2004: 111-114; see also Dyer, 1990: 1; Warner, 1999: 82-129).

Further, within the logic of reality-television and documentary, there is additional meaning attached to representing families at all. In a great many documentaries which first featured 'everyday' families in the UK, their visibility was a result of their construction as in crisis, or as facing 'intolerable stress' (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 61). In order to "challenge orthodoxy" regarding what families are, parents are "forced to become 'public'" (ibid). The conditions of media visibility are thus predicated on being exceptional, on needing to be 'made sense' of (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 4). The resources of recognition are not only controlled by the dominant order, but the expansion or creation of new resources (by which LGBTQ parents can be recognised) are dependent on LGBTQ parents being different, depend on LGBTQ parents being used to signal a problem of cultural intelligibility and social experience which must be solved. The various hierarchies I have identified encoded in media represent an attempt to 'solve' this problem by imposing an order of preferred family production on the diversity of family forms which are emerging.

The existing frameworks of representation require that one family-form connected with LGBTQ parents must be prioritised and validated above all others. The struggle to evaluate and endorse specific types of representations by LGBTQ parents, as illustrated above, should



be understood as an attempt to participate in determining what the dominant image of LGBTQ families and parents is to be. Walters argues the lack of capacity in current representational strategies to offer “multi-layered communities” which *do not* reproduce hierarchies of acceptability means “we need to image a different relationship between visibility and being known...we need to insist that our families might just be radically different” (2012: 930).

The notion of a different relationship to representation, and a different view on the need for media visibility was something Joanne commented on. Speaking about her sense of trepidation as the terms of visibility and the dominant image of LGBTQ families became increasingly fixed, she said:

sometimes [media invisibility is] a good thing, because if there is something then people define you in relation to it whereas if they can't define you they have to work out something else. And sometimes that means they work you out in relation to heterosexuality but sometimes it means that they take you and work you out in relation to who you are...which doesn't reduce you to the stereotype of *Lip Service* or *the L Word*, so actually sometimes the lack of representation can be a good thing. (Joanne, 2013)

Joanne's comments suggest a wish for an “active vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility” (Phelan, 1993: 19). Seb (above) and Joanne's comments indicate an awareness that “gaining visibility for the politically under-represented without scrutinizing the power of who is required to display what to whom is an impoverished political agenda” (Phelan, 1993: 26). Whilst they may not identify their positions as being overtly political, the potential social and ideological implications of being visible within the existing representational framework do have consequences for how they relate to the possibility of greater visibility, and indicate a striving for a different kind of representation and visibility. Their ambivalence around seeking greater representation can be understood as an act of resistance; refusing to seek legitimization through the media, the institutional site of symbolic capital (Skeggs, 1997: 11) and refusing to accept a place in the hierarchy of preferred relationship and family forms or identity performance.

Visibility in mainstream media is achieved through representations which remain rooted in the existing hierarchies of power; these hierarchies are expressed in representations of groups as undesirable, representations of groups as objects of exotic fascination, representations of some groups as more respectable and aspirational than others. Whilst this dominant mode of representation persists, visibility and validation for one group comes at the price of the othering and explicit denigration, and thus disempowerment, of another.

## Conclusions

In this chapter I have shown that LGBTQ parents' response to media representations is the product of the interaction of a number of hierarchies. I showed how media encode hierarchies within representations which produce specific identities as more desirable than others. I illustrated this with reference to media which denies visibility for butch lesbian women, and which refuses to endorse lesbian's suitability to parent. These media hierarchies are indicative of the wider social and cultural conditions whereby mainstream media offers validation to non-heterosexual parents who can be discursively located within the dominant heterosexual reproductive order.

I argue media valuing of certain identities over others has a significant impact on the ease with which LGBTQ parents are able to locate themselves in the cultural world. Further, it creates materially different experiences of parenthood according to the [in]visibility of a parent's identity in media. This is evidenced in the frustration that parents expressed toward media which persistently erased or devalued their experiences. The possibility of redressing or responding differently to representational inequality was unevenly available to parents according to a number of factors including their different cultural capital.

In the second section, I showed how a key element of participants' response to identifying the different valuing of identities in media, was to sort or hierarchise their own identities. Participants prioritised finding representations that offered positive valuing for non-binary gender roles and positive images of women. As I showed, this was something which participants felt mainstream media failed to deliver. Parents also turned to LGBTQ community to address their representational needs. However, community was not evaluated by participants as being as culturally significant as media representation. Identifying the hierarchy which parents placed on the source of representation led me to explore participant comments on the possibility for more diverse representations in the mainstream. Discussion about the representation of bisexuality indicated how the cultural context of a representation shapes its possible meanings; hierarchies of discrete identities shape mainstream heterosexual audiences' knowledge of how to interpret representations and interact with the attempts of media producers to produce images of certain LGBTQ subjectivities. With reference to the representation of trans people in media, I indicated how hierarchies of cultural significance dominated participant responses to representations of trans people. I conclude that parents negotiate media at the intersection of multiple hierarchies. They sort their own identities according to evaluation of cultural context and seek specific types of representation because

of their sophisticated appreciation of the different cultural uses for media representations. I showed that parents understood media is differently received according to context; this informed their response to the hierarchies of value and strangeness which media offered. Anxieties circulated most strongly in response to non-fiction genre representations. Parents were differently placed to resignify the meanings (and negative cultural capital) associated with representations of stereotypical LGBTQ subjectivities and in turn, this informed how rigorously they produced and policed their own hierarchies of representational value.

The hierarchies of judgement which LGBTQ parents imposed on media are not unproblematic; they sustain a representational order which functions by producing a preferred and legitimated inside against a distasteful and abjected other. This persistent hierarchizing of representation continually devalues some subjectivities as it authorises and protects others. But the motivation for parents to negotiate media in this way, and participate in the system of signification which previously excluded LGBTQ people from representation, is complex. Parents negotiated their own anxieties about how they were viewed as LGBTQ parents through their regulation and rejection of media. This offers parallels to the mass-cultural use of media to work through anxieties about certain groups. Like the media working-through, audience handling of representation involved producing hierarchies of preferred LGBTQ identities. The nature of negotiating this in a media saturated culture meant that this work was never absolute, and I showed parents' difficulty in preventing dominant discourses of LGBTQ marginality and otherness [re]asserting themselves. The use of hierarchies to respond to media is therefore the result of mainstream media's dominance over the resources of imaginative possibility. Finding no exterior to representation, no space outside of media narratives, parents seek out ways to operate within mainstream representation and take control of the knowledge being produced about them by sometimes, authorising it, sometimes enacting critical refusals and sometimes distancing themselves from aspects of representations.

Ultimately, there is ambivalence amongst parents about representation which, I argue, stems from their awareness of how subjective audience responses to media are, how significant context is in generating meaning, and how limited representations are in producing any knowledge about a group as a result of various representational limitations. Parents acknowledge that the types of under-representation and representational-devaluing of LGBTQ families are a product of a number of social factors: a dominant patriarchal order which seeks to continually reassert itself through regulation of new modes of intimate and family life, and a continued cultural anxiety about the effect LGBTQ-parented families will have on the

dominant social order. Media representations are a working-through of these anxieties: an indication of, and contribution to, an ongoing discussion about who makes up society and what types of life course will be authorised. Audience responses are also a working through of anxieties, of cultural locations, and of meaning. Parents have access to resources outside of media to produce their families, but their proximity to heterosexual culture means that representational visibility and media validation has special significance for subjects located at the edges of control of social discourse.

## Chapter Six

### Inheritance: Generational Rupture and Passing-On Through Media

Mass media reproduce collective memories, hopes, desires and social values and contribute to the reproduction of social institutions like family (Kellner, 2011; Silverstone, 2007). Participants in my research experienced generational rupture in relation to the reproduction of family and family-meaning between themselves and their heterosexual parents. They regarded themselves as coming from heterosexual families and a heterosexual culture in which their own experiences became a point of rupture in the reproduction of these norms. In this context, the question of what I am calling inheritance becomes important. Inheritance is not just a passing on of values, stories or media but also an intervention or response to the prevailing heterosexual culture.

In this chapter I examine the processes by which new meanings and narratives of family are constructed and transmitted. This is a significant focus as “such restructurings are not merely local and they are certainly not trivial: what is involved is essentially a massive process of institutional reconstitution” (Giddens, 1991: 177). Exploring the changing cultural scripts of family, and the processes by which these changes are made, is essential to understanding how family is experienced and its institutional meanings. Thompson says narratives of family are:

The grist of social description, the raw material for both history and social change; but [more] than that, they are also the symbolic coinage of exchange between the generations, of family transmission. (Thompson, 1993: 36)

The production and circulation of family narratives is an indication of the types of imagined or idealised futures which subjects are engaged in producing. This chapter will therefore be structured by the notion of inheritance: what is passed on? What is exchanged across generations in these carefully shaped narratives of family? What role do community and media resources play in producing, stabilising and transmitting narratives? How do experiences of generational rupture shape what parents seek to pass on to their children? “What stories and images...are chosen and put together” (Thompson, 1993: 36)? What relationship to an imagined future is indicated by the family narratives and practices of inheritance?

Producing new narratives of family, narratives which offer assurances of legitimacy and authenticity to the family forms which LGBTQ parents are creating, has been a central theme in this thesis. Nelson says that lesbian and gay parents are especially in need of access to alternative narratives in order to respond to, and resist, the master narratives of nuclear family

legitimacy and heterosexual imperative which circulate in contemporary society (2006, 9). I argue that the practices and uses of media and family-narrative making which parents report, do not represent a “delving into the past in search of indigenous origins [of family, but] an ‘extroverted’ sense of place, where it is the sum of its linkages to elsewhere which constitutes a place’s identity” (Morley, 2001: 441). I will explore how generational rupture (prompted by non-heterosexual identity) prevents parents from easily locating their production of family in a direct lineage with their families of origin. Rather, parents work to repair inheritance by working on new narratives of place and location which are supported by community links and broader narratives of family making. Burkitt says that self-identity (and in this case, family-identity) is “constructed in...relation to others...through friendships, workplace relations, or indeed any form of medium through which individuals come to identify or dis-identify with each other” (2012: 460). In this chapter I will trace these relations and the media through which parents produce family-identity, locate themselves in culture, locate their families in dialogue with existing narratives of family-meaning, and seek to ensure generational inheritance.

In the first half of the chapter I look at the meaning and value parents associated with queer community and queer culture and consider the types of knowledge or culture they wished to pass on to their children. I build on this initial analysis by looking at the various labours LGBTQ parents took on as they attempted to develop stable narratives of family and make selections of media they wished to pass on to their children. The work to build narratives was complicated by generational rupture, where participants had to negotiate the use of the language of family from their parents. Halberstam suggests that producing intergenerational dialogue through the rationalisation and collation of family narratives inevitably produces a concretization of family possibilities and “mandatory continuity” (2005, 185). As I will show, the experiences of my participants reveal that rather than preventing new narratives being told, restrictions on, and concretizing of, family-meanings causes generational rupture and therefore requires the production of new family narratives by LGBTQ people. Participants described the ways in which the narratives of family their parents provided were limited or inapplicable in crafting new families. I examine how participants’ implicitly responded to their own sense of lack and consciously crafted packages of media to pass on to their children. In the section ‘negotiating parent identities and the language of family’ I continue to consider the idea of rupture by discussing the negative experiences which participants suggested stemmed from both their cultural dislocation, and their lack of resources to negotiate the language of family to produce narratives of legitimacy.

In the second half of the chapter I look at how community and social networks offered parents a resource for building inheritances, assisted them in developing family narratives, and provided a sense of continuity for family making. In the section 'geographical isolation, community, and class' I will highlight how geographical location, access to LGBTQ community, and classed resources play a significant role in how easily parents are able to narrate the location of their families. As I will show, the routes through which parents seek to generate inheritance vary according to their identities and locations; but media consistently offers distinct resources which can be collated, translated or incorporated into identity narratives, and passed on. I will consider how the pleasures of sharing media, which parents reported, offered rewards for the labour involved in producing narratives and inflected participants' sense of the value of inheritance. Finally, I look at how neoliberal demands that families and individuals produce themselves, and minoritarian subjects take on the labour to make themselves intelligible to and within dominant culture, are experienced by parents. I ask how these demands may prevent the production of queer "disorderly narratives" (Halberstam, 2005: 187) when family narratives must be anchored in a stabilized set of media representations. Are inheritances defined by their inflexibility and exclusion of alternative narratives and life courses, or can parents negotiate a new route through the crafting of inheritances? I conclude that whilst parents consciously work towards producing flexible, multiple inheritances, they also exercise critical refusal of neoliberal insistence that they "become [the] agents of their own success...totally responsible for their own destiny" and use all available techniques and technologies to "produce themselves" (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008: 227-228). I show how this refusal plays out in relation to media and the way in which representation is imagined to facilitate social inclusion for LGBTQ-parented families.

#### Generational Succession or Generational Rupture?

For Harriet, whose two daughters were in their late teens, cross-generational media inheritance was inextricably linked to the sexuality of each family member. She felt that her attempts to share media she was interested in was obfuscated by her daughters' different experiences of the world, and community:

I might read *Diva* or something or the *Pink Paper*...but they are not going to be interested in it because it's not their community is it? So you won't get that continuity through the generations that you might if you were in heterosexual society and you were *Guardian* readers, and you all went through the *Guardian* reading culture, and it was a family thing that you always read the *Guardian*...you do weave away from each other, because of your sexuality I suppose. My parents wouldn't have been interested in lesbian magazines. (Harriet, 2013)

Harriet's comments indicate a generational isolation where the heterosexual method of succession is blocked; her own parent's heterosexual-orientated media consumption skips a generation and passes to her [presumed] heterosexual daughters, whilst her own experience of community and media does not resonate with them and is discarded. This 'blocked' inheritance reminds us that the cultural inheritance of the queer family must not be conceptualised as "infinitely open to change" or as producing the possibility to "liv[e] without limits or restrictions, [to become] transcendent figures capable of becoming anything" (Driver, 2007: 7). The selection of media by LGBTQ parents is an embodied and situated experience, with links continually drawn back to their lived experiences, and their expectations of the lived experiences of their children. The possibility of generating inheritance, and the content of what is passed on, is fundamentally tied to who these parents are. In Harriet's case, her experience of tension or failed inheritance from her family or origin prompted an independent search for media representations of people like her. In turn, this different set of media and cultural reference points isolated her from the heterosexual community she was living within, and from her daughters, as she does not share common identifications with them.

For William, a gay father of two sons aged 8 and 12, a fracture between his media landscape and that of his [presumed heterosexual] children was not an issue. He described how he introduced his children to a range of queer media, inducting them into gay cultural knowledge; "whether they're heterosexual or bisexual or gay, I wouldn't presume to know at this stage, [but] they're definitely culturally gay" (William, 2014). For William this was linked to the type of lives which he and his gay male friends had:

I know a lot, a lot of gay men who have typical metropolitan 20th and 21st Century gay lives which did not stop when they decided they wanted to have children, did not stop when they were going through the [adoption] assessment, did not stop after they had children. There are children out there, driving to school with their dads, listening to Gaydar radio every day. (William, 2014)

Community networks emerged as an important framework through which a culturally queer identity was taught and passed on. William also commented on what he felt was a uniquely-lesbian community built around ex-girlfriends which offered the same type of cultural education to children as media-culture offered by gay fathers:

There are lesbian women out there whose children are very tied into their ex-girlfriends and their ex-girlfriend's parents, and their ex-girlfriend's ex-girlfriends. Just like other lesbians would be, they're not a different type of lesbian. (William, 2014)

William's statement that children of lesbian parents were inducted into an inter-generational queer culture through communities of women, rather than through specific media



consumption, was supported in the responses of Emily and Isabel. They identified their connections with other lesbian women and their ex-girlfriends as something which dominated daughter Lucy's understanding of lesbian identity:

Emily: Interestingly Lucy does really enjoy spending time with our lesbian friends. She actually does enjoy our lesbian friends' company.

Isabel: Yeah she's immediately-

Emily: She's immediately relaxed with lesbian women.

Isabel: – relaxed, comfortable...

Emily: We've got older friends another ex of mine – Lucy loves all my exes!...She obviously loves my taste in women! (2013)

However, Lucy's immersion in a lesbian culture of community did not translate to an immediate affinity with her mothers' preferred media. Emily and Isabel reported that Lucy playfully described *Diva* magazine as "lesbian weekly!" indicating Lucy's recognition of the specific audience of that publication with a word she did not yet, and perhaps would not, use to describe her own identity. The passing-on of queer-culture and identifications is a multi-layered process which does not necessarily result in absolute rejection by children of their parents' cultural and media worlds, but can involve partial rejections and ruptures.

This type of [dis]engagement with media was significantly informed by children being able to read the intended audience of a media text and respond according to whether they felt it was 'for' them. The work of parents when selecting and sharing media with their children concerned making it relevant and relatable; as I will explore now, parents' experiences of receiving a [sometimes ruptured] media inheritance from their parents effected the inheritances they prepared for their children.

Several parents spoke about their childhood experiences of [dis]connections to media from their parents' generation and the role this played in the decisions they made regarding how and what to pass on to their own children. Emma said that although she experienced some disconnection from the films and books of her mother's generation she still found points of engagement which remained important to her:

I used to love Enid Blyton...there are a few books that I'd love to share with my kids that I loved as a kid that my Mum shared with me, but also they do send different messages of that generation. (Emma, 2014)

Emma's comments imply that these "different messages" related mainly to traditional gender roles which she tried to tackle by employing a reading strategy popular amongst several

parents I spoke to with children who were not yet able to read: “swapping the protagonist’s names over, you just make up the genders, who goes out with who, and [the children are] not going to know” (Emma, 2014). In this way, generational isolation and cultural disconnect can be negotiated through alternative reading strategies; adapting older texts to fit contemporary values. This indicates that ‘successful’ inter-generational transmission requires flexibility in textual meaning and use. Indeed, Bourdon notes that “each age group develops its own memories of media use, detached from that of the parents” (2011: 67) and Emma’s strategic rereading and use of the media her mother shared with her indicates precisely this process. Emma relates to Enid Blyton stories because they were a totem of meaning for her mother’s generation and offer a connection backwards to her mother; she accepts this as reason enough to include them in her own package of media inheritance rather than needing to relate to the books as something which directly addresses her experiences, as her mother likely did, or because they offer a stable meaning.

Emma was in a heterogendered relationship and this may reveal why her relationship to texts from her mother’s generation with strongly heterosexual characterisations was more accommodating than some of the other parents I spoke with. Hannah, for example, rejected media which represented only traditional gender roles. She traced her reluctance to allow her daughters to have Barbies to her own experience of growing up as a lesbian and the reflections on gender this prompted her to have. Speaking about toy advertising on television (which she tries to limit her daughters’ exposure to) she concluded her main objection was that it was:

So gendered...I always used to think lesbians are more politicised in a way because of the way we’ve had to grow up ourselves so [we] try to have discussions about gender and thinking about the toys. (Hannah, 2013)

Hannah makes implicit reference to the subjugated position of lesbian women within a hetero-patriarchal society which problematizes both femininity and lesbianism; further, her statement that lesbians had to “grow up [by] ourselves” points to her experience of cultural isolation from her parents. Her comments imply that her parents would, however, have provided a clear model for her to grow up heterosexual. Hannah suggests recognition of gender inequality is a necessary stage in negotiating an out lesbian identity, and notes how difficult feeling culturally isolated can be; both of these experiences have ramifications for the way in which she, and other lesbians, move through the world as adults. Hannah appears to seek to alleviate this potentially traumatic or difficult stage for her daughters by avoiding the transmission of rigid representations of gender and sexuality and encouraging them instead to enact non-traditional gender roles and model different family structures in their play.

Sara Ahmed (2010) describes how the entreaty to “be happy” is experienced as failure by queer children who cannot fulfil their parent’s wishes to be happy subjects or happy objects because of their non-conformity to heterosexuality. Hannah’s concern that her daughters are not made unhappy in the same way she was (because she lacked models which could have reassured her she was not a ‘failure’) can be understood as a reaction to the disappointment she feels at not having had the ‘happy’ childhood that was expected of her:

Parents can live with the failure of happiness to deliver its promise by placing their hope for happiness in their children. Happiness can involve a gesture of deferral, a deferral that is imagined simultaneously as a sacrifice and gift. (Ahmed, 2010: 33)

Hannah frames offering her daughters different types of representations as a gift, but what of the sacrifice Ahmed says must come with that? Hannah and her partner Jelena talked about the anxieties and struggles they faced in attempting to reinforce the validity of different models of gender and family. They described the emotional distress involved in challenging their daughters’ reproduction of dominant forms of family and gender roles:

Jelena: They’ve got the Sylvanians, the little families. When they were playing one day they said ‘oh that’s a Mum, that’s a Dad’ I said ‘where is the Jelena then?’

Hannah: Their games are still quite mummy, daddy, baby.

Jelena: But I’ve had that conversation with them both and they try, they say ‘ok, well this is a Jelena’ and sometimes they say ‘we do! Sometimes we do play Mummy and Jelena’ and I say ‘no. Not often enough!’...again I got upset sometimes and Lexi had done some drawings ‘there’s Mummy, there’s Daddy, and me and my sister gone on holiday’ I said ‘how often has that been the case? Never. There is either just Mummy and Daddy and Joe [Daddy’s partner], or two of you, or all of us’...so again it’s a bit personal.

Hannah: It doesn’t get much more personal than that. How you are seen by your kids, how you are valued within the family, it’s highly, highly emotive.

(Hannah and Jelena, 2013)

I argue that, after Ahmed, the ‘happy object’ in which Jelena and Hannah invest their hopes for happy children and a happy life, is their non-heterosexual family arrangement. They continue to ‘narrate’ the possibility, legitimacy, and usefulness of their family model to their daughters, in response to their daughters (apparently happy) reproduction of older, dominant models of family arrangement. Their investment can be understood in relation to Ahmed’s analysis in this way: “The happy object [the idealisation of their family form] circulated even in the absence of happiness [the anxiety and emotive discussions where they attempt to get their daughters to replicate their family in play] by filling a certain gap [the experience of Jelena and Hannah having no models on which to base their family]; we anticipate that the happy object

will cause happiness” (Ahmed, 2010: 32). The potential to produce an inheritance of different, but equally valued models of family is therefore frustrated by a discontinuity of what the ‘happy object’ is, across generations.

