

**EXPERIENCE AND MANAGEMENT OF STIGMA IN ADULT CHILDREN OF LESBIAN, GAY,
AND BISEXUAL PARENTS.**

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By

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On my honor
I have neither given nor received
unauthorized aid on this thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the lived experiences of adults with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) parents using stigma management as a conceptual framework. The study was developed in response to a trend in current literature on this population of utilizing a hierarchical comparative framework, which positions heterosexual families as the standard against which all others are compared. This method of analysis flattens or ignores the complexity of experience in non-heterosexual family structures. In depth interviews were conducted with nine adults with at least one LGB parent. This study discusses four ways in which children with LGB parents experience and manage stigma. These are, in order, disclosure practices, engaging in communities, impression management, and negotiations of queerness. Revealing the lived experience of adults with LGB parents, this research makes an important empirical contribution to the literature on this understudied population. This study also extends models of stigma by highlighting the creative ways that participants managed stigma, and the importance of context to the method of management.

KEYWORDS: (Same-sex parenting, queer, sexuality, LGBT, stigma, stigma management)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
METHODOLOGY	2
LITERATURE REVIEW	5
<i>Current Body of Literature and Dominant Framework</i>	5
<i>Stigma and its Management</i>	8
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	11
<i>Disclosure Practices</i>	12
Assessment.....	12
Readiness.....	13
Exhaustion.....	14
Wariness.....	15
Pride.....	16
<i>Community</i>	17
Cognizance of difference.....	18
Comfort with own identity.....	19
<i>Impression Management</i>	22
Obligation.....	22
Willingness.....	24
<i>Experience of Queerness</i>	26
Fear of stigma.....	26
Perceptions of failure.....	28
Acceptance by immediate family.....	29
CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	30
REFERENCES	33
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	36
APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION	37

There is a growing body of literature surrounding children of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people (Goldberg 2007a and Goldberg 2007b). These children go by many names, like “gaybies” or “queerspawn,” though queerspawn sometimes refers to “second generation queers,” or children of LGB and/or T parents who are also queer. The majority of the research done on this population has been comparisons to children of straight parents to determine if queer parenting is detrimental to the children (Gartrell et al. 2005, Gartrell and Bos 2010, Goldberg 2007a). This research has largely shown that there is very little difference between the social and psychological development of children of queer people and the children of straight people (Gartrell et al. 2005, Gartrell and Bos 2010, Goldberg 2007a, Tasker 2005). My project enters this conversation by investigating the lived experience of these adult children of LGB parents.

While research determining how children of LGB people develop is helpful politically, using straight families as the standard for normal and appropriate development has been problematized (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Designating heterosexual families as the standard to which all other types of families are compared creates a hierarchy of family types. Heterosexual families, as the standard in this framework, are by default at the top of that hierarchy. Therefore, ways in which queer families might differ from straight families are automatically viewed as deficits, as opposed to meaningful differences (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Setting up straight families as the standard ignores potential positive differences that queer families could bring, in addition to preventing queer families from being studied in their own right. Moreover, insofar as these persons are socially positioned to receive/confront social stigma, their experience is relevant to the importance, according to Stacey and Biblarz (2001), of illuminating these childrens’ unique, complex social reality. However, the social scientific literature remains more or less silent on the question of how persons in queer families experience this position. In response to this gap in the

scholarship, this study examines the lived experience of adult children of LGB parents, as told in their own words, without comparing them to children of heterosexual parents. I examine this lived experience through the conceptual framework of stigma management.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to illuminate the subjective lived experience of adult children of lesbian, gay, or bisexual parents. Qualitative methods are utilized because qualitative research allows access to social members' perceptions, interpretations, and meaning-making activity, and what is lacking in the current research is a deeper understanding of the lived experience of this population (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002). The research design follows a phenomenological approach to scientific inquiry and analysis, wherein the lived experiences of social agents as told in their own words is privileged (Becker 1992 and Patton 2002). In depth, semi structured interviews fit well into that framework, allowing the research subjects to construct their own narratives. Additionally, because family life is a sphere that is usually not open to other qualitative methods, in depth interviewing has become the preferred method to study issues of family and interactions regarding family (Matthews 2005). Privileging subjects' narratives was an intentional decision made for this study as a departure from the current dominant model of analysis used when examining this particular population. As opposed the dominant approach which privileges heterosexual families and downplays differences of queer families, the research adopted here allows participants to construct their own narratives, creating a space that can examine the unique social world of the participants, as emphasized by Stacey and Biblarz (2001).

From September 2014 to January 2015, I conducted nine in person and Skype semi structured interviews (4 in person, 5 over Skype) with adults with at least one LGB parent. In the interview, I asked open-ended questions with regard to participants' lived

experiences growing up with LGB parent(s), paying particular attention to stigma management. The participants were from all over the United States, but mostly the east coast (6 from the northeast, 2 from the west coast, 1 from the west/Midwest) [See appendix A for full interview schedule].

Position of the researcher. I, as a researcher, am not without bias. I am a bisexual, white, upper-middle class woman with two lesbian mothers and a gay father. My position as a member of the population that I am studying comes with benefits as well as setbacks. My position inspired me to do this research, and heavily influenced the decision to specifically do this study in a way that challenges the current hierarchical methodology. My status as an insider grants me immediate rapport with my participants, which makes them feel more comfortable to speak freely, which is crucial when doing interviews. However, because I am so close to this data, I engaged in intense and constant reflexive practices at every step of the research process [To view full methodological reflection, see appendix B].

