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THE SILENCE THEY BREAK ABOUT THE DECISIONS THEY MAKE:
GAY FATHERS SPEAK OUT ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Silence they Break about the Decisions they Make:

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This dissertation explores the experiences of 22 gay-fathered households with their children's schooling, and to understand the unique sociopolitical environments of same-sex parenting that may shape these experiences. Research has documented the vacillating and sometimes hostile environment for gay individuals in schools. Studies have also begun to examine the interface of same-sex parents in school-to-home contexts, but have only presented perspectives of lesbian mothers and gay fathers as aggregated data. Gay fathers' experiences alone have not been represented, even given the increasing visibility of gay fatherhood and same-sex parenting in politics and social discourses. Through modes of phenomenological inquiry, this study begins to fill the research void by analyzing data sources that include semi-structured interviews, statewide policy documents, and forms of school-to-home communication. Findings show a range of experiences, particularly for fathers navigating heteronormative and heterosexist school practices and policies, as well as their interactions with students, teachers, and school personnel on social and cultural constructions of family and gender. Moreover, their experiences with regard to access, visibility, and beliefs about LGBTQ-

related topics tend to differ in areas based on the levels of inclusion, protection, and cultural competency of their surrounding community contexts. The findings from this study can inform school leaders, education program providers (EPPs), policymakers, and future research concerning gay fathers and their families

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables	x
List of Figures.....	x
CHAPTER ONE: Problem Statement.....	1
The benefits of family engagement in schools	2
Interrogating diversity in family engagement.....	3
Sociopolitical ideology in school-to-home relationships.....	4
Outline of the dissertation.....	7
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	9
The “perils” of gay fatherhood	11
Inappropriate parenting.....	11
General perceptions of gay fatherhood.....	12
The driving force of religious conservatism	14
Unfit to father.....	15
Gender identity and sexual orientation	15
Victims of mistreatment.....	16
Developing anti-social behavior	17
Embodiment of Lies in Sociopolitical Ideologies.....	19
Pathologizing and criminalizing same-sex attraction	20
Best interest of the child	22
Statewide statutes that complicate same-sex parenting	24
Summary	26
Are the kids alright?.....	27
Psychosocial outcomes	27
Social and emotional development	28
Childhood and adolescent stress	30
Cognitive outcomes	33
Academic achievement	33
Intellectual development.....	34
Sexual orientation and gender identity	35
No differences between same-sex or heterosexual parents.....	35
More fluidity among children with same-sex parents.....	38
Summary	40
So the kids might be alright: How about their fathers?	41
Gay men can have kids?	41
The reaches of heterosexism.....	42

Disassociating gay/father identity.....	43
Becoming a (gay) father.....	44
Decisions for out, gay men to pursue fatherhood	45
The planned pathways they take.....	46
Surrogacy	46
Adoption	48
Gay fathers' experiences.....	52
Negotiating social supports for planned families.....	52
Adopting to a new gay/father identity	55
Addressing gender-typed parenting roles	57
Mom's night out?.....	59
Summary	61
School's in! Gay fathers out?.....	62
Disclosure dilemma	62
Openness in schools.....	63
Barriers to disclose.....	65
School safety for children and parents.....	66
Children's perceived fears	67
Children's mistreatment and coping strategies.....	68
Parents' negative experiences.....	70
School-based marginalization.....	71
LGB exclusion in schools	72
Heterosexual family structures in the classroom	72
Teacher education and LGB-headed families.....	74
LGB family engagement in schools.....	74
Summary	76
Framing the current study	77
Queer theory.....	78
Ecological systems theory.....	81
Queering the spheres.....	85
Chapter two summary.....	86
CHAPTER THREE: Research design and methodological approach	89
Exploring the phenomenon.....	89
Sample selection	90
Data collection	93
Semi-structured interviews	93
Pilot interviews	93
Interview 1	94
Interview 2	95
Forms of school-to-home communication	95
Statewide statutes, municipal regulations, and case law documents	96
Protection of private identifiable information.....	96
Disposal of data.....	97
Data analysis	97
Validity procedures.....	100

Triangulation.....	100
Member-checking procedures.....	101
Research journal.....	101
Researcher bias	101
My role as researcher	102
Methodological limitations	100
CHAPTER FOUR: Findings	104
Comparing State A and State B	104
Emerton: The gay mecca	107
Emerton’s legacy of integration.....	108
An out and affirming community for gay fathers	115
Emerton’s schools: A reflection of the community	121
Gay-friendly havens.....	135
Havens that promote inclusion.....	136
“Conspicuous family” moments throughout the community.....	143
In/Visibility in haven schools	149
Intolerant Towns	163
Elusively inclusive.....	164
“Just let the people see it”: Out(?) and about in intolerant towns.....	169
“Testing the waters” in schools.....	176
Clyde and Alexander.....	192
Perspectives in the closet	192
Breaking free/Coming out.....	196
Chapter four summary	200
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion	204
“Doing family” differently in schools.....	206
Navigating heteronormativity and heterosexism in schools	207
Here come the (hetero)gender police.....	210
Sociopolitical effects on gay fathers’ experiences.....	213
Community-like schools	214
Access and visibility	215
Experiences shaped by social stigma.....	219
Beliefs about LGBTQ inclusion in schools	221
Clyde and Alexander.....	223
Implications.....	223
Leading in (and for) a culture of change.....	223
Relationship building.....	225
Knowledge building.....	226
Preparing socially-just educators	226
Policies that include and protect	228
Study limitations and future research	230
Geographic diversity.....	230
Demographic diversity.....	230
What is “normal”?.....	231

Including additional voices	233
Children.....	233
School personnel.....	234
Learning from the voices of gay fathers	235
References.....	237
Appendix A.....	252
Appendix B.....	253
Appendix C.....	254
Appendix D.....	255
Appendix E	256
Appendix F.....	257

List of Tables

Table 1: Details of participants	92
Table 2: Final coding scheme: Research question 1	99
Table 3: Final coding scheme: Research questions 2 and 3.....	100
Table 4: Comparing statutes between State A and State B.....	106
Table 5: Emerton fathers and their families.....	108
Table 6: Gay-friendly haven fathers and their families	136
Table 7: Intolerant Towns fathers and their families	164

List of Figures

Figure 1: Five spheres of ecological systems theory	82
Figure 2: Queering the macrosystem	85

CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT

Imagine yourself as a gay man, always having had the burden of navigating the privileged, pervasive, and seemingly aggressive position of heterosexuality in U.S. schooling. As a student, elementary school staff discouraged your socialization with female friends, operating under the firm belief that boys and girls behave differently and required separation during activities. Throughout your secondary schooling, you were called a fag by your peers, learned only about the negative aspects of same-sex attraction (e.g., HIV/AIDS), and were relentlessly ambushed by images of the archetypal, heterosexual male. Then, as a teacher, you felt compelled to hide your (homo)sexual orientation for fear of rejection from staff, students, and parents, as well as the real threat of losing your job. Finally, as a prospective father, you worry if your future children will fall victims of mistreatment in school and will only encounter pathological representations of same-sex attraction. You constantly find yourself questioning the extent to which our education systems are fostering agents of social change, or if they continue to perpetuate the marginalized, oppressed, and violently targeted position of sexual minorities in society.

These experiences extend well beyond the hypothetical, as students, teachers, and parents struggle with their gay identities in school systems across the United States. Gay youth have reported instances of verbal harassment, physical assault, and discriminatory policies and practices (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Pascoe, 2007; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2013). The public arena of schooling has forced gay teachers to carefully negotiate the ramifications of disclosing their sexual orientation on their professional lives (Connell, 2014; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Gray,

2013; Lugg, 2006). Research has even documented gay fathers' concerns about the overall wellbeing of their children in society (Schacher, Auerbach, & Silverstein, 2005; Tornello & Patterson, 2015; Vinjamuri, 2016; Wells, 2015). Although increasing evidence has highlighted the sometimes hostile environment for gay individuals in schools (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Kosciw et al., 2016), no scholar has focused solely on gay fathers' experiences with regard to their children's schooling in the United States.

The Benefits of Family Engagement in Schools

Family engagement has increasingly been shown to have positive effects on student success in school (Jeynes, 2012). Young children whose parents foster and support learning at home during preschool years more often possess the knowledge and skills that are necessary for Kindergarten (Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010). Actively involved parents throughout elementary and middle school years increase the likelihood of their children obtaining high grades and test scores, particularly in mathematics and reading (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Xu, Benson, Mudrey-Camino, & Steiner, 2010; Reglin, Cameron, & Losike-Sedimo, 2012; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan 2010; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). In addition to cognition, family engagement supports the development of healthy socioemotional skills such as motivation (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2011; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005) and communication (Adams, Shatzer, & Caldarella, 2010; Powell et al., 2010). Furthermore, some studies have also suggested that family engagement throughout a child's elementary and middle school years contributes to higher achievement test scores in high school (Barnard, 2004; Keith et al., 1998). Despite evidence that highlights such

benefits of family engagement, researchers have simultaneously noted that family engagement programs are often limited for families of historically marginalized backgrounds (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernández, 2013; Lareau, 2003).

Interrogating Diversity in Family Engagement

One critical issue stems from concerns about the ways in which school staff communicate with families. African-American parents have reported feeling marginalized by schools when attempting to discuss various matters with teachers and administrators, such as Individualized Education Programs (Howard & Reynolds, 2008), or providing suggestions to improve overall school atmospheres (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Such devalued input has also caused some parents to feel fearful about continuing to communicate with teachers (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). For families whose language of origin is not English, apprehension has been worsened by the lack of language diversity among school staff or school forms (Auerbach, 2002, 2009; Quirocho & Daoud, 2006). Furthermore, in terms of communication, some schools have even issued behavioral contracts and pledges to parents, assuming that families were incapable of meeting the needs of their children at home (McKenna & Millen, 2013; Nakagawa, 2000).

Disparities in family engagement also occur at structural levels (Cooper, 2009; Jeynes, 2012). School- and classroom-based family engagement practices require family members to access their children's schools at times designated by teachers and administrators (Jeynes, 2012). Such access restricts family members who do not have the luxury of flexibility in their work schedules (Fields-Smith, 2007; Olivos, 2006). Olivos (2006), for example, found that the Latino parents in his study were often unable to

participate in school-based programs due to the absence of paid time off opportunities. When family members of historically marginalized backgrounds do participate in such family engagement initiatives, however, their contributions have not always been as well received as those of White parents (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Cooper, 2009).

Scholarship aimed at critically interrogating school-to-home relationships has also illuminated the ways in which schools create safer and more inclusive spaces for families of historically marginalized backgrounds. Some initiatives have included writing programs with parents, school personnel making house visits, family colloquia, as well as methods of communication that acknowledge all family members as equal decision makers in schools (Auerbach, 2002, 2009; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). In addition to highlighting such positive examples, this research has begun to help inform policymakers and practitioners to reexamine school-to-home relationships for families of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moodie, 2009). Nevertheless, in analyzing school-to-home relationships for diverse families, such a critical focus has yet to be fully developed for families headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) parents—especially gay fathers.

Sociopolitical Ideology and School-to-Home Relationships for Gay Fathers

On November 25, 2013, Natalie Angier (2013) of the *New York Times* expounded upon the transformation of family structures over the past decade throughout the United States. Her article featured the Schulte-Wayser family, a family consisting of two gay fathers and their six adopted children. Angier's descriptions captured some challenges that were unique to these particular fathers and their children. Their socioeconomic status

provided them with financial resources to provide for their six adopted children; however, both fathers struggled to some extent attending to the learning disabilities of some of their children. Both fathers also expressed resentment towards other people who constantly noted the racial and ethnic diversity of their family configuration, as well as often being called noble for their transracial adoptions. Nevertheless, Angier highlighted both fathers' negotiation of daily household rituals, like any other family, such as setting rules, helping with homework, and enforcing bedtime in their attempts to foster a healthy, functioning home environment for their large family.

Although Angier's (2013) article underscores the growing visibility of gay fatherhood throughout the United States, her presentation of the Schulte-Wayser family does not adequately highlight many factors shaping gay men's pursuits towards and experiences with fatherhood. Certainly, television portrayals such as *Modern Family*, *The New Normal*, and *Brothers and Sisters* mirror Angier's work and depict gay fathers as any other parents—gay or straight—attempting to navigate the trials and tribulations of parenthood. Furthermore, recent landmark decisions made by the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) (e.g., marriage equality, joint adoptions for same-sex couples) have helped in formally legitimizing gay-fathered households and securing the economic benefits and legal statuses in their family formations. Nevertheless, representations of gay fathers and their families as ordinary family units may overshadow some of the social and political forces, or sociopolitical ideologies, complicating gay fatherhood.

In fact, research has uncovered such sociopolitical ideologies as manifested through policies, politics, and social discourse affecting gay men and shaping gay fathers' parenting experiences (Berkowitz, 2011; Cahill & Tobias, 2007; Geisler, 2012; Goldberg

& Smith, 2014; Goldberg, Weber, Moyer, & Shapiro, 2014; Vinjamuri, 2015a, b). For example, housing, employment, and parenting policies discriminate based on sexual orientation throughout many areas of the country (Family Equality Council [FEC], 2016), to the point of forcing some gay couples to relocate to states with more inclusive policies in order to pursue fatherhood (Berkowitz, 2011; Geisler, 2012), or provide their families with safe communities and school environments (Goldberg & Smith, 2014). Similarly, the platform of an entire political party defines marriage as a union between a man and woman (Drabold, 2016), and supports conversion therapy efforts aimed at changing one's sexual orientation to heterosexuality (Conley, 2016).

In social and institutional interactions, gay fathers continue to encounter heteronormativity, the presumption of heterosexuality as the norm for everyone; heterosexism, the privilege of heterosexuality; and homophobia, the aversion towards sexual minority identities (Berkowitz, 2011; Cahill & Tobias, 2007; Geisler, 2012; Goldberg & Smith, 2014; Goldberg, et al., 2014; Vinjamuri, 2015a, b). Although increasing evidence has highlighted social and political forces influencing gay fathers' experiences, and despite the growing visibility of gay fathers throughout the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), no scholar has begun to explore gay fathers' experiences with their children's schooling, or even connect such experiences to sociopolitical ideologies of gay fatherhood.

This dissertation attempts to begin to fill the research void on gay fathers and their children's schooling. Based on extant research that has explored gay fatherhood generally, their experiences may be better understood through the unique sociopolitical position of gay fatherhood throughout the United States, as reflected through marriage

equality, anti-discrimination statutes, restrictions in family formation, and the relegated position of sexual minorities in schools. As such, this study explores factors that shape gay fathers' experiences with their children's schooling for gay fathers living in two states with different sociopolitical discourses surrounding sexual orientation and same-sex parenting—State A and State B. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the experiences of gay fathers with their children's schooling?
2. How do sociopolitical ideologies shape the ways in which gay fathers experience and interact with their children's schooling?
3. Do these experiences differ in environments with different sociopolitical ideologies? If so, how?

Outline of the Dissertation

In Chapter Two, I discuss prior research conducted on gay fathers, more generally, as well as the experiences of same-sex parents in school-to-home contexts. Chapter Two also includes the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, including queer theory (e.g., Kitinger, 2005; Rich, 1980; Warner, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). Chapter Three outlines the methodology of this study, including the recruitment process, number of participants included, data collection and analysis, researcher positionality, and validity procedures. Chapter Four presents the findings from this study, as well as information about participants and their settings. Organized into four sections, this chapter focuses first on three community contexts (Emerton, gay-friendly havens, and Intolerant Towns) and the fourth on two single fathers that lived in a gay-friendly haven, but whose prior experiences limited interface with their children's schools. Finally, Chapter Five deeply

explores some of the emerging themes from this dissertation as they relate to prior research and apply to implications for school leaders, education program providers (EPPs), policymakers, and future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In 1992, Casper, Schultz, and Wickens published findings from a three-year, ethnographic study on gay and lesbian parents' experiences navigating their children's schools in the New York City area. A first of its kind, this landmark study uncovered some of the unique interactions of same-sex parents with teachers and administrators, including assumptions of heterosexuality, deciding if and when to come out, and school staff's concerns about gender roles in families headed by same-sex parents. Since its publication, some scholars have continued with this area of research, having supported some of the outcomes presented by Casper and colleagues (1992) —namely, the norms of heterosexuality in registration forms and school curricula, as well as the dilemma of disclosing one's sexual orientation to school staff and other parents (Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Mercier & Harold, 2003). Such focus has also expounded further upon many other important issues such as the mistreatment of parents and their children (Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Perlesz et al., 2006; Ray and Gregory, 2001), heightened concerns about the safety of children (Goldberg, 2014; Perlesz et al., 2006; Ray and Gregory, 2001), and the ways in which same-sex parents address heterosexism and homophobia with their children and children's teachers (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Mercier & Harold, 2003).

Extant research has advanced our understandings of same-sex parents in school-to-home relationships; however, two critical limitations exist. First, most studies are relatively outdated, especially considering the sociopolitical environments of same-sex parents throughout the United States over the past decade. Even more recent studies do

not explicitly connect these environments to education-related experiences (e.g., Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Second, outcomes have reflected the perspectives of lesbian mothers or gay and lesbian parents as aggregated data. Gay fathers' experiences alone have not been represented. Due to this dearth of research, this dissertation draws further from a variety of academic fields and disciplines including law, social work, sociology, and psychology, as well as studies conducted in the United Kingdom and Australia, to highlight the sociopolitical ideologies of same-sex parenting that complicate gay fatherhood. Although this dissertation focuses on the experiences of gay fathers, the review driving this study sometimes explores research on same-sex parenting more generally to begin making connections to gay fatherhood, and to understand the contexts of same-sex parenting as reflected through research.

The framing of this study begins with an examination of research on the perceptions of same-sex parenting. It begins by introducing some of the common arguments raised by opponents of same-sex parenting, especially those concerning children's outcomes, as well as the extent to which such rhetoric has influenced some of the sociopolitical ideologies of same-sex parenting and gay fatherhood, as represented in medicine, law, and policies. The following section explores studies that have compared children with same-sex parents to those with heterosexual parents, ultimately showing that same-sex parenting does not negatively affect the wellbeing of children, but simultaneously suggesting that differences in outcomes may be due to the social stigma that surrounds sexual minority identities and same-sex parenting. Then, this review illuminates the various ways in which gay men become fathers, as well as some of the sociopolitical obstacles that have complicated parenthood pursuits. The two sections that

follow examine gay men's experiences as fathers—the first of which encompasses broader social interactions out in public, or with friends and family members. The second includes gay fathers' experiences, as well as those expressed by other same-sex parents in research, with their children's schooling and education. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the theoretical framework guiding this study.

The “Perils” of Gay Fatherhood

Rooted in religious conservatism, many opponents argue that same-sex parenting leads to a number of inappropriate and unhealthy outcomes for children. Such beliefs, however, extend well beyond social discourse, and into policies that complicate the lives of same-sex parents, gay fathers, their children, and their unique family configurations. This section examines general perceptions of same-sex parenting and the sources of such perceptions. Moreover, this section will illuminate the sociopolitical ideologies under which gay fathers are parenting and making decisions about their children's and family's wellbeing.

Inappropriate Parenting

In 2004, the American Psychological Association (APA) published a comprehensive report on same-sex parenting. Intended for the use of researchers, clinicians, parents, students, and lawyers, this report reviewed a number of studies conducted on the outcomes of children with same-sex parents. Drawing the conclusion that households headed by two men or two women do not inhibit any kind of healthy development, the APA (2004) argued that same-sex couples are as effective as heterosexual parents in raising children. Although the report has been particularly useful in challenging heterosexist conceptions of family configurations, general perceptions of

same-sex parenting and gay fatherhood have remained negative. This section explores the extent of such perceptions, as well as common arguments made against same-sex parenting—the same arguments that the APA (2004) report debunked more than a decade ago.

General perceptions of gay fatherhood. In a nationwide telephone survey of 2,691 adults, as well as data drawn from the U.S. Census, scholars at the Pew Research Center (Pew, 2010) examined a number of topics related to the configurations of the American family. In addition to unearthing changes in family structures since the 1960s, Pew researchers highlighted current perceptions of family and LGB-parented households. They showed that almost half of survey respondents (43%) believed that gay couples raising children would harm society and that more than half (61%) felt that children needed both a mother and a father to ensure emotional stability. Moreover, when asked to classify family units, almost all respondents (99%) selected heterosexual-headed households as a family, while less than two-thirds (63%) answered similarly about LGB parents and their children.

Several other researchers have documented general negative perceptions of gay parenting, particularly when compared to heterosexual parents (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; McLeod, Crawford, & Zechmeister, 1999; Herbstrith, Tobin, Hesson-McInnis, & Schneider, 2013; Herek, 1988; Vescio & Biernat, 2003) and even when compared to lesbian mothers (Maney & Cain, 1997). Examining survey responses from 110 undergraduate students across six different universities, Herek (1988) noted hostility and negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women. Similarly, the 151 undergraduate students in a study conducted by McLeod et al. (1999) felt that the boy raised by two gay

fathers in their vignettes would strongly benefit from custody reassignment to heterosexual parents. Another study revealed a strong desire among survey respondents for gay parents to be denied custodial rights in adoption cases (Crawford & Solliday, 1996). Drawing from questionnaires completed by 158 undergraduate students, Vescio and Biernat (2003) found positive correlations between beliefs in traditional family values and an unlikelihood of endorsing gay fatherhood. Some of the research participants not only rated gay fathering as less desirable than heterosexual parenting, but also expressed little sympathy for the possibility of a gay father losing custody of his child, as depicted in a mock newspaper article. Maney and Cain (1997) explored 195 pre-service teachers' perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting, and found more instances of dissatisfaction among students' attitudes toward gay fathers than lesbian mothers.

Although these studies are relatively outdated, especially given the increased visibility of same-sex parenting and gay fatherhood since their publications, more recent research has found similar, negative perceptions of two-mom and two-dad households (Becker & Todd, 2013; Herbstrin et al., 2013; Weiner & Zinner, 2015). For example, Herbstrin and colleagues (2013) found significant levels discomfort among their 556 participants, also undergraduate students, reacting to pictures of same-sex kissing and same-sex-headed families, but not heterosexual kissing or families. Analyzing data on same-sex parents and their children from Pew (2010), Becker and Todd (2013) found that many survey respondents felt that children raised by same-sex parents would face more challenges than children raised by heterosexual parents. Such challenges not only included potential mistreatment from peers, but also social and emotional problems as well. The work of Weiner and Zinner (2015) additionally highlights the belief in the

dangers of sexual minorities as parents. When asked about the parenting abilities of heterosexual couples versus gay male couples, some of the 106 undergraduate students in their study felt gay parenting does not foster emotional stability for children, and that custody should be granted to heterosexual couples instead.

The driving force of religious conservatism. Traditional ideals about two, heterosexual-parented households influence some judgments about the home environments in which children are raised. In particular, individuals with religiously and/or politically conservative backgrounds are more likely to associate gay and lesbian parenting with interfering with the “nature” of heterosexual parenting (Becker & Todd, 2013; Clarke, 2001; McLeod et al., 1999; Pennington & Knight, 2011; Vescio & Biernat, 2003). Examining the relationship between religion and parenting, Clarke (2001) indicated that one often-expressed argument is that the Bible condemns same-sex attraction and parenting by gays and lesbians. The works of McLeod and colleagues (1999), Pennington and Knight (2011), and Manney and Cain (1997) have also posited conservatism with regard to conceptions of family as possible platforms for individuals who oppose gay and lesbian parenting.

Driven by religious conservatism, opponents have also argued that the so-called deviant position of gay parenting jeopardizes children’s social and emotional stability, which would inevitably lead to heightened childhood distress (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Clarke, 2001; McLeod et al., 1999; Weiner & Zinner, 2015). For example, Clarke (2001) identified six negative perceptions of gay parenting that revolved around safety concerns for children. Through her analysis of media representations and focus groups with university students, she carefully expounded upon the rhetoric of anti-gay parenting

such as ignoring the best interest of the child and the absence of appropriate, positive role models throughout some of the most impressionable years of childhood.

Unfit to father. Although several comparative studies have expounded further upon the emotional stability of households parented by same-sex couples, other issues have remained at the forefront of arguments against same-sex parenting and gay fatherhood. Overall, research has identified three issues—the gender identity and sexual orientation of children raised by same-sex parents, the increased likelihood that children will be victims of mistreatment, and the potential development of anti-social behavior.

Gender identity and sexual orientation. One common argument against gay parenting focuses on the potential for children to be confused about their own sexual identities (Clarke, 2001; McLeod et al., 1999; Pennington & Knight, 2011). Such opposition rests on two claims. First, children raised by LGB parents will somehow adopt an LGB identity of their own later in life (Clarke, 2001). Second, LGB parents cannot adequately provide gender-appropriate role models for their children (Clarke, 2001; Pennington & Knight, 2011). Clarke (2001) examined these claims through focus groups and various media, and uncovered deeply held beliefs that individuals had about interfering with normal child development. While newspapers, magazines, and various talk shows underscored the rhetoric of sexual identity confusion, focus group respondents further highlighted reasons for those concerns. One participant, for example, stated that same-sex parents would not only damage their children because of their LGB identities, but would also increase the number of LGB individuals in society. Another participant worried about boys, in particular, who are raised by two mothers, arguing that without

adult male figures, sons will suffer from knowing how to skillfully socialize with other men later in their lives.

In a more recent study, Pennington and Knight (2011) further honed in on concerns about children's sexual identities in households headed by same-sex parents. Responding to open-ended interview questions, the eight heterosexual adults differed to some extent with regards to their support for same-sex parenting. For example, some participants expressed opposition due to what they considered to be a normal and healthy family unit. Others, however, voiced their support, but simultaneously discussed the possibility of same-sex parents affecting children's sexual orientation and/or gender identity. One participant in particular felt that gay fathers and lesbian mothers would contribute to a child's eventual LGB identity. The majority of interviewees stressed the importance of children developing properly, with regard to gender roles, in nuclear family units headed by heterosexual parents.

Victims of mistreatment. Fears that children of same-sex parents will be bullied and harassed by their peers contribute to an undesirable position of same-sex parenting (Clarke, 2001; Pennington & Knight, 2011). Clarke's (2001) work on perceptions of same-sex parenting illuminates this point further, showing that another often expressed reason that LGB adults should refrain from pursuing parenthood is that their children will inevitably be victims of mistreatment. Rather than identifying the social stigma attached to LGB parenting, many of the focus group participants and various media outlets placed blame on LGB parents for potentially putting children in danger. As Clarke argued, "such arguments [on the mistreatment of children], while expressing sympathetic concern for

the hardship endured, demand that lesbians and gay men adapt to heterosexism by not having children” (p. 566).

Some gay men have also expressed concern about the safety of children raised by same-sex parents or gay fathers (Berkowitz, 2008; Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Mezey, 2012). Through their interviews with 39 gay men, Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) examined a number of deciding factors for 19 of them to remain childless. Some participants highlighted the heterosexist and homophobic environments in which they live, and imagined scenarios in which their hypothetical children would experience various levels of discrimination from other children, and even teachers. Unlike the heterosexual participants in Clarke’s (2001) study, the gay men interviewed by Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) understood negative experiences as a reflection of society’s struggle to move beyond traditional images of two-parent, heterosexual-headed households.

Developing anti-social behavior. In addition to claiming the onset of sexual and/or gender identity disorders (FRC, 2016), some opponents have even suggested that same-sex parenting leads to anti-social behaviors among their children. In fact, this position has been the driving force behind some scholars’ attempts to prove that having same-sex parents leads to increased drug and alcohol usage, as well as a range of criminal activities (Cameron & Cameron, 1996; Marks, 2012; Regnerus, 2012). Throughout their body of work, Paul and Kirk Cameron (e.g., Cameron, 2006; 2007, 2009; Cameron & Cameron, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2012), have insisted on the perils of same-sex parenting and gay fatherhood, arguing that scholarship on same-sex parents has been riddled with methodological flaws, and therefore should be disregarded. Despite the

prominence of the father-son duo throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, they have continued to publish in the last ten years, and have inspired a new generation of anti-gay scholars who have devoted their works to debunking prior studies (Marks, 2012) or developing flawed, biased research findings of their own to justify their argument against same-sex parenting (Regnerus, 2012).

Marks (2012) examined prior research conducted on the wellbeing and outcomes of children raised by same-sex parents. Citing what he believed to be significant methodological issues, Marks challenged 59 studies that concluded no disadvantages for children raised by same-sex parents. Such issues included the lack of diverse study participants, small sample sizes, and the absence of heterosexual comparison groups in many studies. These criticisms compelled Marks to completely discard the “no differences” discourse on children raised by same-sex or heterosexual parents, even though the studies that he cited showed no statistically significant differences. Ultimately, Marks argued for future research that includes larger, more diverse, and randomly assigned study samples in order to disprove “no differences” conclusions, and maintained the position that same-sex parenting leads to “myriad issues of societal-level concern” such as a number of criminal behaviors among children (p. 735).

Regnerus (2012) attempted to address Marks’ (2012) methodological concerns by surveying a random sample of nearly 3000 adults aged 18-39. His study sought to compare the experiences and outcomes of various family structures, including same-sex parents, heterosexual parents, divorced and remarried parents, and single parents. Overall, Regnerus identified more negative outcomes for adults who were raised by same-sex parents than those raised by two, married, heterosexual parents, including

higher frequencies of alcoholism, drug use, and pleading guilty to minor offenses in court. Similar to Marks, Regnerus argued against the “no differences” position of same-sex parenting, and concluded that children require a married mother and father for the healthiest developmental environment.

Since publishing his study, Regnerus’ (2012) work has been at the center of several scholarly and public debates (see HRC, 2013), and dissenters of his claims have identified significant methodological issues (Gates et al., 2012). First, study participants were born between 1971 and 1994, a time in which increased animosity and social stigma accompanied LGB identities, let alone same-sex parenting. Second, Regnerus (2012) classified all participants as raised by same-sex parents if they were in intentional families, briefly lived under the household of a same-sex couple, believed that one of their parents even engaged in a same-sex relationships, or had a parent who identified as LGB later in life. The aggregated data of these participants’ responses were then compared to participants whose parents were not only heterosexual, but remained married and lived together throughout their entire lives. A more appropriate analysis, should have compared this population of participants with individuals raised in intended same-sex families, whose parents were also married and lived together throughout their entire lives. Despite such critiques, Regnerus (2012) has maintained the accuracy of his study, which has had some national and international legislative impact on cases involving same-sex parents (HRC, 2013).

Embodiment of Lies in Sociopolitical Ideologies

Regnerus’ (2012) work and its reaches have not occurred in isolation. Throughout the 20th century, laws and politics surrounding same-sex parenting in the United States

have been influenced by pathological and criminal views of same-sex attraction. Such views have shaped “best interest” laws in assigning child custody to heterosexual parents, rather than LGB-identified parents, and have fueled anti-gay sentiments of several organizations in vocally demoralizing and arguing against same-sex parenting. While the recent visibility of same-sex marriage and parenting may have signaled radical change in creating more inclusion of and protections for LGB parents and their families, statewide statutes throughout the United States continue to reflect negative perceptions of sexual minorities. This section reviews the extent to which such perceptions have historically shaped (and continue to shape) sociopolitical ideologies of same-sex parenting for gay fathers.

Pathologizing and criminalizing same-sex attraction. The position of same-sex attraction as a punishable offense and treatable illness has expanded a continuum of explicit antagonism to covert marginalization throughout the United States. Although the term “homosexuality” (*homosexualität*) did not appear in writing until the 1860s (Pierceson, 2005), earliest efforts to criminalize same-sex attraction date back to the early 1600s in the United States (Pierceson, 2005). Deriving from English law, the legal system of the American colonies and later, the United States, adopted buggery/sodomy statutes. These statutes not only defined any form of sexual conduct other than heterosexual, vaginal intercourse as deviant, but also criminalized anyone who engaged in what was considered to be deviant sexual activity. At the time, states varied on the extent to which they issued consequences—some of which recommended death or returned “offenders” back to England to stand trial (Pierceson, 2005).

Although established upon 17th-century, Puritan ideals of heterosexuality, and buggery/sodomy statutes continued to exist throughout the United States legal system until the 1960s, in which the first two states, Illinois and Connecticut, followed recommendations from the American Law Institute (ALI) to repeal sodomy statutes (ACLU, 2016b). Over the course of about 40 years, all but 14 states followed suit, until the landmark SCOTUS decision in 2003 striking down the statute in Texas (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003). Although the ruling signaled the unconstitutionality of sodomy statutes across the United States, only two states have changed their laws since—Montana and Virginia—while the remaining 12, including Texas, continue to have sodomy laws on the books (ACLU, 2016b; Lugg, 2006).

Around the same time in which only two states followed recommendations made by ALI to repeal their sodomy statutes, medical professionals were simultaneously attempting to understand the “illness” of “homosexuality.” In 1952, the APA published the first version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I)*, in which “homosexuality” appeared as a sociopathic personality disturbance (APA, 1952). Then, in 1968, the second edition, (*DSM-2*) changed the description to deviating from “normal sexual behavior” (APA, 1968, p. 44). Although a revised version (*DSM-2-R*; APA, 1973) removed “homosexuality” from the list of mental disorders, it remained under the guise of sexual orientation disorder (SOD), later changed to ego-dystonic “homosexuality” (EDH), which defined the following:

This is for individuals whose sexual interests are directed primarily toward people of the same sex and who are either bothered by, in conflict with, or wish to change their sexual orientation. This diagnostic category is distinguished from homosexuality, which by itself does not constitute a psychiatric disorder. (APA, 1973, p. 44)

Although the APA no longer classified “homosexuality” as a psychiatric disorder throughout the second edition revision, SOD/EDH updates continued to hold heterosexuality as the gold standard of sexual orientation, and assumed that “homosexuality” could be changed through treatment. The final removal of SOD/EDH, and ultimate riddance of “homosexuality” as a mental illness did not occur until the 1987 revision of the third edition (*DSM-3-R*; APA, 1987).

The late 1980s observed the declassification of same-sex attraction as disorder, and the early 2000s witnessed the determination that sodomy laws were unconstitutional; nevertheless, the consideration of “homosexuality” as pathology and a crime continue to plague some U.S. policies today. One critical issue includes the morality and legal status of reparative/conversion therapy, or the approach to change an individual’s same-sex attraction. Despite having been rejected by major healthcare organizations for decades, attempts to convert same-sex attraction among minors have only been forbidden by state code in five states (New Jersey included) and D.C. (FEC, 2016). Similar policies for adults, however, have not been addressed in any state.

Best interest of the child. Shifts in the legal discourse of child custody contributed to additional challenges for same-sex couples to become parents. Early- and mid-20th century courts awarded custody to mothers in instances of marriage dissolution on the belief that only women could provide nurturing environments for children (O’Toole, 1989); however, this changed during the 1970s to include a number of factors in determining the best interest of, and most effective developmental environment for the child (O’Toole, 1989; Gerber, 2010; Schwartzreich, 2005; Taub, 2007). These factors included a wide range of parent- and home-related characteristics, with the “sexual

lifestyle [...] deemed to be one *among several* pertinent factors to be considered when awarding custody” (italics original, O’Toole, 1989, p. 142). Although the “best interest” language infers some form of equity among parental and home characteristics, a parent’s sexual orientation has held significant weight in assigning custody and visitation rights (Gerber, 2010; Schwartzreich, 2005; Taub, 2007).

In fact, the same misguided fears that have influenced social perceptions of same-sex parenting have contributed to courts’ decisions in making best interest determinations, and many of these fears have mirrored the same outmoded pathological and criminalized position of same-sex attraction. Opponents opined that same-sex parenting would increase the likelihood of mental disorders among children (O’Toole, 1989). The children of same-sex parents, they believed, would fall victims to mistreatment from peers (O’Toole, 1989; Gerber, 2010; Schwartzreich, 2005; Taub, 2007). Moreover, individuals against LGB parenting lamented that children would become confused about their own sexual identities, or worse, would grow up with a same-sex attraction themselves (O’Toole, 1989; Gerber, 2010; Schwartzreich, 2005; Taub, 2007).

The “best interest” rhetoric has fueled several anti-gay organizations throughout the United States in promoting traditional, two-parented, heterosexual households as the only effective environment for raising children (e.g., American Family Association [AFA], Family Research Council [FRC], Family Research Institute [FRI], National Organization for Marriage [NOM], Witherspoon Institute). Many of their core missions stem from religious conservatism and posit gay or lesbian sexual orientation as a choice that is not only harmful to the individual, but to society (AFA, 2016; FRC, 2016). Some

have even adopted the pathological view of same-sex attraction as contributing to increased social and emotional disturbances for children in households headed by same-sex parents (FRI, 2016; NOM, 2016). Such sentiments reflect a recent statement made by Bryan Fischer (2015, para. 17), a prominent voice for AFA:

There is a bad kind of discrimination, which is based on superficial characteristics like skin color. But there is a good kind of ‘discrimination,’ which is nothing more than wisdom and discernment based on moral principle and the best in research. A ban on same-sex adoption is based on what is best for children by rejecting what we know to be the substandard home environments.

The embodiment of such homophobia in these ideologies extends well beyond public discourse and rhetoric, as some of these anti-gay organizations have applied such beliefs to research. Efforts have included intermittent publications, such as those promoted by FRI and its founders, Paul and Kirk Cameron, the aforementioned, anti-gay, father-son duo. Other organizations, such as the Witherspoon Institute, employ a full staff devoted entirely to research agendas that examine a number of issues related to marriage and the family. In addition to funding scholars and fellows with research experience from some of the top universities across the United States, the Witherspoon Institute also hosts a number of ongoing seminars and events for high school, undergraduate, and graduate students in the Princeton, NJ area (Witherspoon Institute, 2016), providing opportunities for this organization to expose new generations to their visions of hate.

Statewide statutes that complicate same-sex parenting. Examining policies that affect same-sex parents requires attention to the unique characteristics that represent their family configurations. These policies encompass family formation, discrimination in housing and employment, and biased-motivated crimes, as well as education-related policies such as anti-bullying and curriculum. The following two sections provide a

general overview of these policies throughout the United States. The two case-study states, State A and State B, are discussed further in Chapter Four.

In terms of family formation, same-sex parents navigate a wide variety of options (e.g., foster care, adoption, surrogacy), which may accompany some legal obstacles depending on the state in which prospective parents live (Cahill & Tobias, 2007). Unlike heterosexual parents, the safety and protection of same-sex couples in employment, housing, and biased-motivated crimes still are not guaranteed in many areas of the country. For example, 32 states and D.C. include sexual orientation as a protected class in employment discrimination codes and statutes (FEC, 2016). The same is true for housing discrimination in only 24 states and D.C. (FEC, 2016).

Same-sex parents enroll their children in some type of PreK-12 education; therefore, one must also explore education-related policies. Only 20 states and D.C. include sexual orientation as a protected class in anti-bullying policies—many of which only frame characteristics of the student, rather than the family. See New Jersey for example:

Harassment, intimidation, and bullying means any incident perceived as being motivated by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as [...] sexual orientation, [...] that disrupts or interferes with the orderly operation of the school or the rights of other students and that [...] has the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or group of students (N.J. Stat. Ann. § 18A:37-14)

The language represented here indicates concern from New Jersey's policy makers to protect students who identify as LGB, but the statute as written does not consider instances in which children are victims of mistreatment due to their parents' sexual orientation. Compare New Jersey with Vermont:

Harassment means an incident or incidents [...] based on or motivated by a student's or student's family member's actual or perceived [...] sexual orientation

[...] that has the purpose or effect of objectively and substantially undermining and detracting from or interfering with a student's educational performance or access to school resources or creating an objectively intimidating hostile or offensive environment (Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. § 16-11).

In addition to anti-bullying, school curriculum policies shed light on the extent to which schools include and protect same-sex parents and their families. Six states require sexuality education courses in schools that are medically accurate, culturally appropriate, and unbiased. Only one state, California, mandates LGBTQ-related topics in school curriculum outside of sexuality education. Nine states have even gone as far as prohibiting instruction that promotes "homosexuality" as a "lifestyle acceptable to the general public," and emphasizing that "homosexual conduct is a criminal offense" (Tex. Educ. Code § 163.002).

Summary

As research has demonstrated, social environments for same-sex parents and gay fathers remain negative or hostile. As Pew (2010) and Herbstrith et al (2013) have shown, some individuals have continued to perceive same-sex parents and their families as inauthentic and disreputable versions of family, and such negative dispositions may stem from religious and conservative ideals of households headed by two, heterosexual parents (Pennington & Knight, 2011; Vescio & Biernat, 2003). A few studies have even found heightened negativity for gay fathers, when compared to lesbian mothers and heterosexual parents (Becker & Todd, 2013; Weiner & Zinner, 2015), possibly due to perceptions of gay men as hypersexualized pedophiles (Biblarz & Savci, 2010). Such dispositions may also explain why some believe that children with gay fathers will ultimately end up confused about their own sexual identities, or even worry that same-sex parenting results in an entire host of anti-social behavior.

Although many studies have begun to highlight the environments under which same-sex parents and gay fathers are raising children, some general limitations in extant research are worth noting. First, the majority of participants in research on perceptions have consisted of White, undergraduate students located in the Midwest. Therefore, responses may not depict an accurate, representational sample of the United States, and may actually reflect homophobic ideologies that have been shown to be worse in this area of the country (Cahill & Tobias, 2007). Second, many studies are outdated, especially considering the number of social and political shifts surrounding same-sex attraction and same-sex parenting.

Are the Kids Alright?

The relegated position of same-sex parents has influenced a number of scholars (e.g., Golombok, Patterson, Tasker, Wainright) to devote much of their work to exploring outcomes of children raised in two-mother or two-father households. The purpose of this section is to review such studies, which have compared the wellbeing of children raised by same-sex parents to those raised by heterosexual parents on a number of issues related to psychosocial, cognitive, and sexual identity outcomes. Ultimately, this section describes research that challenges the notion that same-sex parenting will result in poor outcomes for children, and that gay fathers are unfit to parent.

Psychosocial Outcomes

This section explores studies on psychosocial outcomes for children with same-sex parents. Overall, studies have explored social and emotional developments, experiences with stress, and various coping mechanisms that children with same-sex parents have utilized in handling mistreatment from peers.

Social and emotional development. Findings suggest that having same-sex parenting does not jeopardize the extent to which children develop socially and emotionally (Farr & Patterson, 2013; Fitzgerald, 1999; Patterson, 2006; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). Studies employing the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), which measures components of social competence and behavior, have identified typical social adjustment for children raised by same-sex parents (Crowl, Ahn, & Baker, 2008; Fulcher et al., 2005). Coding data from 19 studies that utilized the CBCL, Crowl et al. (2008) found no statistical correlation between social adjustment and parents' sexual orientation.