Jelena and Hannah’s daughters turn to the nuclear family as the preferred model to reproduce in their play. The dominance of the nuclear family narrative as the normal family and the frequency with which queer subjects are represented as ‘unhappy’ against the ‘happy family’ ideal are the most likely sources for generating resistance to the narrative Jelena and Hannah offer. Lexi and Becca have reshaped their experience to fit a heterosexual mould – their biological father is reoriented in the centre of their family, replacing Jelena and, as Hannah says, generating a highly charged emotional exchange where Jelena must push them to reinvest her in their family. Whilst parents can offer different narratives, the master narratives of the heterosexual nuclear family continue to reassert themselves within the homes of non-heterosexual families. As Nelson acknowledges: “the LG [lesbian or gay] identity of the tellers,” (in this case, the people offering different family narratives,) “does not per se lead to the production of narratives of resistance” (2006: 16). Whilst Jelena and Hannah offer representations of difference tied to their identities, the narrative of resistance to heteronormativity does not clearly assert itself in the way their daughters narrate their family.

Generating an inheritance of clear, stable narratives of queer family legitimacy and valuing of alternative models of gender roles within families is challenging. Parents must build a narrative of family-identity without the usual [heterosexual] resources from their parents and families of origin to support this work; they must then seek ways to make this narrative (which foregrounds LGBTQ identity as central to the new family production) applicable and meaningful to their [presumed heterosexual] children. As I have shown, master narratives of heterosexual succession complicate this identity work, destabilising the alternative, personal narratives parents offer and often dominating children’s imaginary. Central in the evaluations of the need for narratives and the decisions on what to include are parents’ experiences of generational rupture and cultural isolation as they grew up in undifferentiated heterosexual families. The highly idiosyncratic family histories of LGBTQ parents mean that sometimes (like Emma) they find ways to rework heterosexual inheritances into their own family, but at other times (like Harriet) the cultural disconnect is too great to borrow from their past in producing new family inheritances. Ultimately, it is different valuing of what narratives, identities, and values are needed to produce a ‘happy’ and coherent family which interrupts inheritance and shapes the labour LGBTQ parents must do. I want to continue thinking about the types of

personal investment and value parents placed on media now, in order to evaluate how strongly crafting inheritance is linked to identity.

### Negotiating Parent Identities and the Language of Family

A number of parents described *The Kids Are All Right* as an important piece of media for their families. Hannah identified the film's depiction of the emotional labour involved in crafting stable family narratives as valuable:

Just that first scene of them all, you know...the dynamic between the biological and non-biological- The thing about [making a] family...it's not been a painless process at all. We've struggled with it, we've argued about it, we've fought about it, we've cried about it, we've – it's not been painless. It's been a very personal journey to know what to call ourselves in this vacuum, so to be able to have gone to films or gone to something and say, you know, yeah our model is out there look, but we've had to create our own model...It would have helped to have, to see some of yourself out there. (Hannah and Jelena, 2013)

The emotional labour of producing a family in isolation from previous heterosexual generations emerged as a key theme in interviews and, time after time, availability of media representations were implicated as key in negotiating this labour. Correspondingly, a lack of media representing ways to build family identity, craft a sense of generational succession, and acknowledge the specific labours and anxieties which accompany this work for LGBTQ people, was implicated for generating additional social and emotional pressures. In particular, parents indicated that negotiating 'mother' identities was particularly difficult as LGBTQ women.

Lynne, a bisexual lone parent of 16 year old daughter Zoe, felt she faced a stark choice between being unrepresented and marginalised or 'shouting' her position in order to become visible and have her 'mother' identity validated on her terms. Lynne characterised this as exhausting work which she often chose not to take on. Recalling her experience after having her daughter she said:

I didn't feel visible...when I had Zoe I had post-natal depression for a little while, not severe, I look back on that and I wonder if that was part of going against the norms and not seeing myself reflected anywhere and not really getting my head around what to do about it. (Lynne, 2013)

Lynne suggests that it is not having access to models for her role as a bisexual mother, and not being able to make herself intelligible on these terms, which directly affected her mental health. Rose expressed a similar sentiment, tracing her experience of post-natal psychosis and the sense of isolation she and her partner felt, to invisibility in parenting literature and being fundamentally estranged from those parents they met at NCT classes:

What we really struggled with...and was probably one of the reasons I became very ill, was that a lot of straight couples are very used to using those mechanisms [NCT classes] for making friends. For making the social contacts that basically keep women sane when they're at home with young children...they just seemed to be much more comfortable with doing that with each other, not that keen on inviting us...We did go through a phase of going 'is it us? Are we just really unfriendly?' and um, I kind of reflected back and thought 'I don't think so'...I think it was really difficult because we were gay. I do actually. I really do. I'm really reluctant to [conclude] that, and we really talked about it a lot when we were reflecting on the experience we'd had...[Charlotte] was very clear about it, she said 'oh it was definitely more difficult because we were gay'...and it's not just that you're gay, it's that you're gay parents, it's the additional element of bringing children into your family that really throws people off. They're not sure about it, they're not particularly comfortable with it, and so therefore they're not too sure they want to kind of [get involved with you]. (Rose, 2013)

Rose's testimony, and her partner Charlotte's conviction that their isolation stemmed from heterosexual couples not knowing how to relate to them, were implicitly linked to the lack of media models which would provide a framework for their inclusion in the community of heterosexual families. I propose that with the [re]production of a heterosexual family, parents access (or inherit) scripts of social inclusion and cultural intelligibility; recognition via these same scripts is denied to LGBTQ parents who produce visually different families. Harriet's experiences add further credence to this theory. She described the reactions of friends and family to her and her partner splitting up:

There's not that help, there's not that drive to keep you together that there would be in conventional [i.e. straight] society. People don't immediately assume it's bad that you're splitting up, they don't know how to judge it. (Harriet, 2013)

A lack of models to illuminate the commonalities of LGBTQ-headed families with heterosexual families resulted in what Rose and Harriet felt were significantly different responses to their families compared to heterosexual friends and peers. Producing families outside of the heterosexual model results in a generational rupture, not just of family-narrative-making, but also of social location and cultural intelligibility. Silverstone concludes that "for most of us, ambiguities are threats not comforts in the material struggles of the everyday" (2007: 112) and this is borne out in the experiences these women describe; "they don't know how to judge it", Harriet said. It is the ambiguity of location of LGBTQ family arrangements within dominant narrative of family-making which prompts the discomfort which people express in their confused and uncertain responses to Harriet's family breakdown and which drives Rose's social exclusion.

The anxieties and pressures, which parents described emerging from the cultural dislocation of their families, produced social effects. Their resulting social dislocation was played out in

wider society, as above, but it was also evident in the inter-generational communication they had with *their* parents. The focus of the stories participants told about this was the use of the traditional language of family and the threat this came to figure established notions of what role and bodily labour 'mother' signified.

Emily: But my Mum was a bit prejudiced wasn't she?...Mum wrote me letters saying that [I] definitely shouldn't be called Mum, and she still doesn't call me Mum with Lucy, I noticed...and she won't tell any of her friends so although she's a doting Grandma and I'm the only child -

Isabel: She hasn't told anybody.

Emily: She hasn't told any of her friends...So when we go down there and Lucy says 'hi Granny'...if the next door neighbours heard I don't know what she'd do.

(Emily and Isabel, 2013)

Emily's mother attempts to insist she adopt a name which makes her relationship with Isabel less visible as queer and which discursively separates Emily from the established meanings of family language. Emily fails to reproduce the model of family which her mother had offered when she was growing up; this discontinuity, or rejection of the script of motherhood and meaning which her mother attempted to communicate, is an example of frustrated or mediated generational transmission. Emily and Isabel reject inheritance of an undifferentiated definition of motherhood and this rejection, whilst not absolute, has ramifications for the relationship they have with the person (Emily's mother) who offered the inheritance. Further, I argue that Emily and Isabel encounter the response they describe specifically because of their use of the language of family; instead of "operating as the constitutive outsider, they worked from proximity within the space, disrupting safety [or security of hetero family], comfort and home" (Skeggs, 2005: 966).

Duncombe and Marsden (1993) and Oerton (1998) suggest that heterosexual family is built on the emotional labour of women. The explicitly gendered negotiations for the title 'mother' which emerged in interviews (no male participants reported negative responses from their families of origin to their decision to be two 'Dads'), indicates the anxiety which attends the disruption of the foundational roles of heterosexual family. Oerton argues, speaking about housework as a production of home, that the heterosexual imaginary requires a breadwinner husband to be present for a woman to become a housewife, so: "lesbians cannot be housewives" (1998: 76-77). Corresponding with the idea that it is a housewife who produces 'home', I propose it is a mother who produces 'family'. Female homogendered couples represent a threat to the logic which produces heterosexual family, whereby mothers must be

co-constituted by a father before their production of family can be validated<sup>17</sup>. The borders of 'mother' as an identity are closely regulated through intergenerational communication and the transmission of the heterosexual-authorised meanings of mother. Emily and Isabel no longer take up the roles allowed to them within family by heterosexual family, where unmarried (or not-yet-heterosexual) women are expected to support the heterosexual parenting couple as aunts, sisters, and nieces (Oerton, 1998: 74). Instead, they usurp the heterosexual order by jointly claiming the role of mother and with it, the authority to produce family.

The push back from Emily's mother on her claims to family coherence was something which other women experienced. Charlotte and Rose also encountered unexpected hostility from Rose's parents because of their choices about names. Rose said; "you could mistake [my parents] for being liberal...my Mum is a teacher and has a very strong anti-racist belief in education, anti-sexist, anti-discrimination, she's got lots of gay friends" (Rose, 2013). However, this liberalism appeared superficial when Rose's parents were confronted with Rose's co-parenting relationship with Charlotte and they refused to acknowledge Charlotte as a mother; "they've never accepted us as a family, they never have" (Rose, 2013). As I suggest above, the absence of binary parenting roles which authorise the production of family by and through a mother mean that Charlotte and Rose's family is denied validity and refused acceptance.

Rose's parents' unrelenting focus on proving to Rose that her daughters were confused by having two parents called 'Mummy' caused tension in her relationship with both her daughters and Charlotte. Recollecting an occasion when her daughters began calling her Ro, instead of Mummy Rose, Rose described how her parents had:

just chiselled away at that, what started off as a bit of a 'ooh that's interesting, I wonder if she's going to change that, do anything about that' but Mum and Dad [mimes hammering away] and so I felt, we had a few rows about it, me and Charlotte. In some of the most unbelievably silly situations, like getting Mia out of the bath and Mia would be like 'Ro I want Mummy Charlotte to do it' and my hackles would start to rise. (Rose, 2013)

The insistence of Rose's parents that her children did not have a secure attachment to her as their mother because their family was organised outside of the heterosexual model began to influence Rose's own security in her identity and her sense of the validity of her family and family relationships as a whole. Refusal by families of origin to affirm the authority of these

---

<sup>17</sup> The emergence of anxieties about, and disputes over, the validity of families produced by mothers without the presence of a father have already been noted in relation to lone and single parent families (Gongla and Thompson, 1988: 413)



women to produce family through their performance of 'mother' causes generational rupture of the narrative of family, as something which is understood to reproduce itself across generations as long as individuals participate in child rearing and reproduction. Further, the refusal to acknowledge Rose's identity as mother denies her and Charlotte the authority to produce a narrative of family for their children and secure generational succession. The dominance of the narrative of family as a heterosexual formation which produces more heterosexual families does not allow room for new narratives which validate homogendered couples parenting, even when this parenting arrangement is broadly analogous to a nuclear family arrangement.

Sustaining narratives of fixed [heterosexual] meanings of family, which produce "societal heterosexist norms", functions to exclude non-heterosexual people from participation in "parent talk" (Nelson, 2006: 8-9). In being excluded from the production and circulation of family-discourse, non-heterosexual people are refused the opportunity to contribute to a [re]definition of parenthood and family. Put simply; the rigid policing of the borders of family-language denies LGBTQ people – particularly those taking on mother roles – the opportunity to achieve legitimacy for their family narratives or affect change in the master narrative of family. Further, the rigidity of meanings of family-language and the associated value of these meanings generates discord between LGBTQ people and their parents, as their parents attempt to protect the narratives of [heterosexual] family which afforded them legitimacy, even at the cost of denying their children, my participants, validation.

Rather than dismissing the narratives of family which excluded them and refused legitimacy to their family, LGBTQ parents continued to invest in the ideology of family. In particular, parents spoke to me about the reassurance offered by media images which represented the normalcy of their families. Criticising LGBTQ identity narratives which emphasised sexual identity, Emily and Isabel suggested it was media which deprioritised representation of non-heterosexual identities which could offer routes to social [re]location and validation of their place in the generational continuity of family-making:

We're still defining ourselves [through representations] in terms of who we actually sleep with instead of the fact that we are parents and we go to work...whereas...with *Modern Family* if that was a...lesbian couple they're part of the ensemble and it's not about who they are sleeping with, it's about how they cope in that chaotic family. (Emily and Isabel, 2013)

This type of media emphasises the proximity of non-heterosexual families to the nuclear heterosexual norm and produces a narrative of LGBTQ-headed families as tracing a direct

lineage to the heterosexual model of family. However, this narrative does not trouble the “master narrative of a heterosexual nuclear family as the ‘natural’ place for parenthood and children” (Nelson, 2006: 9). I argue that the reason for parents’ preference for this media is *not* a disinclination to confront and refute existing narratives which exclude them in favour of a new, radical, queer conceptualisation of parenthood and family. Rather, it is evidence of the fundamentally connected manner in which people experience their identities and their wish to repair the perceived ruptures between themselves and their parents, rather than reject wholesale the values of family which were passed down to them.

There is not a blank slate from which LGBTQ people can begin to build a narrative of their mother, and parent, identities:

Our lives, the meaning of our actions and our biographical narratives...cannot be disentangled from the way others regard us and respond to us, evaluating our actions and ourselves, or from the way that we *imagine* they do. (Burkitt, 2012: 460, emphasis from original)

Continued investment in the existing language of family is the result of an awareness of “the outside world” which relies on the [supposedly] stable categories of human relationships offered by the language of family (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001: 44). Seeking out media representations which emphasise the similarity of LGBTQ family life and organisation to heterosexual narratives is a way to mediate the shame or stigma which accumulates around narratives which are critiqued (or for which parents anticipate critique) as being inadequate (Burkitt, 2012: 460; Sayer, 2005: 948). As I will explore in the second half of this chapter, parents seek to mediate their sense of generational rupture and reject the static inheritance of family-meaning, through modes of narrative-making which are connected to a wider community, and constituted and secured through media engagement.

Giddens says that as “tradition loses its hold...individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options (1991: 5). For the parents I spoke with, traditions of family largely refused legitimacy to their family-making practices, in response, parents sought ways to make “coherent yet continuously revised” narratives (Giddens, 1991: 5) which were anchored in moments of social and cultural recognition. How these narratives are constructed, what choices and resources parents negotiated, and what inheritances are produced, will be the key sites of investigation in the following sections.

### Community as Resource and Community Inheritance

Participants identified LGBTQ community as a source of validation for the families they were building. Additionally, through their involvement in community, parents indicated they hoped some part of their family narrative would be transmitted to future generations. Specifically, they anticipated this would happen through the circulation of specific sets of media. There is not a single story to be told here about how the resources and meanings of family, collated through media, circulate amongst LGBTQ parents. Rather, the differences in circulation and interaction with media concerning LGBTQ parents was strongly connected to the different social, class, geographical locations, and identities of the parents I spoke with. In the next two sections, I will look at “the use of culture as a resource in self-making [and] how different forms of subjectivity are made available to different groups” (Skeggs, 2005: 975) according to the various identities and subjectivities of my participants.

Many of the parents I spoke to related positive experiences of establishing their families. It is striking, however, that these parents were overwhelmingly based in London and Brighton. Martha and Paige felt comfortable, supported and surrounded by friends who shared lesbian and queer identifications, in their home town of Brighton. This sense of belonging generated moments of surprise when interactions reminded parents of their difference from the dominant heterosexual culture. Describing entering her first NCT class without her pregnant partner Martha, Paige said:

It was like ‘oh my god’ because we’re not walking in together the assumption is going to be I’m straight; the assumption is going to be I’m pregnant and how do I...? I don’t know, it was very instantaneous that I walked in because you kind of, I walk around in the world feeling like everyone is like me in terms of being gay and sometimes I’ll forget that ‘oh my god, there’s straight people too’. (Paige 2014)

Paige’s discomfort was quickly alleviated when she saw their friends, another lesbian couple, in the class; “then I see [another lesbian couple] who I knew socially and it was all fine” (Paige, 2014). Paige explicitly acknowledged that such a swift resolution of her discomfort may not have been possible elsewhere. She identified options that could have helped her avoid exposure as ‘different’ in a group class: “we could have done a one-to-one with this midwife who’s amazing, who happens to be gay, but it’s really important to us to be just like everybody else” (Paige, 2014). However, Paige’s opportunity to be “just like everyone else” is intimately tied to her location. Taylor describes the phenomenon of LGBTQ people congregating in certain cities and forming strong communities as part of “the continual struggle [to] find a stable, ‘ordinary’ sense of home, place and identity” (2009: 45). Berlant and Warner describe

areas where LGBTQ people congregate as “construct[ing] the architecture of queer space in a homophobic environment” (1998: 551). Brighton’s community, through sheer numbers, shifts what is “ordinary” away from heterosexuality, as evidenced in Paige’s experience of being able to forget that “there’s straight people too”, and produces a proto-queer space. In Paige’s experience, occupying a physical, geographically-specific space offers an opportunity to define family apart from (but still linked to) a mainstream space which preferentially acknowledges heterosexual productions of family.

Greater media representation of LGBTQ parents tantalisingly promises a similar project of queer world-building where the mainstream imaginary is occupied by the everyday-ness of LGBTQ-parented families. For parents who lived in areas with smaller LGBTQ communities, their opportunity for ‘ordinariness’ was linked to the available media representations, whilst perceived under-representation in media further underlined their discomfort and sense of being out-of-place in their geographical location and community (see Ahmed, 2006: 11). Parents who are geographically isolated may be able to access community online (such as the users Carol reported coming to her website for LGBTQ parents, to seek out peer support [2013]) or travel to explicitly LGBTQ family-orientated events including Pride and Rainbow Families meetings. Even so, they remain reliant on media representations to offer a sense of wider community and legitimacy. Carol, who lived in the North East, told me that she and her partner decided on the names they would encourage their daughter to use – Mum and Mummy – after reading about the experiences of other lesbian parents online. This mediated their anxiety about what names would be most comprehensible to outsiders and practical for their daughter. Joanne, who lived with her partner in Brighton, had made that same choice based on her knowledge of the families of her [queer] friends who lived in Brighton. The different routes available to parents in making decisions on family arrangement, briefly outlined here, was played out again and again, with parents being divided between those in areas with a large LGBTQ population who took their cue from friends, and those who were geographically isolated and relied on media to offer models. Neither Carol nor Joanne expressed a wish to come by the information to support their choice in a different way, indicating that no one route is preferable to gain this information, but underlining that either media or physical community must be accessible to support and resource family-making.

It is interesting to note that it is family, and the lack of clear generational succession in structuring and describing families which prompts LGBTQ people to turn to community. Homfray argues that:

Given gay and lesbian people are largely brought up within primarily heterosexual family structures, there is no sense of an ongoing inherited gay or lesbian history which passes down through generations, notably through family and kinship networks. (2007: 18)

However, my data suggests that LGBTQ-parents experiences of arranging successful family and kinship networks becomes the history, the knowledge, which is passed down. Although it is not clearly passed from parent to child to parent to child, this knowledge is being passed between parents of different ages (i.e. from parents, who have experimented with and found success with specific naming strategies, to new and would-be parents) and contributing to the crafting of an increasingly well-defined notion of what LGBTQ family can be and how it may be arranged. As Hicks says, “the telling of [a] story is a part of inventing identities...it feeds into the creation of an LGBT parent/family group or community identity” (2011: 69); the transmission of family narratives is therefore heavily implicated in the production of a new group, community identity. This generational communication of knowledge about LGBTQ family is also represented in media, which acts as a cultural repository for alternative, but well-tested, family narratives.

To further illustrate this I turn to Emma who was a parent in a heterogendered relationship. She sought support from representations in producing narratives which resisted binary gender roles, support she could not source from her local community:

We live in...a very middle-class area, it's not that diverse but I need to make sure they have different representations and already, because it's terrifying. The 4 year old is like, 'Girls can only be princesses and can't have swords' so I googled a load of princesses with swords and it's very, very gendered already and I'm trying to challenge it all the time. (Emma, 2014)

Diverse representations, then, offer not only a point of identification for those whose identities and experiences do not correspond with the dominant heterosexual model, but also provide a resource of resistance for those wishing to challenge the apparently automatic legitimacy of heterosexual-family productions. For Emma, her family's legitimacy is never in question. She describes herself as 'passing' for heterosexual in a heterogendered monogamous relationship. Additionally, being white and middle-class gives her the “ability to achieve familyhood [as the] stark reality is that the affluent more easily, and more frequently achieve the status for themselves” (Taylor, 2009: 38 quoting Carrington, 1999). Emma's interaction with media therefore focuses primarily on offering her children expanded possibilities in their own identity narratives, and not a need to solidify or justify her family arrangement.