Recruitment. To be included in the study participants had to be 18 or over and have at least one parent who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Participants were recruited using two methods. The first was via an advertisement, which consisted of a description of the study along with my contact information, on the social media group page of Children Of Lesbian and Gay Parents Everywhere (COLAGE), which is a national organization dedicated to supporting kids with LGBTQ+ parents. The social media page yielded three participants. To recruit from organizations that are explicitly for the population you are studying is to run the risk of creating a biased sample because members of those organizations may be more likely to recognize their status as a member of that population as well as have reflected on their experience (Goldberg 2007a). In an attempt to combat this, the second method of recruitment was to send the same advertisement used with the COLAGE group to my own social networks and to my parents' personal networks of LGB people with children.

This advertisement was sent via email. Participants recruited via this method could not be persons with whom I had socialized or formed friendships with in any point in my life. This method yielded three participants. This recruitment procedure also used social network, or 'snowball,' methods, asking email recipients to refer other potential research participants. Three participants were recruited in this manner.

Description of the sample. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 35. Of the 9 participants, 5 identified as women, 3 identified as men, and 1 identified as neither. All 9 participants had at least 1 mother who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 1 had 2 gay fathers in addition to her 2 lesbian mothers. Mothers of all nine of the participants' were actively involved in their lives. Of the 5 participants who knew their biological fathers, 3 had relationships with them. Two participants were born into families with more than 2 parents. Two participants were born into heterosexual marriages, which divorced due to the mother being gay or lesbian. Seven participants were born into LGB couples, and of those 7 couples 4 are still together. The dissolutions of these couples were a result of divorce and remarriage or the death of a parent followed by remarriage. Of the 9 participants, 8 are white and 1 is mixed race. Two of the 9 participants identify as queer, 6 identify as straight, and 1 chose not to disclose. Eight of the 9 participants have attended or are currently attending college, and 1 has not.

Analysis and Coding. I conducted nine semi-structured interviews that ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. Four of the interviews were in person and five of them were done over video call software. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim.

The broader phenomenological approach described in previous sections overlapped with a grounded theory approach in this study. The goal of this research is to illuminate the lived experience of adult children with LGB parents (phenomenological approach), and to ensure that the methods allowed for this illumination, principles of grounded theory were

applied to the analysis and interpretation of the data. The transcribed data was coded inductively, according to the guidelines for thematic analysis put forth by Braun and Clarke (2006). Inductive coding, a method associated with grounded theory, allows the researcher to code without prescribing to a preconceived framework and instead lets the framework of analysis be 'grounded' in the data. After this initial coding stage was completed, experiences and thoughts about stigma and stigma management appeared as frequent themes. Taking this into consideration, I coded the data again, looking specifically for my participants' references to stigma-related topics. Following this second stage of coding, I defined and named four key stigma related themes in the data: Disclosure Practices, Community, Impression Management, and Experience of Queerness. Within these major categories, there was a wide range of individual experience. To investigate this range of experience, I coded for secondary patterns within key themes, identifying multiple subthemes within each main theme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Body of Literature and Dominant Frameworks

Most of the research done on children of LGB parents has been done to further the political discourse regarding same-sex parenting, adoption, and marriage (Goldberg 2007a). These studies usually compare the children to the children of heterosexual parents in order to determine whether they are "well adjusted," or if being raised by same sex parents does harm to the child (Goldberg 2007a). The vast majority of these studies have concluded that children of same-sex couples do not greatly differ from children of heterosexual couples, except in their perceptions of gender and sexuality as well as diversity and tolerance (Gartrell et al. 2005, Gartrell and Bos 2010, Goldberg 2007a).

The dominant model for doing research on this particular population, even among the most sympathetic researchers, is a comparative model with the goal of discovering the

presence or lack of differences between children of heterosexual or LGB parents. This model, by definition, positions heterosexual families as the standard to which all other types of families are compared. Therefore, ways in which children of LGB parents are different than children of heterosexual parents can be interpreted as deficits as opposed to being examined as meaningful differences and complexities (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Stacey and Biblarz (2001) challenge this framework, asserting that it is steeped in heterosexism and forces researchers to “downplay difference” when studying this population in order to further the political debate (p. 159). It is impossible to escape from ideological and political pressure when conducting these studies, which has affected the methods of these studies by constraining them to a hierarchical comparative model.

What are the differences? Within the existing research with regard to this population, there are some ways that children of LGB people are different from their peers with heterosexual parents. For instance, one study finds that these children tend to be more open to the idea of having a same-sex relationship, even if they identify as straight, and are more open to stretching the boundaries of their gender expression (Goldberg 2007). Research findings also indicate other differences. For example, a study of daughters of lesbian mothers finds that these daughters are more likely to have goals and expectations for themselves that are not congruent with the average (read: raised by heterosexual parents) young girl in the United States (Garner 2004, Goldberg 2007). These studies suggest that daughters of lesbian couples more regularly aspire to be doctors, lawyers, or engineers than daughters of heterosexual couples (Garner 2004, Goldberg 2007). Additionally, research finds that male children of lesbian couples are more likely to feel comfortable exhibiting non-masculine behaviors, which is not particularly common among boys raised by heterosexual parents (Goldberg, 2007). Children raised by LGB parents describe themselves as more open minded in general, whether it's of the LGBTQ population

or racial minorities, or any other group that experiences oppression (Gartrell and Bos 2010).