Fulcher and colleagues (2005) additionally explored these social outcomes by comparing children with same-sex or heterosexual parents. Their study, based on a sample of 80 families (55 headed by lesbians, 25 headed by heterosexual parents), also identified no correlation between social developments and parents' sexual orientation. Moreover, their results highlighted similar outcomes for children raised by lesbian mothers or heterosexual parents. Using a number of other scales (e.g., Rainbow Families Scale, Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, Positive and Negative Affect Schedule), Lick, Patterson, and Schmidt (2013) surveyed 91 adults raised by same-sex parents. Their results showed consistency in social and emotional outcomes, concluding that same-sex parenting does not render negative, long-term effects.

Children with same-sex parents do not engage in any more problematic behaviors in schools than children with heterosexual parents (Farr & Patterson, 2013; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Meezan and Rauch (2005) examined the results from four studies, identifying specific instances of healthy behavior,

while simultaneously dispelling myths about children's social outcomes. For example, they highlighted one example in which preschool children with lesbian mothers were "less aggressive, bossy, and domineering than children with heterosexual mothers" (Meezan & Rauch, 2005, p. 103). Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, and Banks (2005) further examined differences in children's behavior, also finding examples of more positive behavior for children raised by same-sex parents than heterosexual parents. Their 10-year exploration of 78 lesbian-mothered households showed fewer instances of behavioral problems than typically observed in families with heterosexual parents.

Studies engaging in quantitative methods have further explored school-specific social and emotional experiences (Golombok et al., 2014; Wainright et al., 2004; Wainright & Patterson, 2006). Using questionnaires and interviews with parents and their children, Wainright and colleagues (2004) compared outcomes of children raised by same-sex or heterosexual parents. Their study, consisting of 88 families (44 from same-sex female parents, 44 from heterosexual parents), measured various aspects of social and emotional wellbeing such as depressive symptoms, self-esteem, anxiety, and trouble in school. Overall, they found no correlation between social and emotional adjustment to parents' sexual orientation, as well as no statistical differences when comparing children of same-sex parents to heterosexual parents. As measured through frequency in various anti-social behaviors (e.g., drug use, binge-drinking), Wainright and Patterson (2006) also found no significant differences between the 44 children raised by two mothers and the 44 children raised by heterosexual parents. Golombok et al. (2014) reported similar findings with their comparative study of families headed by 41 gay fathers, 40 lesbian mothers, and 49 heterosexual parents. Using interviews, observations, and questionnaires,

the authors actually found slightly lower levels of social and emotional issues among children with same sex parents as measured by conduct problems, hyperactivity, and emotional problems.

Childhood and adolescent stress. Research has also begun to illuminate the extent to which children with same-sex parents experience distress from peers. One comparative study identified similar outcomes for children with same-sex or heterosexual parents on the basis of anxiety, school connectedness, or care from adults and peers (Wainright et al., 2004). These results may suggest similar levels of stress to conclude that “adolescents living with same-sex parents were functioning well in many domains, both at home and at school” (p. 1895). Nevertheless, another analysis of the data, this time focusing on the 44 children reared in two-mother households, instead of comparing them with the 44 children with heterosexual parents, revealed differences in adolescent stress levels due to problems in parent-child relationships (Wainright & Patterson, 2006). The authors argue that indicators of child distress, and how children and adolescents deal with that stress, may be better understood by analyzing the quality of parent-child relationships, rather than parents’ sexual orientation.

More in-depth, qualitative modes of inquiry have begun to uncover the quality of parent-child relationships in households headed by same-sex parents. Although children respondents in two studies recognized the differences in their family configurations, they never felt a sense of betrayal by parents because of their sexual orientation (Sasnett, 2015; Welsh, 2011). For many children, the bonds they had with their LGB parents felt normal and strong (Sasnett, 2015; Welsh, 2011). Through interviews of 14 adolescents (13-18 years old) raised by same-sex parents, Welsh (2011) further uncovered the

strength of these bonds, and the extent to which some adolescents expanded their concepts of family make-up. One respondent, in particular, defined her family not just by immediate relatives, but also to include grandparents, cousins, and friends, arguing that love was what constituted a family—not parents' sexual orientation. Sasnett (2015) also identified participants who spoke about the cohesion of their family units as preemptively preparing them for the social stigma of their two-mom/two-dad households. Through semi-structured interviews of 20 adults with same-sex parents, Sasnett (2015) found that respondents born into families headed by same-sex parents reported fewer instances of distress, as opposed to respondents who learned about their parents' LGB identity through divorce from prior heterosexual marriages. Furthermore, her work has uncovered similar differences between both groups in terms of coping strategies. Participants who were not in two-mom/two-dad households since birth responded to their LGB parents by trying to hide their sexual orientation from peers, or feeling lower levels of self-esteem when confronted with mistreatment. Some participants, however, were resilient in the face of mistreatment, and addressed negativity as ways to educate peers about their families.

While levels of resiliency may differ by timing of parents' disclosure of their LGB identities, some studies have also found positive coping strategies among children and adolescents raised by same-sex parents (Lick, et al., 2013; Welsh, 2011). Although the adolescents interviewed by Welsh (2011) described instances of mistreatment, especially in middle school, they simultaneously expressed ways in which they refrained from internalizing the stress of these situations. Examples of resolving internal and external conflicts included talking to their parents about bullying, educating their peers

about their families, and accessing peer support groups. Of course, not all adolescents developed such positive coping strategies. Some participants expressed their embarrassment and hesitation to disclose their parents' sexual orientation to peers. Similar to Sasnett (2015), however, these negative coping strategies were more often the case for adolescents who were not raised by their same-sex parents since birth. The findings that Welsh (2011) has described highlight the various effects that social ideologies on same-sex parenting have on children's levels of stress and the extent to which they address peer-related conflicts.

Lick et al. (2013) provide additional insight into childhood and adolescent stress associated with same-sex parenting, ultimately concluding that "offspring of gay and lesbian parents adapt to their social experiences over the life course" (p. 245). Through questionnaires of 91 adults (aged 18-61) reared by gay and lesbian parents, the authors used a number of scales (e.g., the Rainbow Families Scale, Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) to measure long-term effects of childhood stress on adult wellbeing. Analyzing 16 variables through a series of rigorous tests that included t-tests, Pearson correlations, chi-square tests, ANOVA and ANCOVA, the authors found no significant correlations between childhood stigma, adolescent stigma, and life satisfaction. Throughout their analysis, the authors also found associations of the age at which children learned about their parents' gay or lesbian sexual orientation and childhood and adolescent benefits. These findings are consistent with Sasnett (2015) and Welsh (2011), showing more positive benefits and suggesting fewer internalized conflicts for children who are raised by same-sex parents since birth.

Cognitive Outcomes

Compared to psychosocial and sexual identity outcomes, research on cognitive outcomes remains relatively underexplored. Such lack of representation may be due, in part, to heightened concerns about social, emotional, and sexual developments compared to any other issues. This section reports on studies that exist that have explored academic achievements and intellectual developments of children raised by same-sex parents.

Academic achievement. Research on academic outcomes of children with same-sex parents remains relatively underexplored, and the results from the limited studies that do exist vary with regard to achievement. One study, found that children raised by same-sex parents scored slightly lower on math than children raised by two heterosexual, married parents (Potter, 2012). Accessing data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten cohort, Potter (2012) examined a number of variables in an attempt to find associations of parents' sexual orientation with children's math achievement, including family structure, math assessment scores, and family transitions. Ultimately, the author found lower math scores when comparing children with same-sex parents to those with heterosexual parents at Kindergarten. Controlling for family transition variables among heterosexual parents (e.g., divorce, separation, remarrying), however, the authors found fewer differences between children with same-sex parents or heterosexual parents in terms of math achievement. Although riddled with some significant methodological issues—for example, comparison sizes were extremely disproportionate (72 for same-sex parents and 11,304 for heterosexual parents at Kindergarten), the authors conclude that differences in math achievement scores are better understood by examining family transitions rather than family structures.

Another study supports Potter's (2012) conclusion that family structure is a weak indicator of children's academic outcomes (Wainright et al., 2004). Comparing 44 adolescents with lesbian mothers to 44 with heterosexual parents, Wainright et al. (2004) found no significantly statistical differences in grade point averages (GPA). Out of a 4-point scale, the authors found mean GPAs by gender and family structure as follows: 2.91 for boys raised by lesbian mothers, 2.76 for girls raised by lesbian mothers, 2.65 for boys raised by heterosexual parents, and 2.90 for girls raised by heterosexual parents. Using additional, bivariate analyses of GPA and parent-child relationships, the authors concluded that indicator of GPA, and subsequently academic achievement, may be better understood through the level of care and warmth offered by parents—not their sexual orientation.

Intellectual development. Research on intellectual development for children with same-sex parents has identified no significant variations compared to children raised by heterosexual parents (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). Two studies, in particular, have focused on comparing the intellectual developments of high-needs children raised by either same-sex or heterosexual parents, also finding no statistically significant differences (Lavner, Waterman, & Peplau, 2012; Leung, Erich, Kanenberg, 2005). Over the course of 22 months, Lavner et al. (2012) examined cognitive and social developments of adopted children (22 with same-sex parents and 60 with heterosexual parents) who were exposed to drugs and alcohol in utero, as identified through toxicology reports at birth, as well as social worker reports. Using three scales (Bayley Scales of Infant Development-II, Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children, and Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale IV), the authors found no

significant differences among children in cognitive development upon two, 12, or 24 months of being placed in their adopted homes.

Consistent with prior findings that show greater significance in parent-child relationships than family structures, Leung et al. (2005) compared various developments of special needs children between households headed by same-sex or heterosexual parents. A total of 158 adoptive parents responded to questionnaires about their children's special needs characteristics, as well as levels of family functioning. According to the authors, both heterosexual and same-sex parents reported similar, high levels of family functioning for their children. Family structure, they concluded, did not prove to be mediating factors in children's cognitive developments.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Research comparing same-sex to heterosexual households has attempted to address three primary concerns related to child and adolescent development: gender identity, gender-role behavior, and sexual orientation (Tasker & Patterson, 2008). This section reviews such studies, but unlike psychosocial and some cognitive outcomes, findings on sexual identities vary. On one hand, scholars have found no statistically significant difference between children raised by same-sex or heterosexual parents (e.g., Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). On the other hand, some studies have identified evidence to support more gender identity fluidity among children with same-sex parents (Goldberg, 2007; Goldberg, Kashy, & Smith, 2012; Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008).

No differences between same-sex or heterosexual parents. Some studies have identified similar developments in children's sexual orientation, gender identity, gender

role behavior, and gender expression when comparing same-sex to heterosexual households (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). To make comparisons, some investigators have attempted to measure differences through children's play preferences that include toys, peer group interactions, and behaviors—ultimately finding children in both household types developing similarly (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). Other studies have examined parents' and teachers' responses about children raised by same-sex or heterosexual parents, and have found no differences in psychosexual developments between both groups (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). Using the Preschool Activities Inventory (PSAI), Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, and Golombok (1997), observed children's play for children of 30 lesbian mothers and 63 heterosexual parents, and similarly found no differences in the gender expression of children raised by lesbian mothers or heterosexual parents, as reflected through social constructions of gender-role play (e.g., playing with toy guns versus playing with dolls).

A more recent study has supported the “no differences” conclusion (Farr et al., 2010). In a study consisting of 106 families (27 lesbian, 29 gay, and 50 heterosexual), Farr et al. (2010) studied responses to a series of survey questions on children's adjustment and development, including the PSAI, CBCL, and Caregiver-Teacher Report Form (C-TRF). Descriptive statistics revealed no significant difference in gender role behavior among all three groups. Moreover, the researchers found no significant correlations between PSAI scores to CBCL or C-TRF scores, showing that children's gender roles do not relate to behavioral or socioemotional problems.

A study conducted by Fulcher et al. (2008) provides additional consistency of similar stereotypical gender behaviors among children raised by same-sex or heterosexual parents. Following the Sex-Role Learning Index (SERLI) assessment, 66 children (33 with lesbian mothers, 33 with heterosexual parents) ranked a series of photos with which they related to the most that depicted stereotypically masculine and feminine activities and occupations. Activities and occupations included boys hammering, boxing, playing baseball; girls sewing, ironing, and cooking; male carpenters, police officers, doctors; and female teachers, hair stylists, and bakers. Results showed that children's preferred activities and future occupations did not differ significantly by household type. Controlling for parents' sexual orientation, the authors concluded that the types of households in which they live did not affect children's gender identity development.

Research has identified similar developments in sexual orientation between same-sex and heterosexual households (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). Studies have shown no statistically significant differences in sexual orientation identities for adolescents raised by lesbian or heterosexual parents (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). Similarly, only a small percentage of adults raised by gay fathers (9%) identified as gay or bisexual (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). Some researchers have continued to examine the sexual orientation of adults raised by same-sex parents; again, finding no statistical significance that having same-sex parents affects sexual identities for children and adolescents (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2008).

Examining relationships between family composition and children's romantic attractions, Wainright and colleagues (2004) also have found no mitigating factors in parents shaping their children's sexual orientation. Through in-home interviews, 44 adolescents with lesbian mothers and 44 adolescents with heterosexual parents responded to a series of questions about their developing sexual identities. Interviews consisted of yes-no questions with topics such as same-sex attraction and dating behaviors. Ultimately, the authors found no evidence to suggest no influence of household type on romantic attractions or sexual behavior.

More fluidity among children with same-sex parents. While the majority of studies have concluded "no differences," some researchers have begun to illuminate more fluidity in terms of sexual orientation for children raised by same-sex than those raised by heterosexual parents (Fitzgerald, 1999; Meezan Tasker & Patterson, 2008). The results of one study, in particular, found that a majority of adults raised by lesbian mothers self-identified as heterosexual, but simultaneously expressed no concerns with the possible consideration of engaging in a same-sex relationship (Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). Additional studies have suggested more fluidity in terms of sexual and romantic attraction among adults who were raised by gay and lesbian parents with other individuals who identify as lesbian, bisexual or gay (Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Saffron, 1996).

Fulcher and colleagues (2008) have identified some gender-related variability for children raised by same-sex parents. Their findings showed instances of gender conformity, as reflected through boys' and girls' higher rankings of same-gender activities and occupations. Nevertheless, the children also demonstrated some flexibility

of gender-role stereotypes. Utilizing the Gender Transgressions Measure (GTM), the authors asked the 66 children in their study (33 from lesbian mothers, 33 from heterosexual parents) to rank cross-gender images (e.g., a boy with nail polish) according to violations in gender role behavior. Interestingly, boys with heterosexual parents responded to such cross-gender images less favorably than any other group (boys with same-sex parents, girls with same-sex parents, or girls with heterosexual parents). Fulcher and colleagues (2007, p. 339) concluded that:

There was one significant difference in children's knowledge about or flexibility around gender stereotypes as a function of parental sexual orientation. Children of heterosexual parents described gender role transgressions committed by boys as being more serious than those committed by girls. Children of lesbian mothers, on the other hand, saw gender transgressions as similar in seriousness, regardless of whether they were committed by boys or by girls. This finding is suggestive, hinting that children of lesbian mothers may not apply a double standard to their judgments of children's gendered behavior.

Additional studies have explored the relationship between children's sexual identities and their parents' sexual orientation (Goldberg, 2007; Goldberg, et al. 2012). Through open-ended interviews, Goldberg (2007) uncovered some of the ways in which 46 adults reflected upon their experiences growing up with a lesbian, gay, or bisexual parent. Eight participants identified with a sexual minority identity (lesbian, bisexual, and genderqueer); eleven described sexuality in terms of a continuum, rather than a binary; and fifteen expressed more comfort identifying as gender nonconforming. Moreover, the majority of participants (30) expressed that their parents' LGB identities contributed to their ability to emphasize and express more open-mindedness towards sexual minorities.

Findings from Goldberg et al. (2012) have also suggested more instances of gender fluidity among children raised by same-sex parents. They examined gender-typed play of children from 126 couples (44 lesbian mothers, 34 gay fathers, 48 heterosexual

parents). Utilizing multivariate analyses of PSAI scores, the authors found fewer instances of gender-typed play among children of lesbian couples when compared to those of gay fathers and heterosexual parents. Through a closer examination, the authors also found daughters of gay fathers to engage in less feminine behavior than the daughters of heterosexual parents, and more feminine behavior than the daughters of lesbian mothers. Rather than directly associating these differences to sexual orientation, the authors argue that:

[Gay fathers] appear to adopt parenting practices/styles that are more feminine than those of heterosexual fathers, and sometimes themselves as a balance of masculine and feminine energies. Thus, although lacking a female live-in parent, daughters of gay fathers may experience their fathers as modeling both masculinity and femininity (Goldberg et al., 2012, p. 513).

Summary

Overall, having same-sex parents does not detrimentally affect children's outcomes or overall wellbeing. Same-sex parenting does not hinder children's academic achievement or intellectual development (Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Wainright et al., 2004). Additionally, having same-sex parents does not jeopardize the extent to which children develop socially and emotionally (Lick, et al., 2013; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Wainright et al., 2004). While some children raised by gay and lesbian parents have reported some social distress, they have simultaneously maintained higher levels of emotional resiliency (Lick et al., 2013). Findings about the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of children of same-sex parents, however, remain varied.

Despite the general "no differences" claim, issues in the collection of this research warrant some exposure. First, a large majority of studies compare households headed by same-sex parents to heterosexual parents. Such comparison perpetuates heterosexual

parenting as the assumed, gold standard of family formation and raising children. Second, comparative studies have based their conclusions on statistical significance; however, as Stacey and Biblarz (2001, 2010) have noted, any significance at all is worth pursuing in subsequent research, particularly given the “heterosexist conditions under which lesbian-gay-parent families currently live” (2001, p. 176). Finally, one critical limitation of outcomes-based research is that the majority of same-sex parents identify as lesbian. Several large-scale, survey studies include children with two fathers, and control parents’ gender in their findings. Nevertheless, no study employing more in-depth, qualitative research focuses on the children of gay fathers.

So the Kids *might* be Alright: How about their Fathers?

More recently, shifts in scholarship have begun to address same-sex parents’ experiences more broadly. Unlike the underrepresentation of gay men in outcomes-based and school-to-home research, many studies on parenting experiences have focused on gay fathers. This section reviews such scholarship. It begins with studies that have captured intermediary factors associated with internalized heterosexism in shaping some gay men’s reluctance to become fathers. The section follows with research on the decisions that some gay men make in pursuing fatherhood, as well as the various planned pathways taken toward gay fatherhood. This section concludes with studies that have explored gay men’s experiences more broadly once they have become fathers.

Gay Men can have Kids?

Negative perceptions and relegated positions of same sex parenting have influenced some men to question the ability of gay men having children, as well as the extent to which gay fathers can create safe and effective environments for children. Some

men delay fatherhood, or completely abandon the idea, due to the messages they have received about gay fatherhood. In some cases, the power of these messages has been so strong as to convince gay men that the only way they could have children was through heterosexual relationships.

The reaches of heterosexism. The pursuit of gay fatherhood can be accompanied by legal barriers and restrictions in many areas of the United States (Cahill & Tobias, 2007). For some gay men, these obstacles have influenced their decisions to remain childless, especially for individuals who lived in states where surrogacy was illegal or did not recognize joint adoptions for same-sex couples in their statutes (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). Some of the gay men interviewed by Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) have expressed concerns about interacting with homophobic agencies and attorneys as determining factors for abandoning the idea of adopting children of their own someday. The authors highlight the particular impediments of gay fatherhood as:

inextricably tied to legalities mandated by both local and national government. So even though gay men's struggles are similar in some respect to heterosexuals' stressful, time-consuming efforts to achieve parenthood through adoption or by using assisted reproductive technologies, gays are further burdened by heterosexist norms about family building (p. 377).

The real threat of encountering opposition from agencies delays the pursuit of parenthood for some gay men as well (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Gianino, 2008; Goldberg, Downing, & Moyer, 2012; Jennings, Mellish, Tasker, Lamb, & Golombok, 2014; Rabun & Oswald, 2009). Gay men have identified the lack of inclusive policies for same-sex couples as hurdles to pursue fatherhood until later in their lives (Gianino, 2008; Jennings et al., 2014). Such heterosexist conditions of family formation have affected gay

fathers to the point of internalizing such barriers as inevitable expectations when attempting to adopt children (Jennings et al., 2014).

The reaches of heterosexist norms of family formation have also influenced the extent to which gay men believe they can adequately raise children (Robinson & Brewster, 2014; Schacher et al., 2005; Tornello & Patterson, 2012). Expounding further upon such heterosexist conflicts, Robinson and Brewster (2014) surveyed 164 childless gay and bisexual men about their ability to parent. By measuring personal homonegativity, gay affirmation, morality of same-sex attraction, and parenting gender roles, the authors found some correlation of internalized heterosexism on perceived parenting abilities, concluding that “internalized heterosexism and gender-role conflict are both important variables to consider when examining parenting attitudes and motivations of gay and bisexual men” (Robinson & Brewster, 2014, p. 56). Schacher and colleagues (2005) have further developed the idea of gender-role conflicts for gay men, suggesting one reason for lower levels of self-efficacy is due, in part, to dominance of heterosexual-headed families throughout society. Their focus groups, consisting of 21 gay fathers, revealed a “heterosexist gender role strain” (p. 42) that dominated many of these fathers’ intentions and desires to pursue parenthood. For some fathers juxtaposing gay and parent identities did not occur until later in life, after they had and raised children through heterosexual relationships (Tornello & Patterson, 2012).

Disassociating a gay/father identity. Growing up without any exposure to same-sex parented households generally, and gay fathered households specifically, contributed to the belief that the only viable option of having children was through heterosexual relationships (Benson, Silverstein, & Auerbach, 2005; Berkowitz, 2011; Brinamen &

Mitchell, 2008; Geisler, 2012). The assumption followed that gay fathering is an oxymoron, and that having a gay identity simultaneously renounces any possibility for a father identity as well. Such heterosexist beliefs strongly affected gay men to the point of remaining childless, due to the absence of gay father role models, and the omnipresent negative discourses surrounding gay fatherhood (e.g., socioemotional outcomes, pedophilia), influencing some gay men to decide against pursuing parenthood (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007).

Such disassociations of gay/father identities have even compelled some men to pursue fatherhood in heterosexual relationships, in which they denied their gay identities (Benson et al, 2005; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Tornello & Patterson, 2012). Many of the 25 fathers interviewed by Benson et al. (2005), for example, felt obligated to have children, whether through social, peer, or family pressure. In fact, the authors report that more than half of respondents (64%) viewed heterosexual marriage, and having children with their wives, as curing their same-sex attraction. More recently, Tornello and Patterson (2012) examined the experiences of 168 gay fathers who had children in previous heterosexual marriages. Their results not only indicated three different contexts in which fathers were currently living (divorced and single, divorced and living with another man, and remaining married and living with wife), but found various levels of openness of their sexual orientation to their children, friends, and family, depending on their current living situation.

Becoming a (Gay) Father

Several determining factors shape gay men's decisions and pursuit toward fatherhood. Decisions vary from long-term desires to becoming fathers, to specific

moments in which they realized the possibility of gay fatherhood. The planned pathways that gay men take vary as well, including foster care, adoption, and surrogacy, each of which is accompanied by some form of social and/or political obstacle.

Decisions for out, gay men to pursue fatherhood. Gay men's decisions to become fathers vary by ongoing parenting desires that they have felt throughout their lives to specific events in which they realized that parenthood was a possibility. For some gay men, becoming a father has always been a life goal (Dempsey, 2012; Geisler, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2012; Wells, 2011), having described parenthood as a natural part of life, or next steps in a relationship, regardless of sexual orientation (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Geisler, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2012; Murphy, 2013). Many of the 10 couples interviewed by Wells (2011, p. 160) have expounded further upon this innate position of parenthood in their lives, describing the adoption of their children as satisfying a "feeling that something was missing" in their relationships. Similarly, motivations to raise children and fulfilling the inherently human aspect of parenthood have extended from some perspective fathers' close-knit connections that they have had with their families (Goldberg et al., 2012), or continuing their families' ancestral, genetic, and biological lineage (Dempsey, 2012).

In addition to fulfilling a natural desire to pursue parenthood, some gay men have expressed their enjoyment of being around, teaching, and learning from children for reasons to seek parenthood (Berkowitz, 2008; Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Goldberg et al., 2012). Altruistic and personal ideals have also contributed to fatherhood pursuits, such as enhancing an adopted child's life through financial and emotional resources, guiding children's moral developments in interacting with stigmatized groups, as well as

the idea that their children could provide aging parents with sources of security into adulthood (Goldberg et al., 2012). Other life course components, such as fathers' ages, or meeting potential partners who shared parenting desires have been cited as additional factors that have led some men to pursue fatherhood (Goldberg et al., 2012).

Research has also expounded further upon specific events that have acted as catalysts for gay men to take initial steps towards fatherhood. These events include seeing same-sex couples with children out in public (Berkowitz, 2011; Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Goldberg et al., 2012; Murphy, 2013), learning about gay-friendly family-formation agencies (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Geisler, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2012; Murphy, 2013), statewide policy changes that no longer banned same-sex parents from adoption (Goldberg, Moyer, Weber, & Shapiro, 2013, 2014) or additional life changing events (Berkowitz & Mitchell, 2007). Interviewing 20 gay fathers, Berkowitz & Marsiglio (2007) elaborated further on such life changing events, finding that some fathers, for example, began to pursue parenthood after learning about religious organizations in which they could participate as gay men, let alone as gay fathers.

The planned pathways they take. This section details the three more common pathways toward gay fatherhood: surrogacy, foster care, and adoption. The first section examines surrogacy, while the second looks at both foster care and adoption simultaneously. Overall, examining such pathways highlights the complex decisions involved in gay men's pursuit toward fatherhood.

Surrogacy. Traditional surrogacy, although the path less taken by gay men (Lev, 2006), refers to the simplest form of reproduction through the father's sperm and egg of

the mother, who carries the child to term. Prospective fathers accomplish this either through sexual reproduction, typically with close friends or lesbians also seeking out parenthood (Berkowitz, 2013; Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Dempsey, 2013; Lev, 2006; Patterson & Riskind, 2010), or through the clinical intermediary of insemination (Berkowitz, 2013; Lev, 2006). A second form of surrogacy, gestational, involves a father's sperm, an egg donor, and the surrogate who carries the child. Gay men who pursue fatherhood through gestational surrogacy also decide on whose sperm to use (if they are a couple) and whether or not they want a known egg donor or for the donor to remain anonymous (Lev, 2006). Although the benefit of traditional and gestational surrogacy guarantees some form of father-child genetic relationship—much of the reason for gay men to pursue these options (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Jennings et al., 2014)—both types are accompanied by a number of legal obstacles.

Limited legal protections across the United States make traditional gestation difficult for gay men. Statewide policies that exist with regard to surrogacy address issues more often related to gestational than traditional options (Creative Family Connections [CFC], 2016). For example, some states considered to be inclusive for same-sex parents (e.g., California, Connecticut, Delaware, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island) allow gestational surrogacy according to state code and supporting case law, but do not provide similar protections for traditional surrogacy (CFC, 2016). Gay men pursuing the latter option have relied on written contracts or simple trust as efforts to ensure custody (Ladomato, 2012; Lev, 2006), with custodial arrangements consisting of complete termination of the birth mother's rights or shared, co-parenting agreements between birth mother and birth father (Conklin, 2013; Ladomato, 2012; Zuckerman, 2008).

Nevertheless, because of the absence of legal protections in many states (State A and State B included), as well as the varying extent to which courts acknowledge formal agreements made with birth mothers, gay men who have pursued fatherhood through traditional surrogacy have simultaneously run the risk of confronting child custody battles in court (Conklin, 2013; Lodomato, 2012; Zuckerman, 2008).

Variation in laws across the United States, as well as navigating around anti-gay agencies further exacerbate gestation surrogacy options for gay men. States with limiting policies, including New Jersey, allow gestational surrogacy, but compensated agreements made between the surrogate and prospective father remain unenforceable in court (CFC, 2016). Similar policies in other states have forced some gay men to achieve fatherhood through gestational surrogacy by seeking out surrogates in different states (Geisler, 2012; Patterson & Riskind, 2010). For example, some men interviewed by Geisler (2012) lived in states with policies similar to New Jersey, but considered gestational surrogacy in California. They ultimately abandoned this route, because of legal barriers, and chose adoption instead. Nevertheless, their narratives identified other challenges that are consistent in additional research, such as related expenses and interactions with anti-gay agencies (Perrin, Pinderhughes, Mattern, Hurley, & Newman, 2016; Riskind, Patterson, & Nosek, 2013; Stacey, 2006).

Adoption. On March, 7, 2016, SCOTUS reached an 8-0 decision to reverse Alabama's refusal to recognize an out-of-state adoption for a lesbian mother, re-granting her parental rights after the dissolution with her ex-partner (*V.L. v. E.L., et al.*, 2016). Nearly three weeks later, a federal judge found Mississippi's ban on adoption for same-sex couples to be unconstitutional, citing *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) as grounds to void

the ban since it denied benefits to married, same-sex couples (*Campaign for Southern Equality et al. v. Mississippi Department of Human Services, et al.*, 2016). Although both federal adoption motions led to legalizing joint and second-parent adoption for same-sex couples throughout the United States, the current legal status of adoption does not accurately depict the ways that agencies and policymakers have created, and continue to create, obstacles for gay men on their journeys to fatherhood.

One way that gay men pursue adoption is through foster care first; however, only eight states (New Jersey included) protect same-sex couples from discrimination (FEC, 2016). One state, Nebraska, prohibits foster care to same-sex couples, while the remaining states (State B included), and D.C., remain silent on the issue (FEC, 2016). Such silence has given power and autonomy to agencies, social workers, and local municipalities to determine foster care arrangements for gay fathers (Berkowitz, 2011; Geisler, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2013; Perrin et al., 2016). Although some gay men have been affected by the stress of dealing with anti-gay agencies (Berkowitz, 2011), other men have reported being denied foster care assignments due to their two-father households (Geisler, 2012).

Legal barriers that gay men have confronted extend well into experiences with adoption, especially prior to the recent, nationwide recognition of joint and second-parent adoptions for same-sex couples. Similar to issues with surrogacy, some fathers have crossed state lines to areas that protected adoptions for same-sex parents in order to form their families (Berkowitz, 2011; Geisler, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2013, 2014). Berkowitz (2011) highlighted the convoluted process taken by one set of fathers, in particular, who lived in Florida but rented an apartment in Vermont for two years. This temporary move

allowed the couple to establish and prove residency, in addition to making the required monthly meetings with social workers and the adoption agency. In some instances where prospective fathers did not have the social and economic capital to cross state lines, hiding their identities and adopting a “don’t ask, don’t tell” attitude became the best option for dealing with agencies (Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, & Goldberg, 2009; Geisler, 2012; Riggs, 2006, 2011).

The works of Goldberg and colleagues (2013, 2014) and Wells (2011) have expounded further upon the effects of anti-gay legislation on same-sex parents pursuing adoption to form their families. Goldberg et al. (2013, 2014) interviewed 15 lesbian mothers and seven gay fathers before and after the lifting of the gay adoption ban in Florida in 2010. Florida’s refusal contributed to heightened stress for same-sex couples. Some couples dealt with the legal invisibility of one partner, but mitigated such invisibility through written formal contracts, wills, or obtaining powers-of-attorney (Goldberg et al., 2013). Distress, as the authors uncovered, was not limited to parents, as children in foster care felt the emotional toll of their parents’ inability to adopt them (Goldberg et al., 2013). Although many parents expressed a decrease in anxiety after the ban (Goldberg et al., 2013), some continued to confront obstacles through lawyers who were not well-versed in the changing legislation (Goldberg et al., 2014; Wells, 2011), or through social agencies that attempted to deny parental rights to same-sex couples (Goldberg et al., 2014).

Homophobic and heterosexist encounters with social agencies have been cited as one of the more challenging components of the adoption process for prospective gay fathers (Berkowitz, 2011; Downing et al., 2009; Geisler, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2014;

Perrin et al., 2016; Schacher et al., 2005; Wells, 2011). Similar to dealing with anti-gay foster care agencies, some gay men chose not to remain open about their two-father households during home visits or interactions with adoption agencies (Downing et al., 2009; Geisler, 2012; Perrin et al., 2016; Schacher et al., 2005). Others found it difficult just trying to locate agencies that would assist with the formation of their adoptive families (Geisler, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2014; Schacher et al., 2005; Wells, 2011). In some cases, agencies explicitly described the “low probability” of successfully adopting to prospective gay fathers (Schacher et al., 2005, p. 44).

Although recent federal decisions may have provided gay fathers with more opportunities to adopt, additional legal barriers continue to complicate these processes. One recent political trend, religious freedom restoration acts (RFRA), allows privately funded organizations (foster care and adoption agencies included) discretion in choosing not to work with same-sex couples or prospective gay fathers, whose sexual orientation and potential family configurations conflict with their religious beliefs (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2016). While definitions vary, 21 states have enacted RFRA with 10 additional states considering legislation in 2016 (NCSL, 2016). Regardless of legal status, however, Goldberg et al. (2014, p. 59) underscore the real threat of social agencies continuing to deny parental rights to same-sex parents, further complicating pathways to parenthood:

It may well be that denying an adoption based on homophobia would constitute reversible error, which is to say that the result would be changed following an appeal. But this may not totally reassure anxious prospective adoptive parents. Appeals are expensive and time-consuming. Even an incorrect ruling, denying adoption would exact a high toll in terms of stress and expense.

Some fathers have even internalized this fear of losing children to social agencies, even after courts have finalized adoptions, to the point of carrying around adoption papers just in case individuals or authorities ever questioned the father-child relationship (Wells, 2011).

Gay Fathers' Experiences

Many studies have begun to capture gay fathers' experiences in broader, social contexts. Research has documented the social supports that gay men have received once becoming fathers, negotiations with their new gay/father identities, as well as continued assumptions of heterosexuality they have encountered out in public.

Negotiating social supports for planned families. Due to different levels of acceptance and inclusion, becoming a gay father sometimes accompanies the challenge of seeking out social supports from friends, family members, and the community. For some gay fathers, the importance of identifying systems of support extended from preemptively mitigating any additional parenting stress (Goldberg & Smith, 2014), or attempts to ensure positive environments for their children and families (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Schacher et al., 2005). Such efforts have also included relocating to areas of the country in which community members, schools, and other families will receive gay-fathered households with more support (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008). In addition, gay men have actively sought out social supports because of their parenting inexperience, in efforts to locate sources of information in raising children (Lynch & Murray, 2000; Wells, 2011).

Despite efforts and careful calculations on the fathers' behalf, achieving success in seeking out supports varies. Some fathers have reported lower levels of support from

their families-of-origin than friends (Brinamen & Michell, 2008; Geisler, 2012; Schacher et al., 2005; Tornello et al., 2011). Surveying 230 gay adoptive fathers, for example, Tornello et al. (2011) found family support measured slightly lower than friend support. Disclosing parenting intentions has also resulted in negative interactions with family members (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Geisler, 2012; Schacher et al., 2005; Wells, 2011). Out of the 10 gay men interviewed by Brinamen and Mitchell (2008), five described their parents' negative reactions when reporting their decisions to pursue fatherhood. Elaborating further on this finding, some of the participants interviewed by Lynch and Murray (2000), Geisler (2012), and Wells (2011) noted refusal from their families-of-origin to accept or even support their decisions to become fathers. According to some fathers, their intent to raise children was the "last straw" for their families (Geisler, 2012, p. 126), or the catalyst for "losing their families [of origin]" entirely (Lynch & Murray, 2000, p. 15).

Some gay fathers encountered forms of support from their families-of-origin, albeit weak and tentative (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Geisler, 2012; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Wells, 2011). Family members, for example, conditionally accepted gay men's fatherhood desires only if they intended to raise sons, noting that daughters needed women in their lives to ensure healthy developmental outcomes (Geisler, 2012). Research has also uncovered examples of what Lynch and Murray (2000, p. 16) identify as "superficial acceptance," in which families-of-origin continue to disagree with the so-called "lifestyle" of same-sex attraction, but simultaneously express love and support for the decisions that same-sex couples make for growing families of their own. For some gay fathers, however, support has not been entirely negative, but has remained an

ongoing process of concerted efforts to change the minds of some family members for safety, inclusion, and full support (Bergman, Rubio, Green, & Padrón, 2010; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Wells, 2011).

Research varies on the types of support systems that gay fathers experience in terms of friends and family members. On one hand, many gay men have reported a sense of ex-communication from their gay (childless) friends (Benson et al., 2005; Bergman et al., 2010; Geisler, 2012). The unique characteristic of being both gay and a father contributed to some fathers feeling as if they no longer fit into the gay community (Benson et al., 2005). Using structured interviews with 40 gay fathers, Bergman and colleagues (2010) identified a sharp, statistically significant decrease in gay men's socializing with other gay men after having children. Qualitative analyses of participants' responses also illuminated the distance that many gay men felt with the rest of the gay community after becoming fathers. Moreover, Geisler's (2012) in-depth interviews highlight some of the attitudes from the gay (childless) community as recalled by 12 gay fathers. Examples of responses include calling one father's daughter a party crasher and challenging the extent to which gay men can be effective parents to other gay fathers. To mitigate complete exile from the gay community, a handful of fathers even found support through a growing network of gay fathering support groups in their areas (Benson et al., 2005).

On the other hand, many gay fathers have described positive forms of support from family, friends, and coworkers (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011; Benson et al., 2005; Bergman et al., 2010; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Richardson, Moyer, & Goldberg, 2012; Wells, 2011). Parents, siblings, and other relatives embraced

many fathers' growing families with open arms (Bergman et al., 2010; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008, Lynch & Murray, 2000; Wells, 2011). For one group of fathers, extended family provided additional, overwhelming support (Wells, 2011). Some fathers continued to socialize with heterosexual friends, while networking with newer groups of heterosexual parents through their children's school and within the community (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011; Bergman et al., 2010; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008). Armesto and Shapiro (2010) and Richardson et al. (2012) uncovered instances in which fathers' coworkers welcomed their growing families.

Adapting to a new gay/father identity. Research has uncovered a variety of changes that fathers have made to accommodate their new parenting identities and growing families. Some of these changes include those also associated with heterosexual parents, such as handling the additional finances of a new family member and negotiating work-life balances (Bergman et al., 2010; Richardson et al., 2012). Bergman and colleagues (2010) found that most of the 40 fathers in their study adjusted well to handling responsibilities at work and at home. The 35 sets of adoptive fathers interviewed by Richardson et al. (2012), described some of their work-life adjustments after becoming fathers. Several men began working at home or changing their work schedules, some relied on childcare for help, while others attributed the flexibility of accommodating their families to the family-friendly environment of their workplaces (Richardson et al., 2012). Although these studies have provided insight into some positive experiences for gay fathers, the homogeneity of participants (White, middle- and upper-class, highly educated, living in the West or Northeast) does not capture the

entirety of gay fathers' challenges with their new families (Bergman et al, 2010; Richardson et al., 2012).

One challenge for gay fathers, however, concerns the extent to which their gay identity influences parenting stress. For several gay men, having been surrounded by heterosexual-parented households contributed to the misconception that being gay was synonymous with being childless (Armesto & Shapiro, 2010; Benson et al., 2005; Schacher et al., 2005; Wells, 2011). Armesto and Shapiro (2010) summarize this point well through their interviews of 10 gay fathers, noting, "When reflecting on their early developmental histories in relation to the evolution of their desire to father, participants described relationships with caretakers, primarily mothers, as loving resources for their own parenting" (p. 80). For these participants, as well as those interviewed by Geisler (2012), the lack of other gay-fathered role models growing up, and the absence of supports for same-sex households contributed to lower levels of self-efficacy in raising children. In fact, anxieties about the ways in which society would perceive some fathers raising boys—that gay men are pedophiles—compelled some fathers to pursue adopting girls (Geisler, 2012). Moreover, internalizing such social stigma has been associated with parenting stress among gay fathers (Tornello et al., 2011).

Research has also begun to indicate that heightened levels of parenting stress occurs for fathers who have come to terms with their gay identities after having children through heterosexual relationships (Tornello & Patterson, 2012, 2015). Surveying 739 gay fathers across the United States, Tornello and Patterson (2015) uncovered a relationship between parenting stress and the timing of parenthood. Using measures such as the LGB Identity Scale Revised (LGBIS-R), Outness Inventory (OI), and Multidimensional Scale of

Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), the authors found that gay men who disclosed their sexual orientation before having children reported lower levels of stress and sensitivity to social stigma than men who came out after becoming fathers. Expounding further upon this phenomenon, Tornello and Patterson (2012) focused their analysis on 168 fathers who had children in previous heterosexual relationships to illuminate associations of stress with timing of parenthood and identifying as gay. Not only did they show three different relationship contexts for these men after coming out (divorced and living with another man, divorced and single, remained married and living with wives), but their analysis indicated similar associations of social stigma and parenting stress across all three contexts. In other words, taking both studies together (Tornello & Patterson, 2012, 2015), the timing of becoming a parent along with coming out have been shown to contribute to parenting stress for gay fathers.

Addressing gender-typed parenting roles. For many gay fathers, understanding their new gay/father identity entails negotiating distinct gender roles associated with two, heterosexual-parented households throughout the United States. The messages of parenting that have been commonly depicted in society have paralleled 1950s Norman Rockwell images of distinct, gendered-type roles. The mother engages in a number of household and childcare responsibilities, while the father's duties ship him out of the home for 40 hours each week, and into a workplace to financially secure the family.

Some gay men have addressed traditional parenting roles by critically reexamining social and cultural constructions of gendered-type household responsibilities (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Geisler, 2012; Panozzo, 2015; Riggs & Due, 2014; Tornello, Kruczkowski, & Patterson, 2015; Schacher et al., 2005). Such deconstruction

has positioned a more egalitarian view of gender relations in the household (Sullivan, 2004), influencing the ways in which gay men have shared related responsibilities has varied. For some fathers, the move in “degendering parenting” signaled conscious efforts to challenge norms and reconstruct their roles as a hybrid of both mothering and fathering qualities (Schacher et al., p. 44). Such efforts have included constantly shifting responsibilities from one father to the other (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008) to delineating distinct duties based on skills and strengths (Geisler, 2012). In so doing, many couples have equally shared household responsibilities (Panozzo, 2015; Riggs & Due, 2014), contributing to positive relationship satisfaction among gay-fathered households (Panozzo, 2015; Tornello et al., 2015).