Focusing on the circulation of media and narratives of family through 'community' suggests a degree of homogeneity in those people participating (Anderson, 2006: 7). It is important to note that 'LGBTQ community' is not a distinct or stable grouping which all parents related to in the same way. Indeed, there was a degree of ambivalence from many participants about the idea that community exists at all. Several trans parents expressed feeling that trans identities were not a logical fit with LGBQ identities; Luke said this 'one size fits all' approach let down trans people when LGBT equality education work took place, arguing that media about and for LGBTQ people must not:

Just tack the T on at the end because in a way transgender people don't belong in the LGB because that is about sex and transgendered isn't about sex, it's about gender. It's like where else do you put us?...they [have] to do the whole package along with the same-sex thing. (Luke, 2014)

The problem with community as the source, or location, of a repository of knowledge and experience on building family is that membership requires certain media interactions. These interactions and the circulation of meanings are the conditions of continued membership (Dyer, 2002a: 15). In the same way in which Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan critique the use of traditional language of family for building identities whose "basic elements" come from "a culture which cannot bring itself to fully validate non-heterosexual ways of life" (2001: 45); using a limited representational vocabulary may also restrict the possibilities for different articulations of family. Whilst large groups of LGBTQ parents turn to certain key pieces of media like *The L Word*, *Modern Family*, and *Orange is the New Black*, the creation of different modes of family may be inhibited in the same way that these parents found their own family-making was inhibited by the limited scripts of heterosexual family-making they received from their parents.

What does it mean to be positioned on the edges of LGBTQ community when crafting media inheritance and family narrative? How do the experiences of those on the edges differ from parents who occupy dominant identity positions (including those who live within queer[ed] communities where non-heterosexual identities are typical or 'normal') with a wide range of resources available to them? Parents with access to media resources and community support generally concluded that their work to generate meaningful and coherent narratives of family and resistant positions for their children was relatively easily achieved. But what of those parents occupying minority identity positions who sought to negotiate clear family narratives with fewer or no resources? Is it true, as Skeggs (2005: 977) argues, that "those who do not have a recognisable respectable identity cannot make political claims upon the state"? Can

parents without access to the necessary resources of family narrative-making participate in discourses on the meaning of family, or model social change through their inheritances?

#### Geographical Isolation, Community, and Class

Homfray suggests geographical location and a connection to 'home' can, as a result of the multiple interactions with a space individuals have, deliver "a sense of completeness and integration" even when individuals are otherwise isolated from LGBTQ community (2007: 26). When participants spoke about media which was important to them in generating a sense of location for their family, representations that helped link them to a specific geographical space, and which traced a link to a national or cultural identity, were particularly important. Whilst all the participants I spoke to lived in Great Britain, numerous nationalities were represented including American, Irish, German, and Scottish; representing this element of their identity to their children was as important to participants as providing narratives of "strong gay identity" (Homfray 2007: 27). Fiona spoke about the importance of media which offered a narrative of Scottish identity to her son, Scott:

I quite like the *Katie Morag*<sup>18</sup> family just because we're quite into watching it at the moment...just because they're Scottish...[Katie Morag] goes out climbing in the hills and walking the beaches and things, all the time. I think I'd like her to be like Scott, and myself as well. Like growing up, I'm trying to give him experiences of being outside in nature and exploring his Scottish upbringing really. (Fiona 2014)

Parents occupying minority identity positions, such as Scots, looked to the media to aid their children's exploration of what it means to be the child of LGBTQ parents, but also to present a narrative of what it means to be something other than English when living in the United Kingdom. This underlines the complexity of the representations LGBTQ-headed families seek, and illuminates how strongly the search for representations is linked to the very distinct lived experiences of LGBTQ parents. Much of the work parents undertook in collating and reviewing media representations for their children concerned conveying a stable and coherent sense of individuality, of multiple identifications, and of composite identities.

Media can provide support for narratives of minority, or resistant, positions; specifically, offering narratives of legitimacy for expanded possibilities in gender, and national identities. However, Yvette Taylor argues that the ability to offer their children such an inheritance is dependent on social class:

---

<sup>18</sup> Katie Morag is a CBeebies series about a Scottish girl and her family who live on a fictional island in the Outer Hebrides.

academic literature on lesbian and gay parenting has positively asserted the political and personal worth in confronting heteronormative understanding of family but what they have neglected is the classing of parental possibilities where 'choice' may only be mobilised for the chosen few. (Taylor, 2009:192)

Certainly for Emma (in the previous section) and Fiona (above), both of whom described themselves as middle-class, white, and had professional jobs, Taylor's assessment of what enables them to exercise choice (in the narratives of gender and nationality they tell, and their access to resources to support this) does hold together. But to fully evaluate the impact of class on constructing identity narratives, it is prudent to look at the experiences of working-class parents to consider their sense of agency in navigating media, and identify which type of inheritance was most important to them.

Regarding the time needed to seek out media representations or appropriate community resources as a classed resource, I want to turn to the comments of Amy. Amy was a trans woman with two children who had only begun transitioning in the 12 months before we met for our interview; she described herself as working-class and emphasised the difficulty she had in finding resources to help in the reshaping of her family:

We've tried to find things on TV mainly because you look for resources for families and there's not very much at all. Every appointment, medical, psychological type appointment I've had I've said 'by the way, can you recommend-' and there's nothing, there's hardly anything anyone knows about and it's all focused on the individual[is transition] rather than [how it effects the] family. (Amy, 2013)

Whilst many of the middle-class parents discussed earlier referred to how they negotiated their way through different (though admittedly limited) options for generating family narratives, Amy's experience emphasises lack: a lack of resources from which to choose, a "lack of access to the techniques for telling themselves and a lack of access to the right culture" (Skeggs, 2005: 974). This limited access to identity-making resources restricts the possibility for Amy to access "the practices...that allow warranted respect or conditional recognition" which are "crucial for well-being" (Sayer, 2005: 959). Amy turned to institutional repositories in the hope of connecting with resources which could help her and her family reconstitute themselves as their family shifted with Amy's transition. But she was frustrated as all the material she encountered reinforced the idea of the trans individual as isolated from structures and narratives of family. Amy is unable to "perform the good self" as a properly integrated member of family, and as a parent, because she lacks the cultural resources to do so (Skeggs, 2005: 974).



Finding little help from the institutions of state, Amy looked to television for the representations she hoped would help smooth her transition and support her family. Again, she found that mainstream representations available through broadcast media failed to describe a family like hers or reinforce the stability of her identity as a parent. The lack of these representations had a knock-on effect on the resilience Amy and her wife felt they had to deal with the “whisperings” of other parents in their village:

You get that societal thing that you don’t want to be different, people just want to get on with life; you don’t want to be someone who is being talked about and an object of interest...Sue worries about that, she says ‘oh, it’s fine for you, you don’t go to school...and have people look at you’ which is a valid point...I think there is that pressure, especially if you identify as different, if you don’t fit. (Amy, 2013)

The comments and “looks” which Amy describes as being directed at her family as a result of her newly visible gender identity emphasises that it is not Amy’s “moral worth or merit” which has altered with her transition, but it is instead the difference in access to resources to describe their family (and so affirm its value and legitimacy) as compared to the heterosexual families at the village school which results in the “pressure” Amy and her wife experience (Sayer, 2005: 948). These inequalities, between heterosexual and queer parents, and between middle-class and working-class parents, can “have a major impact on the possibility of achieving valued ways of life that bring recognition and self-respect” (Sayer, 2005: 948). Further, without resources with which Amy and her wife may narrate their belonging, they are subject to ‘looks’ which “allow certain bodies *into* spaces and renders others *out of place*” (Held and Leach, 2008: 142, emphasis from original). Through these ‘looks’ they are reminded that their family does not fit, is not ‘at home’ in the heterosexual community of families at the school. Generating packages of media inheritance which narrate and legitimise family is not simply a project of futurity; it can also be regarded as a project to secure emotional and social security in the present and achieve parity with the stable and unchallenged narratives of family and inclusion which LGBTQ parents’ heterosexual peers enjoy.

Luke, a trans man, related an experience of geographical isolation complicating the crafting of identity narratives. He was able to negotiate his transition through online groups and resources which were easily accessible and available to him at any time:

My husband at the time...did not want under any circumstances to contact anyone else who was trans...I went online and found a community online to see if there was other people like me etc. but...I found it harder to find people that were older that were coming out...I had no knowledge about trans issues at the time, I didn’t know anybody who knew about trans issues: my GP didn’t know, my psychiatrist didn’t know, my community support workers didn’t know. I was the first one and nobody

knew what to do. I didn't know what to do either...I went on *Press for Change* and was like 'I need to change my name' so I did [what it instructed]; I was kinda going through the list and then telling everybody else what they needed to do. (Luke 2014)

It is important to note that Luke explicitly said that, as his children were in their teens and early twenties when he transitioned, he did not feel he needed to collate resources to support them in understanding who he was as a parent and who they were as a family. Luke's isolation - geographical, medical, and domestic - was directly alleviated by the open access to online resources offered on *Press for Change*. A website and online community transformed Luke's home from a space where his trans identity was expressly prohibited, to a space from which he could communicate and be empowered to change his life. Luke's successful experience of articulating his identity and stabilising his family during his transition through media access and [online] community interaction indicates the degree to which these resources can be vital in validating both identity and alternative iterations of family (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 1999:89).

For the parents discussed here, their home situations and class position had a significant impact on the time or emotional resources they had available to radically reshape or reread media, or lead the production of new resources. They sought clearly signposted representations which could be incorporated into their family narratives without great undertakings of time and energy to recraft and reshape images and narratives to their needs. Geographic and social isolation which increase the pressure to provide a coherent narrative of family legitimacy can therefore be seen to have a significant impact on the value of representations and community resources in the lives of parents like these. Without options, without a broad range of media representations, the tools by which cultural meanings and recognition of family (reported by the parents above as being inadequate for their needs) may be contested, are missing.

The mediated symbolic is not imposed upon us as a space of no escape it is one...we have chosen, one that we choose on a daily basis and one whose choice we have chosen to deny. Choice involves agency. Agency involves the possibility of challenge and refusal. (Silverstone, 2007: 133)

With agency comes refusal and rejection; with rejection comes change and reflexive responses which offer alternatives. Escape from the mediated symbolic is therefore only available through an unpalatable choice of rejection of the partial and unfulfilling media which in turn results in total invisibility, silence and, for parents like Luke and Amy, isolation. Without any media, the vocabulary necessary to describe their identities and lives is inaccessible. The freedom to choose to deny, reject, or challenge the representations for creating family

narrative available in “the mediated symbolic” is, then, a classed one (Taylor, 2009: x; Skeggs, 2005: 974).

Despite having greater cultural capital and access to community resources, middle-class parents and those living in areas with large LGBTQ communities still relied heavily on media to help narrate and locate their families. Silverstone suggests that “we have become dependent on the media for the conduct of everyday life” (2007: 5) and the nature of participants’ community engagement appears to correspond with this evaluation. Joanne, mentioned earlier in this chapter, felt well supported by the community around her in Brighton, but she employed media to help maintain those social links. She reported how *The L Word* had been an important show around which her social life cohered, becoming a central topic of conversation amongst her lesbian and bisexual female friends, and prompting screening parties. More recently, *Orange is the New Black* had prompted Joanne and her partner to subscribe to Netflix in order to participate in their friends’ conversations and maintain their participation in this media-orientated form of socialising. Joanne was one of several women I spoke to who had subscribed to Netflix specifically to gain access to *Orange is the New Black*.

For Mathilde, who lived in the Edinburgh area, watching *Orange is the New Black* did not translate into a social experience shared with friends, as most of their friends were straight. Rather, for Mathilde, it offered a reminder of a wider community of LGBTQ women with whom they shared identification, and gave them a sense, however abstract, of community participation. Participants’ awareness that these texts were significant within lesbian culture “cemented their value in [their] lives and experiences: they were important to [them] as lesbians because they were important to other lesbians” (Liming, 2007: 86). The motivation for both these participants to access *Orange is the New Black* was the same – to participate in a cultural moment – but the wider impact of such participation, i.e. whether it supported or defined participation in a LGBTQ community, was strongly linked to their social location and physical community.

Key media texts, such as *Orange is the New Black* and *The L Word*, came to function as sites of community building. In all interviews the most frequently cited media text in response to the question “can you think of any media which represents families like yours?” was *Modern Family*, coming up in half of all interviews. Anderson argues that community can be united across gulfs of language and space by a shared symbol (2006: 12-13), and the persistence of this single representation in my data suggests *Modern Family* has taken on this symbolic function. Whilst not all participants liked or identified with *Modern Family*’s gay couple,

Mitchell and Cam, they all identified it as a representation speaking about, or relevant to, them. Regardless of its stated inapplicability, this resource was incorporated by many parents into their family identity narratives. The gay homogendered male couple can, therefore, be understood as a key symbol around which community coheres (Anderson, 2006: 12-13), even though, as discussed in the Chapter Five, the majority of participants objected to the frequency with which such couples were represented. How a community comes to be united is clearly not dependent on perfect unity or equality across individual identities, experiences, and needs of the members of that community (Anderson, 2006: 7). Rather, community acts as a foundation stone, allowing parents to access the type of support and resource-sharing which they need.

Sharing key media provided parents with a site around which they could orientate their families. The understanding that these key texts were widely watched and used by other LGBTQ families contributed to a sense of stability and community. As I have shown, these sites of belonging were often not available from heterosexual conceptualisations of family which denied legitimacy and recognition to LGBTQ-parented families. Generational rupture of the narratives and meaning of family left a cultural and social gap for parents. Media representation offered a sense of place for families within the cultural landscape and provided an easily transmitted set of meanings of family for parents to adapt for their family-identity narratives. Simultaneously, media delivered a site which could easily be accessed by a geographically diverse group of parents and, through the knowledge that this media consumption was happening in many homes, helped provide a sense of community (Liming, 2007: 98, see also Aksoy and Robins, 2003). Community offers a sense of social location and helps heal generational rupture by connecting parents to other families, arranged in different ways, and involving people of different ages, all working toward establishing a social and cultural inheritance of mutually legitimated LGBTQ families.

#### Passing-On Media

As I have indicated, there was considerable labour involved in producing family identity narratives and working to resolve generational rupture through various media usage and community engagements. Parents were committed to disguising the emotional elements of this labour from their children and instead presenting solutions for negotiating identity in a landscape of sparse representation. This choice of 'discarding' of bad experience is typical of the way in which family inheritance is crafted (Ahmed, 2006:90). Dylan described how

participation in community at Rainbow Families illuminated to him the need for more media representations of families like his to support his daughter:

She loves going to Rainbow Families, she thinks that's brilliant. So I feel that is something that is missing, she might not know how to express it but I think she feels the lack of...things that are like [her] family and like [her]. (Dylan, 2013)

Dylan presented Morven with routes to alleviate isolation by introducing her to LGBTQ media and LGBTQ community groups. Dylan's own experiences of putting energy and time into finding community through media in order to solidify a personal identity narrative informs his sensitivity to signs of Morven's isolation, even before she is able to articulate it. He then attempts to provide her with the tried and tested tactics he has used to combat such feelings.

Rose described representations of families like hers as useful to her daughters; "my children are really into stories and being read to. *That's how they locate themselves in the world*" (2013, emphasis added). Rose suggested that identifying and collating books which were useful to her children's production of narratives of themselves, and their family, was vital in the education and upbringing of her children. Like Dylan above, her route to understanding the value of media was circuitous. She discovered books about children "with two mummies" as a result of being able to access other media "I think we got...them via Stonewall, and *Diva* actually" (Rose, 2013). What Rose's route to children's books demonstrates is the way in which media impact is cumulative; without access to the Stonewall website and *Diva* magazine, she would not have been able to identify and access books which help her children 'locate themselves'. Media inheritance takes the form of not only of curating a library of representations, but also promoting understanding of the various engagements (the social practices [Driver, 2007: 3]) needed to craft such a collection.

Parents are not simply passing on closed media texts. In Chapters Three and Four I identified resistant reading techniques as a way in which parents [re]negotiated media which excluded them. In the following discussion, I explore queer reading as part of the work of crafting and repairing inheritances. Media was frequently used as a way to begin conversations in families. Speaking about *Modern Family* and the multiple interactions he, his children, and his co-parents have with it, Darren said:

When it comes to sitcoms like *Modern Family* or romcoms or those sort of things...there tends to be quite an open dialogue about some of the relational, sexual dynamics that are going on. I quite like that, it seems like a good way of opening up conversations with the kids...I like watching stuff together and talking about it...they get a lot of their ideas from that, they'll talk about things being sexist...I suppose what

I'm saying is the media and films and TV are important points of engagement for me with the kids and for all of, all four of us. (Darren, 2013)

It is important to note the pleasure which Darren takes in sharing these discussions and insights into his children's perceptions of their family. The joy of being able to share stories and images, relate them to one's own family, and expand on these with dialogue was something many parents spoke about. Dylan related his daughter's excitement when a magazine about LGBTQ families arrived:

She was so excited when *We Are Family* came through the door, she was like 'what's that?' I was like 'it's a magazine' she was like 'oh good, a magazine' I was like 'look! This person has two Mums' she was like 'Oh! It's a person like me!' I'm like 'not quite, but sort of.' (Dylan, 2013)

Morven's enthusiasm underlined Dylan's sense that Morven had been searching for "things that are like [our] family" and in being able to address this need so conclusively, media engagement itself becomes a source of pleasure for both Dylan (in addressing his daughter's needs) and Morven. Even in the moment of successful engagement, Dylan continues to prompt Morven to critically respond to the images she sees; "I'm like, 'not quite [like you]'". Darren and Dylan's questioning and prompting of their children describes a process by which cultural capital is transmitted, or inherited, "by the encouragement of reasoning" (Thompson, 1993: 20). Shared consumption of media allows an opportunity for this "encouragement". This pleasure in shared consumption is reiterated as Darren receives reassurance that his children's values and critical faculties are responding to and developing alongside his own, whilst Dylan takes pleasure in Morven's growing confidence in locating herself within culture.

Attempts to transmit cultural capital not only happened through crafting an inheritance of critical reasoning, but also by inducting children into 'good taste'. Jelena and Hannah spoke about what they hoped the media they offered their children would generate:

Hannah: Just trying to widen their cultural interests, trying to take them to galleries and things like that...There's a responsibility around those things, being aware of [messages] in the toys, the kind of games.

Jelena: I think because we both enjoy good films, to our taste, and good books...

Hannah: Always trying to broaden [their taste].

...

Jelena: Well, introducing them to, as I said, to good taste. I'd like to put it that way, from food – we introduce their little parties, not parties at McDonalds, by introducing and teaching them and developing their taste in good food, and good music and good,

the clothes. They have their freedom and personality but for them to know that's nice and that's not – what's appropriate.

Hannah: Certainly that [is an] educational responsibility of being a parent.

(Hannah and Jelena, 2013)

Hannah and Jelena's comments hint at a variety of classed cultural judgements and again indicate the complexities of understanding how media inheritance is crafted by LGBTQ parents. In particular, they express a sense of responsibility to educate and direct their children's taste. [Lack of] respectability, which can be signalled through taste, is "one of the key mechanisms by which some groups are 'othered' and pathologized" (Skeggs, 1997: 1). By attempting to educate their daughters in how to locate themselves as respectable, Jelena and Hannah labour to inoculate their daughters against being othered.

Additionally, Jelena and Hannah's concern that their daughters develop good or 'nice' taste may be indicative of their desire to give them the tools to avoid or negotiate any opposition to the 'legitimacy' of their family and so represent a type of inheritance concerned with stabilising and guaranteeing their family identity. By directing this taste-making through strategic engagement with media, and educating their daughters on how to form judgements on the worthiness, or tastefulness of an object or action they induct them into the "mechanism for attributing value to the middle-class self" (Skeggs, 2005: 977) and "ensure advantage is passed down through the generations" (Taylor, 2009:40).

Skeggs suggests that whilst "an event can produce explanations of identity, the mundane reiterative everyday experiences of living, degradation and negative value positioning often cannot" (1997:167). In this respect, then, simply educating children in how to practice negative value positioning is not sufficient to fully realise a stable identity narrative. I propose that parents generate 'events' to contribute to their children's explanations of identity and these events are sometimes framed around media engagement. For Darren, these events were conversations with his children, enabled by *Modern Family*:

We've talked a lot about stereotypes. We all find Cameron, one of the gay characters, really annoying. The kids don't like their [Mitchell and Cameron's] relationship particularly. They find it, they talk about it being quite manipulative and argumentative and much more enjoy Phil and Claire's relationship but they don't seem to be judging that in terms of sexuality, it's just how they're responding to it. They've identified characters in the programme with each of us, so they say their Mum's a bit like Claire and I'm a bit like Phil and, you know, they clearly relate in some ways to it. (Darren, 2013)

As *Modern Family* becomes a part of the narrative of Darren's family, its meanings and representation come to function as part of the "symbolic coinage of exchange between the generations" (Thompson, 1993: 36, see also Skeggs, 2005: 969). Darren's selection of this media is informed by its representation of non-heterosexual family, but his mild surprise that it is not sexuality and gender which dominates how his children categorise relationships indicates that whilst the stories and images which constitute this part of the family narrative are fixed, their meanings diverge across the generations and for each family member. The flexibility of these images corresponds with Thompson's suggestion that "most families offer not just a single tradition but a choice of models" (1993: 33); the multiple interpretations of media which are possible facilitate the presentation of multiple-models for inheritance. Imperfect generational transmission is the source for imagining alternative possibilities and provides a more flexible family narrative.