Growing up in the spotlight. While the research reviewed in the previous section explores the differences between children of LGB parents and heterosexual parents, most of the research on queer families emphasizes similarity to straight parents as an indication of positive development. This perpetuates the use of heterosexual families as the standard for normality, and by extension acceptability (Stacey and Biblarz 2010). This hierarchy of family types, along with the fact that children of LGB parents are constantly studied and scrutinized constructs an expectation that they have to be as normal as possible in order to prove their parents to be good people. This expectation of “normality” motivates these children to downplay their own unique family lives and individuality for the sake of proving their parents to be respectable parents (Garner 2004).

In *Families like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is* Abigail Garner, a nationally recognized LGBT family rights educator, brings to light the effect that constant scrutiny and examination have on children with LGB parents over the course of their lifetime. Garner highlights the fact that within the existing political climate, the lives of people with LGB parents’ “lives are not their own—they are *symbols* of something much bigger” (p. 19). Using interviews with over 50 adult children of LGB families, Garner establishes that these adult children perceive strong expectations of what they should be. Specifically, these adult children feel they are the object of an expectation to be “well adjusted,” normal, average American children, or exceptionally smart, talented and successful people in order give gay parents an edge in the political debate. From a young age, these children know their families are different. They have to “come out” about their family repeatedly throughout their lifetime, and are often met with confused, shocked, or hostile responses (Garner 2004). The pressure to be “normal” or to be exceptional forces

them to make themselves “one dimensional in public” through hiding or downplaying aspects of self that are unique to their family. (Garner 2004:31).

Stigma and its Management

Children of LGB parents face social stigma due to their parents' sexuality. Stigma, according to sociologist Erving Goffman (1963), is a negative social label that is applied to persons/groups of people who, by one aspect of their self, don't fit into what society has deemed “normal.” These stigmatized persons are discredited, excluded, or even victims of violence. He describes three types of stigmas: character blemishes, physical traits, and group identity. For instance, homosexuality, mental illness, or unemployment could be considered character blemishes, physical traits such as deformities might be stigmatized, and group identities such as race, religion, or nationality can carry social stigma. Identities, groups of people, and aspects of self that are stigmatized are, of course, not intrinsically bad or worth less than things that are held at a higher value. These are social constructions that change with time, place, and context and that are vulnerable to prevailing configurations of power. To describe something or someone as stigmatized is to observe a societal reaction, not to comment on the worth of what you're describing. Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer identities are “character blemishes” that are stigmatized because they exist outside the dominant heteronormative cultural framework (Goffman 1963).

Concealable stigma. Stigmatized communities engage in what Goffman calls stigma management (1963). Stigma management is when members of stigmatized groups take steps to reduce the amount of backlash they will face, and to be awarded privileges that the given to the dominant group. In respect to stigma, LGBTQ identities are semi-unique in the fact that this particular aspect of self is almost invisible within social interactions (Fuller, Chang, & Rubin 2009). There are behavioral indicators that may set off a persons “gaydar,” usually having to do with queer men expressing more feminine behaviors and women

expressing more masculine ones (Connell 1992). However, these indicators are not foolproof and, because they are behaviors, can be changed. In order to manage the stigma associated with being queer, LGBTQ people often engage in what Goffman calls “passing.” Passing can be unintentional or an intentional decision to hide the stigmatized aspect of their self, in this case their sexuality, and therefore “pass” as a member of the dominant group (Goffman 1963 and Fuller et al. 2009). This is done through changing behaviors to seem more “straight,” or by simply not disclosing their true sexuality, thus encouraging others to assume the LGBTQ person to be heterosexual.

The stigma that kids of LGB parents carry is also an invisible or concealable stigma. They, like the LGBTQ community, will sometimes pass, or choose not to disclose their family structure in order to avoid harassment or having to explain their families to others (Goldberg 2007). There is a growing amount of literature with regard to stigmatized identities that are concealable, like queer identities or the identity as the child of queer parents, and how their concealable nature affects how stigmatized identities are managed. When a stigmatized identity is visible, it immediately influences social interactions, but for those with a concealable stigmatized identity that is not the case. Since identities like queerness or having a queer family have to be disclosed to influence social contacts, the burden of the stigmatized shifts from what Goffman calls “managing tension” to what he calls “managing information” (1963). In other words, when a stigmatized person whose stigmatized aspect of self can be concealed is interacting with others, his/her focus is primarily on whether to and how much to disclose. This type of management requires constant attention, so that the stigmatized are preoccupied thinking of their stigma as opposed to other aspects of the interaction or situation (Beatty & Kirby 2006).

There are myriad negative effects that can come from experiencing and managing this type of stigma. Managing stigma this way can be exhausting (Beatty & Kirby 2006).