On the other hand, the household arrangements made by some gay fathers indicate some conformity to gendered-type parenting roles. Stacey’s (2004, 2005, 2006) extensive research into the experiences of 50 gay men living in Los Angeles uncovered some of the ways in which gay fathers delineated gendered-specific duties in their households. Her insight into one family, for example, showed both fathers’ desires to maintain a household in which one father remained at home to take care of their children (Stacey, 2004). Although the author described the relationship as seemingly harmonious and well balanced, her discussion simultaneously illuminated the financial and legal power that one father had over the other, noting of the employed father’s decision to “voluntarily relinquish the weighty patriarchal power of the purse by taking legal measures to fully share all property, as well as child custody of both fathers” (Stacey, 2004, p. 187-188).

Consistent with Stacey's (2004, 2005, 2006) work, Wells (2011) and Bergman et al (2010) have further elaborated on the ways some gay fathers maintain distinct gendered-type roles in gay fathered households. Once becoming fathers, the majority of men interviewed by Wells (2011) expressed some concern as to who would continue to work, and who stay at home as "the primary caregiving father" (p. 161). In some cases, maintaining gendered-type parenting roles did not necessarily result in one stay-at-home father, but consulting with other individuals to engage in childcare responsibilities (Bergman et al., 2010). Bergman et al. (2010) identified a number of fathers who relied on nannies, night nurses, babysitters, and housekeepers. It should be noted, however, that the average household income of all 37 respondents was \$270,000—well above the national average. Therefore, their decisions to seek out childcare may reflect more on their economic privilege than their conformity to gendered-type parenting roles.

Mom's night out? Upon navigating the various obstacles of becoming parents and understanding their new gay/father identity, gay fathers continue to experience norms of heterosexual-parented households. Gay fathers have reported instances in which individuals out in public have questioned the presence of their children's mother (Brinamen & Michell, 2008; Geisler, 2012; Schacher et al., 2005; Vinjamuri, 2015a; Wells, 2011). Some of these instances have occurred walking down the street, in which strangers have bluntly asked, "What's the story here?" or "Giving Mom a break?" (Schacher et al., p. 43), or have stared at their family's unique constellation (Vinjamuri, 2015). One common area in which gay fathers have been questioned about the mother's whereabouts has been in hospitals or doctor's offices (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Vinjamuri, 2015).

Vinjamuri's (2015a, b) extensive examination into the experiences of 20 gay-fathered households has uncovered additional confrontations. One father, for example, noted coworkers reacting with shock at the sight of his son in family portraits (Vinjamuri, 2015). Such surprise, as discussed by the father and interpreted by the author, extended more from assumptions of heterosexuality in parenting. Another father described a situation in which a flight attendant asked him where his crying daughter's mother was. The flight attendant's question not only signaled presumed heterosexuality, but also followed a false assumption that soothing a distressed child was a mother's responsibility. Overall, Vinjamuri (2015) found few instances of mistreatment among his study participants when they corrected questions regarding the mother's presence. Nevertheless, the author highlights that the majority of negative reactions to gay fathers' responses occurred with authority figures, such as airport officials, medical professionals, police, and some social agencies handling their family documents.

Responding to assumptions of heterosexual parenting has varied. Some men have addressed questions nonchalantly (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008), while others have expressed frustration with medical professionals' assumption of heterosexuality (Vinjamuri, 2015). Some fathers have accepted unofficial "gay dad spokesperson" roles for other gay men, as well as the broader community context (Wells, 2011, p. 168), in which they have informed others about the unique composition of their families, as well as the wide variety of families that exist in society. Communicating both the configuration of their families, as well as the position of heterosexuality in society, has also been a preemptive tool utilized by some fathers in preparing their children with potential social interactions in which heterosexuality is assumed (Vinjamuri, 2015b).

Summary

Research has begun to uncover the extent to which norms of heterosexual parenting have shaped gay men's pursuits toward fatherhood, as well as when they become fathers. In some cases, the prominent ideals of families headed by two, heterosexual parents have influenced some fathers to remain childless, or have kids through heterosexual relationships. In other cases, gay men have realized their abilities to become fathers, and have sought out various foster care, adoption, or surrogacy pathways toward parenthood. Once becoming fathers, however, gay men have reported challenges negotiating the norms of heterosexual-headed households. Gay men have recalled disapproval, or even superficial acceptance, from family members in their fatherhood pursuits, stemming from conservative beliefs that only mother/father households create stable environments for children. For the most part, however, gay men identified heterosexual friends as more likely to approve and support their decisions to become fathers.

Similar to outcomes-based research, studies on gay fathers' experiences tend to include pools of homogeneous samples. The majority of participants are White, fall into middle- to upper-class categories, and live in areas of the country in which sexual minority identities are less stigmatized. Additionally, many studies utilize qualitative methodological approaches to investigate experiences, which may speak more to the exploratory nature of this area of research. Nevertheless, studies incorporating larger samples and more quantitative methods may begin to uncover more breadth of gay fathers' experiences across the United States, and compare such experiences by race, ethnicity, class, and geographical location.

School's In! Gay Fathers Out?

This section explores the literature on LGB parents and their children's education. This section organizes extant research into four themes: the disclosure dilemma, school safety concerns, school-based marginalization of LGB identities, and the ways in which LGB parents are engaged with their children's schools. Due to the underrepresentation of gay fathers on this topic, this review includes research that has focused on a range of LGB parents throughout the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia.

Disclosure Dilemma

The process of coming out, or revealing one's sexual minority identity to others, is often accompanied with uneasy feelings of fear, anxiety, and stress (Budge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013; Meyer, 2003; Ryan, Legate, & Weinstein, 2015). Many LGB individuals confront the dilemma on how to come out, as well as to whom they disclose their identities. Friends and family may appear as obvious options; however, they may respond disapprovingly, causing severed relationships with loved ones, and contributing to the difficulty of disclosing one's sexual minority identity. For LGB parents, the disclosure dilemma, particularly with regard to their children's schools, becomes further complicated since coming out also affects their children's and family's wellbeing. Tasker and Patterson (2008) eloquently summarize challenges for LGB parents: "Judging whether, when, and how to disclose is a complex task. When disclosure is not just an individual matter but involves family relationships, the complexities multiply" (p. 16). For LGB parents, disclosure also signifies additional opportunities to have a presence in their children's schooling and education.

This section focuses on the experiences of LGB parents disclosing their sexual minority identities to their children's schools. Overall, the majority of parents felt some level of comfort to come out to their children's teachers and administrators, as well as the parents of other students (Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008), but the ways in which parents disclosed their identities varied (Casper et al., 1992; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Perlesz et al., 2006). At the same time, however, several studies have also expounded upon various barriers that limited the extent to which parents could discuss their LGB identities within their children's schools (Casper et al., 1992; Gabb, 2005; Haines, Ajayi, & Boyd, 2014; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Morris, Balsam, & Rothblum, 2002; Lindsay et al., 2006; Perlesz et al., 2006; van Dam, 2004; Tasker & Patterson, 2008).

Openness in schools. Many lesbian and gay parents disclose their sexual minority identities to their children's teachers and administrators (Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). In their large-scale survey that included 588 LGBT parents, Kosciw and Diaz (2008) found that 67% of respondents were out to their children's teachers to some capacity, and 45% had discussed their LGB identities with their children's principals. Similarly, Goldberg's (2014) analysis of open-ended survey questions with 79 lesbian mothers and 75 gay fathers revealed that a significant majority of parents had also disclosed their two-mom/two-dad family structure to school personnel--89% and 91%, respectively. Additional research supports increased disclosure for lesbian and gay parents, including studies using interviews as primary sources of data collection (Gabb, 2005; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001) and small-scale case studies (Lindsay et al., 2006; Nixon, 2011).

The ways in which parents disclose their sexual minority identities varies from proud and active to private, selective and passive (Casper et al., 1992; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Perlesz et al., 2006). For some gay and lesbian parents, active disclosure accompanied school selection processes for parents seeking out environments that were safe for their children and family configurations. Mercier and Harold (2003) interviewed 15 lesbian-headed households living in the Midwest, and found that many of these mothers came out to prospective teachers and administrators when finding schools that were known for being inclusive of diversity and multiculturalism. Similarly, another study revealed that some gay fathers directly asked school personnel if they would have any problems with children raised by two gay fathers before choosing a school for their child (Casper et al., 1992). The majority of lesbian and gay parents in Goldberg's (2014) study also came out to prospective teachers when carefully selecting supportive and inclusive preschool environments. The parents in this study who lived in the South, however, described their selection processes as increasingly complicated due to the high number of faith-based preschools surrounding them, that were not as open and affirming of same-sex parents than some non-faith-based preschools.

Limited access to school choice compels many parents to be meticulous about the ways in which they discuss their LGB identities to teachers, administrators, and other parents. Some lesbian mothers only came out to teachers and administrators who were open about their own lesbian identities within the community (Lindsay et al., 2006; Nixon, 2011). Instances of trans- and homophobia also dictated the extent to which trans and lesbian parents disclosed their identities to teachers and parents (Haines et al., 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006). In some cases, parents never vocally disclosed their gay or lesbian

identities, but assumed that school personnel and other parents had already learned about their two-mom/two-dad households (Casper et al., 1992; Gabb, 2005), or had gauged not to come out based on their children's discomfort attending school functions as a family (Mercier & Harold, 2003; Weeks et al., 2001).

Barriers to disclose. The decision not to disclose may relate to personal challenges of parents acknowledging and coming to terms with their LGB identities. Several studies have shown that women who had children from previous heterosexual relationships, but were raising their children in two-mom households, often struggled with coming out to their children's schools (Mercier & Harold, 2003; Morris et al., 2002; Lindsay et al., 2006; Perlesz et al., 2006; van Dam, 2004; Tasker & Patterson, 2008). Lindsay and colleagues (2006) expound further upon this point by highlighting one of their participant's struggles with her children's school. Her ex-husband (and children's father) continued to be involved in the children's school settings. Although this particular mother was in a long-term, committed relationship with another woman, she insisted on attending school-related events (e.g., parent-teacher conferences) only with her ex-husband, fearing that a third adult would be too crowded (Lindsay et al., 2006, p 1066).

Another barrier for LGB parents to disclose their sexual minority identities to their children's schools stems from fear. Many parents have expressed concerns that their children may be bullied or harassed once teachers, administrators, parents, and other students learned of their family constellations (Casper et al., 1992; Goldberg, 2014, Haines et al., 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Nixon, 2011; Perlesz & McNair, 2004). Although the literature framing of this study examines gay fathers and same-sex parents, it should be highlighted that for trans parents, fears of violence and

discrimination have altogether prevented them from coming out to their children's schools (Haines et al., 2014). Haines and colleagues interviewed 50 trans parents about their general parenting identities, and found that only one parent felt comfortable enough to disclose her trans identity to her child's school. The authors suggest that the exclusivity of trans-related issues in schools, coupled with transphobia, prevents more trans parents from feeling comfortable in disclosing their identities.

School Safety for Children and Parents

The *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network* (GLSEN) publishes biennial reports on school safety for LGB youth in K-12 schools (see Kosciw et al., 2016). Each publication reveals significant rates of harassment and assault, bringing awareness to the privilege of heterosexuality and marginalization of sexual minorities that continue to pervade our U.S. school systems. In 2008, Kosciw and Diaz (2008) from GLSEN also conducted research on school safety for LGB-headed families with surveys that included 588 parents and 154 students in grades 6-12. Despite only a minority of students hearing negative remarks about their LGB parents (40%), Kosciw and Diaz (2008) also discovered a number of other negative experiences for students including hearing biased language from peers (72%), feeling unsafe because of their perceived LGB identity (51%), and mistreatment from school staff because they had an LGB parent (23%). For LGB parents, experiences of mistreatment occurred more from other parents (26%) than from students (18%) or teachers (7%) and administrators (6%).

Although the work of Kosciw and Diaz (2008) has highlighted safety issues for LGB parents and their children (e.g., hearing biased language, feeling unsafe, experiencing mistreatment), their study did not focus on the experiences of LGB-

headed families coping with moments of negativity. Several other scholars have explored the range of perceived fears that children had when discussing their parents' sexual minority identities (Gabb, 2005; Kuvalanka, Leslie, & Radnia, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Nixon, 2011; Ray and Gregory, 2001). Students have also reported instances of mistreatment by their peers and school personnel (Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Welsh, 2011), but have responded to such negativity with various internalized and externalized coping mechanisms (Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Ray & Gregory, 2001; van Gelderen, Gartrell, Bos, van Rooij, & Hermanns, 2012). Furthermore, additional studies have expounded further upon the negative experiences of LGB parents with other parents and their children's teachers and administrators (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Goldberg, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Perlesz et al., 2006).

Children's perceived fears. Research has indicated that children and adolescents experience elevated levels of anxiety about their parents' sexual minority identities (Gabb, 2005; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Nixon, 2011; Ray and Gregory, 2001). Kuvalanka and colleagues (2014) interviewed 30 emerging adults who were raised in lesbian-headed households, and found that several participants worried constantly about peers teasing them throughout schooling. Additionally, some participants expressed concern that their mothers were susceptible to losing their jobs or custody if their lesbian identities were exposed. School-aged children have also reported similar uneasy feelings when talking about their parents (Lindsay et al., 2006; Ryan & Gregory, 2001). For example, children who perceived discomfort from their classmates

or teachers on LGB-related issues felt embarrassed to talk openly about their family configurations (Gabb, 2005; Lindsay et al., 2006).

Perceptions of fear worsen as children reach adolescence and enter into middle and high school environments (Kovalanka et al., 2014; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Russell, McGuire, Lee, Larriva, & Laub, 2008; van Gelderen et al., 2012; Welsh, 2011). Using a range of qualitative research methods with 48 children, adolescents, and teenagers, Ray and Gregory (2001) observed that younger children felt less anxious discussing their parents' lesbian and gay identities. Children in fifth or sixth grade, however, appeared less inclined to be as open about their family configurations. The authors also underscore the lengths at which many older students (e.g., middle and high school) hid their parents' sexual orientation from peers out of fear. Some teenagers, for example, staged fake bedrooms to make it appear that their parents' partners slept in different rooms. In their survey that included 2,302 middle and high school students in California, Russell and colleagues (2008) found that LGB students, when compared to non-LGB students, perceived their schools to be less safe for LGB parents and their children.

Children's mistreatment and coping strategies. Similar to levels of anxiety, actual encounters of overt mistreatment from peers increases as children of LGB parents enter into adolescence (Mercier & Harold, 2003; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Welsh, 2011). All 14 teenagers interviewed by Welsh (2011) stressed that middle school was the most difficult period of their lives. Some participants recalled moments when their peers wished death upon their families simply because they had two mothers or two fathers. Similarly, several students in other studies described situations in which their peers responded to their parents' sexual minority identities by using derogatory language at

them (e.g., fag, poof, dyke, ‘you’re so gay’), as well as engaging in forms of physical violence (Gabb, 2004; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Ray & Gregory, 2001). Teachers have also even witnessed instances of children being bullied by their peers for having LGB parents (Bower & Klecka, 2009).

The ways in which children respond to mistreatment, however, varies considerably. Some children have responded to negative experiences by ignoring their peers, which may cause maladaptive coping strategies in the future (Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Ray & Gregory, 2001; van Gelderen et al., 2012), or compel children to hide their parents’ sexual orientation and/or gender identity to others (Gabb, 2005; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Ray & Gregory, 2001; van Gelderen et al., 2012). Additionally, responses to mistreatment may include more externalized actions such as children fighting to defend their LGB-headed families (Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Ryan & Gregory, 2001) or even switching schools to escape bullying (Lindsay et al., 2006). The ways in which some children cope with negativity, however, have been more positive, such as taking on an activist role to educate peers and school personnel about their parents’ LGB identities (Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Welsh, 2011). For example, one individual felt that advocacy was “an obligation [...] to fill in the gaps for everyone else” (Welsh, 2011, p. 60).

Teachers’ and administrators’ mishandling of issues exacerbates the negative experiences of LGB-headed families. Sometimes, children were silenced by their teachers when sharing stories about participating in activities that were unique to their parents’ LGB identities, such as pride festivities (Casper et al., 1992; Casper & Schultz, 1999; Lindsay et al., 2006). Too often, teachers responded to slurs used by other students by

“turning a blind eye” (Ray & Gregory, 2001), and completely ignoring the use of derogatory language altogether (Gabb, 2005; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Welsh, 2011). Similarly, children who were the victims of bullying noted that school personnel failed to implement any type of consequence (Gabb, 2005; Lindsay et al., 2006; Nixon, 2011; Ray & Gregory, 2001), or equally punished victims for physically defending themselves from assault, insisting that it “takes two to fight” (Ray & Gregory, 2001, p. 31). Kosciw and Diaz (2008) further expound upon the inappropriate response rates of school personnel, citing that of the 154 youth surveyed, only 38% of school personnel intervened when hearing negative remarks about LGB parents.

Parents’ negative experiences. Kosciw and Diaz (2008) reported significantly lower rates of mistreatment by school personnel; however, other studies suggest that negative experiences may be caused by more overt forms of marginalization and oppression (Goldberg, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Perlesz et al., 2006). Although a large majority of parents in Goldberg’s (2014) study described their children’s school settings as positive and supportive, some participants recalled hearing negative comments from school personnel about their two-mom/two-dad family structures, noting that their children’s teachers and administrators were perplexed by the use of their parent designations (e.g., Daddy and Papa for one gay couple), or by having two different last names. Teachers have also conveyed their heteronormative ideas of family structures to parents by only allowing one mother to participate in Mother’s Day festivities or insisting to lesbian mothers that their daughter has a father, even if she was conceived through unknown donor insemination (Lindsay et al., 2006; Perlesz et al., 2006).

School-Based Marginalization

Marginalization and oppression extend beyond the use of biased language or harassment, and into the lack of LGB representations in schools. Activists have attempted to counter such heteronormativity and heterosexism by demanding protections for students based on sexual orientation or gender identity (Ansary, Elias, Greene, & Green, 2015), or by queering education in efforts to challenge school structures and classroom activities that continue to perpetuate the dominance and norm of heterosexuality (Goodrich & Luke, 2014). Such efforts include a deconstruction of gender norms in children's play (Butler-Wall et al., 2016) and increased representations of LGBTQ youth and LGBTQ-headed households in school curricula (Butler-Wall et al., 2016; Kendall, 2013). While the enactment of anti-bullying and harassment policies has increased over the past decade, efforts to create more inclusivity of LGB identities remain critical (Ansary et al., 2015).

For LGB parents, heteronormativity and heterosexism in schools continue to render their identities and family configurations invisible and sometimes powerless. Several studies have captured such invisibility through school practices and policies (Casper & Schultz, 1992; Casper et al., 1992; Goldberg, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Mercier & Harold, 2003). Similarly, many teachers have expressed feeling uncomfortable challenging these practices (Bower & Klecka, 2009; Casper & Schultz, 1999; Maney & Cain, 1997; Robinson, 2002; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011; Ryan & Martin, 2000). Such discomfort, however, may partially derive from the lack of preparation provided in teacher education programs (Bliss & Harris, 1999; Bower & Klecka, 2009; Casper & Schultz, 1999; Ryan & Martin, 2000).

LGB exclusion in schools. Schools continue to limit the extent to which they include LGB-headed families in curricula and registration forms. Several parents have voiced their frustrations when filling out registration forms that have spaces only for mother and father (Casper & Schultz, 1992; Casper et al., 1992; Goldberg, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Mercier & Harold, 2003). Even in instances of school selection processes based on safety and inclusion, same gay fathers and lesbian mothers were confronted with registration forms that neglected to acknowledge two-mom/two-dad family structures (Casper & Schultz, 1992; Casper et al., 1992; Mercier & Harold, 2003). Similarly, research has documented the ubiquity of LGB exclusion in school instruction, (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Mercier & Harold, 2003), especially with regard to LGB parents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Kosciw and Diaz (2008), for example, noted that only small proportions of students (27%) and parents (29%) reported any type of LGB-related topics included in the curriculum, while only 31% of students identified representations of LGB parents and families in school topics or activities. Moreover, the absence of LGB-related topics in schools has perpetuated heteronormative family structures, which has ultimately conveyed conflicting and contradictory messages for children of sexual minority parents (Kuvalanka et al., 2014).

Heterosexual family structures in the classroom. Limited inclusion of LGB families in school instruction may stem from teachers' discomfort in discussing related issues with their students. Many teachers attributed the lack of inclusion to their faith and religious beliefs (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Maney & Cain, 1997; Robinson, 2002; Ryan & Martin, 2000). Some teachers even worried that inclusion would be met with backlash

from other parents or school administration (Bower & Klecka, 2009; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011; Ryan & Martin, 2000). Conflating sex with sexual orientation also prevented some teachers from discussing LGB-headed families in elementary school classrooms, fearing that such topics would lead to age-inappropriate questions about sexual practices (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Ryan & Martin, 2000).

Two studies have particularly explored the perceptions and actions of teachers handling LGB-inclusive curriculum for LGB-headed families (Bower & Klecka, 2009; Ryan & Martin, 2000). Bower and Klecka (2009) interviewed five elementary school and five secondary school teachers, and honed in on additional reasons for LGB exclusion in the classroom. Some teachers discussed the unwelcoming school culture and limited instructional time as constraints for inclusion. A general lack of knowledge on how to be more inclusive--especially within STEM-related subject areas--also contributed to LGB-parent exclusion in curricula. Despite apparent inaction, several teachers agreed that the inclusion of LGB-related topics could help with bullying and harassment issues for LGB youth and children of LGB parents.

Using focus group data from school personnel in three different areas of the United States, Ryan and Martin (2000) expound further upon issues that teachers and administrators have raised with regard to addressing LGB-headed families through curriculum inclusion. They found that some school personnel believed that two-mom/two-dad environments would be less effective at promoting a healthy development for children when compared to heterosexual parents. Some teachers worried that discussing lesbian and gay parents could disrupt gender roles that they felt were necessary in parenting. Other teachers simply expressed that they were unsure of what

language to use when talking about lesbian and gay parents, or that they lacked any knowledge of how to address related issues in the classroom. More recently, Herbstrinth and colleagues (2013) have also indicated some lack of preparation among pre-service teachers with regard to households headed by same-sex parents.

Teacher education and LGB-headed families. Teacher education programs have not provided future teachers with the skills and knowledge that are necessary for working with sexual minority parents and their families. Although many programs may cover family and parenting related to race, ethnicity, and class, research has shown that teachers feel particularly unprepared when addressing LGB parents and their children (Bliss & Harris, 1999; Bower and Klecka, 2009; Casper & Schultz, 1999; Ryan & Martin, 2000). Some parents have voiced frustrations about teachers' apparent lack of experience with lesbian- and gay-headed families (Goldberg, 2014). Research also suggests that pre-service teachers continue to hold negative perceptions of two-mom/two-dad households (Herbstrith, et al., 2013).

LGB Family Engagement in Schools

Research has yet to focus specifically on types of family engagement that may be unique to LGB parents; however, results from other studies provide some insight into the ways that LGB parents engaged in their children's schools differently than heterosexual parents. Three studies have indicated that lesbian and gay parents are likely to have a high level of physical presence in their children's schools (Fadewa & Clark, 2009; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Mercier & Harold, 2003). Kosciw and Diaz (2008) reported relatively high rates of lesbian and gay parents of elementary school children volunteering in schools (67%), attending school-based events (94%), and communicating

with school personnel (68%). Fadewa and Clark (2009) analyzed Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) data, and found no significant differences in the school-to-home relationships when comparing lesbian and gay parents to heterosexual parents.

Despite statistics that support strong school presence for lesbian and gay parents, barriers continue to exist that prevent full participation. LGB parents have felt less inclined to participate in their children's school-based activities if they perceive their communities to be hostile towards sexual minorities (Haines et al., 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Mercier & Harold, 2003). Some non-birth mothers in lesbian-headed households have struggled to accept a legitimate parent identity, particularly when second-parent adoption was not an option, which created challenges for them to engage with their children's schools--even to the point of what Mercier and Harold (2003) identify as "self-imposed invisibility" (p. 42). School personnel in their study assumed a non-parent relationship for one particular mother and her son. Although she did not report any mistreatment in correcting the misunderstanding, she simultaneously expressed frustration with the entire situation.

Research has begun to suggest that some LGB parents engage with their children's schooling and education by taking on activist roles to promote social change both at large and within schools. In many ways, LGB parents are filling the void of LGB topics in schools by addressing issues of gender identity and sexual orientation on their own. Responding to mother/father registration forms, many lesbian mothers have crossed out the incorrect designation to show schools that other family structures exist (Casper et al., 1992; Mercier & Harold, 2003). Some also reacted to the issue of registration forms

at school improvement meetings so that new forms would be more inclusive of LGB families (Mercier & Harold, 2003). To address the lack of LGB-related curricula, one mother interviewed by Lindsay and colleagues (2006) bought books for her child's teacher that featured a household headed by two lesbian mothers.

Summary

Although there is a dearth of research on school-to-home relationships for same-sex parents and gay fathers, the findings cited above begin to illuminate some critical issues. First, same-sex parents negotiate the decisions of coming out to their children's school staff, and weighing positive and negative outcomes fuels such disclosure dilemmas. On one hand, out LGB parents have been able to have more presence at their children's school, and in some cases, begin informing school staff about their concerns about the ways in which LGBTQ issues have been severely underrepresented in school curricula. On the other hand, coming out to school staff has resulted in some mistreatment among peers, teachers, and other parents.

Overall, the homogeneity of participants in such studies limits the extent to which researchers and policymakers understand LGB-headed households in school-to-home relationships. The large majority of studies either focus on lesbian mothers, or present data on LGB parents as aggregated data. Most participants are White, considered middle- or upper-class, and reside in areas of the country that protect and include LGB identities (e.g., the Northeast and West). Additionally, few scholars have conducted research on LGB parents in school contexts throughout the United States. The majority of studies are located in the United Kingdom and Australia, and although findings from these studies are useful in identifying possible issues for same-sex parents, they may not entirely

represent experiences for same-sex parents living in the sociopolitical environment of the United States.

Framing the Current Study

Research often frames parent and family engagement with education in narrow contexts (Jeynes, 2011), and does not adequately capture many of the mediating factors involved in school-to-home relationships. Although the works of Epstein (e.g., 1995, 1996) have been influential in positioning family engagement into national policy initiatives (e.g., *No Child Left Behind*, 2002), her six typology of parent involvement has received criticism for placing the onus of involvement on parents (de Carvalho, 2001). In a similar vein, models developed by Comer and Haynes (1991) have underscored a number of school-based initiatives for families, but have simultaneously recognized the role of community members as integral agents involved in school environments, as well as the development of the child. In a more recent framing of parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) argued for more inclusion of family contexts in shaping school-to-home relationships, such as parents' knowledge, skills, time, energy, as well as the family culture more generally.

Despite the widespread popularity and in some instances notoriety of these models, the extent to which they can incorporate broader social contexts in shaping school-to-home relationships remains limited. The models developed by Epstein (1995, 1996), Comer and Haynes (1991), and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) place the parent as the sole, active agent in school-to-home relationships. Additionally, they continue to emphasize family engagement practices and policies that are not only outdated, but have been shown to create obstacles for families of historically marginalized and

underrepresented backgrounds (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Lareau, 2001). As such, this study combines two conceptual frameworks to better understand the social environments in which gay fathers' interact with their children's schooling: queer theory (e.g., Kitzinger, 2005; Rich, 1980; Warner, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

Queer Theory

Queer theory challenges the social constructions of gender as a distinct binary system (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). According to this system, male and female are the only gender categories that exist, and the repetitious representations of such dichotomies reinforce gendered norms throughout society. Many institutional infrastructures are built upon such presumptions (e.g., bathrooms, locker rooms, and dormitories). Common social interactions perpetuate binaries, such as asking a fetus's gender after learning about someone's pregnancy. Even biological sciences have attempted to naturalize distinct gender categories on the basis of sex characteristics such as anatomy, hormones, and chromosomal makeup (Elizabeth, 2013; Jordan-Young, 2010). Further analyses, however, have revealed a wide variety of such sex characteristics that challenge the idea of gender binaries in sex and biological composition (Jordan-Young, 2010).

Despite critical awareness, our gender binary system shapes our actions and interactions in society (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1976; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Goffman (1976) invoked the term, "gender displays" to describe such phenomena as behaviors and expressions according to normalized, social conceptualizations. Societal regulation of gender also affects the embodiment of stereotypical masculine or feminine

expressions, to the point of not being consciously aware of our own gender performativity (Butler, 1991; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In other words, individuals not only do gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), but simultaneously have gender done to them through the widespread, systemic nature of what society has deemed appropriate examples of masculinity or femininity, which adhere to an individual's perceived gender category.

Our gender binary system also privileges heterosexuality as the norm in society (Warner, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Warner (1993), in particular, exposed the taken-for-granted position of heterosexuality, highlighting its embodiment as “the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist” (p. xxi). The norm and privilege of heterosexuality become reified through the constantly recurring images of heterosexual couples in media, popular culture, and literature (Motschenbacher, 2011); assumptions of two, heterosexual-parented households in everyday social exchanges (Kitzinger, 2005); or everyday social interactions with coworkers and friends (Signorile, 1993):

These heterosexuals don't realize that they routinely discuss aspects about their own sexuality every day: telling coworkers about vacations they took with a lover, explaining to their bosses that they're going through a rough divorce, bragging to friends about a new romance. Heterosexual reporters have no problem asking heterosexual public figures about their husbands, wives, girlfriends, boyfriends and children—all of these questions confirm and make an issue of heterosexuality (p. xvii-iii)

The reaches of heteronormativity, however, extend well beyond representation and into mechanisms that preserve the norm of heterosexuality in Western hegemonic culture. Heterosexism (Simoni & Walters, 2001) and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich,

1980) emphasize the range of subtle ways that institutional structures promote and privilege heterosexuality as the social norm. Prior to marriage equality initiatives (e.g., *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015), only heterosexual couples could secure the social and economic privilege of marriage in many states. Even in spite of the SCOTUS ruling, qualifiers (e.g., same-sex wedding, gay wedding, lesbian wedding) denote such marriages as a deviation from the heterosexual norm of marriage. Both heterosexism and compulsory heterosexuality bleed into education policies as well (Birden, 2005). When available, the majority of sexuality education classes, for example, are based only on vaginal intercourse and pregnancy, and completely ignore the wide variety of sexual minorities and sexual acts that exist (Fields, 2008; Kendall, 2013). Additionally, only one state mandates the inclusion of LGBTQ-related topics in the curriculum (California), raising questions about the extent to which such topics are included throughout the rest of U.S. schooling.

In many cases, however, there are deliberate attempts to relegate sexual minorities to the abyss of social stratification. Examples of such homophobia include hateful epithets thrown onto LGB bodies in school (e.g., fag, dyke, sissies, ‘that’s so gay’), or violence enacted upon LGB-identified individuals simply because of such identities (Kosciw et al., 2016). Homophobia, however, does not limit itself to physical actions. Hate has been, and continues to be, manifested in policies directed at limiting the agency of LGB individuals, as has been the case for anti-gay marriage and adoption laws, current religious freedom restoration acts, as well as states that prohibit the teachings of LGBT issues in schools (Cahill & Tobias, 2007). Whether or not they realize it, policymakers in

education continue to commit homophobic violations through such restrictions that are just as painful as the physical violence that accompany LGB identities.

Queer theory has additionally highlighted LGBTQ-headed households' responses to heteronormativity and heterosexism. One such way, "doing family" refers to the various means by which LGBTQ individuals position, define, and construct their families within dominant ideologies of heterosexual and patriarchal family structures (Hudak & Giammattei, 2010; Perlesz et al., 2006; Ryan & Berkowitz, 2009). For example, two lesbian mothers may have conceived their child through donor insemination, in which they know the sperm donor and include him in the child's life. Two gay fathers may have continued communication with their adopted child's birth families. Polyamorous relationships may designate three adults as primary caregivers who are all responsible for raising children in their household. For the purpose of this study, using queer theory and critically interrogating sexual orientation can unearth some of the heterosexist, homophobic, and heteronormative conditions under which gay fathers are not only "doing family" (Hudak & Giammattei, 2014; Perlesz et al., 2006) but are also making decisions about their children's education and schooling.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986) ecological systems theory broadens our understandings of school-to-home relationships by expounding upon five concentric spheres involved in familial experiences (see *Figure 1*). The microsystem consists of direct settings in which children are present (e.g., home, schools), while the mesosystem describes the interrelations among these settings, such as back-to-school nights and parent-teacher associations/organizations. An extension of the mesosystem, the

exosystem encompasses the connections between microsystems and a number of indirect environments in which children are not necessarily present (e.g., parents' workplaces and social networks, government agencies). The macrosystem, which this study specifically utilizes, explores broader values in society that influence the interface of families in education-related environments (Anguiano, 2004; Spera, 2005; Tan and Goldberg, 2009). Finally, the chronosystem considers time and transitions as significant factors shaping familial relationships.

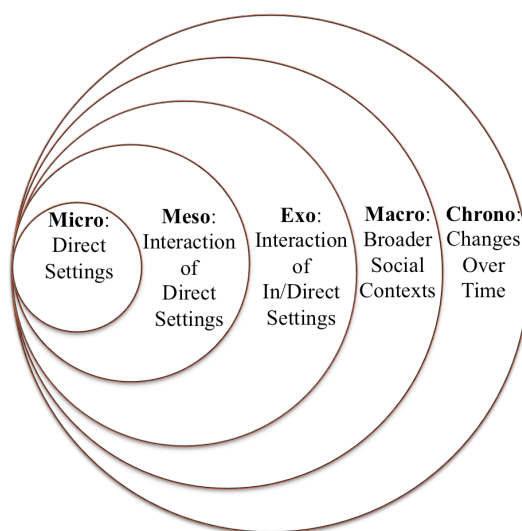


Figure 1. Five spheres of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986).

Although Bronfenbrenner (1979) originally developed his ecological systems theory to underscore the varied contexts shaping child development, many scholars have utilized his framework to investigate such contexts in school-to-home relationships (Bali, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Hill et al., 2004; Price-Mitchell, 2009; Taliaferro, DeCuir-Gunby, & Allen-Eckard, 2009). The concentricity of the five spheres has shifted focus away from individuals/outcomes to contexts/processes (Price-Mitchell, 2009). In terms of school-to-home relationships, this shift translates to expanding understandings of family engagement in education beyond bake sales or back-to-school nights (Price-Mitchell,

2009) and into a more holistic approach that simultaneously examines homes, communities, and schools (Bali et al., 1998; Hill et al., 2004).

Research employing Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) framework, particularly utilizing the first four spheres, has begun to uncover additional components and complex interconnectedness of settings and relationships affecting family engagement in education. Immediate settings in which children are present have typically consisted of homes and schools; however, some scholars have begun to expand the description of microsystems to include community spaces (Manz, Hughes, Barnabas, Bracaliello, & Ginsburg-Block, 2010). The environments of such settings may differ in terms of physical aspects (e.g., size, location, family structures), leading to differences in experiences and outcomes (Seginer, 2006).

Out of the five spheres, the mesosystem and exosystem have received considerable scholarly attention in an effort to focus on the interactions among schools, homes, and other aspects of families' lives (Anguiano, 2004; Christenson, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Manz et al., 2010; Seginer, 2006; Sheldon, 2000; Taliaferro et al., 2009; Weiss et al., 2003). By looking across various settings, research has identified the varied ways in which parents and family members interact with children's education, and different factors shaping those interactions (Christenson, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Seginer, 2006). Lee and Bowen (2006), for example, analyzed a number of demographic and school-to-home variables from 415 third and fifth graders, and found considerable differences in the ways that families differed in engagement types by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES). Their analyses also elaborated on the fact that, despite such variation, teachers typically privileged school-based forms of engagement, which often

excluded families of historically marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds.

Different forms of engagement may have been the result of parents' working conditions (Taliaferro et al., 2009; Weiss et al., 2003), the families' social networks (Sheldon, 2000), or parenting styles (Marchant, Paulson, & Rothliberg, 2001).

Critically interrogating macrosystems in education-related contexts has foregrounded the "language that masks ideology and culture" (Arnold, Lu, and Armstrong, 2012, p. 79), such as the effects of socioeconomic status (SES) on college readiness (Arnold et al., 2012; Renn & Arnold, 2003) and competing cultural definitions of educational achievement (Renn, 2004; Xu & Fuller, 2008). Macrosystem frameworks have also explored broader cultural contexts of school-to-home relationships, highlighting the privilege of SES (Anguiano, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006) and race (Spera, 2005), as well as the position of gender (Pleck, 2007; Tan & Goldberg, 2009) in programs intended to promote school-based family engagement. For Spera (2005), utilizing the macrosystem in tandem with cultural ecological theory (e.g., Ogbu, 1981) has not only been useful in illuminating differences in school-to-home relationships based on ethnicity, but has implications for exploring other cultural contexts of families and schools:

Should particular characteristics such as family ethnicity play a role in the formation of parental socialization goals, or play a role elsewhere in the model, the contextual model of parenting would benefit from expanding its notion of context to include larger cultural context (p. 139).

Adopting Spera's (2005) recommendation, this study employs a critical perspective, queer theory, to explore the larger contexts of school-to-home relationships for a population of parents and families that have been severely underrepresented in research.

Queering the Sphere(s)

In terms of sexual orientation, Goldberg (2010) has suggested Bronfenbrenner's work (1979, 1986) to understand child development in households headed by LGBTQ parents, specifically highlighting "movements and sociopolitical ideologies surrounding marriage rights for same-sex couples, as well as the varied contexts that shape and are shaped by lesbian and gay parents and their children" (pp. 7-8). This dissertation extends such macrosystemic insight into LGBTQ-headed households by employing queer theory as a way to examine gay fathers' interactions and experiences with their children's schooling. Thus, the theoretical focus driving this study utilizes queer theory to uncover some of the broader social contexts in which gay fathers are fathering (macrosystem), which shapes experiences and interactions with their children's schooling (see *Figure 2*). By formally integrating queer theory into the macrosystem, we can begin to see how various sociopolitical ideologies surrounding sexual orientation and same-sex parenting shape gay fathered households. Queering this sphere may also expound upon additional settings and interactions (i.e., the other four spheres) that are unique to this particular population of families.

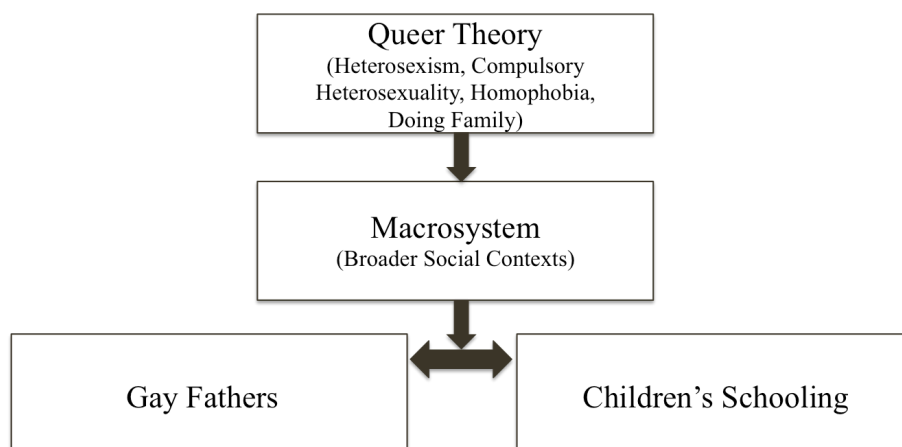


Figure 2. Queering the macrosystem

Chapter Two Summary

Research has begun to show and expound upon the larger, social contexts of sexual orientation and same-sex parenting that complicate gay fatherhood. Opponents of gay fatherhood question the extent to which gay men can adequately create healthy environments for children and adolescents (Clarke, 2001). They presume instability among same-sex parents and firmly believe in traditional ideals of two, heterosexual-parented households; any other non-traditional sexuality potentially leads to catastrophic outcomes for children (Becker & Todd, 2013; Pennington & Knight, 2011). Such concerns include children's confusion about their own sexual identities (Clarke, 2001; Pennington & Knight, 2011), the development of anti-social behaviors (Regnerus, 2012), and mistreatment from peers (Becker & Todd, 2013; Clarke, 2001). In fact, the legal rhetoric of same-sex parenting has historically adopted these views in deciding on custodial and visitation arrangements for lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents who had children from previous heterosexual relationships, as well as conception by means of surrogacy and artificial insemination (Cahill & Tobias, 2007). The same rhetoric propels many traditionalist organizations to verbally attack same-sex parents and their families, and develop entire research agenda attempting to prove catastrophic outcomes associated with same-sex parenthood.

Research has also examined the wellbeing of children raised by same-sex parents, ultimately finding no statistically significant negative outcomes (Wainright et al., 2004). Same-sex parenting does not hinder children's academic achievement or intellectual development (Meezan and Rauch, 2005; Wainright et al., 2004). Additionally, having same-sex parents does not jeopardize the extent to which children develop socially and

emotionally (Lick et al., 2013; Meezan and Rauch, 2005; Wainright et al., 2004). While some children raised by gay and lesbian parents have reported some social distress, they have simultaneously maintained higher levels of emotional resiliency (Lick et al., 2013). Findings about the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of children of same-sex parents, however, remain varied. For the most part, research has shown that parents' sexual identities are not associated with children's sexual identities (Tasker & Patterson, 2008; Wainright et al., 2004). On the other hand, Goldberg, Kashey, and Smith (2012) have indicated some gender expression and sexual orientation fluidity among children raised by two mothers or two fathers.

Regardless of the negative perceptions of gay fatherhood (Becker & Todd, 2013), gay men navigate the heterosexist conditions of family formation and pursue parenthood through a variety of options. Some men have formed their families during previous heterosexual relationships, in which they came to terms with their same-sex attraction later in life (Benson et al., 2005; Tornello & Patterson, 2015). Although accompanied by legal and financial barriers, some men have had biological children through surrogacy (Berkowitz, 2013; Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Foster care and adoption have remained more affordable options for many gay men, despite restrictions for same-sex couples in many areas of the country (Berkowitz, 2011; Patterson & Riskind, 2010).