Whilst I prompted participants to think beyond 'traditional' print and broadcast media during interviews, parents primarily referred to broadcast media (including media available on streaming services such as Netflix) and print media (specifically, that produced by media industries) as what they used to start conversations with their children and where they drew images from to incorporate into narratives of family. Even those parents who reported engaging with online media used it in isolation from their children and families as a resource to solidify or expand their individual identity narratives. Barnet suggests this difference in how people use traditional versus online media is a consequence of the types of interaction it facilitates; "the wired world doesn't promote meditation...using [online] media is more like channel surfing than reading" (2001: 217). Whilst this analysis comes before the shift to a more conversational use of online and social media, there remains a different weight or significance associated with broadcast media and media produced by media industries. Silverstone argues that media industries retain (in the new media landscape) authority in making subjects known and providing audiences with cultural knowledge (2007, 97-116). Conversely, social media, blogs, and other online subcultural media is viewed as a community project which, whilst it carries 'authenticity' in representing LGBTQ lives, lacks the cultural significance and authority to determine meaning or direct dominant discourses. Certainly, in my interviews, it was the capacity of media texts to be enjoyed simultaneously by a family, and used as a route to craft collaborative narratives and prompt discussion, which parents valued. Silverstone says broadcast media promotes a sense in audiences of being part of a "national culture and [feeling of] mutual connectedness" whilst the internet facilitates "increasing individualism and...global dispersal" (2007: 115). The isolating, individualising nature of



reading material online and the evaluation that it lacks power to interject into dominant discourse, does not mesh well with the interactions parents seek to have with their children through media. This is further evidenced by the preference participants appeared to show for American-made television shows (*The L Word*, *Modern Family*, *Orange is the New Black*) which were understood to circulate meanings and images internationally. Participants were enthusiastic to list American-made television which spanned a decade or more as significant for them and their families, but were reluctant to place the same value on British-made television. Participants variously dismissed *Lip Service*, *Queer as Folk*, and *Sugar Rush* as too old, or too obscure, or both. This suggests that there was a different sense of permanence and security associated with American-made television; something which was guaranteed by its higher production costs, and the show's self-evident global reach – things which Brunsdon suggests are presumed to assure higher quality (1997: 143). Further, access to these shows came through subscription (Netflix) or Sky channels, rather than terrestrial UK channels. Brunsdon suggests that subscription to such television channels “signals a desire, a connection with something that these dishes are understood to mean, or connote, or promise” (1997: 152). Participants have, therefore, already [literally] subscribed to the idea that television shows which are broadcast through subscription channels offer something *more*; their reception and valuing of these shows as more significant in circulating meanings and legitimation for LGBTQ lives may be strongly tied to the way in which they are accessed.

Connection to these international media sources offered families the opportunity to locate themselves in global discourses of family legitimacy and LGBTQ identity (see also Anderson on how shared access to a single text across cultures generates a sense of global community, 2006: 37-43). There is value attached to outward-looking broadcast media stemming from the perception that as the overall audience engagement is much broader, the possibility for recognition (and so legitimation) of families is higher (Sayer, 2005: 960, Silverstone, 2007: 116-118). There is a sense in participant's preference for them that these media texts will endure, and continue to offer relevant points of identification for their children in a way in which British shows, with their more limited reach and lower cultural value may not.

Breshears describes family identity as being:

created and maintained through discourse [which] creates meaning out of actions, instructing family members' thoughts and reactions to related aspects of daily life. (2010: 80)

As I have shown, this discourse and meaning-making can include responding to “social messages of homosexuality as unacceptable” (Breshears, 2010: 80) and exploring new way to

talk about family identity. In response to experiencing generational rupture, parents examine their various skills and knowledges in order to identify techniques which may help them produce discursive and stable family narratives. I propose that whilst using media to help constitute the self is a widespread practice, LGBTQ parents approach it differently to their heterosexual peers.

Parents employ skills honed as queer youths in a heteronormative culture (Driver, 2007; Liming, 2007) to reclaim and repurpose the content of representations. Parents' knowledge of the potential of queer reading to [re]locate them in a heterosexist culture, which denies legitimacy and self-knowledge to queer subjects, is levered on the problem of generational dislocation and deployed as a strategy which can be used jointly by the family as they participate in meaning-making and building an inheritance structured by media. Critical queer reading practices are offered as the primary method to engage with media. Queer reading is a fundamental part of the use of media in these families, no longer merely a practice where media is plundered for images to realise queer identity (Liming, 2007) or enable queer erotic fantasies surreptitiously practiced "in the unsuspecting midst of family life" (Medhurst, 1994: 240). It is now part of how family life is constructed. As I have highlighted throughout this chapter and this thesis, media responses do not "stand outside personal and cultural histories; [queer reception] is part of the articulation of these histories" (Doty, 1993: 15, see also Morley, 1980: 171). Much writing on queer reading (Doty, 1993; Innes, 1997; Kennard, 1986; Liming, 2007) proposes that these critical responses emerge as an act of self-preservation in a heterosexist culture where individuals search for spaces to read themselves into mainstream media. They also suggest this reading is a largely private process: "We watch collectively but we always watch alone" (Medhurst, 1994: 238). The practices of queer reading by LGBTQ parents which I recorded moved past these conceptualisations: it was about generating communality and passing on the *skills* of queer reading to children who may or may not come to identify with queer subjectivities.

The meanings and representations found in mainstream media help families model 'normalcy' (Breshears, 2010: 86-87) and [re]locate their families within traditions of validated family-meaning, even when this narrative might be challenged by their families of origin, or society more generally. It is significant also that this modelling happened within the *everyday* life of the family; I argue this everyday practice offers resistance to the "blithe, mundane, everyday arrogance through which heterosexual culture presumes its universality" in media (Medhurst, 1994: 242). Passing-on the skills of critical queer reading was part of the everyday maintenance and production of queer family as a formation distinct from heterosexual family;

repeating and reinforcing these critical responses is an integral part of what these families mean. LGBTQ-headed families are reflexive, participatory, and continuously created and stabilised through discursive practices. This is in contrast to traditional heterosexual families which, although still involving reflexive narrative practices, draw on a much narrower range of meanings and sources, and can comfortably be legitimated through pre-established discourses.

Weston argues that “gay kinship ideologies have used common categories to generate uncommon meanings” (1995: 106). Whilst this is still true of the families I spoke to (evidenced in particular in the negotiations of the language of family) I propose parents are also using uncommon meanings, the queer[ly read] meanings found in mainstream texts, to secure their legitimate place with common categories of ‘family’. Parents offer their children a foundation of media on which to build narratives, providing them with a base which takes them a ‘step up’ from their parents who founded their families without such a comprehensive vocabulary of representations and have spent years accumulating both those resources and the skills to discover them. Parents are primarily concerned to offer a starting point for discussion rather than a fully-formed, stable narrative, they provide an imperfect or unfinished inheritance which offers space for different iterations of family.

### The Neoliberal Turn?

As I have already shown, assembling media and crafting family narratives was not just work which parents did for themselves and their children. They linked these practices to negotiating intelligibility in a heteronormative world, and described these narratives as useful in responding to people, external to their families, who questioned or outright rejected the legitimacy of their family arrangement. How far do the processes of producing family-identity narratives represent conformity to neoliberal demands? Hay suggests that:

individuals have always interacted with television or radio. And that interaction has always been a part of their everyday lives, their organization of their household as a form of self-governing, and their connectedness and sense of connectedness to other spheres of sociality. So in that sense, interactivity is a condition and technique of self-governing societies. (2000: 60)

Certainly, there is a suggestion here that using media in identity-narratives is an inherently neoliberal undertaking. As I set out in the introduction to this chapter, society, state institutions, and wider family all place demands on LGBTQ parents to produce narratives of themselves and offer a fully-formed self before they can expect to be recognised. Stuart Hall discusses the evolution of neoliberal ideology in British politics, he says that as the state is ‘cut’

(i.e. as state services and benefits are ended or restricted), the arena in which minorities “can find a voice, allies, social as well as material support – sites in which they and their concerns can be recognised” is drastically constricted (2011: 719). Hall argues the knock on effect is a reduction in “the resources society collectively allocates to children, [a move from] making children a shared responsibility...to the [reduction of a] general ‘labour of care and love’” (2011, 719-720). Skeggs also writes about how the sense of responsibility for producing coherent narratives of self and identity has moved from society to the individual, concluding that:

If [individuals] do not have access to the range of narratives and discourse for the production of the ethical self they may be held responsible for choosing badly, an irresponsible production of themselves. (2005: 973)

Certainly in the preceding analysis there is evidence that LGBTQ parents’ anxieties about being cast as bad subjects drives their multiple media engagements and prompts the production of culturally situated identity-narratives. But how far were parents willing to conform to neoliberal demands they assume all responsibility for producing themselves? In the interactions with state institutions which participants reported, there was an emerging resistance to neoliberal imperatives which I want to look at now.

Schools were one particular site where distribution and availability of media depicting LGBTQ families was an issue for LGBTQ parents. Despite being abolished in 2003, Section 28 (which banned local authorities from “promoting” homosexuality and “pretend family relationships” [*Local Government Act 1988*: section 28]) has had a long lasting impact on the content of school libraries and the willingness of state schools to provide material which illustrates non-heterosexual family arrangements (see Morris, 2013). Many parents spoke to me about their attempts to push their children’s school to redress this issue and include more books depicting families like theirs. Some parents, including Emma, bought and donated books to their children’s schools and nurseries in order to ensure their resources were more diverse. Several parents said that upon asking schools to improve the diversity of families represented in the classroom they were invited to go in and speak to the class or whole school about their family (Hannah and Jelena, Emily and Isabel). Most parents accepted as natural that the responsibility for ensuring families like theirs were represented in schools, fell to them. In a neoliberal society, individuals are expected to be “agents of their own success” (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008: 227) and the expectation was that LGBTQ parents should work to resolve the representational inequality they pointed out in schools, is indicative of the way in which neoliberal discourses shape the experiences and visibility of non-dominant groups.

Joanne and her partner decided to create a book which narrated the story of their journey to parenthood. Joanne reported how using this book became central in the way they introduced their family to external agencies, such as Molly's nursery:

we sent it to the nursery the first time [Molly] went to nursery because it gives the nursery an idea of how we are talking about [our family] so it's not just about telling her, but about telling the people around her ...at the nursery we're at we were very kind of wanting to do the right thing but not really knowing how to do, so this gives, kind of educates them really about how to, how we want her parenting to be talked about and that it's perfectly fine that she has a donor and it's not a secret and that kind of thing. (Joanne, 2013)

The requirement that LGBTQ people do the work to make themselves intelligible is clearly felt by Joanne, describing her efforts to "educate" people caring for her daughter as "the right thing" to do; providing family narrative is transformed into a moral imperative.

Some parents actively rejected the invitation to increase the distribution of media which depicts families like theirs. I asked Sam and Ian, adoptive parents to two children, if they had asked their village school to purchase more books depicting families like theirs. Ian explained that they had not, despite being invited by the school to contribute books to the library:

I wouldn't have pushed the point about putting books into the school because I'd rather people work it out for themselves rather than inflame a situation by putting a book in with a same-sex couple which the one person who might object would then have a reason to make a focus to their objection, if that makes sense. Whereas they're the silent minority if they do have a problem with us, so we haven't approached [the school to put more books in the library], at all. (Sam and Ian, 2014)

Sam and Ian did not seek a radical restructuring of society to better accommodate or validate families like theirs, they sought instead to avoid generating sites on which hostility could be focused. They identified children's books in state schools as one such 'touch paper' issue. Sam and Ian's refusal to fulfil the school's request, which would place responsibility for inflaming the situation with them and not the school, can be understood as a push back against neoliberalism. Further, Sam and Ian were keen to establish stability in their family life as both their children suffered traumatic starts in life. Avoiding further disruption to their children's lives by deprioritising visibility was one tactic they believed would help achieve this

Jelena and Hannah reported their response to their daughter's school asking them to act as representatives of non-heterosexual families:

Her teacher last year said would we be happy to come and say something about our family so I asked Lexi 'what would you think about that?' and she said 'no.' which was

a good sort of test, I don't think I realised that was how she would feel about it, I don't think she hides anything. (Hannah, 2013)

Like Sam and Ian above, the disruption to the child's well-being and 'normalcy' is referenced as the key factor in deciding whether or not to make family arrangements, and the attendant narratives, publicly visible. It is striking, however, that there appears to be an emerging theme of schools seeking to address their representational gaps, not through organisational change or investment in new, more diverse resources, but through informal and ad hoc arrangements with parents whose families differ from the dominant form. This type of institutional pressure for LGBTQ parents to produce family narratives which are both coherent and easily translatable illustrates a fundamental inequality between them and their heterosexual counterparts upon whom no such demands for self-definition and representation are made. Whilst LGBTQ parents are asked to take on responsibility for providing diverse family representations (that is, asked to perform their duty as good neoliberal citizens) the opportunity for institutional validation of LGBTQ-headed families is frustrated. Creating a state-authorised inheritance of equally-validated families, through the provision of media in schools, falls heavily on the shoulders of LGBTQ parents.

The state, through the institution of school, enforces the neoliberal demand for specific individuals to produce themselves; subjects are expected to do this without intervention from the state, and without state-sponsored arenas for dialogue on alternative identity narratives. This generates additional pressures for LGBTQ parents when negotiating their productions of identity narratives and leaves them navigating a choice between institutional invisibility and the attendant frustrated validation, or compliance with the very same operations of state power which have rendered them invisible and divorced from control of representational meaning, to begin with. Parents who share Sam and Ian's discomfort and unwillingness to present their family narrative for public consumption, or hold themselves up as a representative of LGBTQ-parented families, are producing an inheritance for their children which emphasises identity as a private process, and which suggests that drawing clear distinctions between public and private – and refusing to make oneself publicly intelligible – can constitute an act of resistance.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have shown how negotiations of media are a key element of the work LGBTQ parents do in response to experiences of generational rupture. This generational rupture frequently prompts, or is indicated by, emotionally fraught interactions between families of

origin and LGBTQ parents, and between children navigating cultural invisibility and unintelligibility of their family, and their parents. Parents respond to this rupture, and the cultural lack of models for making family as LGBTQ people, by turning to media and community. Shared consumption of key media allows parents to locate themselves and their families within global communities and generate, from this, a sense of connection to a different type of inheritance: one of queer community and resistance to established family narratives. Experiences of connectedness, facilitated through media consumption, are particularly significant for LGBTQ parents who are geographically isolated. Media offered consolation, support, and connection for these parents. However, as I have shown, access to media was differently distributed according to the class position of parents. Generational rupture and the mending and producing of inheritances is therefore differently experienced and generates different pressures for parents who are already socially, culturally, or economically disadvantaged.

Throughout this chapter, I have shown how dominant discourses of family-meaning and the production of family continually attempt to reassert themselves within the homes and imaginaries of LGBTQ families. Parents negotiated these insistent narratives of heterosexual family legitimacy and LGBTQ transgression by introducing everyday queer media practices. Critical queer reading and careful curation and circulation of media contributed to family practices of collaborative meaning-making which valued queer critique, promoted the transmission of cultural capital, and sought to provide children with tactics to navigate a complex, media saturated, heterosexist, culture.

Making identity through and in media is a complex process of internalised, private evaluation and sorting, and a public speaking and presentation of self (Driver, 2007: 2). Parents variously conformed to and resisted neoliberal demands they produce comprehensible, coherent narratives of themselves. Whilst parents do work to produce narratives of their identities and broadly conduct this work in private spaces, there were specific arenas in which parents publicly shared their identity work: offering inheritances of LGBTQ family legitimacy and place. Parents spoke about sharing their knowledges and narratives with community organisations, such as Rainbow Families and online resources, and crafted media repositories which could be shared and reinterpreted by other parents and those parents who may come after them. Indeed, the parents I spoke to were all enthusiastic to identify specific interventions they either contributed to now, or hoped to support in future, which could deliver an inheritance of more diverse representation for future LGBTQ parents and circumvent a repeat of their struggles for legitimacy and search for media material. These future-interventions were

variously identified as; development of NCT classes to better meet the needs of non-heterosexual parents, expanding parenting and childbirth literature to explicitly include LGBTQ parents, fully-formed and explicitly indicated representations of alternative and diverse family forms available through mainstream broadcast channels, and a strategy for community based models of support for new parents. Looking wider still, participants called for representations of straight grandparents relating to their LGBTQ children's children, and additional training for healthcare professionals on supporting LGBTQ parents. Inheritance is, then, both a personal and social project.

There is a fundamental tension at the heart of all identity work which LGBTQ parents do. Their sense of dislocation and rupture stems from an evaluation of their difference from the heterosexual family and experiences of hostilities and conflict stemming from their [supposedly] transgressive use of the language of family. Whilst a sense of dislocation is negotiated through the crafting of community ties and inheritances, and queered uses of media, parents' comments indicate they still seek validation in mainstream media, associating visibility with access to cultural intelligibility and a legitimated place in the discourse of family. In this chapter, I have argued that the various work which parents do to evaluate, hierarchize, and locate themselves in and through media, all contribute to the overriding work they do to produce a lasting inheritance of flexible family-meaning. Parents, like all social subjects, seek to negotiate a space in the cultural imaginary for different articulations of family and individual identity. Whilst in some respects this means the *conventionalisation* of LGBTQ families through the availability and wide distribution of queer family narratives, it does not mean a striving for assimilation or depoliticisation (Clarkson, 2011: 337). By passing-on techniques of queer critical reading and cultural capital needed to negotiate positions of power in society, LGBTQ parents strive to produce inheritances of disruptive practice and to elaborate tactics which may allow their children to interject into dominant social discourse. Parents offer inheritances of cultural and social location and connectedness, and model routes to making identity which rely on flexible, reflexive narratives rather than static categories of meaning which cause generational rupture in response to difference. Further, parents engage in practices of community which build new meanings of inheritance that do not rely solely on inter-generational transmission between individuals within single families. By imagining themselves in communities through media, and by sharing media and narratives within community organisations, inheritances are disentangled from notions of unidirectional flow and generational coherence to become reflexive, collective productions which respond to both changing individual, and collective, needs.



## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

#### Summary of Findings

This thesis sought to explore the experiences of LGBTQ parents as they craft families and family narratives with media in culture. In the introduction, I identified a gap in existing literature where the experiences of lesbian and gay parents were considered in isolation from the experiences of bisexual, trans and queer parents. I further argued that existing theorisations of LGBTQ lives offered in queer theory relied on a binary evaluation of queer/not queer enough, radical/normative, disruptive/assimilated and stated there was an urgent need to connect these claims to the lived experiences of LGBTQ parents. Finally, I sought to centre the role of media and cultural representation in constituting identity in the study of the everyday lives of LGBTQ parents.

In this thesis, with reference to the reported experiences of LGBTQ parents, I have shown that media is fundamental in the negotiation of family identities and significantly shapes the possibilities for imagining and articulating resistant or alternative modes of constructing intimate and domestic lives. I have shown that whilst representation is key in the circulation and reproduction of family norms, LGBTQ parents are able to make choices outside these authorised forms. Contrary to the provocations of Duggan (2002) and Edelman (2004), LGBTQ parents find space within dominant scripts of family to produce alternative meanings, articulate resistance, and choose to strategically reproduce only norms relating to intimate lives and relationality. Rather than entirely dominating the way in which individuals construct their intimate lives, media offers a framework which parents used to circulate different narratives and promote queer[ed] family-meanings. The parents I spoke with indicated a sophisticated understanding of how media constructs social knowledge. I demonstrated how, through everyday practices of resistant queer reading and media [dis]engagements, they were able to negotiate their location in the social world and participate in the production and circulation of cultural meanings.

In Chapter Three, I revealed how media representations reproduce binaries of straight/gay and knowable/unintelligible. This was at odds with the lived experiences of LGBTQ people who articulated complex, multiple identities which they sought to make visible at different times. I indicated that there was a lack of cultural scripts by which non-heterosexual identities could become visible as queer, given the dominance of images of parents as monogamous and monosexual. Similarly, in Chapter Four I indicated that the ideological dominance of a single

image representing the meaning and practice of activism, and the discursive separation of the domestic from the radical in theorisations of queerness, restricted the possibility for LGBTQ parents to become visible as occupying critically resistant positions. Further, I argued that dominant discourses of what constitutes queer subjectivity denied the significance of alternative [domestic] articulations of radical activist practice. In both cases, LGBTQ parents experienced anxiety and a sense of dislocation for ‘failing’ to be properly queer or properly radical.

Anxiety and dislocation as a product of media and cultural invisibility, or as a result of the lack of scripts for achieving recognition and validation, was a key finding. In Chapter Five and Six I showed how the contemporary conditions of representation in mainstream media generated a range of responses and engagements from LGBTQ parents. Turning on the types of representation of parents and LGBTQ people available, participants pointed to hierarchies of legitimacy and desirability encoded in media representations which excluded some, even as it appeared to validate and include other LGBTQ subjectivities. In the Chapter Six, I outlined how LGBTQ people’s families of origin frequently reproduced normalising discourses and attempted to regulate the meaning of family through close control of the use of the language of family. In both cases, participants experienced these refusals of their family validity and intelligibility as a cultural dislocation and erasure. As I have indicated, media plays a significant role in generating *and addressing* the experiences of anxiety, dislocation, cultural unintelligibility (or “symbolic annihilation” [Gross, 1994: 143]). Producing culturally-located identities was more challenging for LGBTQ parents than their heterosexual peers whose family-organisations are more readily recognised and widely validated. For this reason, media representation plays a key role in the lives of LGBTQ people as they sought to negotiate refusals and denials of the legitimacy of their families. Living in a media-saturated culture means the choice to step outside of representation, and constitute oneself apart from the regimes of meaning and authorisation offered in media is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. The parents I spoke with did not respond to the various problems and anxieties prompted by the contemporary media landscape by ‘escaping’ representation. As I illustrated, parents employed a range of methods in order to renegotiate media and *bend* cultural imperatives of [good] subjecthood to better suit and support their chosen productions of family.

In Chapter Three I spoke about how parents worked to negotiate room within discourses of queerness for articulations of their non-monosexual identities. They refused imperatives that they fit the binary of either heterosexual or homosexual offered in representation. Through critical and negotiated reading techniques parents worked to find spaces in mainstream texts

which could acknowledge non-binary sexual identities. There were problems with this tactic of finding points of identification through discursive practices, as parents felt they had to continually 'speak' their identities in order to be seen in a culture which presumes monosexuality. However, parents also revalued the space of unintelligibility and invisibility. Thinking critically about what expressions of identity and family structure [in]visibility permitted, some participants suggested they found queer possibility in appearing to conform to norms of family making. Participants indicated similar resistance to imperatives they occupy certain subjectivities in specific ways in Chapter Four. I argued that parents offered dual narratives of their families as they rejected the suggestion they were producing families undifferentiated from heterosexual structures, but refused to characterise their domestically-situated articulations of radicalism and resistance as queer-failure (as the conceptualisation offered in the anti-social thesis, and the prevailing discourses of what constitutes activism, insist). Drawing together both of these strands I argue that labelling of structures, people, or practices as 'normative' is problematic as it erases the critical thought and conscious [dis]engagements with norms which individuals and families take. Parents use media to support cautious, emerging narratives of their choices as socially and culturally significant. This work, taken on as part of the production of family narrative-making, is significant. It locates the family at the heart of the ongoing debates about what queerness can be and how it can be lived. Equally, it indicates the flexibility of the institution of family to being queered, to being critically inhabited, and to being resignified according to the ideologies and needs of its members. These findings are only possible with the rigorous focus I offer on the everyday lives and negotiations which LGBTQ parents make. In this way, I submit that my research offers a significant critique of producing theorisations of queer lives without reference to the diverse lived experiences of LGBTQ people. I argue that it is only through situated, reflexive study of queer lives which prioritises the reported experiences of LGBTQ people that it is possible to develop proposals of, or maps for, resistant queer praxis which can be enacted in everyday lives.