Moreover, if the stigmatized person decides to keep his/her identity a secret, there are extensive mental health repercussions, including depression and suicidal thoughts. Additionally, passing or choosing not to disclose, through its silence, maintains the social privileges at play at the expense of the integrity of the stigmatized (Fuller, Chang, & Rubin 2009 and Luhtanen).

Associative stigma. Children of LGBTQ parents are stigmatized because of their association with the queer community, because the “character blemish” of their parents is passed off to them. This type of stigma is referred to as “associative” or “courtesy stigma” (Prior, Reeder & Monroe 2012 and Mason, Sultzman & Berger 2014). Those who bear a courtesy stigma are usually “normal,” but they are also seen as different because of their association with stigmatized persons/groups (Birenbaum 1970). The more meaningful their relationship with the stigmatized person is (i.e. acquaintance of (less meaningful) vs. child of (more meaningful)), the stronger the stigma that they face (Prior, Reeder & Monroe 2012). A large part of managing this stigma, because associative stigmas are usually concealable, is managing information, or deciding whether or not to “come out” or disclose (Mason, Sultzman & Berger 2014).

While there is not extensive literature on other populations of children managing parents’ stigmas, there is a small amount on family members managing other family members’. For instance, studies have been done on parents who have to manage the stigma of their child having physical disabilities and on children who have mothers with HIV. By discussing this limited body of research on family-based stigma, I am not equating having LGB parents to the cases examined in this research, which include having a family member who is sick or disabled. This body of research attends to contexts wherein one family member has stigma and other family members practice stigma management. The

sociological relevance of this body of literature to my project lies in its representation of broader social patterns not in the specific cases.

These studies highlight contexts where family members employ strategies to manage associative stigma. For example, one study shows how parents of children with physical disabilities often avoid situations in which their child could be excluded from or experience prejudice or bullying in order to reduce the suffering, which comes from lack of acceptance by peers (Segal, Mandich, Polatajko, & Cook 2002). Other studies of associative stigma in families describe how children whose mothers have HIV have to constantly decide whether to tell others about their mother's condition, and whether to confront or correct offhand statements or jokes they hear having to do with people with HIV (Mason, Sultzman & Berger 2014). Overall, research on children who manage stigma having to do with their parents or their family is lacking. This study hopes to shed a light in that area. While studies of children with LGB parents have not focused on stigma management, some research in this field finds that children with LGB parents take a similar action to the populations mentioned above: screening out homophobic individuals and avoiding them, instead creating communities in which they and their families will be accepted (Goldberg 2007b). This implies that children of LGB parents face associative stigma; suggesting that these behaviors can be conceptualized as stigma management strategies.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Throughout data collection, the participants who took part in my study shared their lived experience as adult children of LGB people. Over the course of my analysis, I identified four conceptual categories of similarity in their experience, which I will discuss and lay out in the following section. These categories are, in order, Disclosure Practices, Experience of Community, Impression Management, and Negotiations of Queerness. Throughout this

discussion I also emphasize that within this larger schema of commonality the specific experiences of these persons differ significantly.

Disclosure Practices

As mentioned in the literature review, adult children of LGB people carry a concealable, associative stigma. This stigma's management is unique in that is not largely made up of "managing tension" in social interactions but rather managing what information is given and shared within social exchanges (Goffman 1963). Disclosure practices, that is, the participants deciding and negotiating when, where, how and what to disclose about their families was something that every person in the study experienced. Early in the interview, participants were asked to speak about something that 'sticks out' about having LGB parents. In response to this question, seven of the nine participants brought up the issue of responding to questions about or explaining their family to others. Disclosure practices and the negotiation of them were experienced distinctly by the participants, but all nine adults engaged in that negotiation. I portray participants' wide range of feelings and thought processes with regard to disclosure, through the use of five disclosure-related themes: assessment, readiness, exhaustion, wariness and pride.

Assessment. Before being prepared to answer questions or explain their families, sometimes participants have to decide whether they are going to disclose their family structure at all. This decision often has to do with gauging the person or people they are interacting with to see how they might react to the information. Based on that assessment, they make the decision to disclose, or not, or something in between. Leah, a 21 year old with lesbian moms from a small town on the east coast, described an instance where she didn't talk about her family:

I was living with a family in Virginia this summer, who I didn't know and who didn't know me, and I was in a very conservative town and my parents were actually getting married last summer and I didn't tell anyone 'cause I'd

heard them in other conversations mention like how it was against God, and I didn't want to have to deal with that.

As this quote demonstrates, Leah is first faced with the task of assessment. This assessment occurs prior to the interaction. Leah describes three situational features that she perceived to be most relevant to her decision not to disclose: the conservatism of the town, the religious beliefs of the community, and the low level of familiarity with the family she was staying with. In a place where she didn't have very much support, Leah didn't want to reveal information about her family that could invite associative stigma. Leah's hesitation came from a lack of desire to either have to explain her family or experience more negative consequences, like feeling unsafe in the place she was living.

Though some other participants describe situations like this one, where they choose not to disclose, most don't usually deliberately hide their families unless they feel it would be unsafe to disclose. For most of the adults in the sample, that isn't a reality they deal with. Participants, " don't bring it up just to bring it up," as Josh, a 20 year old with two lesbian moms says, but "if it comes up I'm usually happy to talk about it."