As gay men become fathers, they continue to confront norms of heterosexual parenting such as being questioned about the presence of their children's mothers (Schacher et al., 2005), or encountering disapproval from family members (Tornello, Farr, & Patterson, 2011), friends (Bergman et al., 2010), and the gay community at-large (Bergman et al., 2010; Schacher et al., 2005). Furthermore, research has also illuminated

the complex web of heteronormativity in which gay fathers are making decisions for and interacting with their children's schooling throughout the United States (Casper et al., 1992; Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). By juxtaposing queer theory and ecological systems theory, the current study advances our understanding of gay fatherhood regarding school-to-home relationships, as well as the sociopolitical ideologies shaping gay fathers' experiences and parenting decisions with their children's schooling.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Gay men negotiate a number of heteronormative, heterosexist, and homophobic obstacles throughout fatherhood, but little is known about their experiences with their children's schools (Stacey & Biblarz, 2010). Extant research on school-to-home relationships has begun to illuminate some challenges for same-sex parents (Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Nixon, 2011; Perlesz et al., 2006); however, many studies only focus on lesbian mothers (Mercier & Harold, 2003; Nixon, 2011; Perlesz et al., 2006), or consider both lesbian mothers and gay fathers as aggregated data (Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Moreover, no study has connected social and political forces, or sociopolitical ideologies, to the parenting decisions that gay fathers make for their children's schooling. Such ideologies, as reflected in law, medicine, and current policies, have complicated the decisions that same-sex parents—particularly gay fathers—make for their families and their children. As little is known about gay fathers in the specific contexts of school-to-home relationships and sociopolitical ideologies shaping those experiences, this study utilized a phenomenological approach to gain a depth of understanding of gay fathers' experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

Exploring the phenomenon

Phenomenological research begins with identifying a particular phenomenon, and follows with collecting data from individuals to which this phenomenon applies (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). Types of phenomena can range from a specific event (e.g., illness, trauma, empowering events) to the broader, social

contexts in which individuals live (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). While this methodological approach describes the particular phenomenon, data analysis and interpretation focus on the ways in which individuals experience such events or contexts through open-ended interview questions with study participants (Van Manen, 1990).

This study identified gay fatherhood in school-to-home relationships as the phenomenological focus, and follows the suggested procedures and design for phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). To focus on the lived experiences of study participants, primary sources of data collection came from open-ended, semi-structured interviews with gay fathers who have children attending a PreK-12th grade school, as well as forms of school-to-home communication offered during interviews. In order to describe gay fathers' lived experiences further, as well as a means of research triangulation, this study also explored broader, social contexts of gay fatherhood through additional data sources such as state statutes and case law. Such documents revealed sociopolitical environments of gay fatherhood and same-sex parenting at local and state levels that shaped the experiences of gay fathers generally, as well as with navigating their children's education. Weekly memoing also served as a source of data collection, as well as an ongoing component of data analysis and interpretation.

Sample Selection

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board, I began recruiting participants for this study using approved advertisements in local businesses (Appendix A), as well as with gay parent organizations by sending e-mails to organization leaders (Appendix B), or through advertisements on social media sites (Appendix C). I

established an e-mail account solely for the use of this study, GayFatherResearch@gmail.com, in which all e-mail correspondence occurred, and only I could access. I used snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013), by asking individuals interested in participating in my study to share advertisements with other gay fathers they know. Once I had a pool of possible participants, I used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013) in an effort to identify gay-fathered households who represented information-rich samples. I determined information-rich samples through a questionnaire delivered by e-mail or phone, which asked potential participants if they met the criteria for this study. To be eligible, individuals must have had the following characteristics: identified as gay, had children enrolled in school (PreK-12th grade), and lived in one of the two states selected for this study (State A and State B), located in the Northeast section of the United States.

I did not limit participants due to age, race, ethnicity, class, their children's school types (e.g., private, public, charter), marital status, or the parenting pathways they pursued (e.g., adoption, foster care, surrogacy), although a strong majority of participants were White, had middle or upper-middle class backgrounds, were married, and pursued adoption to form their families. In an effort to include a sample of diverse participants, in terms of race and ethnicity, I contacted organizations specifically aimed at providing supports to LGBTQ people of color throughout State A and State B. I selected State A and State B due to the different levels of inclusion and protection of same-sex parents and their families in state statutes, the wide variety of inclusion and safety that exist throughout State A in local policies, as well as my location as the researcher living in both states throughout the data collection and analysis of this study.

I preferred to have both fathers be present during interviews in instances of two-fathered households, as joint-couple interviews provide rich data about their parenting experiences as a family unit (Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2014; Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Drawing on three different studies, for example, Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014) observed a number of advantages for conducting joint interviews when compared to individual interviews, particularly that couples engaged in common reflexivity leading to the production of rich data. Nevertheless, I simultaneously acknowledged the difficulties that may arise in trying to coordinate multiple schedules for two interviews. Therefore, I allowed each household with two fathers to decide whom, and if both fathers, would like to participate in interviews together. Ultimately, 34 fathers participated in this study, representing 22 households, and 49 children, and lived in three different community contexts (Emerton, gay-friendly Havens, and Intolerant Towns) from State A and State B. Table 1 organizes the number of participants, their families, and where they lived. Additional, demographic, family-formation, and school information about each family is provided in chapter four.

Table 1

Details of Participants

State A			
Emerton	10 Fathers	5 Households	16 Children
Havens	10 Fathers	7 Households	14 Children
Intolerant Towns	5 Fathers	3 Households	7 Children
State B			
Havens	3 Fathers	3 Households	5 Children
Intolerant Towns	6 Fathers	4 Households	7 Children

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over the course of six months—between January, 2017 and June, 2017, and included the following: two, semi-structured interviews with fathers, forms of school-to-home communication, statewide statutes, and case law documents.

Semi-structured interviews. Two semi-structured interviews served as the primary source of data for this study. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful as they: allow consistency across data collection; permit the use of probes to direct and capture interviewees' experiences; generate information about meanings, perspectives, and attitudes; and ultimately produce “descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 2007, p. 8). Moreover, the use of two interviews provided opportunities for me to engage in member-checking (Creswell, 2013), as well as establish trust and more of a rapport with participants than if I were only to have conducted one interview (Morrow, 2005).

I developed interview questions based on themes that emerged from a review of relevant literature, the theoretical framework used in this study, and the research questions guiding this study. Interviews occurred twice over the course of six months and took place in person at a location chosen by the participant. Most participants chose to conduct interviews in their own homes; only two selected diners for interview locations. I recorded all interviews using two devices to preemptively address any unforeseen technological failures: the Olympus Digital Voice Recorder WS-853 and the Voice Record Pro software used on a smartphone.

Pilot interview. To fully prepare for interview protocols for this study, I engaged in pilot interviews (Appendix D) for the first three interviews conducted, as pilot studies

are useful for refining study instruments—particularly for underexplored areas of research (Kvale, 2007; McNamara, 2009). These pilot interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 96 minutes to 128 minutes. The pilot interview explored broad topics pertaining to family composition, neighborhood and school characteristics, and fathers' experiences with their children's school staff, other parents, and other children.

Throughout the pilot interview phase, I continued to create memos to document my initial reactions and participants' responses to questions. This process helped me to carefully craft effective research questions that dug deep into fathers' experiences and allowed me to gain maximum data from interviews (McNamara, 2009). After conducting the three pilot interviews, I developed two separate protocols for the remaining interviews. Fathers who participated in pilot interviews also had a second interview, which covered topics not explored during their first interview, but surfaced as important components throughout other fathers' interviews.

Interview 1. The first interview (Appendix E) lasted 45-60 minutes and focused on allowing fathers to speak freely about their families and family formation, which helped shed light on some of the factors shaping their fatherhood experiences. Initial questions and probes during the first interview consisted of a number of demographic and neighborhood characteristics to gain a sense of the unique configurations and current living situations of each father's families of choice. The first interview also consisted of questions about each father's personal histories and experiences negotiating their gay identities before becoming fathers. This section included topics about the environments in which they grew up, their families of choice, and any issues with discrimination that they may have faced. The interview then addressed fathers' parenthood pathways and their

experiences as fathers in society. At the conclusion of the first interview, I asked fathers to think about the levels of inclusion and safety of their family configuration in their children's schooling. This initial inquiry not only prepared for the second interview, but may have helped fathers to begin thinking consciously and critically about various school structures, events, and interactions.

Interview 2. The second interview (Appendix F) lasted 30-45 minutes and served first, to member check (Creswell & Miller, 2000) second, to ask follow-up questions, and third, to focus on fathers' experiences with their children's schooling. Member-checking questions derived from themes observed throughout initial analyses of the first interview, while follow-up questions provided further clarification from first interview response. The second interview provided opportunities for fathers to speak freely about their children's schooling, as well as their experiences interacting with teachers, administrators, other teachers, and other students. Questions and probes focused on specific aspects of school-to-home relationships such as disclosure of gay-father household and levels of school presence (e.g., participation in events, parent-teacher conferences, etc). Additional topics also included any issues of mistreatment experienced by fathers or children because of gay-father household, as well as general LGBTQ inclusivity and safety in school curricula and policies.

Forms of school-to-home communication. When studying a phenomenon, as well as the social interactions that occur within the phenomenon, collecting artifacts can provide useful sources of additional understanding (Silverman, 2001). During interviews, some participants shared examples of school-to-home communication documents. Others redirected me to school and district websites to access at home. Documents included

letters, fliers, school handbooks, advertisements for school events, parent-teacher association/organization artifacts, and posted bathroom policies. Overall, the collection of these artifacts enriched this study with a particular understanding of some of the ways in which schools include, or do not include, gay fathers and their children.

Statewide statutes, municipal regulations, and case law documents. I utilized an analysis of statewide statutes, municipal regulations, and case law to frame some of the sociopolitical environments surrounding this study and contextualizing some components of the surrounding community, using WestLaw and LexisNexis to locate all relevant documents.

Protection of private identifiable information. I changed all names and identities to pseudonyms during the data collection process, as well as in all written materials generated by this study. Names and identities included fathers, children, fathers' friends and family members mentioned in interviews, towns in which families currently live or have lived, schools, school staff, and other identifiable information. As per request of one participant, I also changed the names of the states where fathers were located to State A and State B. When discussing research findings with peers and the academic community, I refer to names and identities only by their pseudonyms. I stored all private, identifiable information about study participants (including e-mail addresses), as well as audio-recordings, transcriptions, forms of school-to-home communication, coded data, and my research journal in secure, safeguarded locations—locked file cabinets in locked offices for hard copies, and password-protected folders on a password-protected computer for digital files.

Disposal of data. Although data collection for this study occurred between December 2016 and June 2017, I will retain all data sources in their secure, safeguarded locations for 10 years. As a developing scholar and prospective professor at a research-focused institution, I will return to these data sources for generating academic publications outside of my final dissertation, recoding data using different theoretical frameworks, as well as making comparisons between the results of this study and future studies. Throughout my career, I plan to continue my focus on gay fathers by exploring differences in experiences in other areas of the country, as well as differences in terms of race, ethnicity, and class. At the conclusion of the 10-year time period, digital copies of signed consent forms, audio files, interview transcripts, and forms of school-to-home communication will be deleted from computer storage, and hard copies will be shredded.

Data Analysis

To prepare the data I first transcribed all interviews verbatim, while simultaneously using memos to capture my thoughts during this process. At this time, I also changed all names and cities to pseudonyms in an effort to ensure confidentiality. I organized each participant's data (transcribed interviews, forms of school-to-home communication, memos, and policy and case law documents) into hardcopy files, and created electronic back-up copies that I stored in password-protected files on cloud-based programs. For this study, I analyzed all data inductively, without predetermined codes, themes, or sensitizing constructs (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and coded data by hand in an effort to engage in meaning making processes more deeply than if I used computer-assisted software (John & Johnson, 2000). I chose inductive analysis as the approach helps to condense raw data into a brief format and to show clear relationships between

my research questions, prior research, framework, and findings (Thomas, 2006). The hand-coding process entailed the use of graphic organizers that I made to select excerpts, attach codes, and connect with broader themes and the theoretical frameworks guiding this study.

To answer my first research question (What are the experiences of gay fathers with their children's schooling?), I analyzed transcripts of participants' interviews, any school-to-home documentation, state statutes, and case law. First, I immersed myself in the transcribed interviews and school-to-home communication documents to get a sense of fathers' experiences and interactions with their children's schooling, in addition to the beliefs they had about related topics and issues (e.g., LGBTQ-related curricula, registration forms). Then, I engaged in an iterative coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that began with multiple readings of each participant's (or partner's) interviews. Throughout this initial immersion and coding process, as well as by drawing from the literature and the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, I created memos and recorded my first impressions about possible codes and themes related to heteronormativity, heterosexism, "doing family" (Hudak & Giammattei, 2014; Perlesz et al., 2006), and "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

During a second reading of documents, I continued to refine my coding scheme until it included codes that were consistent across data sources, had clear definitions, and were mutually exclusive (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I then recoded excerpts of all transcripts and documents using a finalized parent/child coding scheme (Table 2), while paying attention to variations that may have signaled further refinement of my coding scheme. I sorted the data by code and thoroughly read the coded excerpts

within each research question to see how they answered my first research question. I then looked across interviews to make assertions, namely the heteronormative and heterosexual structures they encountered, as well as the types of policing that happened with regard to their family structures and social and cultural gender norms, or (hetero)gender policing.

Table 2

Final Coding Scheme: Research Question 1

Parent Codes	Child Codes
Background Information	Demographic, Family Formation, Age/Grade
Interactions	Students, School Personnel, Other Parents, Mistreatment
School Practices	Curricula, Registration Forms, Mother's Day, Other
School-Based Engagement	Events, Classroom Parent, Communication, PTA/O, Executive Positions
Where's Mom?	n/a

To answer my second and third research questions (How does the sociopolitical environment shape the ways in which gay fathers experience and interact with their children's schooling? and Do these experiences differ in locales with different sociopolitical ideologies? If so, how?) I analyzed transcripts of participants' interviews, school-to-home documentation, state statutes, municipal regulations, and case law documents. I repeated the iterative process described above for the first research question, but with a focus on the community and additional school contexts. This process consisted of reading through transcripts and documents first, to get a sense of the various community and school contexts; and second, differentiate the three types of community contexts (Emerton, gay-friendly havens, and Intolerant Towns). I continued the process by recording my initial impressions related to sexual orientation (e.g., current levels of inclusion in state statutes and municipal regulations regarding sexual orientation, hate crimes, and demographic information); and generating codes that were consistent across

data, clearly defined, and mutually exclusive. Then, I connected codes related to community and school contexts to the experiences that fathers had with their children's education for a final parent/child coding scheme (Table 3), to develop themes and make assertions about the effect of sociopolitical environments on their experiences. These related to access, visibility, interactions shaped by social stigma, and varied beliefs about LGBTQ-related inclusion in school curricula.

Table 3

Final Coding Scheme: Research Questions 2 and 3

Parent Codes	Child Codes
Contextual Information	Communities, Schools
Interactions	Out in Community, when Traveling
Social Stigma	Fears, Sexual Predators
Beliefs about LGBTQ Inclusion	Age/Grade, Subject Area, Other
Sexual Orientation Affecting Parenting	Heightened Fears, Disclosing Sexual Orientation

Validity Procedures

In terms of qualitative research methods, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter" (p. 316). To strengthen the reliability of my study, I address issues of validity in five ways: triangulation, member-checking procedures, the use of a research journal, participation in peer review groups, and clarification of researcher bias.

Triangulation. The design of my study utilized four data sources that allowed for triangulation, or the corroboration of data through the use of multiple methods and sources across time (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Although the majority of data relied on study participants' self-reports through semi-structured interviews, I checked responses

with forms of school-to-home communication, as well as policies and laws reflected in policy and case law documents.

Member-checking procedures. I used member-checking procedures in an effort to establish the credibility of my findings and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Member-checking actions included open lines of communication via e-mail with study participants, as well as opportunities to discuss findings and interpretation of data during the second interview. Taking the advice of Creswell (2013), I did not present full transcripts to participants. Rather, I described some initial descriptions and themes to garner participants' views of "written analyses as well as what [is] missing" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

Research journal. This research journal kept track of memos, important dates, details, and decisions concerning this study and serve to promote self-awareness about possible instances of personal bias (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For example, this journal allowed me to document any problems that arose and how I dealt with them, as well as moments where I may have influenced the research and when the research has influenced me—both of which may alter my outcomes without reflection (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Peer-review groups. I participated in peer review, or group debriefing in which members of an academic community can question my methods and interpretations throughout the process of study design, data collection, and analysis (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000). I participated in dissertation groups, writing groups, and academic conferences, which have allowed me to present my data analyses, thought processes, and preliminary findings.

Researcher bias. I used self-reflexivity to account for how I may be influencing data collection and analysis by creating memos that capture my impressions and reactions before, during, and after interviews. This process allowed me to track how my own personal experiences may have shaped analysis and interpretation of data (Creswell, 2013). I clarified my researcher bias when presenting my research findings with peers, in groups or conference settings, as well as in academic publications.

My role as researcher. I entered this study as a prospective gay father, having spent the first 18 years of my life living in some of the most conservative parts of State B, some of its more progressive areas, and having lived in State A for a few years. Throughout my life, I have experienced the stigma attached to my gay identity. I was punished by my peers for my genderbending expressions of masculinity and femininity, received a year of attempted, pseudo-reparative therapy, and was forced into a closet with all of the garments to cloak my sexual orientation. Subsequently, I have spent many years undoing the embodied social and political messages that have restrained gay identity and future father identity. As a researcher, I explored the stories of gay fathers navigating the same sociopolitical environments that I have, while simultaneously understanding that their experiences may be different from my own, but also knowing that my insider position grants me a unique belonging and perspective to the participants being studied.

Methodological Limitations

Methodological limitations of this research design are worth discussing. First, one of my recruitment strategies included soliciting for participants through gay parent organizations. Their membership assumes some sophisticated levels of social and cultural capital in having access to technology and knowing how to find and navigate such

platforms. Second, the use of snowball sampling led to a participant pool with similar social networks who lived in the same town or towns that resembled each other in terms of social class. Thus, these two recruitment strategies significantly limited the diversity of gay fathers for this study, not just in terms of class, but also race and ethnicity.

In addition to recruitment, the use of two, semi-structured interviews with fathers yielded some limitations as well. During my second interview, I noticed that many fathers answered interview questions in more detail than the first interview, supporting the claim that additional interviews may lead to trust and richer data (Creswell, 2013; Morrow, 2005). Nevertheless, the fathers were not given additional interviews to continue to go into more detail about their experiences. Only interviewing fathers also limited this study to their experiences and their perceptions, raising additional questions, for example, about the extent to which schools included LGBTQ related topics according to school personnel, as well as the experiences of children and their interactions in their schooling contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of gay fathers with their children's schooling, and understand how sociopolitical environments have shaped those experiences. Analyzing interviews and documents, this study sought descriptions of the community context in which families lived, school contexts where fathers sent their children, as well as interactions families had with students, parents, and school personnel. The findings presented in this chapter capture those contexts and experiences, beginning with a comparison of state statutes (State A and B). Three of the remaining four sections are organized into specific areas in which fathers lived—Emerton, gay-friendly havens (henceforth Havens), and Intolerant Towns. The final section focuses on two single fathers, Clyde and Alexander, who had their children in previous, heterosexual marriages, but have since divorced and have part-time custody of their children. Chapter Four concludes with an overview of emerging themes that are discussed further in chapter five.

Comparing State A and State B and Community Contexts

Although neighboring states, the sociopolitical environments of State A and State B are vastly different when comparing policies that affect families headed by same-sex parents. Overall, State A provides more protections than State B for individuals and prospective parents who identify as LGB. State A includes sexual orientation as a protected class on the following issues: housing, employment, and biased-motivated crimes. State B only provides the same protection for government-funded, public sector employees. In other words, LGB individuals living in State B can be denied the sale or rental of a housing unit, fired from a private sector job, and receive no special protections if assaulted—all because of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, although neither state

criminalizes sexual orientation through sodomy statutes, State B continues to list “acts of homosexuality” as forbidden, public sexual conduct.

Recent federal court decisions legalized same-sex marriage (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015) and joint adoptions for same-sex couples (*Campaign for Southern Equality et al. v. Mississippi Department of Human Services, et al.*, 2016); however, both states differ on the policy language that still exists in issues related to family formation. State B continues to define marriage as a civil contract made between one man and one woman, while State A uses general language to refer to marriage (e.g., husband, wife, spouse). In terms of foster care, adoption, and surrogacy, State B remains quiet on all issues in terms of permitting or prohibiting such parenting options for same-sex couples. State A, however, has conflicting policies. On one hand, the state has enacted statutes that frame potential adopters and foster care providers as spouse or couples, rather than husband and wife. On the other hand, the language of policies that prohibit discrimination among adoption and foster-care agencies does not include sexual orientation as a protected class. Furthermore, in terms of surrogacy, State A does not recognize or enforce compensated surrogacy arrangements, creating potential obstacles for individuals pursuing this option toward parenthood.

Education-specific statutes vary between State A and State B to the same extent as human rights statutes. State A is one of 29 states and D.C. that includes sexual orientation as a protected class of individuals in anti-bullying policies. Although State A does not mandate LGBTQ-related topics in school curriculum, the state does require comprehensive sexuality education classes that cannot promote religion. State B recently began providing protections based on sexual orientation in anti-bullying language, but

does not require any sexuality education aside from HIV/AIDS education. The following table (Table 4) organizes State A’s and State B’s statutes (ACLU, 2016a):

Table 4

Comparing Statutes between State A and State B

Statute	State A	State B
<i>Housing</i>	Protected	Not Protected
<i>Employment</i>	Protected	Only Public-Sector Protected
<i>Biased-Motivated Crimes</i>	Protected	Not Protected
<i>Marriage</i>	Non-Gendered Language	Husband and Wife
<i>Foster Care</i>	Non-Gendered Language	Silent on Issue
<i>Adoption</i>	Marital Status not Discriminated	Silent on Issue
<i>Surrogacy</i>	Compensated Surrogacy Unenforceable	Silent on Issue
<i>Sexual Conduct</i>	Does Not Include “Acts of Homosexuality”	“Acts of Homosexuality”
<i>Anti-Bullying</i>	Protected	Protected
<i>Sexuality Education</i>	Required, Comprehensive, Cannot Promote Religion	Not Required
<i>HIV/AIDS Education</i>	Required	Required
<i>General Curriculum</i>	No Mandate for LGBTQ-Related Topics	No Mandate for LGBTQ-Related Topics

The remaining sections of chapter four provide additional details of community and school contexts.

Emerton—The Gay Mecca

We aim to help maintain [Emerton] as a fine community where the worth and dignity of each individual is appreciated and not distorted by prejudice (Local Paper, December 5, 1963, p. 4).

Although expressed more than 50 years ago, a simple stroll throughout Emerton today perfectly depicts its continued celebration of individual “worth and dignity” while not being “distorted by prejudice.” Sprinkled throughout the community, places of worship encompass a wide variety of Islamic and Muslim community centers, Jewish temples, and a range of Christian churches. The quaint downtown areas boast a number of local retail shops, restaurants, and cafés with both Black and White ownership. Businesses and homes proudly decorate their windows and manicured lawns with signs that display “hate has no home here” in multiple languages, as well as symbols of LGBTQ pride and inclusion (e.g., “safe space,” rainbow flags, inverted triangles, and Human Rights Campaign equal signs). Moreover, when walking throughout Emerton, one can easily observe the rich spectrum of children, adults, and families that constitute the town’s diversity of residents. In other words, Emerton not only represents a safe and inclusive mecca for gay fathers broadly, but also specifically for the interracial, transracial, or White gay-fathered households included in this study.

Table 5

Emerton Fathers and their Families

Father (Race/Ethnicity)	Number of Children	Family Formation	Children's Race/Ethnicity	Type of Schooling
Daniel (Black) Joseph (White)	Two Sons	Adoption	Black/ Hispanic	Middle (1); High (1); both Public
Caleb (Black) Anthony (Latino)	Two Sons	Adoption	Mixed Race/ Hispanic	Elementary (1); Middle (1); both Public
Hugh (White) Peter (White)	One Daughter One Son	Adoption	White/non- Hispanic	Elementary (2); both Public
Christopher (White) Jason (White)	One Son	Adoption	Mixed Race/ Hispanic	Middle; Public
Franklin (White) Michael (White)	Two Daughters One Son	Surrogacy	White	Elementary (3); all Public

Emerton's Legacy of Integration

Specific events that occurred throughout the latter half of the 20th century not only illustrate Emerton's long legacy of racial integration, but also highlight the strength of its residents and civic associations in building and supporting a community dedicated to embracing differences. Starting in the 1960s, Emerton felt the direct aftermath of race riots that occurred in a neighboring city, in which its residents welcomed individuals of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds into their community. They voiced strong opposition towards federal attempts to include literacy tests in voting registration as a way to deny voting rights to African Americans (Nelson, 2014). Additionally, while other areas of the country thwarted homeownership for African Americans by way of redlining or blockbusting (e.g., Chicago, Philadelphia, New York City, Detroit: Massey & Denton, 1993), local housing councils in Emerton issued several statements warning realtors and financial brokers against participating in practices that discriminated based on race or

ethnicity (Nelson, 2014). These efforts continued well throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as local multiracial and multiethnic organizations punished discriminatory practices in order to build and maintain the diverse community of Emerton (Nelson, 2014).

All sets of fathers learned about Emerton's long legacy of integration and inclusion, particularly as it initially appealed to them as a place to live when raising their children. Hugh highlighted Emerton's history of racial inclusion, which then continued for same-sex couples:

And when the [neighboring city] riots happened, the White middle class families started fleeing [from there]. The local churches [in Emerton] got together and said "we're going to stay and keep our house values up, and we're going to welcome Black people into our town, and we are going to be integrated." And we were always comfortable visually—you would always see gay families up and down the street.

Christopher and Jason similarly noted:

Jason: Our town is one of the most diverse communities in [the state]. It's known for its diversity first in terms of Black and White relations in the 60s, and then it became known for diversity in adoption because there were multiple international adoptions. Then, gay and lesbian [couples] started coming in. So it's very diverse. There are children adopted in many ways as possible.

Christopher: Never assume, when you meet a child, that the parents are going to look like them.

Franklin also recalled reading an article written by an organization when deciding where he and his husband, Michael, would eventually live and raise their children:

The [organization] on race was run by some marketing people, and one of the articles that got placed, which is why we moved here...they basically said to some public relations people that if you can get articles written about our town being multicultural...because they wanted to maintain the diversity.

The vocal success of organizations in helping to increase the number of Black homeownership also factored into two sets of interracial fathers with children of color to move to Emerton. Caleb and Anthony reflected:

Caleb: I remember hearing about a huge meeting from some friends of ours who already lived here. This was probably in the late 1990s. Anyway, they said they were talking about how to reach out to people living in the city...

Anthony: ...and convince them to move here. The focus was on trying to get more Black residents to move to Emerton.

Caleb: And we knew that when we were looking for a place to live, that would be important for us. This place not only welcomes gay people but also people of color.

Daniel shared similar sentiments:

What was important to me, as a Black man, was moving to a community that had not just diversity, but had Black homeownership. [...] In addition to being gay dads, I also wanted to live in a place that there was Black homeownership, and where there was diversity in the whole community.

As all sets of fathers shared, the history of racial integration appealed to their interest in Emerton. Moreover, similar to organizations intending to maintain and support racial and ethnic diversity throughout the community, several marketing efforts began highlighting Emerton as an open and affirming area for same-sex couples to raise children.

In 2000, Emerton began receiving local and national attention as an area that welcomed gay men, lesbians, and same-sex parents (Dennis, 2000; Gitter, 2002; Gross, 2000). Similar to the work of local organizations, these articles intended to attract future potential residents by highlighting several points of interest. The authors captured a visual description of Emerton that rivaled other meccas known at the time for being somewhat of a safe haven for gay men and lesbian women (e.g., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chelsea in New York City). Rainbow flags lined the streets, same-sex couples

held hands in public, and birthday parties integrated families headed by heterosexual and same-sex parents. The authors also emphasized that the out and affirming nature of Emerton reflected major political shifts that occurred during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Churches and community organizations recognized domestic partnerships, and the state in which Emerton is located began providing protections for allowing same-sex couples to adopt children—nearly 20 years before the United States began providing the same protections. Daniel recalled Emerton getting a head start on issuing domestic partnerships before the rest of the state:

The day that domestic partnership was allowed in [state]... [Emerton] opened city hall on a Sunday before it started, to get a head start, to be a pioneer town with that. We were living in [previous town], but we came out [here] and got our domestic partnership.

Nevertheless, reading these articles featuring Emerton as a mecca for same-sex couples contributed to two sets of fathers wanting to learn more about Emerton. Daniel and Joseph discussed such coverage before moving:

Joseph: We had read about this town in [newspaper]. It was getting a lot of coverage as [gay friendly]...

Daniel: ...we thought, that was the place that we wanted to raise our kids.
Joseph: It was a really great article that made us go, “that’s a place we would probably like to live.”

Caleb and Anthony also cited a similar article they read when they first learned about Emerton:

Caleb: So, I would say that we heard more about Emerton somewhere in 2000 when we found an article in [newspaper]. It sort of featured Emerton as a good place to live for being gay and with kids.

Anthony: And we knew we wanted kids someday, so we kept it on our radar for about five more years until our daughter was entering preschool.

Caleb: That’s when we moved here.

In fact, the increased attention to Emerton as a safe, welcoming, and integrated community influenced several fathers to move there and raise their families. Daniel discussed that he and his husband “didn’t want the kids to go through the ‘only-one syndrome,’ and have everybody wonder what their life was.” Not being the only one included knowing that other same-sex couples had already established their families in the community and in the schools, or that there was, according to Joseph, a “path already to follow.” Michael and Franklin also offered that they purposefully sought out a community, and subsequently a public school, where their children could interact with other families headed by same-sex parents:

Franklin: The thing about our schools... We moved here because we wanted them to go to public schools, where they could be around other kids with two dads or two moms. That was very important to me. We went into it with some trepidation, but we’ve been involved with the school district, and we’ve had good experiences.

Michael: We spent a lot of time building careers and the resources to choose where to live. We also, unlike straight couples who could accidentally have kids...this wasn’t an accident. We were very deliberate in the choices made.

Franklin later differentiated between “trailblazers” and “settlers” among families headed by same-sex parents and interacting with educational institutions, noting that the “trailblazers are the ones who get shot, and the settlers make the communities.” They acknowledged their family less as trailblazers and more as settlers, noting that they “were not on the leading edge of gay men with kids in schools.” They continued, stating, “We were the next ones, and those are the guys and women who really had to deal with the challenges that people think about.” Similar to Michael and Franklin, Christopher and Jason adopted the settler mentality when moving into Emerton to raise a family, which they thought would provide their son with “an opportunity to grow up not feeling like

[our son] was the only one with two dads, and that he could go to school not having to deal with being the odd man out.” Finally, as Hugh and Peter discussed, moving to Emerton allowed them to navigate their daughters’ schooling in ways that they felt they would not have been able to in a less “open community,” stating:

Peter: We got lucky living here...

Hugh: ...I disagree, it wasn’t luck. We chose to live here because of the open community and we wanted...

Peter: ...because we knew that [our daughters] would grow up with other same-sex couples and not have to worry about what others thought.

Hugh: And the schools have been so great with that. I don’t think if we stayed in [previous town] or lived somewhere else, we would have had it this easy.

Hugh and Peter later acknowledged that “deciding where to live as a family,” among several other factors, “was done with [our daughters’] happiness and wellbeing in mind,” a sentiment shared by all sets of fathers for their children, particularly as it pertained to their children’s educational experiences.

For Caleb and Anthony, not being the only ones also entailed a community that would embrace their differences, both as a two-dad household, as well as a multiracial and multiethnic family:

Caleb: [The children in the previous town] were all from straight White families.
Anthony: Well ours wasn’t...everybody else, yeah. But that’s what [previous town]...

Caleb:...well there was a large Latino population, but no gay people.

Anthony: We didn’t know any gay families there. There were no gay families when we were there...

Caleb: ...or interracial families. We wanted to live where more people looked like our family.

When talking about their community, all sets of fathers described the current, and relatively recent, political environment as a way to highlight Emerton's dedication toward welcoming, integrating, and celebrating diverse families. During the 2012 presidential election, Peter remembered seeing "few McCain signs around town," that Emerton was an "Obama town," and only recalled seeing "one Trump sign" during the 2016 presidential election. Similarly, Jason emphasized that they "were a Hillary town." Franklin also provided that there were "16 buses going from Emerton to the women's march [in Washington D.C.]," to highlight Emerton's commitment to social justice and equity. Anthony reiterated the "fairly liberal [and] democratic" surroundings by discussing an annual pride event that occurs in the middle of the town, in which the township committee and mayor "raise a rainbow flag" in celebration, stressing that the "town is inclusive in that way." Hugh provided additional insight into the inclusion that accompanies these events, adding, "So they always have a big festival in the park. Initially, we were always surprised to see that everyone goes to that—not just the gay people. Everyone goes and has a great time. So it's cool that it happens. So it's not like, 'that's for you guys.'" Such inclusion contrasts what another couple, Joseph and Daniel, revealed as a challenge in their previous town, particularly given some of the conservative residents who lived there. Joseph noted that "[previous town] is one of those towns where they have a very conservative population, sort of the older people who live there were very conservative. Where we lived, the block we lived, pretty much everybody was fine and cool."

In addition to these accounts, various policies, as well as the increase in families headed by same-sex parents, continue to highlight Emerton as a "gay-friendly haven," as

described by Joseph. Emerton appropriately reflects its state's commitment to protect individuals based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in all aspects of civil rights, including bias-motivated crimes, housing, and employment—sometimes even a step ahead of the state, as Daniel previously mentioned about domestic partnership.

Despite the all-embracing characteristic that seems to define Emerton, some fathers noted of its shortcomings. In particular, Michael and Franklin recalled attending a community board meeting focused on issues of diversity, but it failed to acknowledge socioeconomic status (SES) as a relevant component. Franklin then expressed his concern, noting that when he thinks of diversity, he also thinks of “economic diversity.” Christopher and Jason also identified stark differences in fundraising capabilities between his son's school and other schools, helping to shed light on some of the socioeconomic disparities that exist throughout Emerton.

Jason: The fact is, [other schools] can raise \$40,000 at an event. The school we were in, we could work all day and would barely raise \$10,000. That was more urban side because it was on the other side of town. It's just fascinating, the differences.

Christopher: And the other schools here can raise money—10, 20, some even \$100,000.

An Out and Affirming Community for Gay Fathers

All of the fathers felt safe raising their children in Emerton, and had never encountered instances of mistreatment or any type of negative reaction to being an out, two-dad household within the community. In fact, when asked about such experiences, Daniel and Joseph immediately responded that they anticipated some uncomfortable moments, but were “surprised” and “shocked” that they had not. Even though they

understood the reputation of Emerton, they simultaneously recognized the “pockets of conservatives” that lived throughout the state, and just presumed they would “have a lot more reaction to being two dads” while out in public. Joseph, however, emphasized, “We didn’t. We got nothing.” Hugh expressed similar, unreactive experiences with family friends, saying “I’m not sure what our friend’s kids think when they come to our house, but that it’s just our family. If it occurs to them that we’re not the traditional family, or if that’s just who we are, they don’t think anything of it.” Hugh’s comparison of his family with traditional families sheds light on the potential for direct questions about the presence, or absence, of a mother—in which none of the fathers remembered occurring throughout the community. Similarly, none of the fathers discussed having to respond to inquiries regarding gender role distinctions in their households such as “Who wears the pants?” according to Caleb and Anthony or “Who’s the wife?” as described by Michael and Franklin.

For Michael and Franklin, however, being able to evade deeply inappropriate questions and easily navigate throughout the community as a two-dad household stems from their attribution of Emerton as a bubble. Franklin and Michael provided:

Franklin: I always say to people that we live in a bubble. We chose to move here because we wanted our kids....

Michael: ...to grow up in that bubble.

Franklin: We understood difference in community and the potential danger of that. Our kids are blithely unaware, by design. We may later regret that kind of sheltering them that way, but truthfully, they don’t have that kind of difference at all.

Franklin’s emphasis on “sheltering” his children from “potential danger” supports the protection they felt from encountering heteronormative, heterosexist, or even

homophobic situations. Furthermore, feeling safe, the Emerton's high ratio of same-sex parents, and its reputation for welcoming and celebrating all family structures also contributed to additional fathers saying that they were less likely to "experience that stuff [mistreatment] in Emerton," according to Anthony, or feel "much more integrated into the streets, the community, and [with] parents" as Jason stated. Franklin elaborated further on such integration while recalling an advertisement for a vacation cruise for same-sex parents and their families: "I remember when the kids were young, Rosie O'Donnell was doing the 'Our Families' vacation thing, and we thought, 'We're not going to do that. We're just going to go to the pool downtown.'"

Emerton's sense of safety and integration may also be substantiated through the interactions that the fathers had with other parents and family members. Every set of fathers referenced having interactions with same-sex couples and parents at some point in their lives by way of connections they made through a local LGBTQ parent organization. Several recalled the formal structure of this particular organization in "hosting an annual conference with breakout sessions," according to Michael. Such sessions focused on issues specific to LGBTQ parents including civil union rights (at the time), family formation options (e.g., foster-to-adopt, private adoption, international adoption, surrogacy), housing, and schools. Regardless of which topic attracted each set of fathers, all of them noted their value in helping to establish networks with other same-sex parents, especially around concerns of looking for gay-friendly realtors, gay friendly adoption agencies, and gay-friendly PreK programs.

Once the fathers had formed their families and/or settled on a specific area to live, the types of families they primarily interacted with varied. On one hand, some fathers interacted with heterosexual parents. Michael summarizes this point well, saying:

That we are gay is like a foot...a sidenote to what our life is. In many ways, the irony is that we moved out here because there are gay families and we wanted our kids to grow up where we weren't an oddity. We have no gay friends. [...] In truth, we are the most conventional, traditional family, other than the fact that we are two dads.

Michael and Franklin, Christopher and Jason, and Hugh and Peter, discussed that they were more likely to interact with parents of other children in the same grade or classroom as their own children, rather than based on two-mom or two-dad statuses. For these two sets of fathers, their roles as parents took precedence over any other identity. When making parenting decisions, for example, Christopher firmly declared, "You don't see yourself as being gay or a gay dad. You're just a parent." Franklin discussed similarly, saying "sometimes I have to remind myself that I'm gay." Hugh and Peter also shared:

Hugh: The gay gets subsumed into whatever your kids are doing. You don't have the luxury of being proudly gay because you have a kid, and you have to be a parent first.

Peter: Ultimately, you're a parent first, a spouse second, yourself third, and if you have time and energy for more, good luck to you.

On the other hand, Daniel and Joseph identified a number of other lesbian mothers and same-sex couples with which they regularly socialized. Daniel offered:

I think there are more two-mom families than two-dad families here. Whenever we go to parties, we're always the only gay guys and there are six lesbian couples. [...] We know a number of gay couples with no kids, and I don't know if we know any lesbian couples without kids...probably not.

The parties that Daniel mentioned consist of regional Family Equality Council (FEC) meetings that are regularly held throughout Emerton. These meetings, some of which

Daniel and Joseph have hosted in the past, offer a platform for parents and children in the area to address policies and relevant events that affect LGBTQ lives.

Interestingly, in contrast to fathers like Michael and Franklin, Christopher, and Jason, as well as Peter and Hugh, Daniel and Joseph seemed more purposeful in their efforts to maintain a sense of visibility with regard to their gay identities and two-dad statuses. In addition to attending FEC meetings, Joseph explained that he continues to publish essays terms of negotiating a gay/parent identity. Although not as socially active throughout the community, Caleb similarly acknowledged differences with his and Anthony's family, in terms of being a two-dad, multiracial, and multiethnic household:

I suspect that with our boys, that having gay dads...that's not the only thing they think about. I don't know if having one Black dad and one Latino is something that they think about more, or concern about more, than the fact that they just have two dads. But it is part of their concern and consciousness and awareness...both issues. I don't think we can separate them out.

Despite having positive experiences throughout their community, some fathers recalled instances outside of Emerton where their families confronted assumptions of heterosexual parenting. While shopping in a neighboring town with his son, for example, one salesperson asked Jason if he was "babysitting" and "giving mom a break." Daniel and Joseph joked that young cashiers in other communities sometimes asked "if we were the grandparents," rather than considering the possibility of a two-dad household. Joseph also identified one coworker's inability to fathom his and Daniel's adoption, describing that when he showed the coworker a picture of his son, the coworker "looked at me and said, 'how the hell did that happen?'" Michael addressed one airline agent's stares when traveling with his family, saying:

The only experience that I ever had that was negative was when I was traveling with [my family]. We were at the airport, and Franklin was parking the van. Our

nanny was traveling with us. [...] We had two luggage carts full of crap, a double stroller, our nanny, and me, and we were checking in. This [agent] stared at me, and I had zero-tolerance for anything. I was like, ‘Look, my husband’s last name is [last name], he’s parking the car. These are our twins. This is our nanny, any questions?’

In addition to highlighting non-verbal cues (e.g., stares) that may yield moments of discomfort, Michael’s experience with the airline agent uncovers a heightened sense of caution and awareness of their differences outside of Emerton, especially when traveling. Michael later elaborated that when visiting his husband’s family in the South, he was “always prepared for somebody to be an asshole” to the point of nearly reacting to two women offering them religious pamphlets at a restaurant. Franklin reassured that all patrons received the same pamphlet, and that they did not feel singled out for being a two-dad household. For Daniel and Joseph, spending summers at a beach town in the same state involved “finding a town that we felt comfortable as an interracial and gay family,” which according to them was “really, really difficult.”

Regardless of remaining in or traveling outside of Emerton, some fathers also referenced media representations as not entirely illustrating the types of configurations that defined their family structures. Daniel and Joseph expressed a particular concern when they were gifted a children’s book, *Are you my Mother?*, from a family member. Additionally, both fathers identified popular films that they no longer included in their collection for the ways they negatively represented other characteristics of their multiracial and adoptive family. Joseph felt that one such film, *Dumbo*, was “demeaning to African American people,” while the first scene of another *Brother Bear*, opens with one sibling “teasing another, saying, ‘well you’re adopted,’ as an insult—which people still do.” Caleb and Anthony similarly noted the lack of diverse racial compositions of

two-fathered households on television. Anthony acknowledged one sitcom, *Modern Family*, for its inclusion of two gay fathers, but disliked that it was the “only show with gay dads featured White dads.”

Emerton’s Schools: A Reflection of the Community

In June, 2016, Emerton received regional attention for one student’s final art project that was intended to raise awareness of the diverse range of sexual minority students that attend Emerton’s high school. The project, a nearly 30-foot banner, suspended over the entire length of the school’s front façade and prominently featured the colors of the rainbow—a symbol of gay pride. The timing of this display could not have been organized more perfectly. June has historically been recognized as gay pride month, and just days before, the country began mourning the massacre that occurred at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida predominantly frequented by LGBTQ people of color. Although Joseph recalled the project as “spark[ing] a lot of controversy around town,” where some people thought “it was a little too out there,” it received support from students, according to local news outlets, as well as from students and school personnel from a few fathers who remembered it as well. Hugh and Peter, for example, offered:

Hugh: The high school was in the news recently about an art project where a student displayed a huge rainbow flag.