Whilst flexibility was key in the responses and the production of family-narratives which parents reported, I have also shown that there are a number of significant factors which inhibit LGBTQ family-making being a process of infinite flexibility or possibility. In Chapter Five, I pointed to the different pressures on, and different cultural capital possessed by, LGBTQ parents. Specifically, I argue the freedom to reject participation in the cultural production and circulation of hierarchies by which validation is bestowed on preferred subjects, is dependent on the location of parents in the social order and their sense of security or stability. The

majority of parents I spoke with responded to the hierarchies of acceptability and desirability, by which LGBTQ parents were represented, by imposing their own hierarchies of value on media. LGBTQ parents negotiate media at the intersection of multiple hierarchies, some of which are encoded in representations, and some of which circulate amongst, and are imposed by, audiences. Nonetheless, the sense that they were free to reject, critique and discursively distance themselves from specific representations contributed to parents' sense that they had agency over making their family-meaning and could actively participate in producing their cultural location. In this respect, I provide an indication of how persistent focus on the interactions between media content and audiences allows new conclusions and understandings to be made about media's central role in constituting identity. I show that making identities with and through media is a process of multiple reflections where audience agency interacts with media power to control and dictate representations, in complex ways.

Participants I spoke with reported sophisticated negotiations of identity and family-organisation: they made informed choices for strategic assimilation alongside conscious acts of resistance to family and social norms. Media was used flexibly to facilitate these new narratives of family and support stabilisation of family through its validation and recognition in media. Representations of family, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual, were critically dealt with by LGBTQ parents and variously rejected, resignified, and incorporated into the private and public narratives of family which participants produced. As I illustrated across all the chapters, parents resisted many competing demands from media, cultural, and social networks in their production of family narratives. In the Chapter Five and Three I highlighted the ambivalence which parents had about becoming visible (and therefore culturally intelligible). This was further evidenced through refusals, detailed in Chapter Six, which some parents reported in response to demands from state institutions that they make themselves intelligible through mediated, culturally located narratives of identity. Similarly, whilst parents express anxiety about their distance from an idealised queer citizen in Chapter Four, they were enthusiastic to build narratives which offered equal valuing for different types of activist engagement, and which indicated ways to recognise a range of resistant practices. I argue this range of actions and responses to media and discourse are evidence that LGBTQ parents produce new narratives of the meaning of radicalism and offer models for incorporating family into radical practice.

Parents did not passively accept the roles or life-courses made available to them through discourse. They explicitly noted the following outcomes of the circulation of dominant discourses on family: inequalities in how lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer people are

differently represented in media; noting the different ways in which meanings and knowledge circulate through and because of media; and the anxieties which result from negotiating interpersonal relationships with heterosexual extended family, or heterosexual society generally. In Chapter Six I showed how the cumulative effect of the above prompted parents to invest their emotional energy in crafting cultural and social inheritances which offer alternative scripts and which model different ways of living together. As a result of various dislocations, the sense of being unaddressed or invisible, and an experience of being positioned outside dominant discourse, LGBTQ parents invested all the more in using and negotiating media material. Media's everyday context provided an ideal location for parents to search for different cultural meanings. Further, the culturally significant role of mass media in contemporary society, and its international distribution, meant it provided an ideal site on which alternative family arrangements could be anchored through narrative.

### Limitations

Whilst the conclusions of this work indicate it is not conformity to normative family models or similarity to dominant representations which produces a depoliticised subjectivity, by drawing only on the experiences of LGBTQ people this risks reproducing some of the assumptions of the work I critique in the introduction, by implicitly suggesting LGBTQ identity, alone, holds the potential for a radical subject position. Whilst this work does not engage with the family-making practices or responses to media representation which come from heterosexual parents, my work does provide a clear foundation for this needed line of investigation to build upon.

As noted in Chapter Two, this research is drawn from a racially homogenous and predominately middle-class sample of parents. It is not possible to draw conclusions about the way in which individuals who suffer intersections of marginalisation and representational invisibility which are not represented in this sample, resource and stabilise their families. However, my conclusions do hint at increased pressure in producing family and parent narratives for individuals with lower social, cultural and economic capital which suggests the experiences of parents from more diverse backgrounds may differ significantly. As such, further work which engages non-middle-class parents, and parents from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds would be valuable in developing our understanding of the role cultural representation plays in family-making.

Similarly, LGBTQ people who parent are a rapidly expanding demographic; this work is a snapshot of a small group of LGBTQ parents who became parents at various times in the last

25 years. As such, it lacks the scope to reflect on how media representation has *changed* the experience of making families visible in this period. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer suggestions for what the future holds for family intelligibility, visibility and potentiality. Continuing to investigate and report on the experiences of new LGBTQ parents in the coming years will help to more fully explore the evolving meanings of family and the changing significance of media representation to a group who are increasingly protected by law and visible in mainstream society.

### Implications

There are a number of approaches for theorising the lives of LGBTQ parents in academic work which can be made as a result of the findings of this thesis. Firstly, my work points to the importance of acknowledging trans, bisexual and queer parents in research on non-heterosexual lives as these subjectivities experience heteronormative imperatives differently, and are differently placed in the social order than gay and lesbian parents. These different experiences are no more or less important than the experiences currently represented in scholarship on this topic. But as I have shown, they are instructive when considering the way representation facilitates different family possibility and when reflecting on the management of insider/outsider borders as lesbian and gay subjectivities are increasingly legitimated by mainstream media.

Secondly, the experiences of participants and their critical reflection on their lives and family-ordering choices indicate that it is vital to ask *why* individuals are apparently reproducing or conforming to institutions. As I have found, the conditions and possibilities for dissidence and resistance are differently afforded at different times; reproducing apparently assimilative structures can be strategically used to shield families from scrutiny and generate space for more radical narratives. Conformity can also shield and provide stability for subjects whose lives and choices may have been problematized and destabilised in other ways; offering a solid foundation from which resistance to various imperatives can be explored. This suggests a rich vein of resistance and critical responses to family and other institutions which could be explored in future research. I propose that broadening the scope of future projects to engage with heterosexual parents could provide an interesting way to consider the meaning of assimilation, family, and queer resistance.

Outside the academy, the findings of my research are suggestive of changes which would aid the construction and maintenance of non-heterosexual lives and families. Firstly, the responses of participants to representations indicates that media not only contributes to the

ordering of everyday life (Silverstone, 2007) but is central in [dis]allowing the production of alternative or resistant life courses and social organisation. Media which offers diverse representations of social groups, and represents these various subjectivities as equally valuable and legitimate, are urgently needed. Such representations facilitate LGBTQ people to speak their experiences and families, and provide a foundation on which narratives of location and connection can be built, providing families with a sense of place. As I illustrated in the Chapter Five, the genre and social context in which these wished-for additional representations appear is significant; my research indicates that diverse representations would only be significant to the lived experiences of LGBTQ parents if they emerged in diverse contexts; from reality to drama, comedy to documentary.

Secondly, the various degrees to which community figured in maintaining and imagining families indicates that well-resourced and easily accessed community groups are needed across the country. The commitment participants indicated they had toward enabling other LGBTQ people to become parents by sharing resources and experience indicates that such community organisations need only provide a physical space or point of contact and the exchange of information and support would quickly become self-sustaining.

Institutional changes are also needed; participants consistently identified their interactions with health bodies including the NCT, midwives, fertility clinics, and state institutions such as schools, as generating significant stress and demanding great emotional labour to navigate. A national programme by which books and learning resources featuring diverse families could be distributed to primary schools would relieve the pressure on LGBTQ parents to be the agents of their own representational inclusion. Updated informational material which explicitly includes trans men and gender non-conforming women in pregnancy literature and acknowledges non-heterosexual, non-monogamous parenting arrangements, as well as training for health practitioners on how to be inclusive of non-heterosexual parents in their work, would have a significant impact on the ease with which LGBTQ people could become parents, remain supported through pregnancies and birth, and access information on parenting.

These various recommendations, if taken up, would help to stabilise and support LGBTQ parents in forming families, reducing the individualised pressures which now exist and absorb significant emotional resources of parents.

### Concluding Points

In the final months of this thesis I enlisted friends to offer feedback on my drafts, the majority were heterosexual and many were parents. In addition to offering comments on my writing, many felt moved to tell me about the conversations which the topics explored in this thesis had prompted, and their reflection on the meaning of representation and invisibility in their own lives. The outcome of these conversations was often that individuals discussed with partners and co-parents for the first time their hopes for society in future and the values which shaped how they imagined family. Participants also told me, before and after interviews, that participating in this research had caused them to reflect on the role of media in their family lives for the first time: it opened new conversations and made them conscious they were driven to parent in certain ways because of their social values and cultural knowledges. Throughout the process of conducting this research, friends and relatives have confided in me their own struggles with working out what kind of family they wanted to make, and spoken about the challenges of managing the various representations of family and parenting ideals they felt had pressured them to perform family 'right'. These comments illustrate the anxieties which accrue around all parenting and the impact which media representations have on every element of family life and the choices individuals make, often unconsciously, to shape and narrate their families.

This thesis sheds light on the intimate negotiation of family which takes place between LGBTQ parents, culture, media, and community. As evidenced in the anecdotal responses this work has already generated, this is not a topic which parents often pause to contemplate or discuss, despite its significance in their everyday lives. Media representations background our choices but, as I have demonstrated, they also provide a key framework around which subjects can build their family-identity narratives. For LGBTQ people, representations can provide a source of their dislocation and sense of difference, but they can also offer a way to renegotiate space in the dominant scripts of family for their homes and lives. Media provides cultural reference points around which communities can orientate themselves, and it can provide, through strategies of queer [re]reading and strategic rejection, experiences of inclusion and validation. In this project I set out to discover how LGBTQ parents conceptualised and narrated their families and what role media plays in those processes. I have discovered that media and cultural representation is absolutely central to forming a family and producing [queer] identity narratives when negotiating those processes outside the norms of heterosexual society.



The lives of LGBTQ people have long been conceptualised as existing at an uncomfortable juncture between the private and public sphere, this is never more acute than when LGBTQ people seek ways to organise domestic, intimate, family lives and find they must negotiate their identities through and in the public meanings of family and home which circulate through cultural productions.

## Bibliography

### Primary Materials

Amy. Interview (14<sup>th</sup> September 2013)  
 Carol. Interview (12<sup>th</sup> September 2013)  
 Charlie and Jamie. Interview (15<sup>th</sup> July 2013)  
 Darren. Interview (15<sup>th</sup> January 2014)  
 Dylan. Interview (15<sup>th</sup> November 2013)  
 Emily and Isabel. Interview (10<sup>th</sup> October 2013)  
 Emma. Interview (9<sup>th</sup> January 2014)  
 Eva. Interview (24<sup>th</sup> October 2013)  
 Fiona. Interview (14<sup>th</sup> February 2014)  
 Hannah and Jelena. Interview (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013)  
 Harriet. Interview (7<sup>th</sup> November 2013)  
 Ivy. Interview (8<sup>th</sup> January 2014)  
 Joanne. Interview (27<sup>th</sup> September 2013)  
 Julia. Interview (15<sup>th</sup> November 2013)  
 Luke and Fran. Interview (8<sup>th</sup> January 2014)  
 Lynne. Interview (20<sup>th</sup> December 2013)  
 Martha and Paige. Interview. (3<sup>rd</sup> November 2013)  
 Mary and Paul. Interview. (11<sup>th</sup> August 2013)  
 Mathilde. Interview (14<sup>th</sup> February 2014)  
 Rose. Interview (15<sup>th</sup> November 2013)  
 Sam and Ian. Interview (8<sup>th</sup> March 2014)  
 Sarah and Daniel. Interview (2<sup>nd</sup> November 2013)  
 Seb. Interview (10<sup>th</sup> December 2013)  
 William. Interview (10<sup>th</sup> January 2014)

### Secondary Materials

*Adoption and Children Act 2002*, Chapter 39. Available at:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/38/contents> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

Ahmed, S. (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

(2006) *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London: Duke University Press

(2010) *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Aksoy, A. and K. Robins (2003) 'Banal Transnationalism: The Difference that Television Makes'. In K.H. Karim (ed.) *The Media of Diaspora*. London: Routledge. 2-22.

Alasuutari, P. (1992) "'I'm ashamed to admit it but I have watched *Dallas*': The Moral Hierarchy of Television Programmes'. *Media, Culture and Society* 14. 561-582

Althusser, L. (2001) 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. in V.B. Leitch et al (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton.

- Alwin, D.F. (2004) 'Parenting Practices'. In J. Scott, J. Treas, and M. Richards (eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 142-157.
- Anderson, B. (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anshen, R.N. (1949) 'Preface'. In R.N. Ashen (ed.) *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*. New York: Harper and Brothers. ix-xi
- Arcury T.A., Quandt S.A. (1998) 'Qualitative Methods in Arthritis Research: Sampling and Data Analysis'. *Arthritis Care and Research* 11. 66-74
- Bankowski, B. and J. Hesla. (2013) 'At the Center of the Rainbow Family Explosion'. *Huffington Post*. 9 September. [online] Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brandon-j-bankowski-md/at-the-center-of-the-rainbow-family-explosion\\_b\\_3896577.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brandon-j-bankowski-md/at-the-center-of-the-rainbow-family-explosion_b_3896577.html) (Accessed: 1 February 2016)
- Barker, M., H. Bowes-Catton, A. Iantaffi, A. Cassidy, L. Brewer. (2008) 'British Bisexuality: A Snapshot of Bisexual Representations and Identities in the United Kingdom'. *Journal of Bisexuality* 8. 141-162.
- Barker, M. and D. Langdridge. (2008) 'Bisexuality: Working with a Silenced Sexuality'. *Feminism & Psychology* 18(3). 389-394.
- Barnet, B. (2001) 'Pack-rat or Amnesiac? Memory, the Archive and the Birth of the Internet'. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 15(2). 217-231.
- Baxter, L.A., D.O. Braithwaite, and J.H. Nicholson (1999) 'Turning Points in the Development of Blended Families'. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 16(3). 291-313
- Beazley, H and J. Emew (2006) 'Participatory Methods and Approaches: Tackling the Two Tyrannies'. In R. Schegras and D. Storey (eds.) *Doing Development Research*. London: Sage. 189-199
- Berkowitz, D. (2003) 'A Sociohistorical Analysis of Gay Men's Procreative Consciousness'. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 3(2-3). 157-190.
- Berlant, L. (2008) *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L. and M. Warner. (1998) 'Sex in Public'. *Critical Inquiry* 24. 547-566
- Bernades, J (1985) 'Do We Really Know What "The Family" Is?'. In P. Close & R. Collins (eds.) *Family and Economy in Modern Society*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. 192-211
- Bernstein, M. and R. Reimann (2001) 'Queer Families and the Politics of Visibility'. In M. Bernstein and R. Reimann (eds.) *Queer Families, Queer Politics: Challenging Culture and the State*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1-17.

Bersani, L. (1989) 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' In D. Crimp (ed.) *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*. London: MIT Press. 197-222

(1995) *Homos*. London: Harvard University Press

Bindel, J. (2014) 'The Proud Whopper? This is not the gay liberation we fought for'. *The Guardian*. 7 July. [Online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/07/proud-whopper-not-gay-liberation-equal-marriage-babies-big-business> (Accessed 6 January 2016)

Bingham, J. (2014) 'David Cameron Welcomes First Gay Marriages'. *The Telegraph*. 28 March. [online] Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10730806/David-Cameron-welcomes-first-gay-marriages.html> (Accessed: 1 February 2016)

Binnie, J. and B. Skeggs. (2004) 'Cosmopolitan Knowledge and the Production and Consumption of Sexualized Space: Manchester's Gay Village'. *The Sociological Review* 51(1). 39-61

Biressi, A. and H. Nunn. (2005) *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*. London: Wallflower Press.

Blee, K.M. (1998) 'Introduction'. In K.M. Blee (ed.) *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest*. New York: New York University Press. 1-15.

Bond Stockton, K. (2009) *The Queer Child, or Growing Up Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press

Bourdieu, P. (1986a) 'The Forms of Capital'. In J. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood. 241-258.

(1986b) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge

Bourdon, J. (2011) 'Media Remembering: The Contributions of Life-Story Methodology to Memory/Media Research'. In M. Neiger, O. Meyers, and E. Zandberg (eds.) *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 62-76.

Breshears, D. (2010) 'Coming Out with Our Children: Turning points Facilitating Lesbian Parent Discourse with Their Children About Family Identity'. *Communication Reports* 23(2). 79-90

Browne, K. (2006) 'Challenging Queer Geographies'. *Antipode* 38(5). 885-892.

Browne, K. and C.J. Nash (2010) 'Queer Methods and Methodologies: An Introduction'. In K. Browne and C.J. Nash (eds.) *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Farnham: Ashgate. 1-24.

Brunsdon, C. (1997) *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes*. London: Routledge.

Budig, M. (2004) 'Feminism and the Family'. In J. Scott, J. Treas, and M. Richards (eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 416-434.

Burkitt, I. (2012) 'Emotional Reflexivity: Feeling, Emotion and Imagination in Reflexive Dialogues'. *Sociology* 46(3). 458-472.

- Burns, D. and K. Chantler (2011) 'Feminist Methodologies'. In B. Somekh and C. Lewin (eds.) *Theory and Methods in Social Research 2nd Edn.* London: Sage. 70-77
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge
- (1993a) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge.
- (1993b) 'Critically Queer'. *GLQ* 1. 17-32.
- (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- (2004) *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge
- Cameron, D. (2014) 'When People's Love is Divided by Law, it is the Law that Needs to Change'. *PinkNews*. 28 March. [online] Available at: <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2014/03/28/david-cameron/> (Accessed: 1 February 2016)
- Cameron, J. (2005) 'Focusing on the Focus Group'. In I. Hay (ed.) *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 116-132
- Carpenter, L. (2013) 'Meet the Co-Parents'. *The Guardian*. 15 December. [online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/dec/15/meet-the-co-parents-modern-families> (Accessed: 1 February 2016)
- Carrie, A.M. (2012) 'It's the Parenting That Counts This Father's Day'. *Huffington Post*. 17 June. [online] Available at: [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/anne-marie-carrie/fathers-day-its-the-parenting-that-counts\\_b\\_1600432.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/anne-marie-carrie/fathers-day-its-the-parenting-that-counts_b_1600432.html) (Accessed: 30th October 2012)
- Caserio, R. L. (2006) 'The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory' *PMLA* 121 (3) 819-821.
- Cavalcante, A. (2015) 'Anxious Displacements: The Representation of Gay Parenting on *Modern Family* and *The New Normal* and the Management of Cultural Anxiety'. *Television and New Media* 16(5). 454-471.
- Civil Partnership Act 2004*, Chapter 33. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/33> (Accessed 29 January 2016)
- Clark, D. (1993) 'Commodity Lesbianism'. In C.K. Creekmar and A. Doty (eds.) *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. London: Duke University. 484-500
- Clarkson, J. (2011) 'The Limitations in the Discourse of Norms: Gay Visibility and Degrees of Transgression'. In G. Dines and J.M.Humez (eds.) *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Critical Reader (3rd edn)*. London: Sage. 335-340.
- Cortazzi, M. (2001) 'Narrative Analysis in Ethnography'. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, L. Lofland (eds.) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage. 384-395
- Cotterill, P. (1992) 'Interviewing Women: Issues of Friendship, Vulnerability, and Power'. *Women's Studies International Forum* 15(5/6) 593-606

- Creekmur, C.K. and A. Doty. (1995) 'Introduction'. In C.K. Creekmur and A. Doty (eds.) *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press. 1-11.
- Dabhoiwala, F. (2015) 'The Secret History of Same-Sex Marriage'. *The Guardian*. 23 January. [online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/23/-sp-secret-history-same-sex-marriage> (Accessed 1 February 2016)
- Daly, K. (2003) 'Family Theory Versus the Theories Families Live By'. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65. 771-784
- Dean, T. (2006) 'The Antisocial Homosexual'. *PMLA* 121 (3) 826-828
- Deer, B. (1988) 'Schools Escape Clause 28 in "Gay Ban" Fiasco'. *The Sunday Times*. 29 May.
- Denzin, N.K. and Y.S. Lincoln. (2005) 'The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research'. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications. 1-30
- Diamond, L. M. (2005) "'I'm Straight, but I Kissed a Girl": The Trouble with American Media Representations of Female-Female Sexuality'. *Feminism & Psychology* 15(1). 104-110
- Dickinson, G. (2008) 'My Baby Joy: By World's First Pregnant Man' *News of the World*. 8 June. [online] Available at: [http://www.newsoftheworld.co.uk/0806\\_exclusive\\_pregnant\\_man.shtml](http://www.newsoftheworld.co.uk/0806_exclusive_pregnant_man.shtml) (Accessed: 21 June 2008)
- Dollimore, J. (1996) 'Bisexuality, Heterosexuality, and Wishful Theory'. *Textual Practice* 10(3). 523-539.
- Donaldson, J (w) and A. Scheffler (a) (2010) *Tabby McTat*. London: Alison Green Books
- Doty, A. (1993) *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Doty, A. and B. Gove (1997) 'Queer Representation in the Mass Media'. In A. Medhurst and S. Munt (eds.) *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*. London: Cassell. 84-98
- Dowling, R. (2005) 'Power, Subjectivity, and Ethics in Qualitative Methods'. In I. Hay (ed.) *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 19-30.
- Driver, S. (2007) *Queer Girls and Popular Culture: Reading, Resisting, and Creating Media*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Duggan, L. (2002) 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism'. In R. Castronovo and D. D. Nelson (eds.) *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalised Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press. 175-194
- (2003) *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press

- Duncombe, J. and D. Marsden (1993) 'Love and Intimacy: The Gender Division of Emotion and "Emotion Work"'. *Sociology* 27(2). 221-241.
- Dunn, K. (2005) 'Interivewing'. In I. Hay (ed.) *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 79-105
- Dyer, R. (1990) *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*. London: Routledge.
- (1997) *White*. London: Routledge
- (2002a) *The Culture of Queers*. London: Routledge.
- (2002b) *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn)*. New York: Routledge.
- (2009) 'The Role of Stereotypes'. In S. Thornham et al (eds.) *Media Studies: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 206-212
- Eadie, J. (1993) 'Activating Bisexuality: Towards a Bi/Sexual Politics'. In J. Bristow and A. R. Wilson (eds.) *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. 139-170.
- (1997) "'That's Why She Is Bisexual": Contexts for Bisexual Visibility'. In P. Davidson, J. Eadie, C. Hemmings, A. Kaloski, and M. Storr (eds.) *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity, and Desire*. London: Cassel. 142-160
- Edelman, L. (2004) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Feldman, S (2012) 'Reclaiming Sexual Difference: What Queer Theory Can't Tell Us About Sexuality'. In J. Alexander and S. Anderlini-D'Onofrio (eds.) *Bisexuality and Queer Theory: Intersections, Connections and Challenges*. London: Routledge. 67-86
- Filax, G, D. Sumara, B. Davis and D. Shogan (2011) 'Queer Theory/Lesbian and Gay Approaches'. In B. Somekh and C. Lewin (eds.) *Theory and Methods in Social Research 2nd Edn*. London: Sage. 86-93
- Foulke, M. L. and R. L. Hill (1997) 'We Are *Not* Your Hope for the Future: Being an Interracial Lesbian Family and Living in the Present'. In R.E. Goss and A.A. Squire Strongheart (eds.) *Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship*. London: Harrington Park Press. 243-249
- Fuss, D. (1991) 'Inside/Out'. In D. Fuss (ed.) *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. New York: Routledge. 1-10
- Gabb, J. (2005a) 'Lesbian M/Otherhood: Strategies of Familial-Linguistic Management in Lesbian Parent Families'. *Sociology* 39(4). 585-603
- (2005b) 'Locating Lesbian Parent Families: Everyday Negotiations of Lesbian Motherhood in Britain'. *Gender, Place and Culture* 12 (4): 419-432

Gabb, J. and J. Fink. (2015) *Couple Relationships in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gay Liberation Front (London) (1978 [1971]) *Manifesto*. Available at: <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/glf-london.asp> (Accessed 12 February 2016)

Garner, T. (2014) 'Becoming Papa: From Daughter to Dad'. In M.F. Gibson (ed.) *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*. Bradford: Demeter Press. 169-184.