Readiness. Many of the adults in the sample describe a need to be ready when they entered into social spaces where the topic of their family might come up in conversation. As respondents emphasize, LGB families, in the context of a heteronormative society, are confusing to some. As a result, people ask questions and often need an explanation, and this explanation is often given by the children. Nick, a 21 year old college student with two moms, one lesbian and one who hasn't labeled herself talks about this ever present need to explain. As Nick jokingly puts it, " 'How did you get here?' is never a question that someone asks of someone with heterosexual parents [laughs]." Another respondent, Josh, shared the following on the topic:

Honestly the first thing that comes to mind is feeling like I always have to be ready to give an explanation. If I was going to meet new people, or going

over to a friends house, or traveling, being ready to give some kind of explanation, and to do it with a smile so it can feel like I wasn't either being condescending or like I didn't want to make the new information seem threatening in any way. So always being ready to do that, and put myself out there.

Both Nick and Josh recognize that in a society where heterosexuality is assumed, their family structure is not what people expect to encounter. As a result, these respondents feel they have to be ready to answer questions whenever these questions might come up.

Goffman (1963) outlines ways in which the stigmatized handle the non stigmatized, who he calls "normal." One of these ways is to be prepared to answer questions put forth by the "normals." In this form of preparation, some of the participants have what they call a "blurb," or a set of prepared answers to the questions they are typically asked. Olivia, a 20 year old with two moms and two dads, says,

Sometimes there are people who ask, and they have this look on their face like they're like, "that's kind of weird, I don't really know how to react to that, so I'm just going to stand her and like pretend like I know what you're talking about and like ask you questions." [laughs] I have prepared answers that I give, 'cause they are usually the same questions every single time, but I'm not offended by it.

Likewise, Zareen, a 20 year old with two lesbian moms, says,

I have practiced [my blurb] from an early age. I think it started [in] childhood, [it was] just really honest, how a lot of children can be. This is my family and I love my family and I love everything about the people that have raised me and I just carried that on. So it doesn't exhaust me because that's just how I have always been for my family.

For Olivia and Zareen, and many of the other adults in the sample, being prepared to talk about, explain, and respond to questions about their family is the norm, and it has been since childhood.

Exhaustion. Even though Olivia and Zareen talk about not being offended or exhausted by having to explain their family to others, this sometimes wasn't the case, both

for them and other participants. Though many adult children in this study shared thoughts similar to those of Olivia and Zareen, and described being generally happy to explain, participants also described many moments where giving explanation was tiring. When asked what the most challenging aspect of having queer parents was, Zareen said, “the hardest part? I guess explaining it. I say that it’s not tiresome but at the same time it’s like do I still live in a society where I have to explain my family to people?” Josh added, “It just feels like work, you know? It’s not the worst thing in the world, but it’s just work.”

Sometimes, the exhaustion associated with telling others was important in participants’ decision to disclose or not. Olivia talked about an experience she had as an RA, having one on one conversations with her residents,

Sometimes I just get so tired, you know, of telling people, like, explaining my family that I just don’t say anything. That happened to me recently, I had one on ones with all my residents this week, and they would ask me about myself and I was like, I could explain this 21 times or... I could not! [we both laugh]. You know? It was just kind of exhausting to have that prepared blurb, and then to give it and then to have them ask all the questions so I just like decided not to.

Wariness. In addition to being constantly ready to explain, many participants talked about a sense of being on guard, prepared for someone to react badly to their family. Josh spoke about a trip that he took to the south, where he felt more nervous about disclosing his family,

It’s always scary to make parts of your life vulnerable to other people, so yeah. I think I visited a friend of mine from college, this was in the winter, in December, and he’s from the northern Mississippi, Memphis area, and it was my first time going to the deep south and I definitely felt myself just more on guard.

Some participants described this fear, or sense of being on guard as irrational, since they had experienced very few actual instances of intensely negative reaction, but that there was still an uneasiness in the back of their mind. Olivia describes it as such:

Because the reaction that I get so often is “Oh! That’s so cool!” I don’t ever like genuinely expect anyone to like be like “Oh we can’t be friends anymore,” or something like that, but there’s a little like seed of like, this I kind of controversial, I wonder how other people are going to react.

Josh, talking about how it feels to be on guard all the time, said,

It makes it impossible to enter a flow with people that like zone where the conversation just kind of takes on a life of it’s own and people are kind of not checking themselves too much, um, there’s just a kind of conversation experience that—that gets precluded I guess.

“Managing information,” as Goffman puts it, it is exhausting for the stigmatized person, as the respondents described in the previous section. A significant part of this exhaustion, for this sample, is a wariness that a “normal” will not react well to the disclosure of a stigmatized identity, even if the participants have never experienced a negative reaction. This can, as Josh points out, also impact the quality of interactions with others.

Pride. Even though feelings of readiness, wariness, and exhaustion are a part of every day life for participants, these adult children also make clear that they feel pride in talking about their families. Being open about their family is a way that they can intentionally declare their love. As Zareen puts it,

Mostly I’m really open. I would never want it to seem to other people that I’m ashamed to have two moms and so I’m always very open about who my family is and who it is made up of. Because when they were raising my sister and I they were like, ‘there are different types of families and no family is less equal than other families just because they’re made up of different people and you should be proud of where you come from, you should be proud of the people that have raised you and you shouldn’t be ashamed of it.’ And so I always want to introduce them as both my moms because I don’t have any reason to be ashamed that I have two moms.