Peter: Some people were ticked off but a lot of people supported it.

Hugh: I think they were still in shock about the gay club shooting in Orlando.¹

Peter: Possibly, but it really wasn’t a big deal. Most of the parents supported it, the same with the students and teachers.

¹ This refers to a mass shooting that happened at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, FL, on June 12, 2016, in which 49 people were killed (Mettler, 2017).

Such support reflects much of the openness and inclusivity that the majority of fathers experienced regarding their children's schooling and education—all of which attending schools in the same district, ranging from Kindergarten through 10th grade. All of the fathers participated in parent-teacher associations/organizations (PTA/O), attended a variety of school-based events, volunteered their time as classroom fathers, and communicated regularly with teachers and administration. Moreover, they interacted with their children's schools together, and as a family. In other words, none of the fathers ever felt compelled to hide their status as a two-dad household throughout their children's educational experiences, most likely due, in part, to the widespread presence of families headed by same-sex parents throughout Emerton and throughout Emerton's schools. Caleb highlighted that “[school personnel] all get it because there was a number of same-sex family kids, so they're really in tune to it.”

Nevertheless, when approaching the school system for the first time, some fathers expressed feeling somewhat apprehensive. Although well aware of Emerton's diversity, for example, Peter worried about how the school would be able to provide a safe and inclusive environment for their family and children:

The thing about our schools...we moved here because we wanted them to be surrounded by other same-sex couples and go to public schools. That was very important to me. We first went into it with some trepidation, completely unaware of how [the teachers] would deal with us, but we've had good experiences. We understand how fortunate we are.

Similarly, Michael and Franklin described being “ready for battle” the first time they met with their children's PreK teachers:

Michael: When we went into that new situation, I was ready for battle.
Franklin: But the truth is, I was always ready for battle and [Michael] would actually do it.

Michael: Our kids went to PreK at a temple, and we went in, and we were like, “we’re two dads, we just want to make sure you know how to deal with this.” What we didn’t realize was that the former president of their PTA was gay—a gay couple.

Franklin: The director was like, “this is the first year we have two moms, so we’re good.”

Michael: There were already far more gay dads than lesbian moms.

For Michael and Franklin, as well as Hugh and Peter, making initial contact provided them with opportunities to gauge schools’ responsiveness to same-sex parents by learning about their prior experiences interacting with families headed by two moms or two dads.

Several other fathers discussed similar approaches. Christopher and Jason interviewed two Catholic schools for their son’s PreK placement. Throughout this process, they learned that neither school ever had a student with same-sex parents, and that they would be the first. The fathers decided on one over another based on its commitment to provide more structure for their child, as well as the principal’s response about the school’s history with same-sex parents. Christopher stated,

One of the principals was a nun, and she said, ‘I wish I could give you some sort of historical evidence, but we’ve never had gay parents before. You would be the first. I don’t see it as a problem, it’s really about your kid. Your child would be like any other child.’

Caleb and Anthony cautioned their oldest son’s PreK teacher to be sensitive to their family configuration, to which the teacher replied, “Please, honey, this is Emerton,” suggesting the teacher’s awareness of and possible history working with same-sex parents. In addition to disclosing their two-dad household, Joseph and Daniel explained that they addressed, and continue to address, their sons’ teachers about their multiracial family:

Joseph: So being gay dads is one thing, and then having Black sons and having an interracial family...so whatever those issues are. Part of when we would go to the schools was that we were concerned that both [our sons] were getting what they needed—that they were not being prejudiced either that they had two dads or because they were Black.

Daniel: We approach [the schools] at the beginning, and that's when we get the response, "we get it." So we now know that they get it. We have, for a few years, we made sure on back-to-school night to introduce ourselves as a couple to the teachers, so that they're clear from the beginning. This child has two dads, and one dad is Black and the other is White.

While recognizing intersections of sexual orientation and race that constitute their family configuration, Daniel's and Joseph's concerns about how their sons are treated highlight issues of racial inequity that exist throughout Emerton's schools—particularly with tracking:

Daniel: There have been some racial conversations and challenges at the high school level about tracking of Black and Brown kids in a lower level. There was actually a lawsuit.

Joseph: There's two lawsuits in Emerton

Christopher and Jason also acknowledged similar racial inequities in their son's previous elementary school:

Jason: But there is a diverse community that doesn't really...the town is addressing it because that school, the socializing and the mixture, isn't really working at [our son's elementary school]...

Christopher: There was an interesting article about that school, and we laughed, where a lawsuit was filed against the school district because there was a disproportionate number of suspensions of boys of color and IEPs from that school.

While none of the fathers expressed that their children were ever targeted because of their racial or ethnic diversity, the possibility for issues remained a concern as they interacted with school personnel and parents. Caleb discussed:

I did have a conversation with the principal once, who was African American, because she has a son who was also in school and has issues. It came up once, and

it was more in conversation. But the fact of the matter is that when you talk to other parents, the concern is that you're never quite sure if they're dismissing your kid because your kid is Black. I feel like my job is to make sure that doesn't happen.

Despite initial heightened concerns about safety and inclusion, especially when their children entered the district, all of the fathers reported to have had positive interactions with teachers about being a two-dad household. Hugh often volunteered at his child's school as a classroom parent or in the library to the point of school personnel and parents assuming he was another teacher in the school. He joked that he "made friends with many teachers and parents that way," and continued to "stay close with some of them." Michael and Franklin described themselves as "extremely involved in [their] kids' education," and "maintained a very proactive relationship" with their children's schools. Similar to Hugh and Peter, Michael and Franklin became close enough with their children's teachers to begin hosting cocktail parties for them at their house. Daniel never recalled there being a "whiff of reaction to two dads," among teachers or administration, adding that, "every communication we get from the administration is very inclusive."

Although the teachers seemed to have promoted supportive and collaborative environments, some fathers noted some instances when school staff, other than teachers and administration, made heteronormative, heterosexist and homophobic comments to them and their children. Peter remembered when an office staff member suggested that his daughter's "mommy and daddy must be very proud" after winning an award. Franklin and Michael enrolled their son in an afterschool chess program, in which the instructor once offered, "if your mother does such and such" to explain a component of the game. Joseph provided that a high school coach was "under fire for abusive language to his players." Such language included calling players "girls, pussies, and faggots," to which

Daniel responded, “there’s a line you have to draw between being offensive and being strict.” Finally, Christopher and Jason described their interactions with a school-based social worker who insisted that she helped their son “fit in” with other middle school boys:

Jason: The social worker says, “I got to tell you, he doesn’t fit in with the other boys. He’s still in my social group and he doesn’t fit in. He just doesn’t have that boy slouch. And he dresses...you need to let me dress him. I should spend money on his clothes.”

Christopher: She said, “You might want to come and see what 7th grade boys are wearing because he tucks his shirt in, and when he walks, he’s upright and has perfect posture.”

Jason: So we went home, and said, “Do you think she would have said that if we were a mom and dad? Would have mom accepted that our son doesn’t slouch or isn’t dressed well? Could you imagine if mom was complaining that her son doesn’t dress well?” So we were just dumbfounded and ignored that woman.

In communicating so-called gendered behavior norms for 7th grade boys, the social worker simultaneously questioned the capacity to which Jason and Christopher, two men, can effectively raise a child together—a tension they have thought about often. Jason emphasized, “they just don’t know what they’re saying. There’s this whole thing that two men are idiots and have no place to raise a baby. Two women can raise a baby because they give birth to babies, but two men know nothing.” Jason and Christopher later expressed that a general undertone where women are needed in raising children fed into their interactions with school personnel, particularly when meeting about their son’s Individualized Education Program (IEP):

Jason: We get, “you guys are doing *such* a good job...”

Christopher: ...I have a website and we’ve written articles. I actually wrote one of them about an IEP meeting where we were the only men. At the end of it, the social workers or psychologist said, “you guys are doing a really great job.” I was like, “oh,” and they were like, “no—you’re really doing a wonderful job.”

Jason: ...and I'm like, "But he's our son—that's just what we do."

Christopher: There were a couple of instances like that where I think the absence of a mother was an issue for women educators. It triggered something in them that he's missing something in his life.

Both fathers later credited such behavior less to purposeful discrimination and more to staff being misinformed due to growing up in "incredibly different environments."

Christopher acknowledged that, "their education—socially and emotionally—is very different, so for them, they're working in a place where they're interacting with people who are very different from them." Although Jason and Christopher were the only sets of fathers interviewed in Emerton that felt these forms of discrimination and overcompensation from school staff, their experiences expose the microaggressions perpetuating heterosexist and heteronormative ideas that the presence of a mother, or at least a womanly figure, is necessary for raising children.

Students' negative interactions with peers have been a little less innocent. Four sets of fathers recalled moments when their children were asked questions, primarily in younger grades, such as, "where's your mother," "why don't you know your mother," or "are you allowed to celebrate mother's day." Daniel discussed one instance in which another student suggested that his son asked his "mom to pack whatever for lunch." In many of these occasions, the children, according to their fathers, responded nonchalantly that they did not have a mother, where their peers were not "phased by it," according to Michael and Franklin. For Christopher and Jason, as well as Hugh and Peter, such questions resulted in more abrasive and contentious interactions with peers. Peter described that their daughter was harassed by another student for having two dads, but that the "schools handled it appropriately, and it hasn't been a problem anymore."

Christopher's and Jason's son had also been a "victim of homophobia," where another boy teased their son during a Mother's Day celebration, resulting in a physical fight. Although upset by the altercation, Jason and Christopher acknowledged the teacher's responsiveness to disclose that she was adopted and use the occurrence as a teaching tool to talk to students about diverse family configurations. Jason stated:

[Our son] said [other students] had been teasing him about Mother's Day, [...] asking why he would even celebrate Mother's Day. And that was the final straw for him. It was instructive because we got to talk about friends and people being gay, but the wonderful part is that when we went back to the school, they were very upset about it—the teachers and the principal. The teacher outed herself to us and said, "you know what, I'm adopted. And you know what, I'm going to talk about this in class." [...] So it was great because she used this and had a big discussion about it. So she did a whole thing about adoption. So that was great and it was very supportive. Of course, once again, we volunteered for everything.

Several fathers reported the use of derogatory language among students—primarily at the middle and high school level. Such language included racist and anti-Jewish words and symbols, in which most fathers attributed to the recent 2016 Presidential election. Hugh found "some of it [to be] genuine, and some of it was teenagers do[ing] what they think is cool or rebellious," stating that teenagers, by nature, "do rebellious stuff, and when you live in a left-wing community, rebelling is being fascist." Nevertheless, the schools responded appropriately and immediately, according to several fathers, by hosting anti-bias assemblies or hosting talks with diverse members of the community such as rabbis. In addition, "faggot" or "that's gay" has been "used a lot in school—probably everywhere in the world" as noted by Joseph. Joseph stated that the use of these words disturbed their son and caused some disagreement among peers, but similar to Hugh and Peter, Joseph and Daniel excused such language:

Joseph: It's interesting because there are kids who use ["faggot"] who know that [our son] has gay parents. And I think they separate the word from the being-of-

gay...as a way to mean “asshole,” but it does disturb him and it’s pretty prevalent. I just think that’s a secondary school thing...

Daniel: ...they’re not calling people the word. They use the word like, “he’s such a fag.” It’s not used as bullying, but it’s used as a descriptor.

Joseph: ...and they’re not doing it *to* [our son]. So it’s not that he feels he’s being bullied. It’s just that they’re using the word.

Interestingly, Franklin and Michael shared similar sentiments with Daniel and Joseph.

Although their children are enrolled in elementary school, they have heard “horror stories about what goes on in the middle school,” but attributed any type of offensive behavior as “more about teenagers than it is about being gay parents.” Additionally, none of the fathers felt that their children were in danger of potential mistreatment because of their two-dad households, attributing such safety to the policies and practices that protect LGBTQ individuals.

In fact, all sets of fathers discussed the level of protection and inclusion in anti-bullying policies at elementary and middle school levels as evidence to support the safety of their children. Christopher, for example, emphasized that his son’s elementary and middle schools have been “very big on bullying and harassment.” He and Jason recalled reading school handbooks that included strict anti-bullying language and enumerated sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics. “Even the Catholic school,” added Jason, “had no tolerance for bullying of any kind.” Similarly, Franklin and Michael, as well as Peter and Hugh, noted of their children’s character education in schools, which covered topics related to respect, morality, and even social justice, according to Hugh. Peter and Hugh highlighted:

Peter: Anti-bullying has a constant presence that starts in Kindergarten—bucket fillers

Hugh: It's part of their character education program, I forget what it's called, and one of our children is part of this group...

Peter: ...the bully busters

Fathers of high school-aged students cited additional practices that supported the commitment of their children's schools to safety for LGBTQ individuals. Joseph, for example, mentioned the presence of a spectrum club, which offers support and an outlet for sexual minority students. Daniel also described his son's school hosting "a number of assemblies where they bring up bullying and harassment constantly." More recently, one of those assemblies, according to Daniel and Joseph, was organized by the son of a two-mom household. Caleb also cited his daughter's art show as an example of the high school's support, not just for LGBTQ individuals, but a number of historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. He reflected:

The school is probably doing everything they can in terms of anti-bullying, inclusiveness, and diversity. They're probably light years away from most schools, I would imagine. I mean, just the other night, we went to an art show, and there was a big poster with all rainbow letters that said, "Black Lives Matter, Women's Rights are Human Rights." Basically, every leftwing slogan you can think of was written in rainbow letters.

In addition to having strict anti-bullying policies, all sets of fathers indicated that they have never encountered mother/father registration forms in Emerton's public schools. "All of the forms say parent 1/parent 2," touted Daniel. Joseph added that they sometimes "say parent or guardian." Franklin similarly described all of his children's public schools having "forms that represent the number of same-sex parents living in [Emerton]." Anthony remembered an instance when they first registered their oldest child in a private preschool and were initially presented with mother/father forms. Quickly realizing her mistake, according to Anthony, the secretary said, "Oh wait, we have new

forms.” Caleb added, “we were parent A and parent B.” Similarly, Christopher and Jason only recalled handling mother/father registration forms at the Catholic school, but noted that they updated their forms with more inclusive language after their efforts to make appropriate changes. They explained:

Christopher: We got there, and saw the registration form: “mother and father.” We said, “oh God, who’s going to be the mother.”

Jason: The secretary laughed, and actually suggested that it was time for them to have right forms.

Christopher: As the first school year went on, we brought it up to the principal to change the forms, and there really wasn’t any problem.

Jason: The next year, there were new forms—parent and parent.

Despite the level of inclusion that existed in anti-bullying policies and registration forms, such efforts remained limited in instruction. Certainly, the majority of fathers noted that their children’s teachers read books that featured same-sex parents. Nevertheless, all of these fathers also indicated that they were the ones to initiate the inclusion of such books into the classroom. Some, such as Caleb and Anthony, as well as Hugh and Peter, offered their own books to teachers to read to students. Others, such as Christopher and Jason, occasionally volunteered as classroom parents to read to their son’s class. Either way, all three sets of fathers specifically noted that every teacher welcomed their input. In terms of the high school, Daniel and Joseph explained that their oldest son was currently enrolled in an honors class that focused on gender identity across literary works. To their knowledge, however, this class most likely existed as the only one, aside from sexual education classes, that purposefully included topics related to sexual orientation.

Although, for the most part, the fathers approached elementary school teachers about LGBTQ inclusion, they simultaneously noted that their teachers always approached them for Mother's Day. "You tell us how you'd like us to handle Mother's Day," Hugh paraphrased regarding the ways his children's teachers talked to him and Peter. Anthony elaborated further, saying that the celebration in school has "always been acknowledged of the freedom to do something else," if the children desired. Most fathers offered Mother's Day as an opportunity for their children to create a project for other women in their lives, including aunts, grandmothers, or family friends. Some, like Joseph, also recalled a few times in which his sons created projects for them. Regardless of the project, all of the teachers welcomed all possibilities at celebrating the diverse family configurations of two-dad households living in Emerton.

All fathers believed their children's teachers handled Mother's Day well, or appreciated them welcoming more representative children's books into the classroom; however, they simultaneously agreed that the schools could be more purposeful in their inclusion of LGBTQ-related topics, as well as topics that address their family configurations. Several couples believed that such instruction should begin early, "as early as PreK," emphasized Jason. In a similar vein, Peter noted that "[the students] really need to learn about families like as soon as they step foot into schools." Hugh continued, "it's not just to benefit us as a gay family, but also kids of straight parents to see how different families are." Sensing an absence of resources that represent his family, Caleb emphasized a "need for lessons that include two dads, two moms, single dads, single moms, White parents with Black children, Black parents with Black children," also to begin early (i.e., daycare, according to Caleb and Anthony).

A number of fathers also imagined a variety of content areas in which LGBTQ inclusion could occur. Daniel and Joseph discussed this point well, saying:

Joseph: Yes, absolutely, I think there is room for [LGBTQ inclusion], since it's not really part of the curriculum at large.

Daniel: There's a lot of places to put it in, whether it's current events, health, family units, heritage days...

Joseph: ...history, English classes, maybe even highlight some famous gay scientists in science classes.

Moreover, similar to Hugh's comment above, Daniel believed that integrating the curriculum to his and Joseph's desires would "benefit kids from more traditional families, maybe even more than ours."

In contrast to Daniel and Joseph, as well as several other Emerton couples, Franklin and Michael viewed the lack of LGBTQ-inclusion in school curricula as a non-issue. They certainly acknowledged that their children, as well as their children's peers could benefit from such inclusion, but pointed to the diversity that already exists in Emerton as sufficiently doing the work of diversity education:

Michael: I think because of the community we live in, that question [on LGBTQ inclusion in schools] is not applicable. There are so many gay and lesbian families here that it's...by this point, by 3rd grade, I just think it's so common and natural and they've had. I think as the years go by, they ask different questions. And because of the district we're in—is it perfect, no.

Franklin: ...but I do think it's more conservative this way...parenting makes you conservative. To the extent that LGBTQ stuff has to do with sex, I prefer in terms of acknowledgement but I'm not anxious to get into the specifics.

Interestingly, in their response, Michael and Franklin not only acknowledged the rich diversity of Emerton's residents as a reason why LGBTQ-related topics seemed unnecessary, but also conflate such inclusion with discussions revolving around sex—an area they were not ready to explore with their elementary school-aged children.

Regardless of beliefs, however, all of the fathers, including Franklin and Michael, addressed LGBTQ-related topics at home. Christopher noted that he and Jason “begin conversations with [our sons] at home,” which includes topics such as the 1969 Stonewall Riots or Harvey Milk, as discussed by Jason. Hugh and Peter described that they frequently redirect their children’s use of gendered language and assumptions of heterosexuality, for example, when “[our daughters] talk about mommies and daddies” or “sometimes ask about a boy’s girlfriend, or a girl’s boyfriend.” Peter explained that they “want to make sure that the way we talk about things with our girls reflects our family difference.” Caleb and Anthony discussed that they frequently attended events centered on LGBTQ activism so that “[our children] are able to meet others like them and maybe even learn from other families.” While Daniel and Joseph also mentioned specific learning moments with their sons (e.g., LGBTQ history and reading books that featured two fathers) and also actively participating in activist organizations throughout Emerton, they also felt that their efforts to challenge heteronormativity and heterosexism could easily be done in schools:

Daniel: Whenever [our son] drew an elephant family, he would say, “That’s the mommy, that’s the daddy, and that’s the baby.”

Joseph: He still does it. Last year, or two years ago, he took a cartooning class, and he drew a Ninja cartoon, which he drew every week, and at the end of the ninja cartoon, one ninja got married to a woman and they had a baby. I said, “Why do you always do this? Your family is two dads and two boys and you always draw opposite sex families, whatever I said.” He said, “Well, some kids just don’t get it.”

Gay-Friendly Havens

I always wanted to live in a small town and this town seemed really open at the time, and it's gotten far more open since. (Brandon)

Idyllic, quaint, community-centered, welcoming, and affirming accurately summarize the environment of gay-friendly havens (henceforth Havens). Colonial-inspired houses and small businesses decorate the tree-lined, cobblestone streets. Resident-owned coffee shops and restaurants proudly boast locally inspired and seasonally rotated farm-to-table products. Similar to Emerton, these five individual Havens display representations of LGBTQ pride in the form of rainbow flags, Human Rights Campaign equal signs, and inverted triangles. In addition, these communities support inclusion, as reflected through their histories of protection for individuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as township and borough community boards that continue to provide LGBTQ-related resources. What contrasts these havens from Emerton, however, is the absence of racial and ethnic diversity, as well as the invisibility of families headed by same-sex couples out in public. Nevertheless, “hate has no home here” clearly resonates throughout the lives of the residents, as well as the fathers that spoke about their experiences with their children’s schooling in Havens.

Table 6

Gay-Friendly Haven Fathers and their Families

Father (Race/Ethnicity)	Number of Children	Family Formation	Children's Race/Ethnicity	Type of Schooling
Billy (White)	Two Daughters	Adoption	Mixed Race/ Hispanic	PreK (2); both Private
Jack (White) Scott (White)	Two Daughters	Adoption	White	Elementary (1); Middle (1); both Public
Adam (White)	Two Daughters	Adoption	White	Elementary (1); Middle (1); both Private
Robert (White) William (White)	Two Sons	Adoption	Black/non- Hispanic (1) Hispanic (1)	Elementary (1); High (1); both Public
Samuel (White)	One Son One Daughter	Adoption	Asian (2)	Elementary (1); both Public
Tim (White)	Two Daughters	Adoption	Mixed Race (1) White (1)	Elementary (2); both Public (one out-of-district)
Brandon (White) Cole (Latino)	Two Sons	Adoption	White	Elementary (2); both Public
Benjamin (White)	One Son	Adoption	Asian	High; Public

Havens that Promote Inclusion

Gay-friendly havens have promoted inclusion through a history of anti-discrimination policies at local and state levels since the 1970s. In the mid-1970s, one particular haven located in State A became one of the first municipalities in the United States to pass an ordinance that protected public employees based on sexual orientation (Rimmerman, Wald, & Wilcox, 2000). Continued efforts throughout the 1980s and 1990s expanded to include private sector employment and housing. In the early 1990s, a local official even signed an executive order boycotting travel to another state that, at the time, prohibited sexual orientation as a protected class. This haven has remained one of the

more welcoming areas in the country, which has provided more protections for same-sex parents and their families than what has been written into policy at the state level.

State B, the state in which the other havens exist has provided protections for individuals based on sexual orientation since the early 1990s. This particular state became one of the first states across the country to do so, which included housing, employment, bias-motivated crimes, and school anti-bullying language that explicitly enumerated sexual orientation. At a local level, counties and municipalities across the state have explicitly adopted these policies, including the havens in this study. Two havens even gained local media attention for their welcoming environments for same-sex couples. One became the first area in the state to officiate a civil union, more than ten years ago, and a same-sex marriage, almost five years ago. Real estate advertisements featured the second as a gay-friendly area for same-sex parents to raise children in the early 2000s.

In fact, some of the fathers recalled observing and experiencing local efforts toward safety, inclusion, and protection for same-sex parents and their families. Brandon, for example, took note of the developments he saw in his haven since moving there in the late 1980s:

I moved here in 1989 and I'm lucky that it happened. [...] I ended a relationship, and it was like...I always wanted to live in a small town and this town seemed really open at the time, and it's gotten far more open since. In 89, it was still kind of...not rough, but it's become more of an open town than when I first got here. It was pretty rural before. [Neighboring town] was always the socially advanced area, and [haven] eventually caught up. It might be more advanced now.

Jack and Scott similarly described progress in their haven, particularly as it began to attract more same-sex parents to move there as well:

Scott: Actually, it was our realtor when we first moved here—he was also gay. It was just by chance. I said, and this was more than 20 years ago, I said, “I just want to let you know that you’re dealing with a gay couple, so I need someone who is gay friendly.”

Jack: And he goes, “Well since I’m gay myself, I guess I qualify.”

Scott: And we’ve seen a few more gay couples moving in since we moved to [Haven].

Finally, Samuel indicated some stark differences between his old state of residence and where he and his husband have lived since the 1990s:

So [my husband] and I moved to this state when we did because it was more progressive in its attitude and laws as related to domestic partnership, civil union, marriage equality—overall diversity than [State A]. And we thought it would be a good place to live. So we moved to an area that had a decent size LGBTQ community. However, that being said, there’s really only a few of us in schools, but it’s growing I think.

Currently, each of the Havens has continued to fulfill their reputations as being friendly and welcoming for families headed by same-sex parents—at the level of policy and beyond. Three of the havens have established local, government agencies or commissions dedicated solely to preserving the rights of LGBTQ individuals. Annual pride events and LGBTQ organizations offer information on rapidly changing policy contexts, as well as opportunities for LGBTQ individuals and LGBTQ-headed families to interact with each other. Although not all municipalities have been evaluated, the Human Rights Campaign continues to score several of the havens highly in terms of local laws, policies, and services for LGBTQ individuals through their annual Municipal Equality Index (cite). Finally, two of the havens have created centers focused specifically on LGBTQ health—one of which has been noted as being the first of its kind in the state where it exists.

Several fathers described inclusion in relation to the levels of openness and progress they have felt since living in and moving to their havens. While discussing where he and his husband wanted to relocate, Samuel found their current area of residence as an “area that was very open and progressive,” which shaped their decisions to move. Similarly, Billy noted of the “progressive part of the city to raise our children,” where he and his husband live. Jack and Scott also sensed that their town was “accepting and welcoming” before moving there, attributing such frames of mind to the town being “affluent” and “educated.” Jack discussed further, saying, “you won’t have people...almost everyone has went to college, so they’re exposed to diversity of all kinds in college.” Scott immediately added, “people aren’t phased by it, by two dads.”

For Adam, Benjamin, and their respective husbands, sensing their havens as welcoming and progressive environments influenced their decisions to choose specific areas to live over others. Adam listed other areas where he considered, but ultimately selected their current haven because they “knew it was going to be more progressive,” especially since his husband grew up in that area. Adam elaborated further:

We had some choices to make. My husband’s job is in [neighboring town]. What would have made the most sense would be for us to live somewhere out there, and for him to have a short commute, and for our kids to go to a school in the neighborhood, but we cautiously made the decision to live here. There’s just more old money out in [neighboring town], and a lot of issues seem to come with that.

Interestingly, Benjamin also cited another town for its “old money” characteristic as one of the reasons for not moving there, and deciding to move where he and his husband currently live:

We didn’t even think about moving here at first. We actually had a contract in [neighboring town], which is old money, anyway, it was a great house. But we were sitting in corporate housing here while we were waiting, we just fell in love with this area. It’s just a great, accepting town that’s open and welcoming.

Later, Benjamin also highlighted his haven's 2012 and recent 2016 presidential election results to further support the type of openness they have felt and experienced:

In 2012, I worked on Obama's campaign and discovered that [our haven] is like 77% Democrat, which surprised me. This year wasn't any different. My husband and I counted maybe two Trump signs in [haven]. Like I said, we've kinda lived in a bubble.

Jack and Scott also highlighted their "bubble" in relation to the 2016 election results:

Scott: This is a pretty liberal town, and may be a bit of a bubble in that regard. To give you an indication, they did an election in [our daughter's] class and they were 132 for Hillary and 17 for Trump. The teacher said to me, "we knew we were in trouble that night."

Jack: Well the actual vote in the town was 70-75% for Hillary. As rich as it is, it's not Republican.

In addition to politics, several fathers illustrated inclusion, safety, and protection through the community-centered environment of their havens. Billy highlighted the "great community spirit that looks out for one another and takes care of one another" that exists in his and his husband's haven. Jack easily relied on others to "drive the kids to school" in case of emergencies, emphasizing that he and Scott had a "list of people in the neighborhood" that they can easily text. Adam fell in love with the idea of "a walking neighborhood," with easy access to "local businesses, shops, playgrounds, and other families." Samuel felt that the small-town feel of his haven offered a sense of connectedness that does not exist in suburbs, saying:

People want to live in towns. People want contact. People don't want to live in these disconnected suburbs. I think small towns are where it's at. That seems to be a pretty...and I've read about it, that people are looking for that. We've certainly felt it with our neighbors, and are really lucky to live here because of that.

Brandon and Cole detailed their interactions with neighbors and other families—something that they have attributed to the "close knit" feel of their haven.

Brandon: We just moved here. Our neighborhood is lovely. We have neighbor parties. When we first moved here, we wanted to get to know people, so we had neighbor parties.

Cole: It's very close knit, very connected to everything. Next door to us, though, was a...they died, both of them, was an old couple. He was one of those, like, a drill Sargent type person. But he always talked to us, and he was always friendly.

Although all of the fathers felt safe and included, some simultaneously identified some drawbacks, particularly with regard to the lack of racial, ethnic, and economic diversity; as well as the limited number of other same-sex parents living in their havens. Jack noted that his town is "overwhelmingly White." Robert indicated the "predominantly White, middle-class" student body when he substitutes in his children's school district. Similarly, Adam found his town to be "completely absent of racial diversity" where he lives. Adam continued to discuss that he and his husband were the "only couple with kids in this neighborhood." Benjamin and his husband also highlighted that they do not know "any other gay couples with kids in the area," despite the "fair number of gay people living in the neighborhood." When asked about the presence of other same-sex couples, Robert and William simply responded, "no," and immediately described their reaction to attending an "Our Family" cruise for LGBTQ-headed households:

William: I don't think I ever realized how large the community was as far as two moms and two dads having kids, until we went on the cruise—the "Our Family" cruise.

Robert: When you go in there, you're like, "Wow every family is like ours." I was shocked. There were so many...

William: It was wonderful. Usually you're the only couple. Let's say you were in a restaurant, a large restaurant, usually you're the only gay couple with kids. Here, it was the reverse. Everybody was gay with kids and you might have one couple that wasn't gay and didn't have any kids. I was like, "Wow we're in heaven."

Robert: We didn't really realize how fantastic it was.

On the other hand, some fathers recognized the presence of other same-sex parents in their havens, but emphasized the need for interactions with them. Tim knew of six other same-sex parents with school-aged children, with whom he continues to collaborate to address school-related issues relevant to their family configurations. Jack and Scott estimated "as many as a dozen same-sex couples" that have moved into their town over the last twenty years. Brandon and Cole counted around "ten or twelve families" in their haven. Although both sets of couples believed these numbers to be high, especially considering that they lived in small towns, they also expressed that "not everyone knows each other," according to Jack, which has made it difficult for his children to see that there are "more families like them living around us."

In addition to interviews, document analyses of news articles and case law revealed additional issues that all of the five havens have confronted in recent years, especially as they related to sexual orientation. In one area, a private high school teacher resigned from her position after posting anti-gay comments on social media. In another, a high school gained attention for one student's vocal opposition to being bullied for being gay. A local country club denied membership to one gay couple in a third haven. A community member in the fourth publicly ridiculed a gay-fathered household for having a trans child on one of the town's social media pages. Finally, in the fifth haven, two gay men were brutally attacked after verbally defending themselves from derogatory language used toward them for holding hands in public. Nevertheless, despite some of the shortcomings and issues, all of the fathers continued to tout the overall gay-friendly environment of their havens for raising children.

“Conspicuous Family” Moments throughout the Community

When describing his and his husband’s adoption process, Billy recalled a counselor’s use of the term “conspicuous family” to describe a “family that doesn’t, on the surface, look like what you would expect a family to look like.” Although Billy was the only father who mentioned this term and provide such a description, all of the fathers defied traditional conceptualizations of family. They all formed their families through adoption, in which their children often had different racial and/or ethnic backgrounds from their fathers. Moreover, their two-dad households differed from the majority of heterosexual-headed households that also lived in the areas where they raise their children. Similar to Emerton, all of the fathers felt safe to live and function comfortably and freely as a family unit. In contrast, however, many of them expressed instances in which they confronted assumptions of heterosexual parenting throughout their communities.

These conspicuous moments never stemmed from places of hate or negativity, but from curiosity, or that “people have a lot of questions,” according to Billy. Billy expounded further:

So we’re often reminded that we’re a conspicuous family. We don’t feel like we are. We’re just on our way to the store. We don’t necessarily think about it, but every time you step out of the house, someone’s gonna’ look at us and wonder, “Are those two dads? Is that a dad and an uncle? Dad and a friend?” Every once in a while, you catch a glance, or a look. You can tell someone’s wondering what’s going on. On those times that you notice it, you just kind of think, “Huh, alright, that was one of those conspicuous family moments.” It happens everywhere.

Similarly, Robert and William counted moments where they caught a glance at a block party, for example, when a stranger “kept staring at us, and I was getting really pissed off, and thought I was going to get into an argument,” or a passerby on the street was

“walking along side us, and just kept looking our son, then looking at us.” Although seemingly innocuous, as Billy, Robert, and William discussed, and as other fathers presented through their lived experiences, they have all had to deal with these rather intrusive reactions within the community about their two-dad households. Overall, these reactions ranged in glances, inquiries, and other interactions around the possibility of gay men raising children.

Every father revealed moments when community members inadvertently questioned their families’ two-dad statuses. Most questions asked fathers about the presence of their children’s mother. Both Jack and Scott, as well as Benjamin, detailed their experiences as they have occurred in community-centered areas. Benjamin insisted that “nobody has ever said, ‘you shouldn’t have adopted,’ or anything,” but also provided that, while out in public, “strangers would stop in shops, stores, or grocery stores, and look at our son, and say ‘where’s your mom?’” Jack and Scott similarly noted when they have been confronted with assumptions of heterosexuality when at grocery stores, among other locations:

Scott: I was at Whole Foods, and I remember this woman was looking at us and she goes, “Oh look at that, Daddy’s shopping so they can make mommy a good Mother’s Day brunch.” And I looked at her and I said, “She doesn’t have a mother, she has two dads.” And you could watch the woman’s face, but it was kinda’ funny because the assumption was that I was out making brunch

Jack: Stuff like that happens when one of us is alone with one of the girls. People will assume that your mom is home or something like that.

Jack’s response also exposes the frequency of such interactions that many haven fathers have had out in public—to the point of “losing count with how many times we’ve been asked about [their mother],” according to Adam, or responding that “[Where’s mom?] happens all of the time,” for Tim. Tim continued to provide that people have confused his

family's nanny for the mother, rather than his husband, adding that "any number of times, you have to come out to people, because they don't automatically assume you're a couple, or you're [the children's] parents, versus some other arrangement." Samuel expressed similar sentiments, attributing heteronormative and heterosexist notions of family to the deeply embedded construction of "traditional, nuclear families" throughout society, which affects anyone challenging the norm:

People assume that you're a traditional, nuclear family, no matter where you go. You basically need to come out constantly, or they'll assume. I'd say that even for divorced families. It's hard because people just kind of assume there's a husband and wife there, because it's so largely the norm.

Some fathers reflected on moments where the mother's presence was not only questioned, but that their ability to make effective parenting decisions as men was challenged. Adam recalled when a fellow beachgoer commented, "oh if her mother could see her now," when one of his daughters had sand all over her body. While shopping at a local store, a woman pointed at the diapers in Billy's cart and commented, "my husband would never be able to do this." Billy believed that moments like that were not only "insulting," but were an "anti-male thing, rather than an anti-gay thing—people have different parenting styles." Robert and William encountered unsolicited advice that they also felt were intrusive to their parenting abilities as men:

Robert: When we were on the train, I would let [our son] fall asleep, and I would let him sleep however he wanted to, because the pressure under the tunnel bothered him. So he fell asleep and I just let it go. But he would be hanging in what looked like an uncomfortable position, but he was asleep.

William: And people would be like—it was usually women, and it didn't matter their ethnicity or race. They would be like "pick his head up, that's not good for his neck." And I'm like, "He's sleeping. Who cares?"

Robert: I think with [our son], it was more...I would notice that people would make assumptions because I was a man...that I didn't have a clue what I was

doing, which was strange. But I got this. I go to the market and I buy organic things, and I cook it, and puree it, and that's the kind of baby food he eats. And, I change the diaper. I haven't killed him yet.

In some instances, community members struggled to understand family configurations that extended beyond conceptualizations of traditional, heterosexual-headed households. Brandon, for example, explained that on one occasion, his husband, Cole, dropped off their sons for ski lessons. When the lessons were finished, and Brandon went to pick up their sons, the instructor questioned who he was. Brandon responded, "I'm their dad," and the instructor then asked, "Who's the other guy, the grandfather?" Robert and William also provided that "when [our family] went out, people thought of one of us as the dad, and the other as the uncle or brother." These experiences may not have explicitly accompanied assumptions of mother/father, but they still provide additional ways in which the fathers' families were not acknowledged by others, at least at first glance.

Some fathers also indicated moments where they encountered issues interacting with other gay fathers. Benjamin found it "incredibly difficult making friends with other gay dads," but craved that network to help, for example, "finding other people who know which attorney to work with" and "not feeling so exposed walking the baby." Brandon elaborated further on the type of disconnect he has also felt not being able to meet other same-sex parents:

I remember walking in town with [my son] and seeing another guy with kids. It turned out he was gay with kids. I would have thought that we're in the same tribe. I asked him, "oh there's this gay dance, do you want to go?" No. He didn't want to...something about not really seeing being gay as a difference, and not needing that with other gay people, so he had lots of straight friends. We do too, but for him, it was very important...It's hard being new at something, especially for a whole population of people...plus, when you're already a discriminated population, it's so much harder. It was brutal. It was very hard starting out. I bring

my own stuff, whatever that is. I'm very sensitive, so I'm always aware of my surroundings, probably overly worried.

Billy experienced a similar type of disconnect with the following interaction between him and a perspective gay father:

I brought our younger daughter to my husband's flag football game one day, and this one friend came up and was like "Oh my god she's so beautiful. So what's the story, is she, like, a drug baby?" I was speechless. I didn't even know how to answer that. I was just kinda' like "uh, no." And this is a guy who was like, "I can't wait until I get to be a dad someday." I'm thinking, "well you have a lot to study first."

Although Billy's and Brandon's experiences highlight some of the challenges of communicating with other gay fathers, or prospective fathers, several identified their involvement in nearby LGBTQ-parent organizations as systems of support that they received for their families. Some haven fathers became heavily involved with these organizations before having children, explaining that such networks contributed to locating gay-friendly adoption agencies. Jack, for example, attended information sessions to learn about how other two-dad and two-mom households expanded their families. Similarly, Adam established contact with a private adoption agency after interacting with LGBTQ parents at an annual conference. Attending seminars also helped Benjamin and his husband navigate rather complicated paths to their international adoption, saying:

Initially, we started pursuing China because it was a really big program, and at the time, they were adopting to single parents. We went to a meeting and learned that they started cutting down, that they figured it out, and they were more suspicious of men... they were afraid there was some sort of predator kind of thing. They're okay with single moms, but not always a single guy. Anyway, we went to this meeting and we got this idea to write a letter...essentially my husband wrote a letter saying that he had a girlfriend. It was this really good friend of ours, who was a girl, that they were very close, that they didn't want to get married, but that she was very supportive. Completely honest and ethical, because she was his girlfriend...there was a lot of omission, but we never lied.

In addition to learning about the pathways toward fatherhood, some fathers continued to participate in LGBTQ-parent groups. Brandon and Cole help organize an annual conference in a nearby city as a way for them to expose their sons to other LGBTQ-headed households, and also learn about issues that are unique to their families. Samuel and his husband regularly participate in a statewide equality group for LGBTQ individuals, in which Samuel recently received an award for his advocacy work in PreK-12 and higher education. Benjamin knew of a small group of gay fathers that ran meetings in another nearby haven, which has helped him and his husband throughout the high school application process for their son.

Despite the varying nature of interactions with other families in the areas where they lived, or having to network with other gay fathers in nearby areas, none of them ever expressed feeling threatened in their own havens. In fact, many of them described individuals' responses to their two-dad statuses as favorable and affirmative—in some cases to the point of overcompensation. Samuel noted when a local business owner “stopped [my husband] and I, and said, ‘I think this is the most wonderful thing that you did,’” to which Samuel responded somewhat surprised. Samuel elaborated further about his reaction, saying that he was “a normal parent,” who, for example, “is super frustrated because my children won’t do what I want them to do. I get frustrated like any other parent, and I don’t spend every day thinking, ‘this is so magical and I’m such a wonderful person.’” Scott recalled when a bank teller said that his family was so special, but responded by “look[ing] at her, going, ‘it’s really not.’” Billy experienced some moments of overcompensation when interacting with community members, responding similarly to Samuel and Scott:

We get a lot of, “You guys are such great people; it’s so great what you’re doing for these kids.” Sometimes, that feels okay, and other times it feels like...Listen, we’re just being parents, and this is the route we had to go to become parents. We’re not looking for “atta-boys” or “you guys are wonderful people.”

In/Visibility in Haven Schools

The experiences of haven fathers with their children’s schooling and education reveal institutions of learning that simultaneously rendered their two-dad households visible and invisible. On one hand, they comfortably navigated schools as a two-dad household, communicated regularly with their children’s teachers and administration, and reported positive experiences with other students. They also cited instances in which some schooling practices welcomed and even celebrated their diverse family. On the other hand, they cited several examples in which their family configurations were left unrecognized in two areas. First, registration forms assumed heterosexual households, offering places for a mother and father to fill in their names. Moreover, some school personnel operated under the same assumptions, sometimes asking children about their mothers. Second, instruction continued to ignore LGBTQ-related topics, although the teachers certainly welcomed fathers bringing in and sometimes reading books that represented their families.

Overall, the fathers expressed that they had a strong physical presence in their children’s schools. Several frequently volunteered in the classroom and school, attended events, and participated in parent-teacher associations/organizations (PTA/O). Scott and Jack, for example, indicated that their daughters’ schools “have tons of volunteer activities,” in which they “always participated.” Robert and William noted of the “many opportunities for family engagement” with their sons’ schools. Similarly, Billy offered that his and his daughters’ school “reaches out to us pretty frequently to help out,” in

addition to “host[ing] activities here and there for the parents to come in.” For these three sets of fathers, as well as the remaining sets of haven fathers, such activities and opportunities included sports, concerts, spelling bees, IEP meetings, chaperoning dances, helping in the school library, and guest teaching in the classroom, such as Samuel’s husband who led scientific experiments with his children’s classes on two occasions. In addition to attending and volunteering for events, a few fathers even held more executive-level positions in school-to-home contexts either serving as PTA/O presidents or vice presidents. One father even served on the school board for over three years.