*Gender Recognition Act 2004*, Chapter 7. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/7/contents> (Accessed 29 January 2016)

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gillis, J. R. (1997) *A World of Their Own Making: A History of Myth and Ritual in Family Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

GLAAD (2015) 'Where We Are on TV Report'. GLAAD. [online] Available at: <http://www.glaad.org/whereweareontv15> (Accessed 1 February 2016)

Gongla, P. A. and E. H. Thompson Jr. (1988) 'Single-Parent Families'. In M.B. Sussman and S.K. Steinmetz (eds.) *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*. New York: Plenum Press. 397-419

Gordon, M. (1972) *The Nuclear Family in Crisis: The Search for an Alternative*. New York: Harper and Row.

Goss, R.E. (1997) 'Queering Procreative Privilege: Coming Out as Families'. In R. Goss and A.A. Squire Strongheart (eds.) *Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship*. London: Harrington Park Press. 3-20

Grant, G. (2003) 'Outrage as lesbian dolls are given to primary schools'. *Daily Mail*. 26 September.

Gray, M.L. (2009) *Out in the Country: Youth, Media and Queer Visibility in Rural America*. New York: New York University Press.

Green, A. I. (2010) 'Queer Unions: Same-Sex Spouses Marrying Traditions and Innovation'. *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 35(3). 399-436

Green, J. (2006) 'Look! No Don't! The Visibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men'. In S. Stryker and S. Whittle (eds.) *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge. 499-508.

Gross, L. (1994) "'What is Wrong with this Picture?' Women and Gay Men on Television'. In R. J. Ringer (ed.) *Queer Words, Queer Images: Communication and the Construction of Homosexuality*. London: New York University Press. 143-156

(2001) *Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.



Gubrium, J. and J. Holstein. (2002) 'From the Individual Interview to the Interview Society'. In J. Gubrium and J. Holstein (eds.) *The Handbook of Interview Research*. London: Sage. 1-30

Halberstam, J. (1998) *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

(2005) *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, London: New York University Press.

(2008) 'The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies'. *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 5(2). 140-156

(2011) *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hall, S. (1980) 'Encoding/Decoding'. In S. Hall (ed.) *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. London: Hutchinson. 128-138.

(1996) 'Who Needs Identity?' In S. Hall and P. DuGay (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage. 1-17

(2011) 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution'. *Cultural Studies* 25(6). 705-728.

Hannam, K. (2002) 'Coping with Archival and Textual Data'. In P. Shurmer-Smith (ed.) *Doing Cultural Geography*. London: Sage. 189-198

Harwood, S. (1997) *Family Fictions: Representations of the Family in 1980s Hollywood Cinema*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Hay, J. (2000) 'Unaided Virtues: The (Neo-)Liberalization of the Domestic Sphere'. *Television and New Media* 1(1). 53-73.

Heckert, J. (2010) 'Love without borders? Intimacy, Identity and the State of Compulsory Monogamy'. In M. Barker & D. Langdridge (eds.) *Understanding Non-Monogamies*. New York: Routledge. 255-266

Held, N. and T. Leach (2008) "'What are you doing here?': The 'Look' and (Non) Belongings of Racialised Bodies in Sexualised Space'. In A. Kuntsman and E. Miyake (eds.) *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Racality*. York: Raw Nerve Books. 139-157.

Hemmings, C. (2002) *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender*. London: Routledge.

Hicks, S. (2011) *Lesbian, Gay and Queer Parenting: Families, Intimacies, Genealogies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Higginson, J. (2008) 'Fathers "Are Not Needed"'. *Metro*. 21 May.

Hill, A. (2005) *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television*. London: Routledge.

Homfray, M. (2007) *Provincial Queers: The Gay and Lesbian Community in the North West of England*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

*Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008*, Chapter 22. Available at:  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/22/contents> (Accessed: 5 January 2016)

Innes, S. A. (1997) *A Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity and the Representation of Lesbian Life*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press

Jackson, S. (1997) 'Women, Marriage, and Family Relationships'. In V. Robinson and D. Richardson (eds.) *Introducing Women's Studies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. 323-348

Jenkins, H. (2006) *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press

Kellner, D. (2011) 'Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism and Media Culture'. In G. Dines and J.M. Humez (eds.) *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Critical Reader (3<sup>rd</sup> edn)*. London: Sage. 7-18

Kennard, J. E. (1986) 'Ourself behind Ourself: A Theory for Lesbian Readers'. In E. A. Flynn and P.P. Schweickart (eds.) *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*. London: John Hopkins University Press. 63-82.

Kentlyn, S. (2008) 'The Radically Subversive Space of the Queer Home: "Safety House" and "Neighbourhood Watch"'. *Australian Geographer* 39 (3): 327-337

Kimmel, A. J. (1988) *Ethics and Values in Applied Social Research*. London: Sage.

Klesse, C. (2011) 'Shady Characters, Untrustworthy Partners, and Promiscuous Sluts: Creating Bisexual Intimacies in the Face of Heteronormativity and Biphobia'. *Journal of Bisexuality*. 11(2-3). 227-244.

Kress, G. (1996) 'Representational Resources and the Production of Subjectivity'. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard and M Coulthard (eds.) *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge. 15-31

Kvale, S. (1996) *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Interviewing*. London: Sage.

(2006) 'Dominance Through Interviews'. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(1). 480-500

Lamb, M.E. (1982) 'Parental Behaviour and Child Development in Non Traditional Families: An Introduction'. In M.E. Lamb (ed.) *Non Traditional Families: Parenting and Child Development*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 1-1.

Lawler, S. (2004) 'Rules of Engagement: Habitus, Power and Resistance'. In L. Adkins and B. Skeggs (eds.) *Feminism After Bourdieu*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 110-128

'Lesbian Request Denied' (2013) *Orange is the New Black*.

Levine, C. (1991) 'AIDS and Changing Concepts of Family'. In D. Nelkin, D.P. Willis and S.V. Parris (eds.) *A Disease of Society: Cultural and Institutional Responses to AIDS*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Lewin, E. (1994) 'Negotiating Lesbian Motherhood: The Dialectics of Resistance and Accommodation'. In E.N. Glenn, G. Chang, and L.R. Forcey (eds.) *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency*. London: Routledge. 333-354.

Liming, S. (2007) "'Reading For It": Lesbian Readers Constructing Culture and Identity Through Textual Experience'. In T. Peele (ed.) *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film and Television*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 85-102

Lingel, J (2012) 'Adjusting the Borders: Bisexual Passing and Queer Theory'. In J. Alexander and S. Anderlini-D'Onofrio (eds.) *Bisexuality and Queer Theory: Intersections, Connections and Challenges*. London: Routledge. 189-213.

*Local Government Act 1988*, Chapter 9. Available at:  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/contents> (Accessed 29 January 2016)

*Local Government Act 2003*, Chapter 26. Available at:  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/26/contents> (Accessed 29 January 2016)

Loftus, B. (1996) 'Biopia: Bisexuality and the Crisis of Visibility in the Queer Symbolic'. In D. E. Hall and M. Pramaggiore (eds.) *Representing Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*. New York: New York University Press. 207-233.

Luzia, K. (2013) "'Beautiful but Tough Terrain": The Uneasy Geographies of Same-Sex Parenting'. *Children's Geographies* 11(2-3). 243-355.

*Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013*, Chapter 30. Available at:  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/30/contents/enacted/data.htm> (Accessed 29 January 2016)

Martin, B. (1996) *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian*. London: Routledge

May, T. (1997) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Maynard, M. and J. Purvis. (1994) 'Doing Feminist Research'. In M. Maynard and J. Purvis (eds.) *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor and Francis. 1-9

McLuhan, M. (1964 [2001]) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge.

Medhurst, A. (1994) 'One Queen and his Screen: Lesbian and Gay Television'. In E. Healey and A. Mason (eds.) *Stonewall 25: The Making of the Lesbian and Gay Community in Britain*. London: Virago. 238-250.

(1997) 'Camp'. In A. Medhurst and S. Munt (eds.) *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*. London: Cassell. 274-293

(2002) 'Tracing Desires: Sexuality in Media Texts'. In A. Briggs and P. Copley (eds.) *The Media: An Introduction*. Harlow: Pearson. 313-325

(2007) *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities*. Abingdon: Routledge.

(2014) 'Queering the Family'. In M. Jastrzebska and A. Luvera (eds.) *Queer in Brighton*. Brighton: New Writing South. 254-259.

Mills, B. (2005) *Television Sitcom*. London: Cromwell Press.

Morgan, J. (2013) 'Anti-abortion group says gay marriage will "destroy UK families"'. *Gay Star News*. 26 April. [online] Available at: <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/anti-abortion-group-says-gay-marriage-will-%E2%80%98destroy-uk-families%E2%80%999260413/> (Accessed 1 February 2016)

Moritz, M. (2004) 'Old Strategies for New Texts: How American Television is Creating and Treating Lesbian Characters', in Carter, C. and L. Steiner (eds.) *Critical Readings: Media and Gender*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. 104-122.

Morley, D. (1980) 'Texts, Readers, Subjects'. In S. Hall (ed.) *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. London: Hutchinson. 163-173

(2001) 'Belongings: Place, Space and Identity in a Mediated World'. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4(4) 425-448.

Morris, N. (2013) 'The Return of Section 28: Schools and Academies Practising Homophobic Policy that was Outlawed Under Tony Blair'. *The Independent*. 19 August [online] Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/the-return-of-section-28-schools-and-academies-practising-homophobic-policy-that-was-outlawed-under-8775249.html> (Accessed 22nd January 2015)

Munoz, J. E. (1999) *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. London: University of Minnesota Press

(2006) 'Thinking Beyond Antirelativity and Antiutopianism in Queer Critique'. *PMLA* 121 (3) 825-826

(2009) *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

Murdock, G.P. (1949) *Social Structure*. New York: Macmillan.

Needham, G. (2009) 'Scheduling Normativity: Television, the Family, and Queer Temporality'. In G. Davis and G. Needham (eds.) *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*. London: Routledge. 143-158.

Nelson, K. Z. (2006) 'The Construction of an Open Time Dimension in Narratives About the Becoming of Lesbian and Gay Families: An Act of Resistance'. *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review* 7(1) 8-18.

- O'Brien, K. 2012. 'We Cannot Afford to Indulge This Madness'. *The Telegraph*. 3 March. [online] Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/9121424/We-cannot-afford-to-indulge-this-madness.html> (Accessed: 20 March 2012)
- Oerton, S. (1998) 'Reclaiming the "Housewife"? Lesbians and Household Work'. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 2(4). 69-83
- Ottolenghi, Y. (2013) 'Why I'm Coming Out as a Gay Father'. *The Guardian*. 3 August. [Online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/aug/03/yotam-ottolenghi-gay-fatherhood-parenting> (Accessed 17th April 2015)
- Padva, G. (2008) 'Educating *The Simpsons*: Teaching Queer Representations in Contemporary Visual Media'. *Journal of LGBT Youth* 5 (3). 57-73
- Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2011) 'You're Too Queer for the Straights and Now Too Queer for the Gays!'. *Journal of Bisexuality* 11. 566-570.
- Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. and S. Lubowitz (2003) 'Outside Belonging'. *Journal of Bisexuality* 3:1. 53-85
- Park, A. and R. Rhead (2013) 'Personal Relationships' *British Social Attitudes* 30. [online] Available at: <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/key-findings/personal-relationships.aspx> (Accessed 1 February 2016)
- Parsons, T. (1949) 'The Social Structure of the Family'. In R.N. Anshen (ed.) *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*. New York: Harper and Brothers. 173-201.
- Patton, C. (1993) 'Tremble, Hetero Swine!' In M. Warner (ed.) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. London: University of Minnesota Press. 143-177
- Pérez, Miriam. 2012 'Preparing for the Trans Baby Boom'. *RH Reality Check*. 18 June. [online] Available at: [www.rhrealitycheck.org/article/2012/06/13/preparing-trans-baby-boom](http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/article/2012/06/13/preparing-trans-baby-boom) (Accessed: 27 October 2012)
- Perkins, T. E. (1979) 'Rethinking Stereotypes'. In M. Barrett et al (eds.) *Ideology and Cultural Production*. London: Croom Helm. 135-159
- Phelan, P. (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge
- Postman, N. (1985) *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- (1993) *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Pramaggiore, M. (1996) 'Straddling the Screen: Bisexual Spectatorship and Contemporary Narrative Film'. In D.E. Hall and M. Pramaggiore (eds.) *Representing Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*. New York: New York University Press. 272-297.
- Rabinowitz, P.J. (1987) *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*. London: Cornell University Press.

Ramazanoglu, C. and J. Holland (2002) *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices*. London: Sage.

Reed, N. (no date) 'So Let's Talk About the Fucking Asterisk'. *Tumblr*. Available at: <http://nataliereed84.tumblr.com/post/65412526336/so-lets-talk-about-the-fucking-asterisk> (Accessed 1 February 2016)

Rich, A. (1980) 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5(4). 631-660

Riggs, D.W. (2014) 'What Makes a Man? Thomas Beatie, Embodiment, and "Mundane Transphobia"'. *Feminism and Psychology* 24(2). 157-171

Ringrose, J. and V. Walkerdine. (2008) 'Regulating the Abject: The TV Make-Over as Site of Neo-Liberal Reinvention Toward Bourgeois Femininity'. *Feminist Media Studies* 8(3) 227-246.

Robinson, L. (2006) 'Three Revolutionary Years: The Impact of the Counter Culture on the Development of the Gay Liberation Movement in Britain'. *Cultural and Social History* 3. 445-471.

(2007) *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Rofes, E. (1997) 'Dancing Bears, Performing Husbands, and the Tyranny of the Family'. In R.E.Goss and A.A. Squire Strongheart (eds.) *Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship*. New York: Harrington Park Press. 151-162.

Rose, G. (1997) 'Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics'. *Progress in Human Geography* 21(3) 305-320

Roseneil, S. (2005) 'Living and Loving Beyond the Boundaries of the Heteronorm: Personal Relationships in the 21st Century'. In L. McKie and S. Cunningham-Burley (eds.) *Families in Society: Boundaries and Relationships*. Bristol: Policy Press. 241-258

Sardadvar, K. and K. Miko (2014) 'Shifting Families: Alternative Drafts of Motherhood'. In M.F. Gibson (ed.) *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*. Bradford: Demeter Press. 141-158.

Sayer, A. (2005) 'Class, Moral Worth and Recognition'. *Sociology* 39(5). 947-963.

Schacher, S. J., C. F. Auerbach and L. B. Silverstein. (2005) 'Gay Fathers Expanding Possibilities for Us All'. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 1(3). 31-52

Schlichter, A. (2004) 'Queer at Last?: Straight Intellectuals and the Desire for Transgression'. *GLQ* 10(4). 543-564

'Schooled' (2012) *Modern Family*.

Schwartz, S (2011) "'Going Deep" and "Giving Back": Strategies for Exceeding Ethical Expectations when Researching Vulnerable Youth' *Qualitative Research* 11(1) 47-68

- Scott, S. (1985) 'Feminist Research and Qualitative Methods: A Discussion of Some of the Issues'. In R. G. Burgess (ed.) *Issues in Educational Research: Qualitative Methods*. London: The Falmer Press. 67-85
- Sedgwick, E. Kosofsky (2004) "'The L Word': Novelty in Normalcy'. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 17 February.
- Sender, K. (2003) 'Sex Sells: Sex, Class and Taste in Commercial Gay and Lesbian Media'. *GLQ* 9(3). 331-365
- Setter, C. (2011) 'Lesbians Speak Up – We Can't See You'. *PinkNews*. 12 July. [online] Available at: <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2011/07/12/lesbians-speak-up-we-cant-see-you/3/> (Accessed 10 February 2016)
- Sheff, E. (2014) *The Polyamorists Next Door: Inside Multiple-Partner Relationships and Families*. Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Shugart, H. A. (2003) 'Reinventing Privilege: The New (Gay) Man in Contemporary Popular Media'. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20(1). 67-91
- Silva, E.B. and C. Smart. (1999) 'The "New" Practices and Politics of Family Life'. In E.B. Silva and C. Smart (eds.) *The New Family?* London: Sage. 1-12.
- Silverstone, R. (2007) *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Simpson, B. (1997) 'Representations and the Re-Presentation of *Family*: An Analysis of Divorce Narratives'. In A. Dawson, J. Hockey, and A. James (eds.) *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology*. London: Routledge. 51-70.
- Sin, C. H. (2003) 'Interviewing in "Place": the Socio-Spatial Construction of Interview Data'. *Area* 35(3) 305-312
- Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London: Sage
- (2005) 'The Making of Class and Gender through Visualizing Moral Subject Formation'. *Sociology* 39(5). 965-982.
- Skill, T. and J.D. Robinson (1994) 'Four Decades of Families on Television: A Demographic Profile, 1950-1989'. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 38(4). 449-464.
- Smith, J. A. (1995) 'Semi-Structured Interviewing and Qualitative Analysis'. In J.A. Smith, R. Marre, L. Van Langenhove (eds.) *Rethinking Methods in Psychology*. London: Sage. 9-26
- Stacey, J. (2004) 'Cruising to Familyland: Gay Hypergamy and Rainbow Kinship'. *Current Sociology* 52(2). 181-197
- Steinmetz, K. (2014) 'The Transgender Tipping Point' *Time*. 29 May. Available at: <http://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/> (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2016)
- Strauss, A. and J. M. Corbin (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.



Streeter, W. (2012) 'Celebrating Different Families in Schools'. *The Alternative Parenting Show*. London, Grand Connaught Rooms (Public Seminar, 15 September 2012)

Sudis, D (2009) 'Get Loved, Make More, Try to Stay Alive'. *Archive of Our Own*. October 2009. Accessed 3 November 2014. <[http://archiveofourown.org/works/26640?view\\_adult=true](http://archiveofourown.org/works/26640?view_adult=true)>

Sullivan, A. (1995) *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality*. London: Picador.

Taylor, E. (1989) *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Taylor, Y. (2009) *Lesbian and Gay Parenting: Securing Social and Emotional Capital*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

(2010) 'The "Outness" of Queer: Class and Sexual Intersections'. K. Browne and C.J. Nash (eds.) *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Farnham: Ashgate. 69-84

(2012) *Fitting into Place? Class and Gender Geographies and Temporalities*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Thatcher, M. (1987) 'AIDS, Education and the Year 2000!' Interviewed by Douglas Keay. *Woman's Own*. 23 September. Available at: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=106689> (Accessed 4 February 2016)

'The Egg' (1970) *The Clangers*.

Thompson, J. (1988) 'Introduction'. In J. Thompson (ed.) *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Thompson, L. (1992) 'Feminist Methodology for Family Studies'. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54. 3-18

Thompson, P. (1993) 'Family Myth, Models, and Denials in the Shaping of Individual Life Paths'. In D. Bertaux and P. Thompson (eds.) *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 13-38.

Thompson, S. (2005). 'The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital'. In K. Gelder (ed.) *The Subcultures Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn). London: Routledge. 184-192

Thomson, R., M. J. Kehily, L. Hadfield, and S. Sharpe (2011) *Making Modern Mothers*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Titman, N. (2013) 'About that often misunderstood asterisk'. *Practical Androgyny*. 31 October. Available at: <http://practicalandrogyny.com/2013/10/31/about-that-often-misunderstood-asterisk/> (Accessed 1 February 2016)

*Torchwood: Children of Earth* (2009) BBC One. 6-10 July.