Zareen is intentional in her use of unambiguous terms so that heterosexuality cannot be inferred from her description and, as she describes, she does this as an act of love towards her moms and her sister. Zareen’s intentional openness is reflected in many of the other

interviewees in this study, who, when they feel safe to, make this part of themselves very clear.

The pride that Zareen and other participants speak about is reflective of stigma management strategies that have been employed by both the LGBTQIA+ community along with other disenfranchised groups over the course of history. This strategy of finding pride in a stigmatized identity is applied particularly when dealing with stigmas that attempt to create feelings of shame in the stigmatized, like framing homosexuality as dirty or abnormal (McDermott, Roen & Scourfield 2008 and Stryker, Owens & White 2000). According to scholars in the field, finding pride in a stigmatized aspect of self is a powerful tool to change both conceptions of self as well as societal conceptions about the stigmatized group (Stryker, Owens & White 2000).

While relevant literature discusses pride as a response to, or strategy to overcome feelings of shame, the adults in my sample spoke very little about shame. Zareen's, and others', apparent lack of shame in respect to their LGB family suggests that the adults in the sample are not responding to shame when they express pride in their families. While this project is not designed to investigate adult children's experiences of shame, and does not claim to present findings about participant's affective/emotional configurations, the absence of shame-related references in participants discussions of pride raises the possibility that participants' pride-based actions may not, as some of the stigma management literature suggests, be motivated by the desire to mediate stigma-related shame.

Community

Some of adults in the sample grew up within a strong community of queer adults and also other kids with LGB parents, while other participants didn't have access to those spaces as children. For the purposes of this discussion, I use 'community' to refer to a

community of peers who also have LGB parents. The way participants talked about and were influenced by community varied significantly, so I've outlined the two most prominent patterns below: cognizance of difference and comfort with own identity.

Cognizance of difference. As children, participants were cognizant of their family's difference in comparison to straight families. This cognizance took different forms. The variation in forms had to do with whether respondents were in a space where they were alone in the fact that they had LGB parents or whether they had peers in similar situations. Leah, who grew up in a small town, didn't have a community as a child, and both Leah and her parents were very conscious of difference:

In such a small town, I grew up with the people there since preschool and they all knew me. I mean, I think also the fact that my parents don't look super gay like [laughs] one mom is like fairly older and no one assumes gay in my town, they could be like sisters or they could be a mom and a daughter. No one really jumped to that conclusion and they didn't want to, so it wasn't really brought up.

In Leah's town, people assumed heterosexuality even in the case of two women living together raising children. Leah spoke later in the interview about how she intentionally didn't disclose her parents' sexuality for most of her childhood and adolescence. This had to do with her heteronormative hometown's refusal to acknowledge her family structure, and how this made her very aware of her family's difference.

Some participants, like Olivia, didn't have to think about being different until high school. When she was speaking about the evolution of her prepared "blurb," she mentioned that she had a community of peers in elementary and middle school who understood and supported her:

I went to a sort of very sheltered k through 8 so I never really felt like I had to have a blurb because everyone knew my parents. There were like 15 kids in my kindergarten class and those 15 kids all went on to go all the way through 8th grade with me. Also, like half my grade was kids with gay and lesbian parents so it was like totally chill [we both laugh]. So even though I

had like two sets of parents, which was pretty abnormal, they understood, they kind of got it. So there were a lot of families who had like, similar but different situations.

Zareen had a similar situation,

When I was in elementary school, in our kindergarten classroom there were 19 of us, 7 of us had same sex parents, so it wasn't weird, it wasn't like I was the only kid that when I drew my family I had two moms, it was like, your teacher would ask you, "tell me about your picture!" and you'd be like, "these are my moms and this is our dog," and someone across the room would be like, "Ah I have two moms too!"

The communities that Leah, Olivia, and Zareen were immersed in significantly shaped their individual awareness of their families' difference in comparison to straight families. The varying degrees of awareness that these participants, along with others, experienced promoted different strategies and thought processes with regard to their management of information/disclosure practices. Leah, whose community assumed heterosexuality and refused to acknowledge her family's difference, spent most of her childhood and adolescence choosing not to disclose at all. Having peers with "similar but different" situations, as Olivia puts it, who knew them and "got it," allowed both Olivia and Zareen to be unencumbered by the "managing of information" that is disclosure practices. When they didn't have to worry about when, what, or how to tell people about their families because of a close-knit group of peers, a large number of whom also have queer parents, these adult children of LGB families didn't feel different.

Comfort with own identity. Emphasis on community came mostly from those participants who had not had access to one in their younger years, but had discovered one later in life. For them, this experience was very important in their construction of an identity as a child with LGB parents. Leah, whose early lack of community is mentioned/described above, found a community when she was 19. At 19, Leah discovered that her sperm donor had fathered at least 13 other children, many with lesbian couples like

Leah's moms. Meeting them was crucial to Leah's process of settling into herself as a child of queer parents, as well as increasing her comfort when talking about her family with others.