The only exception to regularly participating in school-based activities occurred with older children. Two sets of fathers discussed that their presence began to diminish once their children attended high school. Nevertheless, Robert felt compelled to maintain some level of communication with school personnel, saying that he “still talks to [his son’s] teachers and case manager about once a month.” Robert and William explained further that their hands-off approach for their older son was “more about him taking ownership of his education,” rather than having anything “to do with being gay dads.” While research certainly supports that a decrease in school-based involvement tends to happen in secondary schools to foster independence (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Wang & Eccles, 2012), not having as much access as the fathers did in elementary school may render the family configurations less visible as a two-dad household. Benjamin, another father with a high-schooler, explained:

All of the kids knew who I was at [the elementary school], and knew our son had two dads. [High school] is not organized like that, so we’re not as present there at all. Any divulging that he has two dads is completely on him. I don’t know...he hasn’t said that he has told anyone. As far as I can tell, no one knows.

Benjamin disclosed that, although his son has never shown any indication that having two dads has been an issue, he has “some concern that no one may know,” but did not elaborate further what those issues might have been.

Despite these concern, Benjamin, along with all haven fathers, described their relationships with their children’s school personnel as friendly, supportive, and receptive. Many noted that teachers and administration have been very inclusive of their two-dad statuses, especially when the fathers have brought in children’s books that represent their families (e.g., *King and King*, *Heather has Two Mommies*, *Tango makes Three*), when they offered input about changing heternormative and heterosexist registration forms, or have brought attention to the lack of trans-inclusive language in anti-bullying policies. Billy even mentioned a specific school staff member that he trusted having an “extra set of eyes on [his daughter] if something’s not right,” and felt the unique attachment “had something to do with us being two dads.”

Other fathers attributed a sense of trust with school personnel to their children’s schools having out teachers and administration. Adam explained that his daughters’ school, where his husband attended as a student, has had out teachers since the mid-1980s. Robert and William described one of their son’s teachers as a “strong, feminist lesbian.” Benjamin and his husband confided in one of their son’s teachers who “came out to us during a parent-teacher conference.” For Brandon and Cole, having an out principal at their son’s previous elementary school contributed to an environment that mirrored the overall inclusion of sexual minorities of the haven where they lived. Cole noted:

The principal of that school was gay and out. He was such a great guy. The teachers...I think because of him, the teachers were just wonderful with our family and other same-sex parents. Look, it's a small town, so if the town has this kind of energy, it's going to be hard for a teacher not to get hired if they don't have the same energy. And really, every teacher has just been better than the last. This really is an amazing town.

All haven fathers expressed having a positive rapport with their children's schools; however, several recalled interactions with school personnel about their two-dad family configurations that made them somewhat uncomfortable. For some fathers, assumptions of heterosexuality sparked teachers and staff to ask questions about the presence of students' mothers. Tim, for example, described a moment where one of his daughter's teachers asked her to check with her mother about dismissal arrangements one day. Benjamin noted when a teacher asked, "where our son's mother was during an IEP meeting." Both Tim and Benjamin found these inquiries to be harmless, in which the teachers apologized profusely; however, Robert's and William's experience with their one son's crossing guard became a little more invasive:

Robert: I was crossing the street with [our son] to [school]. This crossing guard would always ask, "Where's his mother?" I said, "His biological mother? We don't know where she is, but he has two dads."

William: She wouldn't let it go.

Robert: "Two dads? I don't understand." She just kept pushing it and pushing it. It happened constantly. Finally, I wouldn't let her be the crossing guard. I would walk myself across and say, "I don't want to talk to you."

Although not explicitly asked about the presence of their children's mothers, some fathers highlighted specific interactions with teachers that they thought would have been different if they were a heterosexual couple. Billy and his husband "got the sense that the teachers all talk to each other, to kind of get the story," which they felt "probably wouldn't happen if we were straight." Robert and William mentioned that they "never

really had an issue with any teachers,” except “maybe one where we were a little uncomfortable with, who got a rash all over her neck,” whenever they talked to her. Similarly, Robert and William wondered if they would feel a sense of discomfort if they were a heterosexual couple or single fathers. Finally, Scott remembered when one of his daughter’s teachers referenced his husband, Jack, as “the other one” during an exchange:

Scott: The only time we had something...there was something going on, and I wasn’t aware of it, and I went up to the teacher and I said, “I’m not aware that this is going on.” She was a piece of work. I do like her, but...So she said, “I said it to the other one.” And the way she said it...and I felt that I could make a battle. And I said, “Well that’s your first mistake because Jack isn’t very good at keeping track of things, and you should learn from now to go to me.” After that, she was fine, but the way she said it was like...the other one?

Jack: Whereas if it were a heterosexual couple, it would have been “I told her mother.”

Questions about family configurations also surfaced when both fathers and their children interacted with other students. Samuel acknowledged a “natural assumption” made about the presence of a mother, in which his children have “shared with me in the past that they’ve been asked about it by other kids.” Jack similarly expressed that their daughters’ peers reacted with “more questioning and curiosity.” He continued, saying, “the sense that I’ve gotten is that if kids express anything at all, it’s a sense of curiosity.” Brandon noted of “several times where others have asked [our sons] where their mom is” at school, particularly when “one child in kindergarten whispered, ‘does [your son] have a mom?’” Cole reiterated that this interaction was more out of curiosity, that “kids are just very curious.” Billy’s oldest daughter, in PreK, recently began encountering such curiosity, where “kids in her class have asked her about having two dads and where her mom is.” In a similar vein, Tim remembered firsthand when another student at one of his daughter’s schools kept asking about her mother:

[My husband] and I would volunteer at lunch, to serve lunch and help with recess, and this one boy would always come up to us and ask where [our daughter's] mother was. He always wanted to know more about why she didn't have a mother.

Although most fathers noted the innocence of these interactions, some described the constant questions from other children as being intrusive. Scott, for example, recalled an experience while in the car, in which one of his daughter's friends not only asked about her birth mother, but also about the birth father. Having "never talked about a birth dad before," Scott felt unprepared in that moment and immediately responded, "that's not appropriate conversation in the car." Scott reflected that "the questions just keep coming, and some you never even think of before—it just gets to be too much sometimes."

Benjamin also found other students' questions "a little annoying over time," particularly for how he feared they would affect his son's overall wellbeing. He reflected:

I know [our son] constantly gets asked questions by students about us. I know they don't mean anything by it and are just curious, but it gets a little annoying over time, having to constantly field questions about your family. They wouldn't keep doing that if he had straight parents.

Similar to Benjamin, Adam recalled specific moments when their children seemed bothered by constant questions from peers. He discussed that, "there was one time, somebody asked [our daughter] why she has two dads, and she said, 'because I do.' She just wasn't in the mood to deal."

In addition to the constant questions, some fathers also identified moments where their children fell victims to mistreatment from other students—primarily in the form of being teased. For Samuel's son, there "was a situation at aftercare that he went to, where there was an issue with another child." School administration notified Brandon when they "had this one thing," in which his son "was pretty dismissive of it." Brandon later

emphasized that his son saw “the other kid as kind of a mess, and he really wasn’t upset by it.” Tim, who served on his district’s school board for nearly three years, attended to one issue in which a student was teased for having two moms. It should be noted, however, that Samuel, Brandon, and Tim believed that school personnel handled all three instances appropriately.

Robert and William identified more than one moment in which their children were teased—all of which the fathers handled matters on their own. Other students teased their oldest son on more than one occasion for having two dads. William discussed:

One time, [our son] was coming home, and the school bus drops them off in front of the house. He came into the house and he’s hurrying in, and he closes the door behind him, and he’s sitting behind the door. I asked him what happened, and he goes, “there’s two kids picking on me.”

William then described how he addressed the issue by approaching the other students’ parents at their houses. Unfortunately, the intervention did not work as, according to William, “it happened a second time,” where his son “was afraid of them.” Although not necessarily teased because of having two dads, Robert described when other students made fun of his son not adhering to social and cultural norms of masculinity by wearing a pink backpack: “I stopped them and said, “what was the big deal—his backpack? His backpack is pink, and pink is a girl color?” So I wore pink shirts the rest of the week, and I told the kids that colors don’t have to be boy or girl.”

On the rare occasion, some fathers indicated negative interactions with parents around their family configurations and sexual orientation. Adam, for example, recalled when another parent wanted to cancel a playdate with his daughter and another student at their house after learning of their two-dad household. The parent suggested, instead, to

hold the playdate in a public place. When asked why she made the change, Adam immediately responded:

Because I'm some creepy pervert, I suppose. And she offered a public place or their house, but the message was quite clear that the child was not coming to my house. It was a kick in the teeth, and my guard was up from that point on with other parents.

Adam then emphasized that other parents “have been absolutely fabulous,” and highlighted that the playdate interaction was “an isolated one that never surfaced with other parents.” Benjamin also discussed that “there were a couple of parents, who we sorta felt like they didn't want to have playdates with us,” for the same reason. Brandon similarly indicated that he limited the extent to which his sons' friends came to his house:

It sometimes made me nervous having our sons' friends over because I don't know what people harbor. I don't know what beliefs people have about gay people. It's always been there...lurking, abusing kids, preying on kids. That's the old time thing about gay men—they're predators, and there are witch hunts that happen.

Although not specifically expressed in the same vein—that gay men are predators, Robert and William generally felt the father of one of their son's friends was uncomfortable about their two-dad household:

Robert: [Our son] and his friend would put their arms around each other and some other kids would make comments.

William: Like, “Oh you're gay just like your dad.” And it bothered his friend's father very much.

Robert: So we went to talk to the parents, and I said, “Yes, he has two dads, and if you have any questions, ask us. We'd be happy to answer.”

For Robert and William, as well as several other haven fathers in this study, answering questions became critical in their efforts to provide more exposure to families headed by same-sex parents.

In fact, the level of exposure about same-sex parents, as well as adoptive families varied in haven schools. Families headed by same-sex parents remained relatively ignored in registration forms that, for the most part, continued to assume heterosexuality. All but two sets of fathers indicated that their schools used forms that designated spaces for mother and father. Some fathers were unfazed. Billy, for example, indicated that he usually “cross[es] out ‘mother’ and write in ‘parent’ when filling out forms,” noting that they “never really bother us,” because “we’re a small percentage of who those forms apply to.” Robert and William similarly “cross out ‘mother’ and write ‘father,’ believing that the mother/father forms “aren’t intentional.” Robert explained:

I don’t think it’s intentional. Friends of ours get very angry when the forms are sent home from school that say “mother.” They go crazy. The schools are trying to get better about it, but we still have to cross out mother and write father. It didn’t bother me that somebody didn’t pay attention or that they had a surplus of old forms.

Jack and Scott, however, expressed feeling bothered by registration forms that ignored their family configuration. Scott discussed that “the only thing with the school that continues to irk me is the bill and the forms,” which “are addressed to Mr. and Mrs.,” and also “say ‘mother’ and ‘father.’” Jack continued to note, “To me, it’s incredibly old fashioned. You can’t just assume...take the time to accommodate people the way they live today. That’s my one beef with the school—to change that.” Scott and Jack were not alone in their frustrations, as Samuel and Tim, and their respective husbands, took recent action to change forms to become more inclusive. Samuel mentioned that he recently addressed the issue of mother/father forms to his children’s school leaders, in which they began making changes to say “parent.” In the process, he also acknowledged that “there was no anger or frustration,” owing the continued use of mother/father forms to school

personnel “not know[ing] any better and needing to be educated.” Similarly, Tim had conversations with district administrators to make changes, noting that they have been “really amenable to changing things.” Tim also noted that making such changes “wasn’t their automatic response,” and that school personnel “just needed someone to bring it up.”

In addition to registration forms, the extent to which haven fathers’ family configurations were represented in instructional practices remained limited. The majority of fathers questioned if “anything is actually built into the curriculum,” as expressed by Billy, who expressed that “any discussions are probably based on her in terms of having two dads.” Robert found such inclusion to be “very slow,” to the point of them coming into classrooms to read books, such as *King and King*. In fact, Robert also questioned why the school did not include *King and King*, but would include C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* as a required reading, despite its “religious imagery.” Samuel frequently read to his children’s classes as well, but did not know how else other teachers Jack and Scott indicated that their daughters’ schools host a diversity week, but could not remember how it addressed LGBTQ-related topics. Similarly, Brandon responded, “I don’t know how much they talk about [LGBTQ topics], except that they are aware.” Cole continued further, saying, “I don’t even think they talk about foster families.” Benjamin also indicated that he has not seen any LGBTQ inclusion in his son’s school curricula, emphasizing that “there wouldn’t be a place for it in the types of classes that he is taking.” Tim, like most of the haven fathers, noted the lack of LGBTQ representation in school curricula, but had begun to meet with district administration, alongside a small group of other same-sex parents, to work towards inclusion—

something he believed would support more “preemptive” work on the safety of all LGBTQ individuals: “I think that’s one of the things we’re going to talk about [with the superintendent], is making sure inclusion is preemptive. They did a number of things for trans issues last year, which was beneficial, less about the LGBTQ in entirety.” Tim later added that students and families would also benefit from talking about adoptive families, or to begin countering “the awkwardness about talking about adoption” in schools.

An aspect of Tim’s response, or what his daughters’ schools did for trans issues, also highlights a common answer among some other fathers to questions about school curricula—the extent of inclusion in anti-bullying and sometimes bathroom policies. In his immediate response, for example, Samuel discussed that “the school board approved trans inclusion as part of their non-discrimination policy, and as part of their efforts around anti-bullying.” Tim noted that “they’re probably most cognizant of the ‘T’ in terms of the student situation.” Similarly, Adam discussed the recent designation of “all gender” bathrooms at his daughters’ school in their attempts “to be inclusive of trans identities across all contexts, especially anti-bullying.” While not all fathers indicated the level of LGBTQ inclusion in anti-bullying policies, document analyses showed that all schools in which haven fathers sent their children protected students from harassment, intimidation, and bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

When talking about school curricula, several fathers also described how their children’s schools addressed Mother’s Day. For a few fathers, the annual holiday rendered some levels of discomfort for themselves or their children. Tim simply responded that the school celebrations “gets a little more awkward for them.” Jack and Scott expounded further upon such “awkwardness,” when one of their daughters

expressed to their teacher that she and a friend, who has two moms, “weren’t happy about Mother’s Day and Father’s Day because they were feeling left out.” When one of their daughters celebrated Mother’s Day for the first time at her new school, Billy and his husband felt that “we forced her entire class to have conversations they weren’t ready for,” around the death of their daughters’ mother. Billy discussed:

Well we’re coming from Mother’s Day, so that was super exciting at school—having to answer a lot of questions and explaining to the teachers how they should handle it. Our daughter will be five years old next month, so she’s confused. She still doesn’t fully understand that her mother has passed away. She’s talking about heaven like it’s a place that you can come back from or a place to visit, and we had to back off of that language because it was confusing to her. She has to understand the permanence of death, which her little brain doesn’t really comprehend.

Billy then emphasized that “the school was very good, and the teachers were staying in touch with us to know how she was responding to things.”

In fact, several fathers stressed that they have always been pleased with the ways that their children’s teachers accommodated Mother’s Day. For fathers such as Billy, Adam, and Jack and Scott, the teachers suggested that children create projects for other female relatives in their lives such as aunts and grandmothers. Some fathers, like Adam and Tim, encouraged their children to direct such projects to female friends. Samuel noted that his children’s schools celebrate “Parents’ Day” instead. Finally, in addition to creating projects for other female relatives or friends, Brandon recalled when one of his son’s schools insisted on his presence at a spa day:

So at the nursery school, they had a spa day for Mother’s Day. I’m a stay-at-home dad, and I saw this announcement and thought that I would never go in a million years. I was even anti-going. It was all about my own insecurities and my own uptightness. Then two days before, I asked myself what I was going to do. I went, but I went late. As soon as I walked in the door, [our son] jumped up and ran over to me, grabbed my hand, and took me to the nail station, and did my nails.

Regardless of how their children's schools addressed Mother's Day, all fathers agreed on the value of including LGBTQ-related topics in instructional and school-wide practices. Moreover, they all imagined such inclusion to begin occurring as early as Kindergarten, PreK, or "from the very beginning—age 0," according to Benjamin. "Obviously, you're not going to talk about sex when you're talking to three- and four-year-olds," he continued, "but when you talk about mommy and mommy or daddy and daddy the same way you talk about mommy and daddy." Adam confirmed the importance of addressing topics or issues early, acknowledging his daughters' previous school as an exemplar:

The perfect school is [previous school]. I can't imagine a school any better. They start with LGBTQ education in PreK. They have a pride week in the lower school, and they actually had to defend that decision. They did their research, and explained to parents that homophobia forms around age six, and that talking about these issues early on would be...they had a few parents completely opposed.

Adam continued further, emphasizing that "the perfect school is also being able to educate the parents as well. It's like dog training. Are you training the dog? No, you're training the owner."

For some fathers, inclusion could also begin by opening up conversations, exposing children to a wide range of family configurations and "making it less abnormal," according to Billy. He explained further that "kids should be exposed to it, making it more normal—not abnormal." He continued further with this sentiment, emphasizing that "I don't say that with a negative connotation—it's just not as common, so it's not something kids will be exposed to." Jack and Scott similarly agreed on including discussion, that "LGBTQ should be part of the dialogue, and should have a place for it in the curriculum." Scott, an educator, recognized the mandated instruction on

Black history month, the holocaust, genocide education, and explained that “[the schools] always talk about racial issues in school, and even economic and class statuses of students, so there should be issues included for LGBTQ students and parents.” Jack immediately added, “you don’t want to make a big deal about it—people resent that. You just want to make it a matter of fact.”

Samuel, Tim, and Brandon and Cole also imagined LGBTQ-inclusion occurring throughout school curricula. Brandon and Cole, for example, felt that topics related to “different kinds of families” would benefit all children. Cole explained:

I think it would be good to have some curriculum about different kinds of families—single parents, whatever. I don’t know if that’s in there or not—no idea. I don’t mean focusing specifically on same-sex families, but to talk about that there are different families—one parent, grandparents, two moms, two dads, foster care. To me, that would be the best way to address difference.

Tim shared:

It would make sense to start talking to kids about diverse families, where they have diverse families in class who are finding out about it anyway, but that’s where you need to go deeper...talking about it broadly, regardless, and not making assumptions about family units. You don’t have to get into much detail, but just the fact of it.

Samuel extended curricular inclusion further, noting that “there needs more talk about different family structures, sex ed needs to be more comprehensive, and teachers and students need to learn appropriate language.”

Intolerant Towns

You don't wear it on your sleeve, because if you do, you get harassed unmercifully. So, you don't really come out until it's socially acceptable.
(Derrick)

Few similar characteristics unify the rural areas, suburbs, and small communities that constitute types of Intolerant Towns. Some span acres of farmlands outlined by miles of back roads and two-lane highways. Others feature distinct pockets of McMansion-style housing developments and strip malls proudly boasting major retail and department stores. A number of Intolerant Towns even nestle against borders of cities and major metropolitan areas, having once thrived with coal mines, textile mills, and steel companies. Despite these differences, however, remarkably absent from each Intolerant Town are explicit signs of inclusion and protection of individuals based on sexual orientation. Rainbow flags, equality signs, inverted triangles, or even "hate has no home here" signs that spread across lawns and businesses in Emerton and havens have no apparent presence throughout Intolerant Towns. As Derrick emphasized, and as interviews have expounded further upon, that despite explicit forms of inclusion and protection, Intolerant Towns have offered gay fathers livable areas to raise their children for those who may "wear it on [their] sleeve," or are immediately forthright about their sexual orientation or gay father statuses within their communities and schools.

Table 7

Intolerant Towns Fathers and their Families

Father (Race/Ethnicity)	Number of Children	Family Formation	Children's Race/Ethnicity	Type of Schooling
Paul (White) Eric (White)	One Daughter One Son	Adoption	Mixed Race/Hispanic	Elementary (2); both Public
Wayne (Black) Mike (White)	Two Daughters	Previous Heterosexual Relationship (Mike)	White	High (2); both Public
John (White)	Two Sons	Adoption	White	Elementary (1); Public out-of- district; College (1)
Eugene (White)	One Daughter	Adopted	Mixed Race/Hispanic	Middle; Public out-of-district
Shane (White) Derrick (White)	One Daughter One Son	Adopted	White	Elementary (2); both Public (one out-of-district)
Ian (White) Nathaniel (White)	Two Daughters Two Sons	Adopted	Mixed Race/Hispanic	Elementary (2); Middle (1); High (1); all Public
Walter (Black)	One Daughter	Adopted	Black/non- Hispanic	Elementary; Public

Elusively Inclusive

The levels of inclusion, as well as the extent to which Intolerant Towns explicitly provide safe and welcoming areas for same-sex parents remains unclear. In terms of policies, three areas are located in the same state as Emerton and Havens, State A, which protect individuals based on sexual orientation in statutes related to housing, employment, public accommodations, biased-motivated crimes, and anti-bullying. Nevertheless, unlike Emerton and havens, these particular Intolerant Towns do not appear to initiate or organize any type of local platforms for sexual minority individuals, such as pride events, LGBTQ-community centers, or specific commissioner offices

dedicated to human rights issues. Moreover, violent crimes, in addition to responses to crimes in neighboring areas, present additional questions about the safety of these areas for gay fathers and their families. Crimes included a murder of a gay man, as well as verbally assaulting a gay-owned business. One town even published a series of news articles challenging the victims of a recent hate crime in State B, where three individuals violently attacked a gay couple holding hands while walking down the street. Those three individuals were eventually found guilty for the attack, but not for being motivated by bias against individuals based on sexual orientation. State B, where the incident took place does not include sexual orientation as a protected class of individuals in hate crimes.

In fact, that same state, State B, where four Intolerant Towns are located, neglects to protect individuals based on sexual orientation on a number of factors, including housing, non-public sector employment, and public accommodations. Similarly, although public code includes sexual orientation as a protected class in school anti-bullying, the language of the state law continues to exclude any enumeration. In other words, students, or even students' families, are not explicitly protected against bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation according to this state's law.

At a more local level, these towns reflect a similar status with regard to sexual orientation. Although approximately 200 municipalities across State B have developed language of inclusion around anti-discrimination, none of the four represented in this study have followed suit. Similar to the other state, these Intolerant Towns do not provide any form of inclusion, protection, or even support through local commissioner offices. Intolerant Towns in this state also have had strong ties to discrimination against

individuals based on sexual orientation. First, the three aforementioned individuals involved in the crime against the gay couple lived and grew up in one town. A second town houses a regional chapter of the American Family Association, an organization opposed to same-sex marriage and families headed by gay and lesbian parents. A college in the third town has had a long history of being ranked as one of the worst campuses for LGBTQ students (Campus Pride, 2017). Finally, a fourth town received attention in the past five years for two crimes—a murder of a gay man, and a gay couple’s garage door having discriminatory language spray painted on it.

Additional characteristics challenge levels of inclusion and protection in Intolerant Towns in both states. LGBTQ centers, as well as various services specific to LGBTQ individuals (e.g., health, marriage, family formation) are visibly absent from communities. Access to annual pride events, or even smaller meet-ups for gay and lesbian parents, requires traveling long distance for many fathers. Furthermore, recent voting records reveal overwhelming support—in all towns—for the Republican candidate, whose 2016 presidential platform and work since being elected has remained largely anti-LGBTQ.

Despite policies, little access to LGBTQ spaces, and violent incidents, some fathers described their towns as providing welcoming areas to raise their children. For some of the fathers, these descriptions often included broader statements of progress and acceptance. John, for example, noted, “this area is getting to be progressive even though it’s still a small town.” Eugene shared similar sentiments that, overall, the town has “slowly started becoming more accepting” since he first moved there. Paul simply stated that, “this area is way more accepting of others.” Wayne perceived the people in his

community to be “more accepting of our family” than a previous area in which he and his family lived prior.

Some fathers’ descriptions detailed two sides of town, separated by highways or railroad tracks, or positioned in relation to outskirts of towns. Interestingly, all of the fathers who made these comparisons acknowledged the type of “negative views” that occurs on one side, as noted by Eric, but emphasized that the side in which they all live, the “better one,” for Paul, remained “open minded.” Paul and Eric, for example, discussed:

Paul: There are two sides of town—on one side of [highway], which is run down...

Eric: ...a lot of negative views in that area.

Paul: And this is the better one, which is a little nicer.

Eric: The other side is more blue-collar, this one is more white-collar.

Paul: ...and also more open-minded.

Shane and Derrick addressed differences between two sides of town:

Shane: This is a great neighborhood to live.

Derrick: Everyone is very accepting here, especially more than the other side of tracks.

Wayne and Mike distinguished the outskirts where they used to live, as “less accepting and welcoming,” according to Mike from their current residence in the center of town as having “more pockets of folks that are a bit more artsy and a bit more open minded,” as noted by Wayne. Ian and Nathaniel also described two sides in terms of outskirts and the center of town. Unlike Wayne and Mike, however, they viewed living on the outskirts as

being “much more accepting,” attributing to the abundance of space and land as an opportunity for people to “mind their business,” as Ian emphasized. He discussed:

We’re kind of on the [out]skirts, and it’s much more accepting than being in town. But I think because of how small it is, and it’s more of a rural area, people just go about their own business and mind their own business. It’s just so country that no one seems to have issues with anything. They just..everybody just minds their own business.

Although the majority of fathers touted their towns as slowly progressing and accepting, or being open and welcoming, they knew of no other family headed by gay or lesbian parents living in their areas. Some fathers, such as Wayne and Mike, as well as Shane and Derrick recalled gay and lesbian parents once living in their areas years ago, but have since moved and no longer keep in contact. For all other fathers, however, responses to similar questions about the presence of other gay and lesbian parents included “we are the first that we know of,” as stated by Paul, “I am the only openly gay person in [town],” according to John, and for Eugene, “there are other gay and lesbian people I know, but none here.” Walter, a single father, not only indicated the absence of other gay fathers, but also the lack of other out, gay men living in his area:

There’s an app, a gay hookup app, and a couple years ago, I met a guy. He was on the DL, and I come to find out that he’s married and lives in [neighboring town]. There’s a lot of DL dudes around here. If I go to my daughter’s school and pick her up, I turn on [the app], and it’s just like a lot of blank profiles. I think this is an area where it’s hard for guys to accept themselves.

For Walter, being the only one also entailed being one of few Black men living in his area:

I grew up here, and back in the ‘70s, me and my brother were the only Black kids in school. I remember kids coming up to us, wanting to touch our skin and our big afros. There are a few more Black people now, but not many.

Several other fathers expressed similar concerns regarding their town's lack of racial and ethnic diversity. Wayne noted that he "felt isolated as being two minorities in a predominantly White town." He continued, "I've got the woman in the elevator who's afraid to be there because I'm Black and could steal her purse, then outside of the elevator, I'm the person who could taint her grandson for being gay." When forming his family, John told the adoption agency that he "could not adopt an African American child" due to the "area being very backwards thinking at times." Finally, Ian and Nathaniel attributed the "all White makeup of [town]" to the fact that their children's schools do not observe or celebrate MLK day.

"Just Let the People See it":

Out (?) and About in Intolerant Towns

Paul and Eric recalled many moments in which their daughter has walked up to strangers, emphatically stating, "I have two dads!" "Everywhere we went," noted Eric, who immediately expressed his typical response to her: "We don't have to tell everybody. Just let the people see it. Just be there." This sentiment was not unique to Paul and Eric, as the majority of fathers described carefully navigating perceptions and receptions of their unique family configurations, often shaping their interactions with neighbors and members of the community. Similar to Emerton and havens, these families challenged traditional conceptualizations of family configurations as two-dad households with adopted children, as well as the two, gay, single-father households who participated in this study and lived in Intolerant Towns. Although the majority of fathers indicated overall, positive experiences within their communities, they provided several instances in which their families were not only questioned, but were also subjected to mistreatment.

The ways and extent to which most of the fathers disclosed their sexual orientation or two-dad status varied. Paul and Eric, for example, insisted on not drawing attention to their family configuration, also stating that they “don’t do public displays of attention,” according to Paul or “never want to put it in anybody’s face,” as noted by Eric. Similarly, Shane refused to engage in public, visual displays of being married to Derrick, stating, “we’re very conscious, too, that...we don’t really make it known.” Derrick continued that people “think we’re brothers a lot of times with our kids,” to which he or Shane never seemed to dispute, saying, “and that’s okay, I guess.” Shane and Derrick acknowledged a fear of mistreatment guiding their decisions to remain stealth about their two-dad status, stating that couples who are perceived as or actually are gay encounter more issues:

Shane: Some people around this area are a little less progressive

Derrick: And we’ve never had any problems, but that’s not to say that other couples...

Shane: Where it’s more obvious that they’re couples, there is more potential for problems

Some fathers first learned about their surroundings before comfortably interacting with neighbors and community members. For Ian and his husband, this was a process of “testing the waters,” particularly after “being so burned the last time in [another town].” Before moving to their current location, Ian and Nathaniel endured several instances of homophobia as a two-dad household, including having been reported to local child services, as well as a real estate agent who “went behind our backs, telling everyone how wrong she thought it was.” Ian suspected that he and his husband were “the talk of the daily lunch counter” in their current town among community members, but nevertheless

insisted on “trying to be under the radar before making any big splash.” Nathaniel continued with this sentiment, insisting, “We are not a gay family. We’re just two dads who are raising kids.” Similarly, Walter only came out to groups of people that he understood to be open minded and accepting. He explained:

When people see me, number one, they see this big Black guy and number two, I’m heavily tattooed. They don’t immediately think, “oh he’s gay,” and I don’t really feel as if I need to tell someone that I’m gay. It’s not my focus. I’m out at my job, and I don’t hide, and the moms in my daughter’s dance group know, but they’re all open minded and I know they don’t care. They accept me regardless.

In addition to Shane and Derrick, as well as Walter, Wayne and Mike carefully observed new situations before talking about each other as partners:

Wayne: There are some stores out in the country, where you can sense it...

Mike: Yeah, there’s a tension in the air.

Wayne: Yeah, you don’t feel comfortable walking into that and being who you are, so you learn to walk a very thin line. I would never want anyone to feel uncomfortable, so I would much rather...it’s much easier for me to tone down myself, or...

Mike: ...change the pronoun—that’s what I would do in a situation like that. I find myself in new situations, where I’m changing pronouns, specifically to not let it out that...I’ll say “spouse” instead of “partner” or “husband,” and as I become more comfortable, I’ll talk about [Wayne].

John also let feelings of comfort dictate when he and his husband came out in new situations, but only in instances outside of where he lived. He cited an example in which he met his oldest son’s fraternity brothers for the first time, saying

At the beginning, it was very...we just didn’t talk about it. Slowly, probably around his junior year, it started to come out and he started to introduce us as his two dads. We just kind of rolled with it—okay, we’re the dads. Whatever the comfort level was for [our son], we just went with it.

In terms of where he lived, John never felt threatened being open about his sexual orientation or his family’s two-dad household. He attributed his relative ease in being out

among the community to having grown up in the area, being a decorated athlete, and working as a school administrator in the same district where he lives:

Because my family is so well known in town, everyone knows us and we have not had any issues. My family owns business in town. Plus, we were all athletes, all-state athletes, state champions, and D1 athletes. And because I'm in an administrative role, I'm at every event in the district. All of that has helped us as well.

Nevertheless, John also recalled an instance in which an assistant superintendent threatened to fire him for adopting his son. At the time, his son went to the same school district where John worked, but John also noted a straight female teacher's adoption of a student in the district that were not met with threats.

Eugene, in contrast to all other fathers living in Intolerant Towns, never hesitated letting neighbors and members of the community know about his gay, single-father household. He noted that when he first moved into the area, he received the "[town] welcome, which meant being reported to [child services] for suspected child abuse." When asked if he imagined this turn of events would have been different if he were straight, Eugene emphasized that it would, adding, "my sexual orientation and gender have always been an issue." Moreover, it was this occurrence, and several others like it, that fueled a need to be fully visible throughout his community. He elaborated:

I am very involved in town issues. After the first time I got reported to [child services]...when I get bullied, I show up. So I found something to show up for and became very visible in this town, because I wanted to make it clear that there was no way to chase me out. There was no way to intimidate me, and that's what I did. I showed up.

Eugene continued, emphasizing a broader disservice to the community by not acknowledging and talking about diverse families such as his:

I think it does a disservice to straight families and alternative families to deny the diversity and deny the unique perspective that it brings to situations. It's sad...we've taken the community out of gay community, and now we're just gay

parents. We stress parents over community. There are times where I think it would be really healthy for the kids to know that one family has gay parents, and that means something specific, and that might be something you might want or feel is appropriate for you, but we don't do any of that.

Despite the extent to which the fathers were out among their communities, all of them recalled experiences where they were confronted by assumptions of heterosexuality with regard to their family configurations. When Mike's daughters were younger, their friends' parents constantly confused his ex-partner as his uncle, where he "felt mortified if people found out that [ex-partner] wasn't [my daughters'] uncle." Similar to fathers in Havens, however, the majority of heterosexual assumptions revolved around questioning the presence of children's mothers. "All of the time," Ian immediately exclaimed, and "Oh we still get that now," Nathaniel continued, when asked how often community members or neighbors have asked, "where's Mom?" Shane and Derrick laughed when asked the same question, responding "Yes, we always have those [questions]." Shane discussed further that they have also received questions around social and cultural norms of gender roles in heterosexual-headed households such as "who's more the motherly figure," "who's the more fatherly figure," or "who's the more affectionate one." Derrick continued that he and Shane "just kind of laugh it off" to assumptions of heterosexual parenting, insisting that "we don't really feel that anybody really needs to know our personal business, especially if we don't know them."

Some fathers, like Walter, attributed such inquiries to "people just being curious," but described the personal nature of "getting [those questions] all of the time." Nathaniel and Ian expounded further upon the invasive nature of similar interactions when traveling—particularly when coming back into the United States:

Ian: We just went to [Canada] last year, and the guy on the American border knew we were together, knew these were our kids, opened up the back door and asked our kids, “Where’s your mother?”

Nathaniel: “Where’s your mother?” And the kids, they’re like, “we don’t have one.”

Ian: The Canadian side...when we were going into Canada, the minute we said that we are two dads, they said, “Oh okay, welcome to Canada.”

Nathaniel: It was coming back across to America. My oldest got pissed, and said, “we don’t have one.” My younger ones were crying. It truly shook them up.

Paul and Eric also discussed that most individuals’ questions about their family configuration remained inoffensive, or just “people curious about our family,” according to Paul. Nevertheless, Paul and Eric preferred more neutral types of questions and responses. For example, the family has become heavily involved in a nearby Karate club, being there “every day of the week, including Saturdays for advanced classes.” Paul noted that the “parents are amazing there,” and only remembered when one father asked them “if we’re [our children’s] fathers.” That father, according to Eric, responded, ““that’s cool,’ and went about like it wasn’t a big deal.”

Eric, however, mentioned two other community interactions where his family configuration was questioned that felt more meddlesome. One included when a doctor acknowledged his son’s two-dad household as “the coolest thing ever,” emphasizing that “she was over excited, [telling] us all about all of her gay friends.” Paul agreed: “You say hi to us, we’ll say hi to you, and we’re cool. Let the gay thing go.” The second instance occurred at a local grocery store, which seems to remain an emotional bruise in Paul and Eric’s memories. When initially asked when there have ever been moments where people asked about the mother’s presence, Paul and Eric immediately asserted:

Eric: Oh that bitch at [grocery store] the one night...[Paul] had to keep me from going back in there. What did she ask?

Paul: She asked if we were both the dads and if we adopted.

Eric: I'm like, "well of course [our son's] adopted." and she's like, "well that makes sense then." I was like, "I'll rip your lungs out."

Paul: Well you didn't say that.

Eric: No but I wanted to. We just left.

Although both fathers appeared to be upset by the incident, Paul insisted that the experience "had nothing to do with [us] being gay."

Eugene's experiences not only provide additional examples of heterosexual assumptions, or asking "the whereabouts of my wife or my daughter's mother," but also illustrate some of the distressing responses he received from strangers, community members, and even neighbors. As reported earlier, some of Eugene's neighbors reported him to child services as soon as he moved into his town. Eugene listed similar events including when patrons at a local grocery store "grabbed [my daughter] from me," as well as "a couple of other incidents out in stores where women appropriated her and didn't want to let her leave with me." Eugene noted that "it's not like they were embarrassed or apologetic," and that "they were suspicious." With each incident, Eugene "had to explain, 'that's my daughter,'" in which the patrons and women eventually released his daughter to him after "[she] started calling me 'daddy.'" Although Eugene emphasized the shock that he and his daughter felt throughout these experiences, he simultaneously mentioned that "they had no idea she was with me—I'm White and she's of color." In addition to race and ethnicity, Eugene identified additional characteristics of his family unit shaping his interactions with community members—particularly that he

was an out, single, gay father living in a community that he understood as perceiving gay men as predators:

I think the people around here are uncomfortable with the influence I may have on their kids. I wish they had more respect, or more appreciation of just what knowledge does for those kids. Instead, I have to do this thing...I had to explain to the mother of one of [my daughter's] friends. "Listen, I walk my dog all of the time, and I see your son all of the time. I never say hello to him and I want to tell you why—because I'm a single, gay father living in this town, and I'm not going to be seen as overly friendly to teenage boys." [...] And that makes me sad. I wish it was okay for me to talk to teenage boys without fear of being seen as a predator, but that's still where we are, and it's even more heightened as a single, gay person.

The severity of Eugene's interactions throughout the community remain relatively unique when compared to all other fathers living in Intolerant Towns. In fact, many of the fathers expressed having overall, positive experiences. Paul stated, "nobody has ever batted an eye—we've been really lucky," noting that the neighbors "were all over [our daughter] when she first arrived," and that they "still buy [our children] Christmas presents." Mike described his and Wayne's relationships with neighbors as "cordial," insisting that they have had "no issues, or anything like hate crimes." John never recalled any negative experiences with neighbors or community members, but accounted for the "environment of support" to "people already knowing me in the area well before I had kids." Interestingly, Derrick apologized for not being able to provide examples of mistreatment within the community with him and his family, but, similar to John, acknowledged that "most of the restaurants or stores or businesses we go to know us now."

"Testing the Waters" and "Laying Low" in Schools

Ian and Nathaniel first spoke of "testing the waters" in terms of interacting with community members, and they reiterated the same type of interface with their children's

new schools. “We lay low,” Ian emphasized, and admitted that although he strongly desired to fully participate in school-based activities and events, he remained hesitant. Such apprehension, however, did not stem from how he would be treated, but from the safety of his children. Ian, who works as a stay-at-home dad and has more scheduling flexibility than Nathaniel, noted:

I don’t want to move out of here. I like my house and I love the space. Therefore, I should be my daughter’s class parent because I play guitar, and I have CDs out, and I’m awesome. But I’m not going to because I’m afraid of people. I’ve been hurt by people because of who I am, and I’ve been able to get over it. But if they hurt my children, I’ll slash them.

Both fathers elaborated further that the apparent lack of diversity—both in terms of race and sexual orientation—fueled some concern about the reception of their family in schools and subsequently, their levels of involvement and engagement:

Ian: I didn’t join the PTA here...

Nathaniel: He’s a little standoffish and afraid to get involved in everything.

Ian: I am...I hide. I would totally be the class parent now, and making cupcakes, and playing guitars and parachutes, but I just can’t yet. I mean, they don’t even have off for MLK day. How the hell are they even going to respond to us?

Nathaniel: We’ll see how it pans out, but for now...

Ian: ...we lay low.

Ian and Nathaniel were not the only ones to test the waters or even lay low; in fact, the majority of fathers described a seemingly tentative process of gradually interacting with their children’s schools. Similar to Ian and Nathaniel, this process for three other sets of fathers entailed negotiating and understanding the reception of their two-dad households. For example, although Eric acknowledged that he was initially

“hesitant about the Catholic school” where his children attended in years prior, he and Paul felt a sense of ease after speaking to the priest about his family:

Eric: We ended up sending them to Catholic school, but we had to meet with the priest.

Paul: We’re thinking, “oh, great.”

Eric: But he sat us down, and he was awesome. He said they never had parents like us before, but it wouldn’t be an issue, and he really was awesome.

Paul: That shocked us.

Shane and Derrick also gauged levels of safety through a Catholic school administrator’s response to their two-dad household. In contrast, however, they decided against the school, because they, according to Shane, “felt really mistreated when we went there to tour the school with the director.” Derrick added that the director “seemed really weird around us and gave us the impression that she couldn’t be bothered.” Shane then questioned, “if that’s the way she treated us, how would she treat our kids when they’re there?” Finally, Mike attributed a general sense of support from their daughters’ music department to a set of lesbian mothers who “set the tone” before they became actively involved:

[The lesbian mothers] set the tone. They were very active with the band, and the parents became supportive. I’m sure that there’s some that didn’t agree with them or don’t agree with who we are, but they have all been very open. We’re really active with band now, we head up the concession stand and help out with their festivals.

Mike then emphasized that the staff with whom he and Wayne interact “are primarily in the music department, theatre, and band,” and that “they get it.” Moreover, when compared to other staff at their daughters’ school, Mike understood the music department

to be more mindful of his family's unique configuration, which included recognition of his ex-wife and Wayne, his husband:

I find that [the music department] was better at supporting all of us than the rest of the school could, even though there was a separation. Regardless of my sexuality—that wasn't even on the table. Even though [my daughters'] mom and I aren't together, they still are cognizant that I exist, and who [Wayne] is, and I find that very helpful.

In addition to assessing school perceptions of gay fathers or same-sex parents, some fathers developed relationships with their children's schools, but did so in ways of not purposefully drawing attention to their sexual orientation. Although John and his husband live in a town where he grew up, their youngest son attends an out-of-district placement to better meet his Individualized Education Program (IEP). In terms of coming out, John stated, "they know, but it's really not my place to be in anyone's face about it and shake up the status quo," and attributed his composure, as well as his and his husband's appearance, to the positive relationships he has with his son's school:

I think because I have that open, ongoing personality...and when you see both of us—he's military and I'm an athlete. So, we just roll with everything and that has helped us. I think if we had been very uptight or even offended by certain things, that would change our relationships with the schools.

Shane and Derrick suspected that the current schools where his children attend know about their two-dad household, but like John, they "don't really go in and tell them—[the teachers] just figure it out." Eric also expressed that with his children's new school, deciding to come out "falls more into my low-key and not making an announcement, like our presence has been enough." Paul continued that they have "never been out to say, 'we're the new gay dads' when meeting [our children's] teachers." Although Walter indicated that his daughter's school personnel have presented opportunities for him to come out, he refuses, saying, "I don't feel as though I need to tell you, as her teacher, that

I'm gay." He continued, "I don't feel as if I need to say that, and I don't; I just do the single, adoptive parent thing."