Torring, J. (1999) *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe, and Žižek*. Oxford: Blackwell



*Transparent* (2014-2016) Amazon Video.

Tyler, I. (2008) "'Chav Mum Chav Scum': Class Disgust in Contemporary Britain'. *Feminist Media Studies* 8(1). 17-34

Valentine, G (1993) 'Negotiating and Managing Multiple Sexual Identities: Lesbian Time-Space Strategies'. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18(2) 237-248

Van Dijk, T. A. (1996) 'Discourse, Power, and Access'. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard and M Coulthard (eds.) *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge. 84-104

Vaughan, B.K. (w) and F. Staples (a) (2012) *Saga*. Volume One. #1-6. Image Comics

Waitt, G. (2005) 'Doing Discourse Analysis'. In I. Hay (ed.) *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography 2<sup>nd</sup> edn*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 163-191.

Walters, S.D. (2012) 'The Kids Are All Right but the Lesbians Aren't: Queer Kinship in US Culture'. *Sexualities* 15(8). 917-923.

Warner, M (1999a) *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

(1999b) 'Normal and Normaller: Beyond Gay Marriage'. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5 (2):119-171

Watson, P. (1997) 'There's No Accounting for Taste: Exploitation Cinema and the Limits of Film Theory'. In D. Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, H. Kaye, and I. Whelan (eds.) *Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and Its Audience*. London: Pluto Press. 66-83

Weeks, J. (1977) *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. London: Quartet Books.

Weeks, J., B. Heaphy and C. Donovan. (1999) 'Everyday Experiments: Narratives of Non-Heterosexual Relationships'. In B. Silva and C. Smart (eds.) *The New Family?* London: Sage. 83-99.

(2001) *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*. London: Routledge

(2004) 'The Lesbian and Gay Family' in J. Scott, J. Treas and M. Richards (eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*. Oxford: Blackwell. 340-355

Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*. London: Sage.

Weston, K. (1995) 'Forever is a Long Time: Romancing the Real in Gay Kinship Ideologies'. In S. Yanisako and C. Delaney (eds.) *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis*. New York: Routledge. 87-107

(1997) *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn). New York: Columbia University Press.

Wetherell, M. and J. Potter. (1988) 'Discourse Analysis and the Identification of Interpretive Repertoires'. In C. Antaki (ed.) *Analysing Everyday Explanation: A Casebook of Methods*. London: Sage. 168-183

Wiegman, R. and E. A. Wilson (2015) 'Antinormativity's Queer Conventions' *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26(1). 1-25

Winegar, J. (2012) 'The Privilege of Revolution: Gender, Class, Space and Affect in Egypt'. *American Ethnologist* 39(1). 67-70

Woods, G. (2009) "'Something for Everyone': Lesbian and Gay 'Magazine' Programming on British Television, 1980-2000'. In G. Davis and G. Needham (eds.) *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*. London: Routledge. 108-120.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Questions

#### About family

1. Who is in your family?
2. What words do your children use to describe/name their parents? How did you arrive at these titles/were these titles inspired by a particular source?
3. My project is provisionally entitled “the place, production and potential of the queer family’ and I want to know how that title might need to be revised; what do you understand queer to mean? Is it a term you would use to describe your own identity or family?
4. What is the best thing about your family?
5. Do you feel there were any particular challenges for you as a LGBTIQ+ couple/individual having children compared to your straight peers? If so, what helped you overcome them? (ask only depending on rapport/previous responses)

#### About media

1. Do you feel there are representations available in the media [media means anything from TV to film, blogs to newspapers] currently which are relevant or useful to you in describing or talking about your family?
2. Has your children starting school/nursery/attending community groups for parents meant you had to consciously describe your family? Have media representations helped you talk about your family?
3. Are there any particular media representations of families that you want your children to see? Are there any particular media representations of families that you don’t want your children to see?
4. What is your favourite queer/LGBTQ family on TV?
5. What representation of queer/LGBTQ families do you most hate?
6. What is your favourite show? Is it important to you that there are/are not LGBTQ characters in that show?
7. What is the most radical, or unusual representation of a family you’ve seen?
8. When was the last time you saw a family that you felt was like yours on TV?
9. If you could put any representation on TV/into the mainstream media, what would it be?/What portrayals, if any, (of families like yours) would you like to see in the mainstream media?

#### Secondary Questions if Needed

1. Do you read sub-cultural media such as blogs by queer parents, queer news sites, or alternative and art house productions? (Only used if they don’t talk about non-mainstream media in their responses)
2. Do you think there is one clear ‘model’ of family that exists in the UK today? If so, what/who does it consist of?

3. Do you feel a pressure to have a certain kind of family or talk about your family in a certain way? If so, where does this pressure come from? [Offer examples of 'ideal' or 'nuclear' families in adverts etc. - if no response/understanding]
4. Has having a family changed the way you describe your identity, relationship status, or home to other people? Have media representations helped you talk about your family? (depending on rapport, direction interview takes, and previous answers will inform whether this question is asked)
5. Have you watched *Orange is the New Black*, *Modern Family*, *The L Word*? Are there any representations in those shows you particularly like or dislike?

## Appendix 2: Information Sheet

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Study title**

How do LGBTQ parents interact with, and experience, media representations of families like theirs?

#### **Invitation**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask any questions you wish.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The interview you are being asked to take part in is part of a series of interviews with LGBTQ identified parents across the country. The responses I receive in these interviews will be used in my PhD research project which aims to describe the experiences of LGBTQ parents interacting with media representations of families like theirs and, in particular, to identify which representations parents feel are missing from the media, and which representations they really enjoy seeing in the media.

#### **Who can participate?**

If you are over 18, self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, intersex, trans\*, genderqueer, non-binary, or queer, and are a parent then you are welcome to participate. I am aiming to interview at least 30 parents who fit the above criteria from across the UK.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

#### **What will happen if I decide to take part?**

We will arrange a mutually convenient time and place for an interview and I will bring a Dictaphone to record our conversation on. Interviews will last between an hour, and an hour and a half. After our interview, I will transcribe the interviews and store the text file under a pseudonym. The digital audio file of the interview will also be stored under a pseudonym.

#### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Your participation will have the considerable benefit of helping to further our understanding of how LGBTQ parents interact with media representations and the impact (both positive and negative) such representations can have on families in their day-to-day lives.

There are no financial incentives available for taking part in this project.

#### **Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?**

I will take all reasonable, and all possible, steps to ensure your privacy and anonymity in the storage and use of our interview; the digital audio recording and transcription of our conversation will be securely stored on a hard drive that only I have access to. Additionally, all your responses will be stored under a pseudonym in order to anonymise your information.

All personal information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

**What should I do if I want to take part?**

If you wish to take part in this study, you can opt in by emailing me at [ehr20@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:ehr20@sussex.ac.uk) and I will get in touch as soon as possible to arrange a mutually convenient time and location for our interview.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The information I collect in this study will be used in writing my PhD thesis. If you would like to review the section of my work in which your responses are used you may request a copy to be sent to you and I'll be glad to receive your feedback.

As well as my PhD research project, transcriptions of sections of the interview recording may also be used in conference papers and publications in academic journals or books; you will not be named in any of these pieces; I will take all reasonable steps to ensure it is not possible to identify you from any descriptions given.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

I am conducting this research as a PhD student at the University of Sussex, within the school of Media, Film, and Music. My research study is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Sussex Ethical Review board.

**Who should I contact for further information?**

If you require any further information in the first case you can contact me via email; [ehr20@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:ehr20@sussex.ac.uk). If you have any queries or concerns about the way the study has been conducted, you can contact my supervisor, Kate O'Riordan, on [k.oriordan@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:k.oriordan@sussex.ac.uk)

**Thank you**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet; I hope you will be willing to participate in this project.

Date

May 2013.

### Appendix 3: Consent Form

Project Title: The Place, Potential and Production of the Queer Family

Project Approval Reference: ER/EHR20/1

1. My participation in this project is voluntary, and I can choose not to participate in part, or all, of the project. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I understand that I can withdraw from the research project at any stage without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.
2. I understand that if I feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview session I may choose to decline the question or end the interview. I may also choose to withdraw any of my answers from the project at any time after the interview has been concluded.
3. I consent to being recorded on a digital audio recording device and this recording being stored, in an anonymised form, by the researcher. I understand all reasonable steps will be taken to secure this recording but as with all data storage there is a small risk it could be accessed by a third party.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using the information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will be maintained as far as is practically possible. I understand that all personal information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
5. I understand that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for information which I might disclose in the focus group/s or group interviews.
6. I understand that any reports or papers produced using the information I provide in this interview will only be used by Elizabeth Reed in producing her PhD thesis and any associated academic papers and publications.
7. I understand that this research project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Sussex Ethics Committee. If I wish to contact them to clarify or query any aspect of this approval I can do so by contacting Kate O’Riordan at the University of Sussex on [k.oriordan@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:k.oriordan@sussex.ac.uk)
8. I consent to the use of transcriptions of sections of the recording of my interview in the report on the research project and any publications that may arise out of it, on the understanding that I will not be named and all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure it is not possible to identify me from any descriptions given.
9. I have read and understood this explanation of my rights and have been given the opportunity to ask any questions, and have a copy of this form for my own records.

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

#### Appendix 4: What is the best thing about your family?

##### **Amy**

"It's just the clichéd things about having a family that anyone would have, just the spending time together stuff, sometimes that's good. Sometimes in the mornings getting ready for school that's a horror show, someone's crying about something, and you just want to batter them all to death but then um, if you're just sat watching a film together or something and you don't really notice it's nice. And when you go to something it's nice to give them a squish in the mornings and things and just doing family, family things really is-it's a boring answer but it's true, just spending time with them and doing fun things with them. Like, when they're little it's all milestones so when they learn to walk and talk and stuff it's nice because you're [indistinguishable] like when Joe learnt to walk um, because he was born prem, he was 7 weeks early, he weighed 4 pounds, he was very small and spent a long time in hospital, and it was a really bad time um, so even really because of his prem-ness he's come, he's got hypermobile legs, his hips...So he'll never be, they said 'oh he'll never be an athlete' so but as a result of that he didn't really learn to walk until he was 18 months, 20 months. He did it one day at an art gallery up north and just everyone's face was brilliant, and just those little moments and things are really the things that create memories."

##### **Carol**

"Oh Lyla! Oooh, that's it! [laughs] nothing else now!"

##### **Charlie and Jamie**

Charlie: "Well Harley is awesome...Having a baby is, I think, more fun than people often say...yeah I think people don't spend enough time talking about how great babies are other than in sort of the abstract, in the what you might call the heteronormative sense the 'oh babies are brilliant, everyone should want a baby', you know?...The actual fun things they do and being quite sort of nerdy and...I think that doesn't get covered enough and being quite nerdy and rationally inclined people – some people would say we're not rationalists because we're not atheists and all that – but we really like what you might call understanding learning processes so having a tiny human learning thing is fascinating to watch, so those are cool things about the baby um that's a good thing about our family..."

Jamie: "But, do you know my favourite thing about the family? Is the friendship and companionship"

Charlie: "Aw, I was going to say are you going so say a lovely romantic thing, yes...But I would say, that even if we didn't have a baby I would regard us as family and um, I would say it's sort of the continual sense of support also being around Jamie is never hard work, it's never stressful, family is a place where you can actually retreat from the annoyances and pressures of the outside world and even when Harley is work, it's not the sort of work that is infuriating, you know, like being in the working world can be where you come home and you're furious. You know, it's slightly frustrating sometimes because you're 'what do you want? What do you



want?' but.....it's a very positive sort of feeling and it's very...um, vivifying, refreshing...it's the very opposite of draining."

Jamie: "Yeah. Revitalising."

Charlie: "Revitalising! That's it. That's the word."

### **Darren**

"The kids are great, they're really great. They're really thoughtful in terms of thinking about things and thoughtful in terms of sensitivity and they're funny and they are very, I'm really proud of their adaptableness, that they move between us very easily and accommodate us and our differences. I like that, I think it will stand them in good stead. They know their minds and they're quite strong willed in different ways but they're not judgemental, which I like, except to each other! [laughs]"

### **Dylan**

"Best thing about my family...the people in it. Even my Dad who I'm not really getting on very well with at the moment is at heart a good person, I mean, I know that they there for me and because we're quite a small family we tend to be really aware of each other and then if somebody needs something then, you know, I can...it's, we tend to be quite responsive to each other and quite supportive in whatever we're doing...Yeah, I think that's probably the best thing about our family, we're all really, try to be supportive of each other even when we think other people are doing something daft."

### **Emily and Isabel**

Emily: "Ooh, that's a nice question, a difficult one but a nice one. [pause] I remember in Greece recently, we've just come back from holiday in Greece, there just are those lovely moments aren't there, the three of us were just sat on the patio in the sun just thinking, yeah this is where I'm at, this feels safe, it feels special. Yeah I feel very lucky. There's part of me that's scared of its fragility because there's only three of us and because I come from a small family myself, so I suppose it [indistinguishable] it's quite a small [unit?] and we are very dependent on each other. You know I sometimes worry that Lucy is going to have to deal with two aging Mums on her own that's the sort of downside, but the plus side is that we're a very sort of close knit, we are a bit the three musketeers aren't we?"

Isabel: "Mm. I don't know, I think it's quite a difficult question isn't it? Lucy's taken to wanting to er, do 15-20 minute dance before going to bed, actually you were out last night, so last night we were rocking it here, to pop music, dancing out."

Emily: "— with the curtains closed!"

Isabel: "— before she went to bed, we do that quite often. That's quite fun."

Emily: "You wouldn't do that without having a child! [laughs]"

Isabel: "[laughs] No."

Emily: "The three of us were doing that-"

Isabel: "- in fact I'm slightly in pain today."

Emily: "So the three of us dancing to that pop music the other night was quite funny wasn't it? Thinking what are the downstairs neighbours thinking!"

Isabel: "Yeah it's a hard one isn't it. It's moments sometimes, or just shared activities, or you know."

Emily: "Isabel and Lucy recently did some archery"

Isabel: "I did some archery with her, or swimming, or yeah....finding things, finding things on telly that we can watch together that's a real achievement I can tell you. You know what I mean? When you move from that real baby thing into...so Friends, Glee, Modern Family we can all watch together."

Emily: "What's great about being a parent is that you experience the world so differently through a young person's eyes again isn't it. It really keeps you fresh."

### **Emma**

"They're all completely bonkers, but in a good way. They're, we're just ace, all of us. They're hard work but they, it's been really interesting because Grace will just accept anything and be 'yep, some people-' and it's just been fascinating watching them grow up and how different they are. I used to think it was more parenting than it was genes but that's just bullshit, it's virtually all genetic and the genetics causes the behaviour and that causes your reaction. My two are so different, so Grace is pretty much goodie two shoes, she looks exactly like me but blonde and a tiny version and if you compare photos of us two at the same age you can't tell them apart, it's terrifying. Erin is a little ginger ball of terror who just causes mayhem! She's hilarious but completely bonkers, my pregnancy with her was different, everything's been very, very different. She's lovely and hilarious and very cute and gets away with murder. She will just walk up to 6 year olds and lamp them, she's just got no fear, she takes no shit. It's great and I love that she's very very feisty but she's also slightly terrifying!"

### **Eva**

"Oh god! Um, they are very fun, they're very supportive of one another, Noah and Sofia are very rambunctious and rebellious with a really good sense of humour, they keep me from becoming too depressed or serious or analytical or anything like that, they both do. Yeah. They're fun. They keep me in check, both of them. He teaches me patience and she certainly keeps me sane."

### **Fiona**

"Just um, being tactile, cuddles, kisses, reading him stories at night-time. Just the warmth that comes with it."

### **Harriet**

"Ah, that's a good question. I think the – I suppose the best thing about it is that it's relatively happy, now. I can't say it was when we split up, that was a hard couple of years and me and Abigail had a hard time for at least a couple of years after that. But it's been happy and stable either side of the split up, that's what I'd say the best thing about it is, and the girls have done well and it's all worked out fine. Um, yeah. And, um, it's kind of broader than, it's like an old extended family, people can belong to it without technically being part of it, it's not limiting because like new partners come in, like when you have a Mum and a Dad in a heterosexual normal family, when a new Mum comes in she gets put in that step-mother role, because it's not clearly defined it makes it more open for other people to be part of it and feel part of it and in a way I think that's quite nice....Um, yeah. And I guess one of the other things about it, we joke about being a broken family; 'we're a broken family!' but it's alright, sometimes it's hard. It's been hard on the kids going between homes at times, particularly for the older one she didn't like it when she was in the earlier years of secondary school but she's got used to it now, but, the good thing about that is they get more choice about how they can live their lives. Olivia said that to me a couple of years ago, you can see Abigail runs her house one, I run mine one, Jason runs his one way and they've kind of got more of a choice of how they want to be than other families would, other kids would, I mean they can see between Mum and Dad but that's often gendered and so they're very constrained by that whereas they genuinely are looking, thinking, I don't have to do it one way."

### **Ivy**

"It's still together! Yeah, it's still together. It's been quite challenging, having a second child was really hard and I guess the best thing about it is the love within it really. My son is hilarious at the moment, he runs up to me every day when I leave the house 'Mummy wait! I haven't given you a hug! I haven't given you a kiss!' and he tells me he loves me and it's just really lovely. He talks about his family unit, he says 'I love Mummy and I love Mama and I love Theo and I love myself' and it's so lovely that he includes himself in that list. He sort of has talked about family units and Mummies and Daddies and he's definitely processed the fact he's got a Daddy Ben and we kind of deliberated over whether we just call him Ben and started off just calling him that, and calling him 'your donor Daddy' and decided just to call him Daddy Ben and Alfie hasn't quite started calling him Daddy Ben yet but he sees him often enough to have a relationship with him which is quite sweet really, so. Yeah. I think definitely the love and the fact we're still together! [laughs]"

### **Jelena and Hannah**

Jelena: "A house with love in it. It doesn't matter what size, shape, form is the best in it. From my point of view."

Hannah: "I feel so lucky to have had two kids because I didn't have Lexi until I was 37, I took quite a few years to find somebody who could be a donor who I could have a baby with, it possibly wasn't going to happen and it was something that I absolutely wanted so much, for quite a few years it was trying to make that happen. So to have a family, a normal family that does all the mess ups and wonderful things and just be itself, that's absolutely miraculous really! And not just one child but two children and to be a unit, that's not come about

smoothly. There's been struggle in that to be a unit, all kinds of struggles on all different levels. So I suppose, don't take that for granted really."

Jelena: "I think what has kept a lot of things going is the big L – not lesbian, love. When those struggles have been presented and gone through then what we had realised that more than anything that is bigger than that is that – what we feel about that unit and one another."

Hannah: "The love has been bigger than the conflicts or the difficulties. I hope, I'm sure that they'll go through stages of being a little bit embarrassed or rejecting us, or going – like every child does with their parents but I hope they'll feel proud and I think they've got 4 good role models, they've got 3 sets of grandparents that they're very close to who are all good role models to them so they certainly feel like loved children who I think are growing really beautifully with all their worries and fears and struggles and confidence and in school and with friendships."

Jelena: "I tell them, you are very lucky, because I said you get 4 sets of presents, come Christmas you get that and that and that."

Hannah: "We don't say that to them do we?"

Jelena: "I do! You feel very lucky, I said, and loved from much more people than, you know, so always remember that, so that will make them feel strong and confident when they grow."

Hannah: "I came from an unconventional family and it caused me great embarrassment at time, great pride at times, and relishing in its difference and richness, I went through different stages with it and still do. It's so forming, your family is so forming of who you are. I imagine Lexi growing up – I say Lexi because she's nearer teenage, it sometimes feels like it's here already – she'll be proud of having two homes and a richer array of models to choose from. I've always valued difference and I hope she, I hope they'll both feel that."

Jelena: "I came from a very conventional family but with a big emancipation and equality between my parents, for one another. Which I know, compared to all my other members, uncles, aunts, it was quite a rarity. I was accepted and loved from day one so I've never felt the need to be pissed off with my parents, be angry, I'm quite proud of my parents and them of me so I hope the girls at some point, tell story 'oh my mum used to do this just to get us shoes' when we go into the shop to get the shoes. I haven't got a pair of shoes that cost as much as Becca's shoes! They listen, they do listen, to the stories. "

Hannah: "They have good awareness of life and people and...they think about the world and they ask questions so certainly proud of that, they're not all just focused in on their own needs and sometimes they are, they're children."

### **Joanne**

"Umm....depends what you define as 'a thing' because it's probably really corny, like 'love'. That's the best thing. Love and being around each other, and time. But yeah...Its love, and time, and security and belonging, and everything that makes a family and home really. Yeah...really corny...Yeah. Well that's kind of the truth really. Acceptance and I guess just the

key things that went I met Cate, it was a bit disruptive with Molly, was just the ease of it, the familiarity of it very, very quickly. And how it wasn't complex, or problematic, or you know, I had a stream of relationships that were all of those things. But it was just easy and simple and straightforward. A bit less straightforward now, but still quite straightforward."

### **Julia**

"I love watching her learn. I love seeing her develop. Before she was born we were told she'd never walk and she's just started being really independent and strong with her walking...She's so sociable. I think because when she was very tiny I was very unhappy in my relationship so I was going out all the time, out all day every day, we were out. And now she just wants to be out! What have I done?! I'm not that sociable, I want to be at home, can we not just hide at home today?! Out, out! Garden, garden! Um. I think the best thing about being on my own with her is that I don't have to defer parenting decisions, I can decide how it is. Equally the worst thing about being on my own with her is that I feel I could be a better parent if I could walk away sometimes when she's having a strop, I could go right 'you deal with it, I'm going to go off and do something else.' I feel like I would have more time and more patience if I wasn't always trying to get all the housework done while she's under my feet. If, you know, I don't want to do all the housework while she's in bed because I don't want her to think the magic cleaning fairy comes. But, equally, her helping can be very counterproductive sometimes! [laughs] but much appreciated. But the bond that we have, my Mum was a single parent as well, and the bond that we have as an only child and a single parent is immense. I honestly don't believe that other families have the same intense bond that me and my mother have and me and her will come to have. Obviously, only just starting to not be quite one way, she loves me now and you can see that, that's something that's developing, she's doesn't comprehend a world that doesn't have me in it. In the same way that I can't comprehend a world that doesn't have her in it and it's my worst fear. She doesn't really have that, I think I've been away from her for about 12 hours at the most, you know?"