Definitely growing up here in Amishville central [laughs], I didn't want to be different. And I think when I really changed was when all of our half siblings got together, that was two summers ago and we all rented this house in Cali and it was just like gay mom central. [we both laugh] I'd never really like experienced that, and just the normality of it. They all told their friends everything. The fact that I had been born with a sperm donor was something that I didn't tell anyone until the middle of high school when I told my very best friend, but they were all so open about it and they were just like happy families and I was like yeah, there's nothing weird about this.

Seeing her half siblings, many of who also had lesbian moms, feeling comfortable and secure in their identities inspired Leah to do the same. After meeting all of them, she describes being much more open and secure in her identity:

Yeah, then I went abroad, and like everyone I met there I just started telling, which was really great. I didn't, like specifically bring it up but when you're meeting new people you ask about their families and just like general things about their life so, I would—I pretty much just told everyone.

Wendy, a 35 year old with a gay mom also found solace and comfort in a community she found later in life. Wendy, who spent her adolescence in the Midwest during the AIDS epidemic of the 80's, never felt completely safe or comfortable discussing her mother's sexuality, or exploring what that meant in terms of her own identity. It wasn't until she went to a conference where members of COLAGE were leading a panel discussion that that started to change.

When I went to a COLAGE event earlier this year [I felt] feel super safe, because it was actually one of the very few times in my life where I felt that I had nothing to hide. I didn't have to worry about someone judging me. And even though they could judge a million other things about me, it didn't matter, because that was the one particular thing that has been guarded my whole life.

That panel discussion introduced Wendy to the community of COLAGERS, as they call themselves. It also facilitated Wendy's first experience of a safe space, where she "had

nothing to hide,” and she “didn’t have to worry about someone judging her,” to talk about and reflect on her experience as a child of LGB parents. As Wendy describes, this experience has been invaluable to her in terms of coming to terms with and accepting this part of her identity.

Another respondent who discussed community as influential in coming to terms with their identity as a child of LGB parents was Jay, a 20 year old who prefers they/them pronouns. When asked what stood out most to them about having queer parents, they chose to speak about community. They use the word “queerspawn” to describe themselves and other people with queer parents.

Actually the first thing that comes to mind is COLAGE, [laughs] I didn’t really have much of an identity as a queerspawn until I started to become involved with COLAGE. It was just a really sort of transformative experience in that I didn’t really realize how much of my identity as queerspawn I wasn’t connecting with and not sharing because I felt like other people wouldn’t get it, until I was able to be part of COLAGE spaces.

Sharing their experiences as a “queerspawn” was a “transformative experience” for Jay. Jay “wasn’t connecting with” their identity as a child of LGB parents until they gained access to COLAGE spaces, where people “got it,” as Olivia said in the previous section. A space consisting of peers with similar experiences allowed Jay to explore and create their identity as “queerspawn.”

To be surrounded by community of other adult children of LGB people creates a space where the managing of information is unnecessary. As these quotes demonstrate, this momentary break from the concern with how, what, when, why and what to disclose allowed these participants to bond with others and to become more comfortable with themselves. As Leah’s comfort talking about her family when she was abroad, after she met her half siblings indicates, this comfort can be taken

back into the world, and might make the management of information there less exhausting.

Impression Management

Often, the participants felt as if, to others, they sometimes represented all adult children with queer parents. Adults in the sample took this into consideration during conversations about their families through engaging in impression management.

Impression management is a way of interacting with others in which people attempt to influence others perceptions of them through selectively and intentionally sharing or not sharing information (Goffman 1959). The adults in this sample practiced impression management by putting their best feet forward when their families came up in order to construct a positive image of queer families. Respondents experienced the work of impression management in two ways: feeling obligated to engage in it, or being willing and happy to.

Obligation. There are times when using themselves as examples to others feels like an obligation to the adults in this study. As Katie puts it, “I feel like sometimes I have to have like the duty of like being the like, ‘Hey guys, guess what, I know you don’t have anyone else to tell you this shit so I guess I have to ‘cause I’m here. I guess I was put here to do this, so I have to.’” To Katie, talking about her family in a positive way sometimes feels like a duty because she fears that she may be the only person that the people she’s interacting with will come across who can impart them with this information. Josh also expresses feelings of obligation when talking about his family. Josh not only speaks about portraying his family in a positive manner but also about making the experience of the exchange better for the “normal” he is interacting with:

There’s just a lot of like emotional balancing and accounting that I have to do, like okay it’s not this persons fault that they don’t know, this part of my life. Um, and I just feel like I have to be a very careful facilitator of that

transfer of information. Um, so that it isn't the negative experience for them, if that makes sense?

When asked how he accomplishes this, Josh explains:

I just try to be super candid about it, I think sometimes I air on the side of giving more information than has been asked, for whatever reason, I feel like that tends to put people more at ease. If they ask "have you always had two moms?" and my only response is "yes," I'll be waiting for them to ask the next question, like it's just not conducive to a comfortable or happy exchange. I tend not to go into new social situations with a sense of eagerness like "Oh, boy! When do I get to tell everyone about how different my family is?"

Even though Josh doesn't always look forward to these social exchanges, he feels that sharing information about his family in a way that doesn't give the "normal" in the interaction a negative experience is important. For both Katie and Josh, it is important that people who aren't usually exposed to queer families have a positive experience of them. This importance sometimes takes precedence over the actual desire of Katie or Josh, along with many other participants, to have a conversation about their family.