Eugene also discussed that he did not explicitly disclose his sexual orientation to his daughter's schools. Nevertheless, unlike Walter and several other fathers, Eugene emphasized, "it's not like I'm hiding it." Coming out, he elaborated further, has been so prevalent in his adult life that he is "done." He noted:

I'm so out at this point in my life that I can't imagine that her teachers don't already know. I don't walk into the schools and say, "Hi, I'm [my daughter's] gay dad!" But I walk in, and it's just me, and she's adopted. I was actually married to a woman for a while. I wasn't out my entire life, and I didn't come out until my mid 30s. So at this point, I've been coming out for 20 years. I'm done.

Despite the extent to which fathers did not explicitly disclosed their sexual orientation, all of them engaged with their children's schools for a variety of circumstances, often together in the case of two-dad households. Children from six out of the seven families had IEPs, and the fathers from those families regularly participated in meetings with school personnel. Several fathers volunteered by reading books to their children's classes, chaperoning for trips, and assisting with the logistics of specific events. Walter, for example, touted his role of organizing his daughter's annual book fair each year. In addition, many fathers also attended functions such as concerts, dance performances, softball games, school-based festivals, open houses, and back-to-school nights.

Although the majority of two-dad households participated in school-based functions together, Wayne expressed some reluctance, even to Mike's surprise. When asked if both fathers hesitated attending non-music related events together, Wayne immediately affirmed. Mike then questioned, "is there?" Wayne explained:

There is, because I don't want to make it awkward. The band is fine because we know people that have put their kids through it, and know that we are going to get acceptance there. But with everything else, I try to stay in the background. I'm there for the events that I need to be there for. Although I think the rest of the school might be accepting, I still don't want [our daughters] to have the stigma created by me. I always feel like I need to stay in the background enough so that they decide when to come out to their friends about their parents, but only when they're comfortable.

Mike later discussed that his daughters' friends know about their family configuration, emphasizing that "their friends are very honest and accepting—we're the cool gay parents."

Nevertheless, Wayne's concerns relate to a common thread shared by many families living in Intolerant Towns—students' responses to gay-father households. For many fathers, such responses surfaced as direct questions about the mother's whereabouts or reasons for having two dads, often judged as harmless curiosity. Derrick noted of "many times when other kids keep asking them where their mom is." Ian recalled a recent interaction in which "somebody in [my daughter's] class asked, 'where's your mom and what happened?'" John described one of his son's friends continuing to ask why he has two dads and not a mother. Similarly, Eric described several moments on the school bus where his daughter fielded questions from peers about having two dads.

Interestingly, none of the fathers reported instances of mistreatment among their students' peers regarding their family configurations. Those with students in high school, or who have recently graduated, reported the use derogatory language, but felt unthreatened. Wayne and Mike's daughters, for example, have occasionally informed them of "gay jokes" or "students calling each other 'faggots' in the lunchroom," but attributed such behavior to "teenagers [being] stupid who say stupid things all of the time," according to Wayne. Similarly, John referenced the use of "faggot" or "that's so

gay” among his oldest son and his peers, but insisted that “it has nothing to do with us being gay.” John, a coach and school leader, emphasized that he uses those moments to teach students about the inappropriate nature of such language, but also insisted that “in their minds, they don’t associate those words with actually being gay—they’re just words to them.” At the elementary level, Paul and Eric remembered when another student thought it was “weird” for their son to have two dads, in which the Kindergarten teacher reprimanded the student. Nevertheless, similar to Wayne and Mike, as well as John, both fathers excused the student’s comment and remained baffled by the way school personnel handled the incident:

Paul: [Our son] said that somebody said to him, “You have two dads.” This was at the Catholic school, and the teacher pulled the student out and panicked, saying “You can’t say stuff like that.” It was a bit too much.

Eric: They needed to calm down, especially the principal. She called us to tell us that there was an issue, that someone said he had two dads, and that it was weird, and asked, “is one of your dads a mom?”

Paul: They were in Kindergarten.

Eric: So they took the kids to the vice principal’s office and tore him and his parents apart, saying why it’s unacceptable. They’re five and six—to them, it is weird.

Paul: We actually apologized to his parents when we saw them.

Despite Paul and Eric’s apparent dissatisfaction, the teacher and administration displayed some form of support for the family with regards to their two-dad household—an action that did not always exist for all fathers.

In fact, some fathers described moments when school personnel questioned their ability to raise children. For Ian and Nathaniel, such questions arose at their children’s previous school, and became so intense that they “abruptly withdrew their children,”

according to Ian, and began homeschooling their children until moving to their current town. Ian noted that when they first started sending their children to the previous school, they were “an amazing novelty,” where “people were friendly, outgoing, and open.” Ian also felt comfortable engaging in as many activities as possible, saying, “I was the class mom, on the school board, a PTA president, a soccer coach—I was this, I was that, I was everywhere.” Nevertheless, a turn of events occurred as school personnel and the fathers began implementing an IEP for one of their children. Ian stated:

When we started the IEP with [our child], the school automatically took over and tried to do what they wanted to do. When I opposed them doing what they were doing, I feel like they didn’t treat us like normal husband-wife parents. I felt they know that we were...I guess what I felt was that they...Comments were made that we were over our heads and didn’t know what we were doing, and that they knew better. They didn’t think that I knew what was best. We were dismissed a little bit.

When asked if his and Nathaniel’s two-dad household affected this experiences, Ian immediately answered, “Absolutely. At the end of the day, completely and utterly yes.” Nathaniel continued, “We always wonder what would have happened if we were a straight couple and how those things would have been different.”

Ian and Nathaniel were not alone in school personnel questioning their parenting skills. Walter recalled a specific moment when his daughter’s Kindergarten teacher not only assumed heterosexuality, but then prompted discussions about Walter’s status as a single father. When picking up his daughter from school one day, the teacher engaged in a conversation about her hair. After learning that his daughter’s mother does not do her hair, the teacher then asked, “well then who does her hair, an aunt, a grandmother?” Walter responded that he did and reflected:

I've always got people saying to me, "wow, it's really rare for the dad to keep the kid in a divorce." People just always assume that a guy can't do it. When they see my daughter...I always carry around pictures of her, and people say, "wow man, that's great, you and her mom must be proud." They just think we're idiots—that dads can't do it. I do.

Similar to Walter, Eugene confronted questions about his ability to raise a daughter as a single father. He recounted several IEP meetings over the course of his daughter's elementary and middle school career that "felt more like parenting lectures." Eugene elaborated further that, "there were conversations about female role models, and what am I doing to bring female role models into [my daughter's] life."

In addition to school personnel, several fathers in two-dad households highlighted some uncomfortable interactions with other parents around their family configurations. Another father (presumably heterosexual) asked John and his husband if they were "rais[ing] the kids gay or straight." A few years ago, a mother withdrew her son from the same class as Shane and Derrick's son due to some "cock-and-bull story that her son had been to our house with our son, and that they took a bath together," as Shane described. Ian wanted to chaperone one of his children's overnight trips at their previous school, but decided against it for fear of rejection from other parents. He elaborated, saying "I didn't want to be...I didn't want someone's parent to say, 'I don't want my kid with some gay guy.'" Finally, Eric noted an incident where he was similarly concerned with parents' reactions to his presence around their son.

There was a little boy in sixth grade. He fell at the bus stop, and I was the only parent around, screaming, because he broke his ankle. My neighbor came out and helped me get him into my van, and I drove him down the street. His father was confused, and I told him that [the son] fell on the ice at the bus stop. He looked at me like, "why do you have my kid?"

Although Eric insisted that “it had nothing to do with being gay,” his continued response suggests that he had some concerns that this experience may have had something to do with his sexual orientation. He immediately detailed the timing of when everything happened, saying, “let’s time stamp the situation,” discussed how well he knows all of the neighbors, then abruptly changed the topic to when he and Paul drove past a statue of Mary when they first visited their children’s prior Catholic school.

Aside from interactions with students, teachers, administration, and parents, the level of exposure of diverse family configurations remained largely absent in common, school-level practices. All of the fathers living in Intolerant Towns indicated that registration forms continued to assume heterosexual parents, with spaces for mother and father. When asked about registration forms, for example, Derrick expressed that “the schools are not set up for same-sex couples.” Such forms, according to Nathaniel have been “at every school we’ve been at.” Paul shared a similar sentiment, that “registration forms have always had a space for mother and father.” John also mentioned the mother/father registration forms as “something I come across all of the time.”

Some fathers highlighted that, in addition to heterosexuality, school-related forms assumed two-parent statuses. Mike identifies his daughters’ mother on such forms, but also noted that Wayne’s guardianship is only listed as an emergency contact. Eugene emphasized that “the majority of forms are mother/father,” but has also “dealt with parent 1/parent 2 forms,” which essentially send the same message: “we’re not anticipating you as a single father.” Walter recalled having to fill out a waiver form for the presence of a mother. He reflected:

As a matter of fact, I had to do a waiver for the mother/father stuff with her school. They were asking information about her mother: “Is she deceased?” “Are you divorced?” I was waiting for...but there was no space for me to write that I was just a single dad. So I just kept putting “N/A.”

Walter elaborated further about encountering such forms:

I feel as if single mothers don’t get the questions that single dads get. If a girl goes out and gets pregnant, has a kid, she’s just a mother. For me, it’s sort of like, “we have to ask these extra questions because it’s just not normal.” I just get pissed about it every time, I really do.

Similar to Walter, the other families that did not fall into a two-father structure described frustrations around the invisibility of their households on forms. Wayne stressed:

I am more than an emergency contact. I am a step-parent. These are my kids. They were six and eight when I first met them. It’s been almost 10 years. I show up to concerts, and I get involved. I want to know what’s going on with my kids and make sure everything’s okay, so I think it’s important for the schools to know that I am a parent.

Irritated by the presence and frequency of two-parent forms, Eugene stated that he has attempted to talk to the schools about representing “alternative families” on forms. The schools have been “slow to change,” according to Eugene, in which he continues to “passively aggressively cross[es] a line through ‘mother’ or ‘parent 2’” as one of his “acts of rebellion.”

Two-father households responded to mother/father forms with less frustration. Shane noted that he “no longer bat[s] an eye at the mother/father forms,” and that “they’re not a problem.” Derrick agreed, saying, “they’ll probably change them sooner or later,” and that “it’s just not a concern.” Although Ian “cross[es] out ‘mother’ to put ‘father,’” the fact that they handle such registration forms “doesn’t really bother [him].” John stated that he has begun to work with schools to change mother/father forms, but

attributed their continued use to school personnel “never being challenged to think otherwise.”

In some contrast, Paul and Eric expressed some frustration with mother/father forms, but it was directed to other gay-fathered households who spoke out against their use. They explained:

Eric: I get very upset on the [social media] group, because every summer, it’s this “can you believe it still says ‘mother’ and ‘father’ on these forms?”

Paul: Just scratch it out and put father.

Eric: My approach is, if you don’t make it a big deal, they won’t make it a big deal. And I don’t really care that I have to scratch out “mother” and put “father.”

Paul: Of all the issues we have, this is the one we’re going to pick apart?

Later, when talking about the level of ease they felt they had when interacting with other parents, Paul and Eric reiterated their stance on mother/father registration forms:

Eric: The parents have all been...Nobody has ever been...I feel bad, because I feel like I get annoyed with other gay dads than I do anyone else.

Paul: It’s petty things—it’s this mother/father stuff—who cares?

Eric: Like, do you ever think about just letting the little stuff go?

In addition to registration forms, assumptions of two, heterosexual parents extended well into the curriculum. In terms of instruction, no father identified an area in which their children formally learned about LGBTQ-related topics in the classroom, even though several cited children’s books that they had in their collection at home. Shane discussed that “[LGBTQ topics] aren’t talked about at all,” adding that it amazes how “how little they know that [their children] are being raised in an LGBTQ home.” Nathaniel responded, “[the teachers] are so far away from even thinking about including that in the class.” John offered that his son’s school does not address LGBTQ-related

topics, but “they’re getting there—they’re really trying to work on it.” For every other father living in Intolerant Towns, additional responses including simple “no” or “absolutely not.”

Single fathers like Walter and Eugene expounded further upon the absence of resources or materials that highlighted their unique configurations. While searching through the book fair at his daughter’s school, for example, Wayne described an unsuccessful attempt at finding representative children’s books for him and his daughter:

One of the things I noticed is, when I was looking around my daughter’s book fair the other day, I went looking for books for kids with gay parents. I actually found one on two mommies, my mommy and her wife, one with two dads. But I’m looking and looking around for books with a single dad. Then, on top of that, I’m looking for Black, single dad books. The closest thing that I found was something like “My Hair is Not like my Friend’s Hair.” I’m always on the outlook.

Similarly, Eugene recalled a recent family tree project assigned to his daughter that neglected to capture the relevance of their family, forcing his daughter into publicly talking about “issues that she is very sensitive about discussing.” He reflected:

We had an incident recently with a relatively insensitive teacher. My daughter’s in health class, where she gets this assignment, and she has to draw a family tree. Now I understand—they’re doing a family health history, which is important. But she’s adopted, and she doesn’t know anything because it’s a closed adoption. I wrote to the teacher and said, “this assignment makes no sense to her—she has no knowledge of her birth family, and my health history is irrelevant.” He said that she could do a family tree of her adoptive family. Without really realizing it, I think, he forced her to disclose this different to everybody, on issues that she is very sensitive about discussing.

In addition to the absence of representative resources or materials, Eugene’s and Walter’s experiences with Mother’s Day celebrations led to uncomfortable conversations around their family configurations. Certainly Mother’s Day called attention to several of the fathers in two-dad households, but these fathers simultaneously acknowledged that they have comfortably asked teachers to have their children make projects for aunts,

neighbors, grandmothers, or family friends. Eugene, however, encountered a teacher's refusals to allow his daughter to make projects for him instead, saying:

I tried to talk to the schools about us being an alternative family—there's no mom here. For Mother's Day, the kids sit down and make presents. I said that I wanted her to make a present for me, but they wouldn't do that. They wanted her to make a present for my mother, and I specifically told them that I wanted something else. They wouldn't do it. When I tell the teachers that I consider myself to be my daughter's mother, that is beyond their ability to comprehend. Sometimes I identify as a mother, I don't identify as a woman, but I do identify as a mother and as a father.

Walter associated some stress with Mother's Day as well, particularly because it recently initiated conversations about his daughter's adoption—a topic that he felt unprepared to discuss:

I always stress about Mother's Day. Up until last year, I would always get a call from a teacher, like how do I want to handle it. The way I explain it to my daughter, and I wasn't ready to explain, but it led to questions...I'm not prepared for those conversations. I thought I had years, but I had to explain where her mom was, why she was adopted. It was like a punch in the gut.

Walter continued to explain how he discussed with his daughter that her mother was not ready to have a child, that some families have a mother and father, some have two fathers, others have two mothers. Walter then emphasized to her, “but you're lucky, 'cause you've got a daddy and a mommy all rolled up into one.”

Although experiences like Walter's and Eugene's, as well as other fathers' responses have shown less attention to diverse family configurations in the classroom, several fathers highlighted school-wide practices as evidence of support for their households. For example, some mentioned that their children's schools addressed “bullying issues for LGBTQ people,” according to Derrick, “especially for trans students,” added Shane. Eugene, a lawyer, also emphasized that his daughter's school “was strongly committed to protecting all students based on sexual orientation or gender

identity.” Wayne cited “safe space” and “no hate zone” signs as indicators that his daughters’ school attended to issues surrounding LGBTQ individuals. Furthermore, Mike remembered the same school once having a Gay-Straight Alliance, but that it “stopped because of funding, not because there wasn’t any interest, but because of the lack of funding.”

The ways father responded to interest in LGBTQ inclusion varied. Most fathers agreed that at some point in their formal education, their children should receive LGBTQ-related instruction. A number attributed health class as a platform for delivering such content, noting that high school in particular would be more appropriate since the “maturity levels of students are a little better for handling those issues” according to Wayne. While discussing it further, Wayne also offered middle school social studies as another area for children to receive instruction on LGBTQ individuals, where they could potentially learn about history, famous authors, and poets. Nevertheless, Wayne and Mike, as well as Shane and Derrick and John clearly outlined that introducing LGBTQ-related topics should begin at the secondary level.

In contrast, some fathers entertained the idea of beginning instruction in elementary school. Shane, for example, thought that “[inclusion] would be helpful in elementary school because it is becoming so much more prevalent now,” particularly with regard to teaching about diverse family structures. Immediately, however, he also discussed that “there are some families that are, due to their religious beliefs, are still less open minded—I don’t know if it would fly.” Eugene, on the other hand, firmly believed that students should start discussing LGBTQ-related topics as early as PreK, and offered an ideal teaching environment:

It would start in PreK. It would involve openly gay and lesbian teachers. It wouldn't be a taboo subject to discuss. It would involve teaching pronouns differently. It would involve teaching mother's day and father's day differently, and going through the textbooks to look at examples of families, and making sure all descriptions of families are included. From the job to top-down examination, it would involve making sure that we're not teaching heterosexuality as the norm.

Interestingly, there were also fathers who were opposed to the idea of introducing LGBTQ-related topics in schools, regardless of age range or content area. For Ian and Nathaniel, such opposition stemmed from a potential political backlash that might occur with other parents. Ian proposed, hypothetically, that if “tomorrow they discussed [LGBTQ-related topics] in school, then they could have some parent complaining that it was disgusting.” Nathaniel added, “and then it becomes a problem—they're just not ready.” Walter, however, understood such inclusion as leading to inappropriate questions posed to him or his daughter:

That's another issue for me. I don't want them talking about that stuff in her classes. I don't feel as though I need to explain to you about my sexuality to justify my fatherhood and that's what's going to happen. When it comes to that stuff, people are just so ignorant, and it'll open the doors to questions like, “where's your mother?” It puts me in a place where I have to cup her ears, like “who the hell are you to ask my child personal questions?”

In a similar vein, Paul and Eric described LGBTQ inclusion in schools as unsuitable for school environments, and that such topics should be left to other parents to teach at home:

Eric: I don't know if they want that at the public school

Paul: In my opinion, that's something we should address at home, and not leave it to the school

Eric: And I know you want to show diversity, and you want other kids to be able to see it and read it and ask questions, but...

Paul: It's not our place to teach other children.

Clyde and Alexander

Am I the odd man out—the one that did the least for his kids? I'm not the parent that's least involved with his kids, am I? Sometimes I feel guilty about that. I feel like I could've helped them more. (Clyde)

Dealing with everything and the baggage I've had...that has made it really difficult for me to be as involved as I want to be. (Alexander)

Single fathers Clyde and Alexander each expressed deep concerns about the ways in which they have been incapable of engaging in their children's schooling and education, particularly after coming out to their ex-wives and families after having children. Their lack of involvement, as each father has described, does not stem from scheduling issues, interest, or some belief in distancing themselves to foster independence. Rather, it has entailed a complex negotiation of access, with their efforts often resulting in defeat. More tangible obstacles have included navigating part-time custody arrangements, as well as living up to a 90-minute drive from where their ex-wives and children relocated. Additionally, each father has endured a lifelong struggle with their sexuality and being gay throughout their own schooling experiences and into adulthood, affecting their levels of comfort and creating additional barriers for having more of a presence in the religiously-affiliated schools where their children attend. Although Clyde and Alexander currently live in Havens that provide a sense of inclusion and protection for same-sex parents, their stories reveal a richer understanding of factors that may contribute to school-to-home relationships for gay fathers.

Perspectives in the Closet

Clyde and Alexander each were born and raised in rural, blue-collar, and working-class environments. Thinking back on his childhood, for example, Alexander described a great deal of space and factories that constituted his particular hometown. His

father, he continued, worked at a plant that supported a number of jobs until its shutdown in the 1990s, which “must have affected hundreds of families, if not more.” During this time, Alexander also noted significant change and growth in the area where farms have since become grounds for shopping malls and department stores. “Whenever I’m back there,” Alexander explained, “I’m always struck with how they’re building everything up—the fields where I once played in are now stores or roads or highways.” Clyde’s hometown, on the other hand, remains relatively undeveloped from when he lived there. Farms have prevailed, and the five-block main street area continues to provide additional goods and services to residents.

In addition, Clyde and Alexander emphasized the highly conservative environment of their respective hometowns. “It was full of rednecks, which is why I wanted to get away from [town],” Clyde noted. He elaborated further, saying, “they’ve always had a KKK problem—it’s been known for having active members for years.” Similarly, Alexander referenced his area’s long history of having a KKK presence, as well as frequent displays of Confederate flags to support his departure, saying, “I got out of there as soon as I could. I just couldn’t stand...even when I was straight, or thought I was straight, the KKK, the Confederate flags...it was too much for me. College came around and I got my ticket out of there.”

Despite having left, however, several traumatic experiences during school continued to haunt both fathers. Clyde recalled, “I went through a lot of bullying in high school and junior high school. It was so bad that at the end of 10th grade, I started having suicidal thoughts.” Alexander also described high school as the “worst years of my life,” adding that he “felt traumatized in school by the bullying,” and emphasized that he

“didn’t take bullying well.” He elaborated further, offering that, “some people can roll with [being bullied] and can just roll it off their feathers. I wasn’t able to do that. You internalize it, and you don’t realize it until after the fact.” As both fathers reflected on their youth, they provided additional details of the mistreatment they received from their peers, as well as fears associated with telling anyone about the details of their physical and/or verbal abuse. Alexander, for example, elaborated further about his high school experiences:

I used to get called a faggot all of the time. It didn’t make sense, even when I had a girlfriend...I remember walking down the hall and this kid always looked at me in the eye and called me a faggot, like it was no big deal to him. Then there was gym class when it got so bad that I had to leave. I ran into the guidance counselor’s office, burst into tears, and made up some story that my grandfather was sick and it was getting to me.

Clyde recalled one particular instance as a Boy Scout:

One time, these kids tricked me into doing a sexual act, and invited a bunch of kids into the tent where I was doing it. I only did it to gain their friendship, and they came into the tent, saw what was going on, and told the whole school. So I had a few years of hell after that. I used to get called a faggot all of the time. I kept trying to tell my parents why I was getting teased, but I couldn’t tell them why. I was too scared.

Clyde later revealed that his parents allowed him to transfer to a private Christian academy during his junior year, where he spent the rest of his high school career. It was during this time where Clyde finally found a sense of comfort interacting with peers and connecting with others in school. He noted:

[My parents] sent me to a private school for the last year and a half of school, and I got very involved in a real conservative Bible study, and because I was always afraid of drugs and drinking, and these guys didn’t do that, and they were friendly and welcoming and didn’t bully me, I hung out with them.

Life near the end of high school and afterward for Clyde and Alexander proved somewhat less confrontational with peers. Clyde described “going down a path” of what

he considered to be “very, very conservative Christian” during his senior year of high school and afterward. After one year at a state university, he transferred to a private Christian college, where he interacted with peers who “were friendly and had similar interests,” met his ex-wife, continued his interest in Bible study, and ultimately found a sense of security that “helped keep me in the closet for a long, long time.” Unlike Clyde, Alexander remained at his high school until graduation, where he surrounded himself with a close group of peers who “supported” him and “never questioned my sexual preference” or his sexual orientation. Alexander elaborated further saying that “senior year was by far the easiest—we were offered a little more independence, so I was able to interact with friends and avoid things like being called a faggot in the hallways.” Alexander attended college, where he also became a part of more supportive social groups and eventually met his ex-wife. After college, both fathers married their now, ex-wives, and began having children and expanding their families.

In disclosing additional details about their adulthood, each father described moments in which they struggled identifying as gay. Alexander discussed that, “even when I was married, I thought maybe I could be bi, but definitely not gay—I really was in denial.” He elaborated further, saying, “I even remember a number of times where I would hang out with my friends, at the gym, at the office, at work, outside of work, and join in making gay jokes.” Alexander assured that “[the jokes] were never directed toward anyone specifically.” Similar to Alexander, Clyde emphasized “denial” as part of his struggle to eventually come out, and even financially contributed to anti-gay organizations:

When I was married, you have to remember that I was very repressed, and I was trying very hard to be straight. So I was even doing things to kind of counter the

gay community in a way. Like, I was giving money to Focus on the Family and other groups like that. That's how deep I was in denial, basically.

Struggling to come out also affected the ways both Clyde and Alexander made parenting decisions about their children's schooling and education. Clyde and his ex-wife insisted that their children received the same type of Christian-based education that they had. They sent their children to private Christian academies and limited exposing them to particular, secular content. Clyde explained:

When I was an evangelical Christian parent, there were a lot of things I wouldn't allow my kids to be exposed to. Movies had to be PG, and no secular radio. As far as education goes, same thing. My ex-wife and I sent them to Christian schools because of the moral education we knew they would get.

Alexander similarly described his parenting as being "more strict" before coming out, adding that back then, he never could have imagined including any type of LGBTQ-related topics in school curricula. "Years ago," he emphasized, "I would've voted against that kind of the thing. I would have fought against it as hard as I could, even if it meant trying to stop those discussions in schools."

Breaking Free/Coming Out

After being married for a number of years, Clyde and Alexander eventually came out to their ex-wives, inciting a number of changes to their family units. Clyde came out in 2007, separated from his ex-wife that same year, and dissolved their marriage in 2011. In that four-year period, Clyde's ex-wife, along with their children, moved to completely part of the state to be closer to her immediate family. With that move, Clyde no longer saw his children on a regular basis, which became official in the part-time custody arrangements upon which they agreed after the divorce. Alexander came out to his ex-wife in 2013 and they divorced a year later. Similar to Clyde, Alexander's ex-wife

relocated to another part of the state, but for a job. His daughters live with his ex-wife, who has full-time custody. Each father continues to live in the same area where they had originally settled with their ex-wives—areas that, in many respects, have inclusive and protective characteristics as Havens.

The coming out process subsequently incited a number of shifts for each father and their families. The extent to which they had a physical presence in their children's schooling diminished. Both Clyde and Alexander remembered attending a variety of functions before coming out, including concerts, parent-teacher conferences, athletic events. Moreover, they helped with homework, communicated regularly with school personnel, and interacted with other parents and families. Although the distance that ensued after their respective divorces contributed to some physical barriers, each father also expressed feelings of discomfort that limited their engagement. Clyde, for example, cited an example when he recently attended a play at his daughter's high school, saying, "I went with a couple of my friends to see a show at my daughter's school. I brought my housemates with me, so here we are, three men sitting together. No one did anything or said anything to us, but I felt out of place there." Alexander similarly recalled feeling the "stares" at one of his daughter's recent field hockey games: "I used go to [my daughters'] games all of the time—I was like the dance moms of field hockey. After I came out, it became a little harder. I still go but not often. The last time I went, I just felt like everyone was staring at me."

While being physically present in their children's schooling diminished, each fathers' networks with other out, gay fathers increased. Alexander began attending meetings at a local LGBTQ community center, which offered "break out groups for

seniors, men, women, and parents.” Involvement in that organization allowed him to meet other gay fathers, with whom he continues to socialize on a regular basis. He discussed, “there’s a group of men, some dads, that I met [at the LGBTQ center], and we’ve been doing this monthly potluck for a few years now.” Alexander added that his participation at the center, as well as subsequently meeting “others like me” have been integral for him in building systems of support and a personal level of confidence with regard to his sexual orientation and having children. He noted:

That group has been really helpful to me, really good to me and supportive. They’ve let me see that there are others like me—whether it’s the gay thing or being a dad. You have to understand that it took me a while to come out of feeling repressed and to realize that it’s okay to be gay.

Clyde became involved with group meetings to help cope with the stress of coming out. At first, Clyde met with other out, gay fathers through a local LGBTQ community center. Although those meetings “were really helpful” for Clyde, they eventually “fizzled out” due to the gradual decrease of participation. Clyde recognized similar types of meetings held in other Havens, even in Emerton, but the long driving distance, coupled with some financial obstacles, made it difficult for him to fully commit to those groups. Clyde gradually sought social refuge in a gay-friendly church known for clearly explicating an “out and affirming” mission. He struggled at first, particularly with trying to “reconcile all the years of faith, with the sexuality part.” “God makes people that way,” Clyde discussed, adding that coming out helped him “view the Bible in a very different way.” He noted further:

They used to teach that it’s literal and that you believe every word of it. Now, I’m totally different about it. It’s open to interpretation—there’s a lot of allegory, fables that aren’t real. There’s things that aren’t at all appropriate today that were accepted back then.

Clyde continues to participate in functions and events with the church, in addition to annually attending a national conference for out, gay Christians.

The coming out process also signaled some shifts in parenting views for each father. Clyde acknowledged that after coming out, he “let [his] kids listen to secular radios, to see more movies.” He emphasized that he “didn’t let all of [his] morals out of the window,” but just loosened his stance, which included clothing and his children’s friends. Alexander reported to have more open conversations with his daughters around sexual orientation, specifically addressing a type of normalcy around individuals who identify as gay. He elaborated:

After coming out, I had some honest conversations with my daughters. I tried to explain to them that gay people is a normal thing, and I’m a normal guy—there’s nothing wrong with me. I wanted them to realize that people like me exist in the world, and even though we don’t like this and we would like to be straight because it’s easier, we can’t, so we have to make the best of it.

After coming out, Clyde’s and Alexander’s ideas shifted in how schools should address LGBTQ-related topics—a stark contrast to how their children’s schooling has operationally attended to such inclusion. Registration forms, according to each father, need to use more gender-neutral language (e.g., parent, guardian, caregiver), rather than assume mother and father. Clyde and Alexander emphasized the importance of expanding instructional materials beyond heterosexuality or families headed by a mother and father. “It would be nice if schools started reading books with two dads or two moms in elementary school, but I doubt that’s even on their minds,” Alexander stated. Clyde expressed similar sentiments about LGBTQ inclusion in school curricula—that it should happen, but considered high school to be a more appropriate age, saying:

I don’t know about middle school about having [LGBTQ-related topics]. I definitely don’t agree with elementary school—they shouldn’t have it. I just don’t

think the kids are ready—it's probably too early...definitely high school though, the need it there. I wish they had that in my high school when I was growing up.

In addition to school curricula, each father noted the lack of protections for LGBTQ students and parents. They cited the presence of anti-bullying policies, but questioned the extent to which schools have fully addressed issues of mistreatment their children have experienced. Alexander, for example, provided that his daughters, both in middle school, “have been teased before about me being gay, and I know [the schools] talk about bullying in schools.” Alexander suggested that, “the schools need to do more,” and suspected some opposition to his daughters’ school referencing sexual orientation or gender identity with anti-bullying, explaining that he has “heard instances where the principal would say that they don’t need to do that because it’ll incite more bullying, or say just the opposite of what it would do—that really hurts the kids who don’t have support.” Clyde cited middle and high school as particularly difficult for his children, and proposed Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) as a potential solution. He wondered how their existence would have helped his children, saying “[my daughter] probably wouldn’t have been bullied, she wouldn’t have been teased, and my son wouldn’t have gone through the grief that he did.” Clyde expounded further upon the possible effect of such inclusion and protection for LGBTQ individuals in schools, as well as the children of LGBTQ parents:

If there were GSAs, this stuff wouldn’t happen. And if there were teachers who were required to talk about this stuff—they should be allowed to talk about it—these kids wouldn’t suffer. When you don’t do these things, the kids are made to feel like they’re garbage. That’s one of the things I have a burden for: seeing gay kids not get bullied, seeing kids with gay parents not bullied, and seeing them be safe.

Chapter Four Summary

The findings presented in chapter four identify a range of experiences that gay fathers had with their children’s education, particularly when considering the diverse

community contexts in which they lived. Emerton fathers faced fewer instances of heteronormativity and heterosexism in schools, with the exception of school curricula that did not explicitly include representations of their family configurations. Despite this absence, however, a number of fathers felt comfortable introducing their children's teachers to various children's books that featured a wide diversity of families, including two dads and adoptive families. In terms of interactions, Emerton fathers felt fully supported by school personnel, with the exception of Jason and Christopher who recalled an interaction with a school social worker that insisted that their son adhere to social and cultural constructions of (teenage) masculinity/boyhood. In addition, their son was also the only child among families living in Emerton and participating in this study that experienced some form of harassment from another student for having two dads. The remaining fathers never cited similar instances, but noted when other students asked about the presence of their mother. A few fathers even indicated the use of derogatory language used in middle and high school, but asserted that their use was never directed at their children.

Haven fathers experienced many similar encounters. Their children's schools also lacked LGBTQ inclusion in school curricula, but the fathers approached teachers with related materials to incorporate into class instruction. School personnel also seemed similarly amenable to changing registration forms to utilize more generic, "parent/parent" language, especially since the majority of schools continued to use "mother/father" forms. Interactions for Haven fathers, however, differed from Emerton. Haven fathers reported more instances of mistreatment, particularly around the stigma attached to gay men as being sexual predators. The fathers and their children also encountered more

instances of school personnel and students questioning the presence of a mother.

Nevertheless, Haven fathers never felt compelled to hide their statuses as gay fathers with their children's teachers.

Similar to Havens, fathers living in Intolerant Towns reported the absence of LGBTQ-related curricula and the use of "mother/father" registration forms in their children's schools. Nevertheless, in contrast to Havens, as well as Emerton, fathers in Intolerant Towns never felt that they had any agency to provide input in making changes to school practices. Even in their attempts, as was the case for Eugene, they were met with resistance from teachers. The fathers also reported several instances where social stigma around gay men as sexual predators surfaced, particularly when they interacted with other parents. Moreover, the fathers recalled a number of times in which they were questioned about the presence of their children's mother, or even questioned about their ability to be effective parents because they are gay men.

Clyde and Alexander's experiences remain somewhat exceptional to the rest of the findings in this study. Certainly, they lived in Havens that protected them based on sexual orientation, but several components of their personal histories complicated their fathering experiences, especially after coming out as gay. Nevertheless, they stressed the importance of schooling environments that welcomed and protected students based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Although these findings show some range of experiences and interactions, six cross-cutting themes emerged from the data. The first concerns the extent to which the fathers encountered instances of heteronormativity and heterosexism in their children's education, which include curricula and registration forms. The second examines instances

of (hetero)gender policing, where individuals questioned the presence of mother, as well as some fathers' ability to make effective parenting decisions in the absence of a womanly figure. A third explores similarities between community and schooling contexts, which lead to a fourth on the extent to which fathers had access to and were physically visible in their children's schools as out, gay fathers. The fifth theme describes how experiences shaped by social stigma affected fathers' interactions with other parents. Finally, the sixth theme uncovers fathers' beliefs about LGBTQ inclusion in schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Several scholars have indicated the benefits of strengthening school-to-home relationships generally, noting of the positive effects engagement and involvement initiatives have on student success (Jeynes, 2012). Nevertheless, research has also identified barriers for families to have full access and participate in their children's schooling, particularly for families of historically marginalized backgrounds (Baquedano-López et al., 2013), but has yet to fully explore families headed by sexual minorities. Recognizing a critical gap in research, this dissertation focused on gay fathers in terms of school-to-home contexts by examining the experiences they had with their children's schooling, as well as the social discourses, policies, and politics that shaped those experiences. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the experiences of gay fathers with their children's schooling?
2. How do sociopolitical environments shape the ways in which gay fathers experience and interact with their children's schooling?
3. Do these experiences differ in environments with different sociopolitical ideologies? If so, how?

Chapter Two positioned this dissertation in relation to prior studies that have covered school-to-home relationships for same-sex parents. Findings in education-related research indicate a lack of representation in instructional practices and policies such as curricula, registration forms, and anti-bullying policies. While findings from these studies have advanced understandings of same-sex parents in school-to-home contexts, no study has specifically focused on gay fathers' experiences alone, even considering the increased visibility of gay fatherhood (Angier, 2013, Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). Thus, this

dissertation also drew from a variety of academic disciplines, particularly from studies that have examined gay fatherhood in terms of reception, children's outcomes, family formation, and gay men's experiences as fathers. Chapter two also detailed the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, which include elements of queer theory (e.g., Kitzinger, 2005; Rich, 1980; Warner, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986)

Chapter three described the research design, methodological techniques, and phenomenological approach of this dissertation. Creswell (2013), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (1990) suggest the use of phenomenology when examining the lived experiences of individuals in organizational settings. After recruiting participants based on a number of criteria (e.g., identified as gay, had children enrolled in PreK-12th grade, and lived in one of the two selected states), I collected data through two, semi-structured interviews, as well as a number of school-related documents, and policies at local and state levels. Subsequently, I analyzed data iteratively, or without predetermined codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which included multiple readings of all data sources.

Organized into four distinct sections, chapter four presented the experiences of gay fathers with their children's schools, in addition to the community contexts in which they lived. The first three sections focused on specific areas: Emerton, gay-friendly havens (henceforth Havens), and Intolerant Towns. Each section identified a range of subtle and overt differences among fathers' experiences based on where they lived. The fourth section focused on two single fathers who were previously married to women conceived children in these relationships, and had little contact with their children.

Finally, chapter four concluded with emerging themes that are further explored in chapter five.

“Doing Family” Differently in Schools

The configurations of all families participating in this study challenge conceptualizations of family structures throughout Western culture. Although the majority of family units were composed of two parents, some defied traditions of family structures further through step-parent roles (e.g., Wayne) or single-parent roles (e.g., Eugene, Walter, Clyde, and Alexander). Interestingly, Walter and Eugene, the two single fathers who were never married, expanded such definitions further by identifying as both mother and father roles, or as Eugene stressed, “I don’t identify as a woman, but I do identify as a mother and as a father,” and for Walter as “a daddy and a mommy all rolled up into one.” Moreover, the ways that fathers formed their families expand notions of family units. Some fathers had children through previous heterosexual marriages, in which they remained single (e.g., Clyde and Alexander) or remarried (e.g., Mike) after their respective divorces. One set of fathers pursued surrogacy (Franklin and Michael). The remaining adopted their children, while challenging conceptualizations of family units further by countering images of biological connections between parent and child.

In other words, all of the fathers were “doing family” differently (Hudak & Giammattei, 2010; Perlesz et al., 2006; Ryan & Berkowitz, 2009), whether through sexual orientation, family structures, or family formation, raising the question of how schools attended to such differences. This section focuses on schooling contexts for gay fathers and their children, addressing research question 1 that asks, “what are the experiences of gay fathers with their children’s schooling?” Overall, the findings from

this study show a number of institutional practices, schooling policies, and interactions with students, school personnel, and other parents that continue to silence and suppress gay-fathered families.

Navigating Heteronormativity and Heterosexism in Schools

Scholars, including queer theorists, remind us of the heteronormative and heterosexist conditions under which gay fathers are raising their children (Kitzinger, 2005; Warner, 1993; Yep, 2002). Although both terms are related, heteronormativity refers to the taken-for-granted position of heterosexuality (Warner, 1993), or that heterosexuality is the “indisputable and unquestionable bedrock of society” (Yep, 2002, p. 167). Heterosexism, in turn, refers to the assumption of heterosexuality, as well as forms of privilege and bias that occur with such assumptions (Jung & Smith, 1993; Simoni & Walters, 2001; Yep, 2002). Moreover, such norms, assumptions, and privileges thread well throughout education, where policies, practices, and interactions largely ignore diverse sexual minorities (Birden, 2005; Fields, 2008; Kendall, 2013), particularly with regard to families headed by same-sex parents and gay fathers (Casper, Schultz, & Wickens, 1992; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

In terms of heteronormativity and heterosexism in education, the findings problematize two primary aspects of the school context that affected the experiences of gay fathers. First, the findings show the ubiquity of school curricula and instructional practices where heterosexuality (particularly heterosexual parenting) remains the norm. One exception occurred with Daniel and Joseph’s oldest son, who took an honors course on gender identity across literary contexts. Broadly defined, this course also provided opportunities for their son to learn about topics related to sexual orientation as

represented in famous literature. Aside from this example, however, the remaining fathers noted the sheer lack of LGBTQ inclusion in formal components of instruction, instruction on diverse families in relation to adoptive families, and Mother's Day celebrations. Certainly, many fathers countered the lack of curricula by supplying their children's teachers with books (e.g., *King and King*, *Tango makes Three*). One couple, Christopher and Jason, even had conversations with their son's teacher about classroom lessons focused on adoption. Many fathers also offered that their children participated in Mother's Day in their own different ways, which included celebrating a father or another female figure in their lives.

Navigating heteronormativity and heterosexism for some fathers meant searching for school curricula that represented their families in terms of race and ethnicity as well. Interestingly, only households in which one father identified as Black or Latino raised issues about the intersections of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, even despite the high proportion of children with multiethnic and multiracial backgrounds in households with White fathers. Certainly, several of these fathers noted their desires for more representations of adoptive families in schools, but did not provide details of how those topics connected to race and ethnicity. Walter, for example, pined for children's books that not only talked about gay fathers, but specifically addressed gay, Black fathers. In fact, the only representation of race that Walter noticed in his daughter's book fair collection was something along the lines of "My Hair is Not like my Friend's Hair," as he described. Similarly, Caleb, Anthony, Daniel, and Joseph indicated that in their ideal schools, curricular materials and instructional topics would cover lessons that entertain multiple structures of families in terms of sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. Not

surprisingly, however, such attentiveness to intersections threaded throughout all fathers-of-color, whether through concerns about schools or their own safety throughout their communities, or as Wayne stressed, “I’ve got the woman in the elevator who’s afraid to be there because I’m Black and could steal her purse, then outside of the elevator, I’m the person who could taint her grandson for being gay.”

In addition to school curricula a second aspect of schooling contexts revealed the use of school registration forms that provide spaces for “mother” and “father.” Although all schools in Emerton and some in Havens remain exceptions, the rest in Havens and all schools in Intolerant Towns continued to assume heterosexual parenting. Interestingly, the ways that fathers responded to such forms varied slightly across these contexts. Some, such as Tim, Samuel, and their respective husbands, discussed the issue with teachers and administration who began the process of developing new forms. Others, such as Jack and Scott, Wayne and Mike, Eugene, and Walter, expressed deep frustrations and concerns with the use of such mother/father forms. For Wayne and Mike specifically, the use of mother/father forms, or even parent1/parent2 forms continue to ignore Wayne’s guardianship as a third adult/step-parent in the family. The remaining fathers, many of whom lived in Intolerant Towns, did not express feeling bothered by registration forms.