### **Lynne**

"A real closeness. I'm not sure we would have had – it gets a bit intense sometimes, we're very alike [laughs] I know some friends go 'how do you two manage to run along together, you just go [bang!] all the time!' And we do, but...Yeah, I just, I mean actually the last 6 months of work has been horribly stressful and I've never experienced my work as stressful, I've just had too much to do and Zoe's been ill with chronic fatigue so she's moved from being quite, becoming more independent to needing my support and help a lot more so it's kind of a triple whammy, I'd taken on more at work because she was becoming more independent, and then she got ill, wasn't able to help round the house and I was taking on extra care for her which I figured takes probably an extra day out of my working week, just hospital appointments, acupuncture, taking her to school, picking her up, so that's all been really, really difficult, it has been a really difficult 6 months and before that my Dad died and that grief consumed me for a while. I was just reflecting on that recently actually, because I've been doing an 8 week meditation course and it did just make me reflect that I really like my life, we've got a lovely home and we have a brilliant relationship. So like Christmas day, it'll just be the two of us and that's what we want, we're not interested in seeing anybody else, well actually Zoe is, she's

seeing her boyfriend. I know she worries about me being on my own and I constantly have to say I really like being on my own, she's staying at her boyfriend's tonight so I'm, well actually I'm going round to a friend's but! The idea of having a night in by myself is bliss, so I'm thinking 'oh god! Got to go out!' So yeah, I don't think we would have had that, quite that intensity and closeness had we had a larger family or more people in our lives. Yet on the other hand I do have some sadness that – I do quite like that idea of non-conventional families that mix and match and there's a flow in and out of houses, I interviewed Stephen Whittle, I think he has about 3 or 4 kids, and they have lodgers who are like family and other people, and I just thought god how nice. Actually, with Zoe being ill, I really feel that responsibility of being a lone parent, it is all down to me, there's no one else. For a long time I was very fearful about dying, because I work in end of life care, I thought oh god that would be absolutely devastating to Zoe if I died, because she doesn't have a relationship with her Dad that would help that gap. In fact, the Guardian, I was reading in the family Guardian, I felt reflected there – there was a woman who was a lone parent, not in a relationship, isn't interested in relationships, her only child has been central in her life and she took a drug overdose and died 6 months ago, I was reading that and my heart was pounding and Zoe came home and I said 'you have to promise me, you will never ever, ever go near drugs!' and she was like 'where's that come from?!' [laughs] 'oh mum!' [laughs] But I just, how devastating for that woman, that's her identity gone in a swipe. She talked about herself as 'smothered' so that's 'mother' the 'ed' was the used to be a mother, and then I can't remember what the 's' is, I can't remember how she coined that phrase now. I have had those thoughts from time to time, maybe I dwell on the bleakness, it kind of brings home to me how being a mum is very central in my identity. Zoe and I, I'm really proud of her, she's fab, very bright, incredibly mature for her age, she's kindness personified and generous in ways that I am not. And yeah, to think I've produced this beautiful lovely girl and we just have the best relationship, it's just delightful, in a way that I don't have with my Mum, and in fact I sometimes say to her 'when I'm old, tell me if I'm getting like Grandma' [laughs] But we are very similar and I was brought up in a very working class family...My mum and I have a very surface level, perfectly pleasant, but it's not an in depth relationship and I think Zoe and I just share almost anything. I'm not aware that she keeps anything from me – she might because she's a teenager! – but we read each other very well so when she started having sex with her boyfriend I knew before she told me because she came home so dreamily! [laughs] And sometimes, I was reading a letter from my Mum a few weeks ago and there was some news in it that was a bit concerning and I thought my face was blank, I was just reading this letter and she said 'oh what is it? What is it?' because she'd seen something go across my face I guess, so that closeness is really nice."

### **Martha and Paige**

Paige: "The best thing about our family? I think we are a pretty chilled out family and that feel positive, we have our stressful days like any parent, and it's tough going – it's a hard old job – and we have days where we really feel like, like yesterday in the park we were like 'really?' It couldn't have got any more stressful, everything that could go wrong did go wrong and we lose our rag but we're able to be like 'ok, this is just a minute in time, let's get back in the car and start again'."

Martha: "It's an open and honest family I think. It's a family that we're willing to accept people into to give Amy enough, not, so she's able to have as many experiences, going forward. So I think it's quite an open family and I think that's a good thing."

Paige: "Yeah. Open family, I mean we consider ourselves a unique family or a different family because most people don't have two Moms and two Dads. Even in our gay circle although that's becoming more prevalent, so within our five-some, so me, Martha, the Dads, and Amy, we'll kind of talk about our special family or our unique family we, you know, go on holidays with them, they were just down the other night for Halloween. So yeah, I'd say our family is unique but maybe it's less unique. It's a very loving family, a very fun – we're a very fun and funny family."

Martha: "It's a very normal family. I think that's quite important to note, we go through the same trials and tribulations as everyone else who's had children and um, I think that's why, what I was saying about, how we approach a nursery situation or whatever, it's about...We wanted to have kids because we wanted to have kids but I hope somewhere along the line the people we've come into contact with will realise a lesbian family isn't something to be afraid of or to be, it's just something that's as normal as their family"

### **Mary and Paul**

Mary: "James generally, James himself is a pretty good thing...One of the things I do say like about the way that our family is set up in terms of you know, people, the sort of having more grown-ups around is a very much a social and sexual thing, it's having people around, you know, one person who lives here, one person who's round here quite often who we see regularly, who are not parents so are not, don't have the same kind of preoccupations that we do, are kind of more, you know they're differently engaged in the world and that's really, that's a nice kind of...can't think of the right word..."

Paul: "I like the way it feels very kind of integrated. I really love the way that there can be times when James will be sitting over in that corner there playing with something and I might be keeping an eye on him while sitting vaguely trying to do some work there, and Mary will be sitting there knitting and Matthew and Sandra will be sitting there talking about strange films about tundra and it all just seems to work kind of together in a very nice integrated whole, um, it's not, I think we kind of put a lot of effort into trying not to make it so children are over here kind of environment and I like that they are growing up in that environment, that you know we're deliberately not being all 'oh this is not for you, this is an adult thing'...Yeah I mean obviously, taking safety and sanity into account."

Mary: "Yeah. And um, you know, a lot of new mothers talk about feeling very isolated and that's not something I have found because you know we're not, we have non-parents around all the time and from James's point of view having those other people around is great you know people who are bound up in his life but have a different role. We're, we're trying to as much as we can, trying to co-parent equally so we've both gone part time and we've both sharing parenting and that's something I very much like about, you know, we have things set up because you know, again for, in terms of traditional family models, I mean specifically we're not doing the sort of 5 days at home and then get to the weekend thing and I'm not the sort of

expert parent which I think a lot of mother's get set up as...there's an awful lot of baggage around that word ['Mother'] and like most parents I meet around playgroups and meet ups and things it's primarily women and it just drives me nuts, argh! So annoying! But yeah, the fact we're getting more kind of, that both of us are both working and parenting, I think it's good. I think it's a very positive thing. I like that a lot."

Paul: "I remember when my previous job, everyone worked quite long hours and I remember walking round the office at 9 or 10pm and seeing a lot of men, it was always men, saying goodnight to their kids over the phone uh, and I remember very vividly thinking wher- I just do not want it to look like that and I'm glad I did."

Mary: "In sort of terms of family, the way our family is structured, I like this house a lot and that's, we're here partly because there's three and a half of us, being able to pool our resources together in that way for this kind of, space. But without kind of...We probably could have done it for a standard two person family but that would have been a stretch but with three of us it's not a stretch, it's much more relaxed. Which is nice because you don't feel so nervous about you know what happens is someone loses their job or, we could cope. So that's...sort of...it mostly feels really comfortable."

### **Mathilde**

"My son. I think, yeah definitely, I don't know if he necessarily brought us closer I think he just made us complete, a family. I know two people can be a family but for me it was always you have children and I think, yeah. He's quite important. I think for us it's important as well, there are certain people in our lives that involve family, they are not there all the time but they make it, quite an important part without who we wouldn't be. Most important is still Rory...Yeah, and I like that since having Rory it seems to be even easier to be in a gay relationship, it takes away the whole thing of, people presume when you're in a gay relationship you can't have kids or you can't, you know there's always a presumption there, sometimes even if you're not included. The only downside is, well not downside, I think people because I don't necessarily look the part, people presume I'm just a straight mum. You know, which is fine, [indistinct] it's just, yeah, it's more including and it makes it even easier sometimes. Even easier being gay because who can say no to a cute wee child?! Who can be nasty, you know. People are generally not nasty, they are quite lovely actually. But yeah."

### **Rose**

"I think we just do have a lot of fun when we're relaxed and not too worried about various things, money and work and kind of family issues actually, family tension has been the principle kind of downer. Um but yeah when we're just together and playing and just having fun and taking them swimming and going to the park and just generally enjoying each other's company. I think the kids are really coming on; it's just the kind of stage that they're at – they're discovering language and learning about themselves and their place in the world. We all just feel like we've come on such a significant, and yeah it has been challenging journey, but we've all kind of come on it together in a sense. Neither of us had ever had children before in previous relationships and we'd never really spent a great deal of time with young children, I had been a play worker for a period of time but with older kids, and that had been for quite a



short time, it was kind of a peripatetic job when I lived in Brighton I used to do play work in parks and schools during the summer. It was really fun but big groups of kids. It's not intense, it's not an intense role. It's been such a journey for us, we've really learnt about boundaries and our boundaries and how to set them in a non-confrontational way, we've really learnt a lot about personal organisation which we just knew nothing about, we really didn't!"

### **Sarah and Daniel**

Sarah: "I mean, obviously because of the, going through the whole transition thing and the family taking a long time to come to terms with it and some of them not even knowing um...but...my sense of family is a lot less than many other people, I have friends who are [have] much closer, tightly knit families. I don't have that, um what I do have, and what I'm very happy with, is a fairly diverse family. There's a range of different, my son's wife is not British, Daniel's family are part native American...Yeah. And obviously our relationship is not a standard nuclear. The fact that we can be an example to other relatives, to people you know us that you can have a diverse and loving family that doesn't follow the nuclear family pattern is, I think, a good thing. Even though we're not on television doing it, we are at least doing it."

Daniel: "We're just out there living, just living our lives. We are neither, we're neither hiding ourselves nor are we driving around in a car with a banner on it saying 'hey hey! Look at us' you know, we got other things to do! [laughs]"

Sarah: "Yeah."

### **Seb**

"I suppose because my relationships with the kids are fairly new, over time they become less so one of the best things, I guess is experiencing the changes and how they've grown in different directions. When I met them they were still very much children, now they're in that in between stage, how my relationship with them has changed with them. And we've got a history together so we can say 'do you remember two years ago when we did this' or 'when we did that' so having a sense of shared history that's been accumulating over time. How that kind of informs how the relationships are going to grow and change and future relationship and you can see glimpses of it and see them developing as people, see the relationships with the other kind of parents changing into that parent kid into still a parent kid but with more an adult kind of friendship, watching them experiencing some different ways or talk about things in different ways and understand things a bit differently, just watching the way – it sounds really cheesy – watching the way they bloom, socially and as people"

### **William**

"The best thing about my family or the best thing about my family for me? Because I'm an individual, because that's the funny thing and it's an important thing, you need to still be yourself. It's such a rich thing, it's difficult to know where to start because it changes my relationship with my partner, it changes my relationship with our broader families and circles of friends, and even with society in a way in that I want to be seen as part of a movement. Some people will find, this is me being very honest here, as someone who knows how to be media friendly, when that comes across even just to strangers sitting opposite you on the

tube, that you can at least in public, promote a good representation of something which they had no prior experience of you feel like you're changing the world. Our children will change the world, that's what I always think, they really will change the world because how could – and I don't just my children, I mean all of our children – how could they tolerate some of the things that go on today and pass as well-meaning or supportive or whatever....What's the best thing about my family? It is an awful lot of love, it's just fantastic, you're part of just an increased amount of love, my partner and I love each other dearly and have done for a long time but there's just so much more love in all directions. It's not without major challenges and I always knew, I always had a great respect for mothers and I say specifically mothers because they usually had the job of bringing up children, and I don't just mean putting a plaster on a cut knee, I mean all of it, imposing routine, dealing with the daily grind, often having to manage the finances, and so many other aspects whether they're working or not, Mothers have always worked so hard and, largely – I don't mean it's always the mother, or a mother – so in approaching parenthood I didn't think – I don't like, again like just the difference between men and women, I don't go for the idea that male and female parents are that different, I don't talk about the role of a mother and a role of the father because, as I say, people's ideas of mothering is nurturing, people's ideas of fathering is getting someone pregnant, that's what fathering often means, it can be used in that way that completely cuts you off from any involvement in the actual bringing up of children . And I think it's a bloody tough role, nobody takes it on thinking it's going to be all lovely, you take it on because the rewards match the effort, it's just incredible. I don't think I've given you anything much there – love! Love!”

### Appendix 5: List of Media Cited in Interviews

The following is a list of all media cited in response to questions about what type of media parents and families enjoyed, what media contained representations participants liked or found useful, and what media parents wanted to pass on to their children.

#### **Books**

Balixk, A (w) and C. Szymanski (a) (2013) *Keep Your Cool: How to Deal with Life's Worries and Stress*. New York: Franklin Watts

von Blixen-Finecke, K. (1937) *Out of Africa*. New York: Putnam

Brill, S. (2002) *The Queer Parent's Primer: A Lesbian and Gay Family's Guide to Navigating the Straight World*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications

Carr, J. (2010) *Be Who You Are*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse

Carter, V. (2007) *If I Had 100 Mummies*. London: Only Women Press

Coyote, I. (1998-2014) Various titles. See: <http://www.ivanecoyote.com/books>

Donaldson, J. (w) and A. Scheffler (a) (1999) *The Gruffalo*. London: Macmillan.

(2005) *The Gruffalo's Child*. London: Macmillan.

(2010) *Tabby McTat*. London: Alison Green Books

Evans, K. (2008) *The Food of Love: Your Formula for Successful Breastfeeding*. Brighton: Myriad Editions

Ewert, M. (w) and R. Ray (a) (2009) *10,000 Dresses*. New York: Seven Stories Press

Feinberg, L. (1993) *Stone Butch Blues*. Ithaca: Firebrand Books.

George, A. (trans.) (1999) *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. London: Penguin.

George, S. (1993) *Women and Bisexuality*. Scarlet Press

de Haan, L. and S. Nijland (2002) *King and King*. Berkeley: Tricycle Press

Highsmith, P. (1952) *The Price of Salt*. New York: Putnam

Lingdren, A. (1945) *Pippi Longstocking*. Various editions.

Maupin, A. (1984) *Tales of the City*. London: Black Swan

McMaster Bujold, L. (1986-Present) *The Vorkosigan Saga*. Riverdale: Baen Books

Newman, L. (w) and C. Thompson (a) (2009) *Daddy, Papa and Me*. Berkeley: Tricycle Press.

Newman, L. (w) and C. Thompson (a) (2009) *Mommy, Mama and Me*. Berkeley: Tricycle Press.

Parr, T. (2003) *The Family Book*. New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

Rajendran, S. (w) and N. Subramaniam (a) (2012) *The Pleasant Rakshasa*. Chennai: Tulika Books

Richardson, J. (w), P. Parnell (w) and H. Cole (a) (2005) *And Tango Makes Three*. New York: Simon and Schuster Books.

Saffron, L. (1987) *Getting Pregnant Our Own Way: A Guide to Alternative Insemination*. London: Women's Health Information Centre

Salvatore, D. (1995) *Paxton Court*. Tallahassee: Naiad Press

Silverberg, C. (w) and F. Smyth (a) (2013) *What Makes a Baby*. New York: Seven Stories Press

Skutch, R. (w) and L. Nienhaus (a) (1997) *Who's In a Family?* Berkeley: Tricycle Press

Summers, A.K. (2014) *Pregnant Butch: Nine Long Months Spent in Drag*. Berkeley: Soft Skull Press

Texier, O. (2004) *Jean a Deux Mamans*. Paris: Ecole des Loisirs

Vaughan, B.K. (w) and F. Staples (a) (2012-present) *Saga*. Image Comics

Watson, K. (w) and V. Carter (a). (2006) *Space Girl Pukes*. London: Only Women Press

Winterson, J. (1985) *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Pandora Press

### **Blogs and Websites**

*Milk Junkies: Breastfeeding and parenting from a transgender perspective*. [Blog] <http://www.milkjunkies.net/>

*Mumsnet* <http://www.mumsnet.com/>

*Nick King's Blog: I've Done Some Pretty Cool Things, But Nothing's as Cool as Creating Our Family* [Blog] <http://www.nickkingworld.com/blog/>

*Press for Change* <http://www.pfc.org.uk/>

*Teacher Tom: Teaching and Learning from Preschoolers* [Blog] <http://teachertombsblog.blogspot.co.uk/>

*The Fourth Vine* [Blog] <http://thefourthvine.livejournal.com/>

*Stonewall* [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)

### **Television and Films**

*Aimee & Jaguar* (1999) Directed by: M. Färberböck [Film] Senator Film

*Bob & Rose* (2001) ITV [Television Show]

*Brave* (2012) Directed by: M. Andrews, B. Chapman, S. Purcell [Film] Disney Pixar

*Brokeback Mountain* (2005) Directed by: A. Lee [Film] Focus Features.

*Curious George* (2006 – present) [Television Show]

*Dottie's Magic Pockets* (2008) Directed by: A. Maxwell [DVD] Pink Pea Productions

*Eastenders* (1985 – Present) BBC 1 [Television Soap]

*Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café* (1991) Directed by: J. Avnet [Film] Universal Pictures

*Friends* (1994 – 2004) [Television Show]

*Gigola* (2010) Directed by: L. Charpentier [film] Marie-Amelie Productions

*Grey's Anatomy* (2005 – Present) [Television Show]

*Home at the End of the World* (2004) Directed by: M. Mayer. [Film] Warner Brothers

*Imagine Me and You* (2005) Directed by: O. Parker [Film] BBC Films

*Katie Morag* (2013 – Present) CBBC [Television Show]

*Kiss Me* (2011) Directed by: A.T. Keining [Film] LeBox Production

*Lilo & Stitch* (2002) Directed by: D. DeBlois and C. Sanders [Film] Disney

*Lip Service* (2010 – 2012) BBC 3 [Television Show]

*Lost Girl* (2011 – Present) [Television Show]

*Modern Family* (2009 – Present) [Television Show]

*My Neighbour Totoro* (1988) Directed by: H. Miyazaki. [Film] Studio Ghibli

*My Summer of Love* (2004) Directed by: P. Pawlikowski [Film] Apocalypso Pictures

*My Transsexual Summer* (2011) Channel 4 [Television Show]

*Orange is the New Black* (2013 – Present) Netflix [Television Show]

*Postman Pat* (2002 – 2013) CBeebies [Television Show]

*Queer as Folk* (1999 – 2000) Channel 4 [Television Show]

*Raa Raa the Noisy Lion* (2011 – Present) CBeebies [Television Show]

*RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009 – Present) [Television Show]

*Shrek* (2001) Directed by: A. Adamson and V. Jenson. [Film] Dreamworks

*Something Special* (2003 – Present) CBeebies [Television Show]

*Spongebob Squarepants* (1999 – Present) [Television Show]

*Sugar Rush* (2005 – 2006) Channel 4 [Television Show]

*The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005) Directed by: A. Adamson. [Film] Walt Disney Pictures

*The Clangers* (1969 – 1974) [Television Show]

*The Hours* (2002) Directed by: S. Daldry [Film] Paramount Pictures

*The Kids Are All Right* (2010) Directed by: L. Cholodenko [Film] Focus Features

*The L Word* (2004 – 2009) [Television Show]

*The Real L Word: Los Angeles*. (2010 – 2012) [Television Show]

*The Wire* (2002 – 2008) [Television Show]

*The Wizard of Oz* (1939) Directed by: V. Fleming [Film] Warner Bros

*Tipping the Velvet* (2002) BBC 2 [Television Show]

*Tomboy* (2011) Directed by: C. Sciamma [Film] Hold Up Films

*Torchwood* (2006 – 2011) BBC [Television Show]

*Transamerica* (2005) Directed by: D. Tucker. [Film] Belladonna Productions

*When Night is Falling* (2005) Directed by: Patricia Rozema. [Film] Crucial Pictures

### **Other**

*Book of Ruth* Available at: <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et2901.htm> [Accessed 25 February 2016]

*Boys Own* [magazine] See: [http://www.westernboys.org/boys\\_own.html](http://www.westernboys.org/boys_own.html)

*Diva* [Magazine] See: <http://www.divamag.co.uk/>

*Gay Times* [Magazine] See: <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/>

'Helpful Banking' [Advert] (2013) *Natwest*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOUiOUfEv3I> [Accessed 25 February 2016]

*Hercules Love Affair* [Band] See: <http://herculesandloveaffair.net/>

Laura Jane Grace/Against Me! [Musician/Band] See: <http://www.againstme.net/>

Lou Reed [Musician] See: <http://www.loureed.com/inmemoriam/>

Macklemore [Musician] See: <http://macklemore.com/>

Morrissey [Musician] See: <https://www.facebook.com/Morrissey/>

Pet Shop Boys [Band] See: <http://petshopboys.co.uk/home>

*Pink Paper* (1987-2009) [newspaper/news website]

Sinead O'Connor [Musician] See: <http://www.sineadoconnor.com/>

*The Archers* [Radio Drama] BBC Radio 4. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qpgr>

*The Guardian* 'Family' Section [newspaper] [Available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/family>]

*This American Life* [Radio Show] See: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/>

*Time for T* [Radio Show] See: <http://www.radioreverb.com/shows/Time-4-T>

*We Are Family* [magazine] See: <http://wearefamilymagazine.co.uk/>

*Woman's Hour* [Radio Show] BBC Radio 4. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007qlvb>