Nevertheless, the use of many instructional practices and registration forms reinforce the norm, assumption, and privilege of heterosexuality in schools. On one hand, the data from this study are consistent with prior research on same-sex parents. Casper and Schultz (1992), Goldberg (2014), and Kosciw and Diaz (2008), for example, all reported the widespread use of heteronormative and heterosexist curricula. Similarly, the same scholars, in addition to Lindsay et al. (2006) and Mercier and Harold (2003)

identified the use of mother/father registration forms. On the other hand, the findings from this study also suggest that the inclusion of LGBTQ-related topics, particularly for gay-fathered households, remains less common. Kosciw and Diaz (2008) surveyed 588 LGB parents, and found that 29% reported the presence of curricula that represented their family configurations. Their work, however, aggregates data and includes a higher proportion of women respondents, raising questions about the extent to which gay men felt that their families were represented in school curricula. Although Goldberg's (2014) survey of pre-school, adoptive parents disaggregated data by lesbian mothers (n=79) and gay fathers (n=75), none of the gay fathers responded to questions about curricular topics relevant to their family structures.

Here Come the (Hetero)Gender Police

Heteronormativity and heterosexism extend well beyond instructional practices and policies, and into the interactions that many same-sex couples and parents have with other individuals (Kitzinger, 2005; Motschenbacher, 2011; Signorile, 1993; Yep, 2002). Inquiries such as the presence of a child's mother summarize this point well (Vinjamuri, 2015a), while additional questions about gendered-type parenting roles (e.g., Bergman, 2011; Geisler, 2012) seem to suggest a juxtaposition of policing for heterosexuality, as well as for social and cultural constructions of gender. Certainly, several scholars have discussed the latter at length (i.e., gender police: Gerber, 1996; Reay, 2001; Thorne, 1999), particularly in terms of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and gender performance (Butler, 1990). Nevertheless, as West and Zimmerman (1987) highlight, "doing gender" has become so deeply rooted in society that it is unavoidable in everyday

interactions—including those, I argue, involving questions about family structures and the whereabouts of a mother or womanly figure.

For some fathers, (hetero)gender policing occurred through questions about their ability to raise children in accordance with social and cultural norms of gender as gay men. Only one couple in Emerton, Jason and Christopher, reported such instances with a school-based social worker who worried that the absence of a mother led to their son inappropriately doing gender—that boys need to slouch and wear unfitted clothing. Robert and William recalled when their youngest son became a victim of harassment for wearing pink. In Intolerant Towns, each of the single fathers, as well as Ian and Nathaniel, experienced interactions with school personnel around parenting effectiveness. One teacher complimented Walter's (non-existent) wife for doing his daughter's hair, while Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams suggested that Eugene, Ian, and Nathaniel remained clueless as gay fathers, and needed to incorporate more female role models into their children's lives. In addition to schooling contexts, several additional fathers noted instances in which their parenting abilities were questioned by individuals in the community—something that many expressed would not have happened with the presence of a mother.

In addition, the summation of interactions around family structure contribute to the (hetero)gender policing that several family units experienced. Some fathers recalled instances in which teachers asked or suggested to them, or their children, about the presence of a mother (e.g., where's mom, your mom would be proud, is your mother picking you up from school). More commonly, students' peers made similar inquiries as well—including those living in Emerton. Most interactions, according to the fathers,

appeared innocent in nature, but nonetheless perpetuate heterosexist and heteronormative ideas about family configurations, in which fathers and children regularly encountered. Some interactions, however, remained more invasive, such as Robert and William's constant confrontation with a crossing guard who failed to cease with questions about their youngest son's mother, or several fathers' children who fell victims to some harassment (e.g., Christopher and Jason, Brandon and Cole, and Robert and William).

The fact that only three sets of fathers recalled outright issues of mistreatment challenges current data, albeit limited, on the experiences of same-sex parents' children in schools. Prior research has noted a prevalence of such encounters (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008), but the fathers in this study did not indicate similar reports such as wishing death upon families (Welsh, 2011), falling victim to constant bullying (Bower & Klecka, 2009), or becoming the subject of derogatory language (Gabb, 2004; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Ray & Gregory, 2001). Some findings from this study support work conducted by the *Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network* (e.g., Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008) about the increase of derogatory language in middle and high school, but all of the fathers who reported such use asserted that it was not directed to their children about their family configurations.

Nevertheless, students' constant encounters with questions about their mother's presence corroborate findings from previous studies (Ryan & Gregory, 2001). Namely, Ryan and Gregory (2001) utilized the term "morbid curiosity" to describe such phenomena, but only attributed students to being the subject of questions. Expanding to include fathers as the recipients of constant questions and linking questions to suspicions about effective gendered-type parenting helps uncover some of the general, negative

experiences reported in prior research (e.g., Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Moreover, adopting this broader, (hetero)gender policing approach can also begin to bridge broader studies on the perceptions of parenting effectiveness for gay fathers (e.g., Becker & Todd, 2013; Herbstrinth et al., 2013; Pew, 2010; Weiner & Zinner, 2015) with the lived experiences of gay fathers in school contexts.

Sociopolitical Effects on Gay Fathers' Experiences

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory provides critical insight into community-school-home relationships. In particular, the macrosystem underscores some of the broader sociopolitical ideologies that may affect family units (e.g., heteronormativity, heterosexism, and norms related to gender and family configuration). Certainly, many of the aforementioned experiences highlight a connection between such ideologies and school curricula, registration forms, and interactions with students and school personnel. Nevertheless, such examples only explore school-based experiences, and may not link additional components of sociopolitical ideologies surrounding gay fatherhood to their children's schooling (e.g., social stigma of gay men and written policies that affect same-sex couples).

This section examines broader social discourse, policies, and politics in surrounding environments that have shaped gay fathers' experiences with their children's schooling by addressing research questions 2 and 3. Research question 2 asks, "how do sociopolitical environments shape the ways in which gay fathers experience and interact with their children's schooling?" Research question 3 asks, "if/how do these experiences differ in environments with different sociopolitical ideologies?" Ultimately, the findings suggest some relationship between levels of inclusion and protection at local, community

contexts and the experiences that fathers had with their children's schools. In other words, sociopolitical environments shaped many fathers' thoughts, actions, and interactions with their children's schools, and did so differently among the three community contexts included in this study.

Community-Like Schools

Explicit levels of inclusion for same-sex parents existed as one of the more prominent, distinguishable characteristics among all three communities. Both Emerton and Havens have had long histories of inclusion. They received national and local attention in numerous media outlets for being safe, welcoming, and idealized areas for same-sex parents to raise their children—some since the early 2000s. Moreover, both areas have provided protections in statewide and/or municipal policies related to housing, employment, bias-motivated crime, and anti-bullying, and have supported the Democratic presidential nominee over at least the past three elections. Although Emerton and havens share several of these similar characteristics, the proportion of gay-fathered households living in each area differs significantly. Emerton, according to interviewees, houses a number of gay fathers while fewer, if any, live in Havens, which seem to have more lesbian mothers or childless gay couples. Intolerant Towns, in contrast to Emerton and Havens, do not include similar levels of inclusion in policies in most areas, nor have not been recognized as gay-friendly areas to live, and supported the Republican presidential nominee in the 2016 presidential election. In fact, several fathers' interview responses indicated some threats of mistreatment for out, gay men, let alone out, gay fathers.

Several school-related elements supported and reflected community commitments to inclusion as well. Although LGBTQ-related topics remained absent in the majority of

schools, regardless of community, fathers in Emerton and Havens felt comfortable addressing their children's classroom teachers about bringing in children's books that feature two fathers. Some Haven fathers even mentioned feeling comfortable discussing the possibility of changing mother/father registration forms to include more neutral titles—an irrelevant issue in Emerton's schools, which use more generic parent/parent forms. Fathers living in Intolerant Towns, however, indicated the continued use of mother/father registration forms, as well as a lack of LGBTQ-related topics in the curriculum. Moreover, many fathers expressed concern that their children's schools remained slow to change.

Access and Visibility

Differences in community inclusion and protection for same-sex parenting contributed to some varying levels of ease, access, and visibility of gay fathers with their children's schooling. Emerton and Haven fathers immediately came out to their children's schools upon initial registration or during the first few weeks of school. Regardless of each area, school personnel tended to fully support fathers' decisions to come out, as well as their family configurations overall. For example, Caleb and Anthony recalled one such teacher saying, "please honey, this is [Emerton]," indicating that the school has long interacted with gay fathers before. In addition to Caleb and Anthony, all of the other fathers living in Emerton identified schools' prior experience interacting and working with same-sex parents. Although similar experiences of interacting with gay fathers remained unclear in Haven schools, none of the fathers expressed any form of discomfort when talking to their children's teachers and school administration with regard to their sexual orientation and family configurations. A number of Haven fathers

(e.g., Adam, Robert and William, Benjamin, and Brandon and Cole) even cited other out school personnel as indicators that their children's schools would be open and receptive to their two-dad households.

In contrast, the majority of fathers living in Intolerant Towns never felt compelled to explicitly come out to their children's schools. The fathers' overall understanding of the schools and communities drove many to undergo a process of "testing the waters," both within the community and at their children's schools, or gradually negotiating school personnel's and other families' responses to their gay-fathered or two-dad households before "making a big splash," according to Ian and Nathaniel. Although the majority of fathers expressed that their children's teachers knew about their family configurations, some living in Intolerant Towns (e.g., Walter, Wayne and Mike), remained closeted to some extent. Walter evaded questions about his sexual orientation or the whereabouts of his daughter's mother—deeming them inappropriate and unnecessary to his daughter's learning. Wayne and Mike openly expressed their married status to their daughter's music department, but never felt comfortable to disclose to the school-at-large.

Regardless of disclosure status, all fathers in Intolerant Towns reported that they had a physical presence in their children's schooling—a slight contrast to findings from prior research. Lindsay et al. (2006), Haines et al. (2014), and Mercier and Harold (2003) ultimately found that on one hand, same-sex parents felt less inclined to participate in school-based functions if they perceived their communities, and subsequently schools, to be unsafe, identifying such a phenomenon as "self-imposed invisibility" (Mercier & Harold, 2003, p. 42). Certainly, several fathers in Intolerant Towns carefully gauged

receptions of their family configurations, but never felt threatened enough to physically distance themselves from their children's schools. Some exceptions exist with Clyde's and Alexander's experiences, but their lack of school-based involvement could also be attributed to the part-time custody arrangements.

Nevertheless, a strong majority of fathers participating in this study indicated having a strong physical presence in their children's schools and reported overall, positive interactions with their children's teachers—even in Intolerant Towns. Several attended concerts, sporting events, and IEP meetings. Some even became involved in various school-based functions. Essentially, a strong majority of fathers noted that they never shy away from engaging in academic and extracurricular pursuits—a finding that is consistent with prior research that indicates high rates of school-based involvement for gay and lesbian parents (Fadeway and Clark, 2009; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Mercier & Harold, 2003).

Two differences existed between Intolerant Towns and Emerton and Havens in terms of involvement and engagement with schools. First, although the majority of fathers communicated with their children's teacher regularly, some Emerton and Haven fathers seemed to have had stronger relationships with their children's teachers and classrooms. Several noted their increased interface with school personnel and other students as classroom parents, to the point of teachers confusing them for additional school personnel. Some in Emerton even interacted with teachers outside of school by hosting cocktail parties (Franklin and Michael) or at Family Equality Council meetings (Daniel and Joseph). Second, Emerton and Haven fathers engaged in some decision-making processes for and about their children's schooling. Formally, they were

presidents or vice-presidents of parent-teacher associations/organizations (PTA/O) or served as school board members. More informally, they introduced children's books that featured content relating to their two-dad families, challenged the use of heteronormative registration forms, and even leveraged their activism experiences to inform school personnel and other parents about other, important LGBTQ topics and issues.

In other words, Emerton and Haven fathers advocated for their family configurations in schools—actions that remained less welcome or even possible in Intolerant Towns. Certainly, one set of fathers, Paul and Eric, refused to enact some form of gay-father educator role for school personnel in terms of including LGBTQ-related topics or changing registration forms. Nevertheless, a number of additional fathers living in Intolerant Towns expressed a need and desire for change, but felt, or sometimes experienced, forms of resistance at the school level. Nathaniel, for example, stressed that his children's schools were “just not ready” to begin talking about LGBTQ-related topics in schools. “I don't know if it would fly,” Shane similarly expressed. Eugene even tried talking to one of his daughter's teachers about the inappropriate and inapplicable nature of a family tree health project, to which the teacher forced his daughter to complete the project anyway.

Interestingly, data from this study expand prior research on same-sex parents' roles in advocating for more LGBTQ inclusion in their children's schools. Works by Casper et al. (1992), Casper and Schultz (1999), Mercier and Harold (2003), as well as Lindsay et al. (2006) identified parents who challenged various heteronormative and heterosexist practices in schools (e.g., curricula, registration forms). Their research only identifies more informal discussion contributing to such change, rather than some of the

more formal, executive roles in which several Emerton and Haven fathers engaged to make decisions important to their children and families. Moreover, by comparing community contexts, the data from this study also suggest fewer opportunities for such activist work to occur in schools where surrounding communities remain silent on their inclusion of and protection for individuals based on sexual orientation. Certainly, Paul and Eric possibly resisted for personal reasons, but concerns expressed by other fathers were rendered invisible—a complete contrast to Emerton and Havens.

Experiences Shaped by Social Stigma

Numerous studies remind us of the various social stigmas surrounding gay fathers (Clarke, 2001; McLeod et al., 1999; Pennington & Knight, 2011) and gay men more broadly (Clarke, 2001). One stigma stems from the perception that gay fathers may confuse children about their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Clarke, 2001; McLeod et al., 1999; Pennington & Knight, 2011). Another posits that children of gay men are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior early on in life (Clarke, 2001). Finally, a third poses gay men as sexual predators (Clarke, 2001), possibly stemming from the historical contexts of pathologizing and criminalizing gay men through medicine (APA 1952, 1968, 1973) or various laws that have attempted to control sexual behavior among gay men (ACLEU, 2016b; Lugg, 2006). Essentially, these stigmas have revolved around conflating sexual acts with sexual orientation, and although medical definitions or policy language has been challenged (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003) sometimes amended (APA, 1987), such perceptions surfaced during some of the gay fathers' interactions with parents and sometimes other children

Fathers living in Havens and Intolerant Towns reported such interactions. Peers of Robert and William's oldest son, for example, teased him for becoming "gay, just like [his] dads." Brandon worried that his son's friends and family members harbored perceptions that gay men lurk, abuse, and prey on children. For related reasons, Benjamin limited playdates for his son with children of certain parents. Adam reported one instance in which another parent refused to let their children meet at Adam's house for fear that he was "some creepy pervert." In Intolerant Towns, another parent insinuated the possibility of John raising his son to be gay. A mother accused Shane and Derrick that their sons bathed together. Ian refused to chaperone overnight trips for fears that another parent might dispute the arrangement simply because of his sexual orientation. Finally, Eric recalled an instance where another father appeared to be somewhat disturbed after Eric helped his son who fell at the bus stop.

In contrast, fathers living in Emerton never reported similar instances, but talked extensively about the fears they initially had about their children's overall safety in school—another stigma attached to gay fatherhood (Berkowitz, 2008; Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Mezey, 2012). Clearly, their fears were mediated by school personnel who welcomed their two-dad households upon their first meetings, as well as the complex processes of "school-shopping" that several of them underwent. Nevertheless, worries that their children would fall victims to mistreatment shaped some of their immediate interactions with schools.

Understanding stigma in the context of school-to-home relationships begins to expand prior research that has explored same-sex parents' perceptions of safety and their own negative experiences. Certainly, several scholars have indicated heightened fears

that children of same-sex parents have in school contexts (Gabb, 2005; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006; Nixon, 2006), as well as students' negative experiences for their two-mom or two-dad households (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Nevertheless, no scholar to my knowledge has incorporated perceptions of student mistreatment with gay and lesbian parents' interactions with their children's schooling. In terms of same-sex parents' negative experiences, some scholars have indicated some instances of mistreatment (Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008), but the survey design of their research did not describe the exact types of mistreatment they encountered. The fathers participating in this study, however, begin to provide such details.

Beliefs about LGBTQ Inclusion in Schools

A number of scholars have examined same-sex parents' responses to the inclusion of LGBTQ-related topics in school curricula (Casper and Schultz, 1992; Goldberg, 2014; Kosciw and Diaz, 2008), showing an alarmingly small percentage (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008), but also raising additional questions about how same-sex parents imagine types of LGBTQ inclusion. A strong majority of fathers participating in this study voiced their own beliefs, which range in age and content they feel would be appropriate to students. Moreover, their beliefs differed among the community contexts in which they lived.

Most fathers in Emerton agreed that such inclusion should occur early—either in PreK or Kindergarten. They also imagined several content areas where students could receive such instruction, including “current events, health, family units, and heritage days, [...] English classes, [...] science classes,” according to Daniel and Joseph. Caleb even offered that LGBTQ inclusion also meant discussing different family configurations not just in terms of sexual orientation or gender identity, but also in intersections of race

and ethnicity. For fathers living in Emerton, such forms of inclusion were not only important for their children, but also for the children of heterosexual-headed households, or as Hugh stressed, “to see how different families are.” One exception existed in Emerton, Franklin and Michael, who questioned the applicability of LGBTQ inclusion because of Emerton’s diversity, as well as the appropriate nature of talking about “LGBTQ stuff” in terms of “sex.”

Haven fathers similarly agreed with the majority of Emerton fathers on the age in which children should start learning about LGBTQ-related topics in schools. Their responses provided further detail about the types of discussions they would want their teachers to have with children. “LGBTQ should be part of the dialogue,” Scott emphasized, in which children can be “exposed to it” and “making it less abnormal,” according to Billy. Adam also offered that schools should provide adequate training for teachers to discuss LGBTQ-related topics in the classroom. Finally, Samuel, Tim, and Brandon and Cole explained how various subject areas could easily be incorporated with topics related to LGBTQ identities and their families’ configurations.

Fathers in Intolerant Towns responded differently to LGBTQ inclusion than fathers in Havens and Emerton. Certainly, most understood the importance of such inclusion, but questioned students’ maturity levels in handling related instruction. An immediate response about where inclusion could occur addressed sexual education/health as making the most sense. A few fathers even expanded into social studies or history, but again, emphasized secondary schooling as an appropriate age range. Some even suggested elementary school as a platform for opening discussions on diverse family configurations. Nevertheless, a number of fathers simultaneously opposed the idea of

LGBTQ inclusion for two reasons. On one hand, some fathers felt that such inclusion could lead to backlash—either from other parents or inciting uncomfortable conversations between gay fathers and their children. On the other hand, one set of fathers, Paul and Eric, believed that discussions related to sexual orientation and gender identity need to be left up to other parents, not the schools. Their perspectives, however, support what Gutmann (1987) has described as the state of families, or the position that families should have more involvement in the values and knowledge that schools do or do not teach children.

Clyde and Alexander

Clyde's and Alexander's experiences remain rather exceptional regarding how sociopolitical environments shape school-to-home relationships for gay fathers, at least in the sense of current environments. Each father lives in Havens, which have had long histories of being open to and welcoming of LGBTQ individuals, after having grown up in and lived in less progressive, possibly anti-LGBTQ areas. They also appeared to have had the most physical and communicative distance with their children's schooling and education—partly due to part-time custody arrangements, and possibly due to what Brown and Trevethan (2010) have linked struggles in identity formation with shame in gay men who have been previously married to women. Nevertheless, their present position in Havens did not contribute to having more access to or visibility in their children's schools like the rest of Haven fathers.

Their experiences, however, expand the relationship of social stigma, gay fatherhood, and beliefs about LGBTQ inclusion beyond (current) sociopolitical ideologies and environments. The stigma shaping their experiences surfaced in high

school, forcing them to suppress their gay identities, and eventually develop rather conservative views on sexual orientation. Clyde even went as far as adopting evangelical Christian beliefs and donating money to anti-gay organizations. Such internalized homophobia also contributed to “strict” parenting styles and beliefs, according to Alexander, particularly around the inclusion of LGBTQ-related topics in schools. Once they came out, however, their views shifted—even to the point of understanding the importance of including related discussions early on in schools, adopting more generic “parent/parent” registration forms, and ensuring increased protections for LGBTQ individuals in education.

Implications

Building on the work of scholars such as Casper et al. (1992), Casper and Schultz (1999), Goldberg (2014), and Kosciw and Diaz (2008), this dissertation focused on the experiences of gay men with their children’s education, and the ways that sociopolitical environments shape those experiences. Recognizing the important work of building and sustaining school-to-home relationships in PreK-12 environments, this section presents implications of this study for school and district leaders, for education program providers (EPPs) that grant degrees in education, and for education policymakers.

Leading in (and for) a Culture of Change

In his seminal text, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Michael Fullan (2001, p. 3) argued for leadership that “confronts problems that have never successfully been addressed.” This perspective offers an alternative to finding simple solutions to rather complex problems, or to “confront complex problems that do not have easy answers”

(p. 3). Rather than “mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve” (p. 3), Fullan’s framework stresses effective leadership that guides constituents to engage in important but difficult work under constant conditions of societal and organizational change. The complexities of leadership certainly surface in Fullan’s argument; however, one component that remains overshadowed is leading *for* a culture of change as well. The recommendations that follow incorporate two of Fullan’s five competencies (relationships and knowledge building) by highlighting how school and district leaders can not only lead in changing conditions, but also guide decision-making that incites organizational change for promoting environments for gay-fathered families that are supportive, inclusive, and competent.

Relationship Building. There are several ways to build and sustain relationships so that “things get better” (Fullan, 2001, p. 5) for gay fathers and their children. One way is to talk to fathers about issues related to their families. Although no scholar has documented such initiatives for gay fathers or same-sex parents, Auerbach (2002, 2009) has studied similar endeavors facilitated by principals in urban settings. Her work demonstrated the power of positioning Latino parents and guardians to contribute to more equitable learning environments for their families. The same processes could provide a platform for gay fathers’ voices in making important decisions in practices and policies that concern their families. Certainly, this recommendation limits schools without the presence of gay fathers, or at least out, gay fathers, leading to a second relationship-building method.

District and school leaders could incorporate experts into groups of parents, school personnel, and students in creating change for issues that not only concern gay-fathered families, but potentially for LGBTQ individuals more broadly. Adam, a Haven

father, and his experiences in a previous school speak to this point. When the head of school began implementing LGBTQ-inclusive curricula and policies (including gender-neutral bathrooms), Adam remembered some resistance from parents. Countering these opposing views, the head of school created a panel of related experts, including a psychologist whose work focused on the onset of homophobia among young children. This example suggests that by incorporating experts, leaders could begin to address and make appropriate changes for issues that not only concern gay-fathered families, but potentially for LGBTQ individuals more broadly.

Knowledge Building. The example with the psychologist highlights another important component: knowledge building. Relatedly, Fullan (2001, p. 6) stressed the benefit of leaders who “commit themselves to constantly generating and increasing knowledge inside and outside the organization.” In addition to talking to gay fathers or experts, district and school leaders need to engage in ongoing education on related issues, and subsequently consider potential solutions. They could become familiar with the range of free, web-based resources available to schools on LGBTQ inclusion, such as Welcoming Schools, GLSEN, Family Equality Council (FEC), and Children of Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (COLAGE), and disseminate such information to teachers and parents. Through these resources, leaders would learn that education around sexual minority identities extends well beyond health and sexuality education classes, and into all subject areas. Moreover, leaders could learn the ways of introducing such inclusion in early education environments, such as discussing “daddy and daddy” when also talking about “mommy and daddy.”

Preparing Socially-Just Educators

Several scholars have recently argued for social justice shifts in education program providers (EPPs)—both for future teachers (Boylan, 2015; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Kumashiro, 2015; Mills, 2016) and future school leaders (Ellis, 2016; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009). Such initiatives have offered preparing teachers and school leaders for anti-oppressive education, critical pedagogy, activism, and engaging with families and communities. Although the number of EPPs with socially-just programs and their framing of social justice remain unclear, standards and guidelines (e.g., InTASC, the Council of Accreditation for Educator Preparation, and the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate) have highlighted knowledge of equity, community, and families as necessary for teachers and leaders when working with diverse, historically marginalized, and underrepresented populations in education. Nevertheless, as Bower and Klecka (2009) have indicated, education professionals feel highly unprepared when addressing and interacting with same-sex parents and their children. The findings from this dissertation begin to expound further upon how EPPs can prepare teachers and leaders on to work with gay-fathered families.

First, coursework needs to include topics and issues that are central to several gay fathers' concerns. With some exceptions, the majority of fathers believed that LGBTQ-related curricula needs to exist. Many fathers living in Emerton and Havens agreed that such integration should occur as early as PreK and well throughout the curriculum. Many fathers living in Intolerant Towns also desired some type of inclusion, but starting later in school—around middle and high school. In addition to curricula, several fathers identified other concerns such as registration forms, representations of adoptive families, anti-bullying policies, and appropriate language. EPPs need to learn how to better equip

teachers and administration with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions on creating more inclusive curricula at all levels, and in all subject areas, as well as developing broader policies and practices that are more protective and culturally competent.

Second, EPPs need to prepare teachers and leaders to situate parents and families in terms of broader social policies and community contexts. This study showed how broader social and political discourses shape the ways in which gay fathers can access their children's schooling. On one hand, areas like Emerton and Havens have supported social contexts where gay fathers can comfortably and freely navigate their communities and schools. On the other hand, many fathers in Intolerant Towns struggled to have an active voice or come out in their communities and children's schools, thus affecting their presence in their children's education. By simultaneously examining school practices with broader discourses, EPPs could prepare future teachers and administration to become critical consumers of issues that may affect parents' and families' interactions with children's schooling and education—not just for gay fathers, but for families of other historically marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds.

Policies that Include and Protect

In *Forbidden Language: English Learners and Restrictive Language Policies*, Patricia Gándara and Megan Hopkins (2010) examined how restrictive language policies at state levels contributed to inequitable learning environments for students with limited English proficiency. By linking broader policies to school practices, their work uncovered obstacles for parents and families to fully engage with their children's schooling. For example, such restrictive policies led to English-only written documents for families, including handbooks, registration forms, and other forms of school-to-home

communication. Their work also highlighted promising alternatives, such as dual-language programs, and recommended significant shifts in education policy with regard to language to ultimately create more equitable environments and interactions for students and families. A similar approach that links policy to the experiences of gay fathers and their families in schooling contexts could lead to similarly equitable outcomes.

First, policymakers need to assess state statutes and municipal regulations that largely affect gay-fathered families, whether through omission or explicit exclusion. Certainly, the majority of fathers in this study lived in a state with inclusive language in terms of housing, employment, and discrimination. Some, however, lived in areas not fully included or protected, as reflected at both local and state levels. These fathers, the ones living in Intolerant Towns, also encountered more heteronormative and heterosexist school practices than the other two community contexts. In a similar vein, mandating LGBTQ-related topics in the PreK-12 curriculum could address the widespread absence of inclusion that all fathers reported, including those in Havens and Emerton. Second, policymakers need to examine the language of existing policies that may attempt to include or provide protections for individuals, specifically based on sexual orientation. Only recently, one state, where four Intolerant Towns are located, began enumerating protected classes of individuals in anti-bullying initiatives through the state's school code. Shifting the language in the state's statute has yet to happen. An evaluation of current policies would also reveal anti-bullying language that typically protects students, but does not do so for students' families.

Study Limitations and Future Research

This study explored the experiences of gay fathers with their children's schools. Although a first of its kind in focusing on this population of parents in school-to-home contexts, especially as experiences may relate to sociopolitical ideologies, the design of this study follows with particular limitations that are worth mentioning.

Geographic Diversity

The findings from this study do not generalize to all gay fathers living throughout the United States. As this study has shown, ideologies differ across community contexts, even within the same state and neighboring states. Moreover, ideologies, as reflected through state statutes and case law, indicate even more varying levels of inclusion and protection just in terms of education. For example, California mandates LGBTQ-inclusion in schools (the only one of its kind), while a number of other states located in the South actually forbid such instruction that promotes "homosexuality as a lifestyle acceptable to the general public," (Tex. Educ. Code § 163.002). Similarly, anti-bullying policies vary as well, with a number of states neglecting to enumerate "sexual orientation" as a protected characteristic. As such, future research could begin to focus on other community contexts to make cross-case comparisons, while also exploring how social and political ideologies shape gay fathers' experiences.

Demographic Diversity

Relatedly, demographic diversity limited generalizability of this study, potentially stemming from the ways in which I recruited study participants. The fathers in this study had some type of membership to LGBTQ-parent groups, or had access to LGBTQ-parent

networks. Such networks and participation in organizations immediately assume a level of social and cultural capital in navigating social spaces for their children's overall wellbeing—a component commonly associated with middle and upper-middle class families (Lareau, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006). In addition to class, this study included a higher proportion of White fathers than Black and Latino fathers. Findings indicated a heightened sense of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; McCready, 2010) among families headed by fathers-of-color, that shaped their experiences with their children's schooling. Future research needs to consider a wider range of diverse fathers in terms of class, race, and ethnicity.

What is “Normal”?

This study utilized heteronormativity as one component of queer theory to examine gay fathers' experiences with their children's schools. Certainly, this framework has been useful in uncovering schooling practices that continue to assume heterosexuality and perpetuate it as a social norm. Nevertheless, its use has often received criticism for simultaneously describing how lesbian and gay individuals, particularly parents, conform or assimilate to heterosexual culture, or phenomena that Duggan (2002), Gorman-Murray (2017) and Rosenfield (2009) have described as homonormativity.

For example, Gorman-Murray (2017, p. 155) describe, that homonormativity, “denotes privatizing and domesticating lesbian and gay lives, removing them from the potential to generate public disruption and linking them (and privileging them) with affluent consumption patterns.” Thus, additional critical approaches to gay fatherhood could interrogate the narrative of “normal family” that threaded throughout several fathers' responses—regardless of community context, and expound further upon how

assimilation to middle and upper-middle class heterosexual culture has afforded them particular privileges in society and in the context of their children's schools.

In a similar vein, how fathers positioned their family configurations, in terms of normal, also suggests additional research that considers fathers' responses to society's negative perceptions towards gay men and gay fathers. One such framework includes internalized homophobia, or the "direction of negative social attitudes toward the self" for being gay (Meyer & Dean, 1998, p. 161). Utilizing this framework, future studies can examine how fathers' past experiences have affected their current interactions with their children's schooling, particularly around stigma, mistreatment, and microaggressions. Some of the fathers in my study, for example, expressed feeling reluctant to have more of a presence in their children's schools due to potential threats to their children and how their family units challenge traditional, conceptualizations of family. In other words, their refusal to sometimes participate in or not come out to their children's schools may not only stem from some form of internalized homophobia, but also from a fear of what society as deemed "normal" for family configurations.

At the same time, however, internalized homophobia as a concept to understand gay men's negative perception of the self has received some criticism (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Herek, 2004; Williamson, 2000). Williamson (2000, p. 104), for example, argues that "the concept suggests weakness rather than the resilience demonstrated by lesbians and gay men, and keeps the focus away from the structures of inequality and oppression." By focusing more on resilience, future research can begin to look at how gay fathers are responding to society's negative perceptions of gay men in ways that challenge norms of family configurations. The fathers in my study provided several examples of such

resilience by bringing in children's books that feature two dads or demanding more inclusive registration forms.

Including Additional Voices

Findings from this study were limited to the experiences of gay fathers representing 22 households. Certainly, the use of additional documents (e.g., policies and forms of school-to-home communication), as well as two interviews allowed me to provide contextual information of communities and schools, and examine fathers' experiences deeper than if I had engaged in only one interview. Nevertheless, the voices of students and school personnel.

Children. A number of fathers in this study raised important points of how their children were treated by or interacted with peers, school personnel, and even other parents. On one hand, some fathers—primarily in Emerton—found that their children never encountered any instances of mistreatment among peers, but still observed peers using derogatory language in schools. On the other hand, some fathers in Havens and Intolerant Towns indicated some negative interactions that their children experienced. Regardless, since this study only focused on fathers' perspectives, additional research is needed on children's perspectives—whether children of gay fathers or LGBTQ parents, more broadly.

Such future works could examine children's experiences in a phenomenological type of research design that build on research conducted by Kuvalanka et al. (2014) and Welsh (2011) that examined emerging teenagers and adults who were raised in gay- and lesbian-headed households, or hone in on more psychosocial paradigms that explore resilience or coping strategies such as research conducted by Ray and Gregory (2001) or

Ryan (2000). In addition, future research can also begin to integrate both parents' and children's perspectives into one study, helping to provide richer data on the ways that schools do or do not include or protect LGBTQ-headed families. To date, only one study has done so (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008), which used survey research methods, limiting the extent to which parents and children could provide more detailed responses about their experiences.

School Personnel. In addition to children, not having the perspectives of school personnel limited this study, and all fathers noted of some type of interaction with their children's teachers and administration. Many fathers in Emerton and Havens, for example, noted of positive interactions, particularly when disclosing their sexual orientation. Their children's teachers were also open to them bringing in and reading books that were more representative of their family configurations. Some fathers in Intolerant Towns, however, indicated instances of heteronormativity and heterosexism (e.g., "Where's Mom?"), but for the most part, described positive interactions as well. It should be reiterated, however, that not all fathers in Intolerant Towns were out to their children's school personnel.

The findings from this study, however, suggest additional research that includes the perspectives of teachers and additional school personnel. One question raised from these findings was exactly how schools and classrooms include LGBTQ-related topics in their curriculum. Certainly, the fathers noted of instances when this was or was not the case, but without listening to the voices of teachers and administration, we cannot be completely sure. One study has looked at teachers in the context of LGBTQ parents (Boweer & Klecka, 2009), which found that teachers felt unprepared with how to

include this population of parents and their families into their practices. The findings from my study, however, indicate some variation. Certainly, some teachers may have felt unprepared, particularly those in Intolerant Towns. Nevertheless, other teachers may have felt more prepared in Emerton, especially given their experience working with other diverse family configurations.

Learning from the Voices of Gay Fathers

Despite these limitations, however, the findings from this study represent an important beginning step on examining gay fathers regarding their children's schooling and education. Some findings support previous, related research on same-sex parents—namely that policies and practices continue to assume and perpetuate families headed by heterosexual parents. Nevertheless, with the opportunity to describe their experiences in more depth than in prior research, and not have their responses become aggregated data, the fathers in this study underscored some important components of PreK-12th grade education in terms of school-to-home relationships.

First, some have provided positive examples of how school personnel are creating more inclusive environments for children of gay fathers through instructional practices and policies by discussing different family types as early as PreK or moving beyond heteronormative language when communicating to parents. Similarly, many fathers have shown how such policies and practices have changed as a result of them working collaboratively with teachers. Second, the fathers' voices have also highlighted instances of policing with regard to heterosexuality and gender that continues to occur in schools—even in Emerton and Havens, where fathers were comfortably out to teachers, administration, and other parents. Third, and finally, each fathers' story shows some

linkage between broader social and political discourses of gay fatherhood and their experiences with their children's education, particularly around issues of access and visibility, social stigma, and general beliefs about LGBTQ-inclusion in school. As such, these relationships—whether direct or indirect—are important for understanding some of the contexts shaping the ways that gay fathers can interact with their children's schooling and education, as well as the extent to which institutions of learning are effectively creating safe, inclusive, and culturally competent environments for gay fathers and their families.

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Appendix A
Flyer for Local Businesses

ATTN: Gay Fathers

Do you have children in PreK-12th grade?

Do you currently live in [State A] or [State B]?

Can you commit to two, 45-60 minute interviews over the course of six months that explore your relationships with your children's schooling?

If you are interested in participating in a groundbreaking study that focuses on gay fathers, in which your responses will remain

confidential, please e-mail the researcher for more information:

GayFatherResearch@gmail.com



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Appendix B
Official Letters to Gay Parent Organizations

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Andrew Leland and I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University in the Graduate School of Education. From December, 2016 through June, 2017, I will be conducting interviews with gay fathers on their experiences with their children's schools for my dissertation. I am requesting to recruit members from your organization for my study.

The study itself will consist of two interviews—once in early Winter and again in the Spring, and will ask about your experiences with your children's schooling. Interviews will last between 45-60 minutes, will occur at a location that is convenient to the interviewees, and will be digitally recorded in order to maintain precise records. Please know, however, that the identities of all participants, as well as any identifiable information of families and schools will remain confidential. Additionally, all names and identities will be replaced by pseudonyms.

This is an area of research that is terribly underrepresented, and as a prospective gay father myself, I believe it is time to have the voices of gay fathers heard by others. If you know of any fathers who may be interested in participating in this study, please do not hesitate to provide them with this letter or e-mail me for more information:
GayFatherResearch@gmail.com.

If you have any further questions, or would like to talk more about this study in detail, please do not hesitate to contact me as well. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Andrew Leland
GayFatherResearch@gmail.com

Appendix C
Shorter Advertisement for Solicitations via Social Media

Gay Fathers: Let Your Voices be Heard!

My name is Andrew Leland and I am currently a PhD student at Rutgers University. I am working on my dissertation that explores the experiences of gay fathers with their children's schooling. This is an area of research that is terribly underrepresented, and as a prospective gay father myself, I believe it is time to have the voices of gay fathers heard by others.

The study itself will consist of two interviews—once in early Winter and again in the Spring, and will ask about your experiences with your children's schooling. The identities of all participants will remain confidential.

If you are a father who identifies as gay, have children in PreK-12th grades, live in either [State A] or [State B], and are interested in sharing your experiences, please email me at GayFatherResearch@gmail.com for more information.

Many Thanks!
Andrew Leland
GayFatherResearch@gmail.com

Appendix D Pilot Interview Protocol

Opening Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. Tell me a little bit about your partner (if applicable).
3. Tell me a little bit about your family (of choice).
 - a. Probe: What are some characteristics that make your family unique?
 - b. Probe: What are some characteristics that make your family like other families?

Family Configuration

1. What were some reasons for you wanting to become a father?
2. How would you describe your pathway(s) toward fatherhood?

Neighborhood Characteristics

1. Describe the area in which you live.
 - a. General characteristics (e.g., urban/suburban/rural, diversity, family-centered activities)
 - b. Length of time living in current area
2. How would you compare your current area to other areas in which you have lived (if applicable).
3. Discuss any reasons for living in your current area

School Characteristics

1. Tell me a little bit about your child(ren)'s school(s)
 - a. Type of school, size
 - b. If private, what made you choose this particular school
2. How would you describe the level of diversity in your child(ren)'s school(s)?
 - a. Probe: any other LGBTQ parents? LGBTQ youth?
3. How well does the school address issues of diversity?
 - a. Probe: LGBTQ-related curricular materials, bullying policies?
4. What opportunities does the school provide for parent/family engagement?

School Presence

1. How often would you say that you communicate with your child(ren)'s school(s)?
2. Describe some of the topics regularly discussed with teachers (if applicable)
3. To what extent are you open about your family configuration to your child(ren)'s school(s)?
4. How would you describe first coming out to school staff (if applicable).
5. To what extent do you (and/or your partner) participate in school-based family engagement programs?
 - a. How often do you participate together?

Mistreatment

1. Describe any instances in public in which you and your family were treated negatively because of your family configuration.
2. Describe any instances in which you and your family were treated negatively with regard to your child(ren)'s school(s).
3. How do you think those scenarios would have been different if you were a straight couple?

Appendix E

Interview 1 Protocol

Opening Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. Tell me a little bit about your partner (if applicable).
3. Tell me a little bit about your family (of choice).
 - a. Probe: What are some characteristics that make your family unique?
 - b. Probe: What are some characteristics that make your family like other families?

Family Formation

1. What were some reasons for you wanting to become a father?
2. Describe the pathways you considered and took to become a father (if applicable)
3. Talk about the process of the pathway you chose.
4. How would you describe the moment you first realized you were going to have a child?

Fatherhood Experiences

1. How would you describe the reception of your family configuration with your family-of-origin? Friends?
2. Who would you say are have been your strongest social supports as a family?
3. What changes in social supports did you notice before and after becoming a father?
4. How would you describe the reception of your family configuration out in public?
5. Describe any instances in public in which you and your family were treated negatively because of your family configuration.
 - a. Probe: mistreatment in the form of microaggressions, institutional discrimination, violence
6. How did you address those moments of mistreatment?

Neighborhood

1. Describe the area in which you live.
 - a. General characteristics (e.g., urban/suburban/rural, diversity, family-centered activities)
 - b. Length of time living in current area
 - c. Probe: political environment of neighborhood?
2. How would you compare your current area to other areas in which you have lived (if applicable)
3. Were there any specific reasons for moving to/staying in your current area?
4. How well do families and individuals in your neighborhood know about you and your family?
5. How would you describe their reception of your family configuration?
6. What, if anything, would you change about your neighborhood to make it more inclusive of or safer for your family?

Appendix F Interview 2 Protocol

Member-Checking Questions

1. Present overarching themes from first interview to father(s) for thoughts and reflections of accuracy in data analysis
2. Ask follow-up questions from first interview for further clarification, if needed

Revisit Interview 1 Protocol

1. Ask questions from the first interview that were missed or not addressed
2. Any school/neighborhood changes since Interview 1 and why (e.g., moved, changed schools)
3. Ask follow-up questions from that interview, if needed

School Characteristics

1. Tell me a little bit about your child(ren)'s school(s)
 - a. Type of school, size
 - b. If private, what made you choose this particular school
2. How would you describe the level of diversity in your child(ren)'s school(s)?
 - a. Probe: any other LGBTQ parents? LGBTQ youth?
3. How well does the school address issues of diversity?
 - a. Probe: LGBTQ-related curricular materials, bullying policies?
4. What opportunities does the school provide for parent/family engagement?

School Presence

1. How often would you say that you communicate with your child(ren)'s school(s)?
2. Describe some of the topics regularly discussed with teachers (if applicable)
3. To what extent are you open about your family configuration to your child(ren)'s school(s)?
 - a. Probe: structure of registration forms?
4. How would you describe first coming out to school staff (if applicable).
5. To what extent do you (and/or your partner) participate in school-based family engagement programs?
 - a. How often do you participate together?
 - b. Describe your level of comfort in participating in school-based programs
 - c. Has your level of comfort changed at all since first sending your child(ren) to school?

School-Based Experiences

1. Overall, how would you describe your experiences with your child(ren)'s school(s)?
2. Describe the level of safety for your child(ren) and family because of your family configuration.
3. To what extent have you encountered mistreatment from school staff, parents, or children because of your family configuration?
4. To what extent has your child encountered mistreatment from school staff, parents, or children because of your family configuration?
5. How did you address moments of negativity?
6. To what extent is the school inclusive of your family configuration?
7. Can you describe any moments in which you attempted to teach school staff about how to be more inclusive of your family configuration?

- a. How were those received?
8. In what ways are you teaching your own children about issues that are unique to your family configuration that may not be covered in school?

School Pros and Cons

1. What would you describe as some of the selling points of the school and school district?
2. What would you describe as areas in which the school and school district could improve?

Final Questions

1. Are there any questions for me?
2. Is there any additional information that you would like to provide that you think might be useful for me to know about your experiences with your children's schooling?