Part of creating the positive experiences of the "normals" is to emphasize normalcy within queer families. Zareen was particularly adamant about this:

There's so much talk about on like right-winger conservative news it's like, oh, those radical lesbians that are you know corrupting the youth that they're raising. like it's wrong or it's broken or there's underlying notes of like oh is that child abuse like, bullshit. Complete bullshit but it's like in some way being a child of two parents, you like want to crusade forward and say like no it's not true, I don't want my family to have to be some strange enigma, like we're normal! [shouts and does air quotes when she says the word normal].

Zareen wants to emphasize the normalcy of her family in order to counter claims by right wing media that her parents aren't suitable, but she also questions what "normal" means:

[laughs] I think that that's like it's almost like a defense mechanism against like what you worry about in the back of your mind about what people might be thinking about your family, and about what the right wingers on

their talk shows are talking about the LGBTQ community. It's like you want to just be able to throw in their faces no we're normal, we're just like any other family except that there are two moms or two dads. But really there is no normal, or there shouldn't be, or it's always changing it's in flux, it's totally special and it's different than what we would want—or then what is constructed as normal, like what that looks like in America.

Zareen knows that pushing the normalcy of queer families is an effective strategy in countering heterosexist claims that these families don't deserve to exist, but she also thinks that what we think of as "normalcy" is maybe not an ideal we should strive for, or even something that can be defined concretely. She applies a strategy that she knows will do something to refute negative perceptions of her family, but she also questions the logic behind that strategy.

Willingness. Despite those feelings of duty, obligation, and questioning of self that arise when participants used themselves as examples of good products of queer families, often, participants felt proud and happy to do so, seeing it as a way of defending, protecting and standing up for their families. Nick talks about using himself as an example in terms of what he, as a relatively privileged person, can do to help the cause, and therefore his parents.

Hearing about the struggles of the LGBTQ community is hard in a way in that it makes me want to say—it makes my place really interesting because I'm not someone who can stand up and say like, "Look at the oppression I've faced, like, and I'm a healthy happy person." But I can say like, "Look at the perfectly normal home environment I came from, and I'm a healthy happy person." And I've seen people do that online or whatever where they give some impassioned speech and everyone's like, "Oh what a smart boy," [Mocking voice and claps his hands together] and then [the speaker] is like "I have two moms!" and everyone's like, "Oh, like shocking!" [sarcastically]. So I feel like my contribution to that thing is trying to just blend into an idea of normalcy.

The impassioned speech Nick describes refers to a video of 19 year old Zach Wahls who appeared in front of Iowa legislators to protest a constitutional amendment that would ban

same sex marriage and civil unions. For Nick, being normal, and showcasing his health and his happiness is his way of contributing to the cause and defending his parents, and he is happy and proud to do so. Olivia also referred to that video when she was talking about using herself as an example,

All these videos like were going around my GSA of like—there was one particular video that I remember that was of this guy defending his moms in court or something... its basically this guy stands up in front of a group of people and is extremely eloquent and basically just says like, “I graduated high school with a 4.0 and now I’m going to Harvard Law and like I grew up with two moms and if you think that I’m like damaged in some way you’re so wrong. Obviously I’m great” and I was like, “Yeah! You go! That’s so true!” [laughs] So I just felt like other people were doing it, other people were using themselves as examples and here I was, a very clear example of a perfectly well adjusted girl that grew up in a gay and lesbian family, and I mean if it helps the cause, why not?

Both Olivia and Nick describe being inspired by others to use themselves as examples to create more positive narratives of LGB families and people. Olivia speaks about a time when she was volunteering on the No On Prop 8 campaign in California and actively uses her position as the child of LGB parents to make a statement:

There was this one guy who had a video camera and he was making a movie about like gay rights and the prop 8 campaign and everything and he stopped us and asked us why we thought gay people should be able to get married. I was like a big part of the argument that gay people shouldn’t be allowed to get married was that like children of gay and lesbian families like don’t do as well, or like aren’t—I don’t know or are like missing something very important like a mother or a father. So, I was like “Okay, I’ll talk about my parents,” and so I said like on camera like, “I have gay dads and lesbian moms, and I’m doing just fine!” [laughs]. “Clearly there’s nothing wrong with me, they should be allowed to get married.” That was kind of just the defining event of something that I had been feeling while the entire prop 8 campaign had been going on.

When Olivia says, “Clearly there’s nothing wrong with me, they should be allowed to get married,” she indicates how using herself as an example was a way in which Olivia could counter all of the claims of the argument against same sex marriage,

simply by being herself. As Olivia's narrative suggests, the arguments made against same sex marriage don't only involve queer people who want to get married, but the children of queer people who see themselves being misrepresented. Both she and Nick, among other participants, expressed a feeling of pride in being able to refute homophobic and heterosexist claims made by anti gay legislators and media.

The manner of impression management that the adults in the sample practice raises an important point in discussions of management of stigma. Stigma management can serve to reinforce dominant narratives that reproduce social inequalities, but they can also be used to challenge those narratives, as evidenced above, the participants engage in the latter. The participants engage in impression management in which they emphasize the love, respect, and happiness that they feel within their queer families, with the intention of creating a narrative that counters others that would serve to denigrate and limit queer people and their families.

Experiences of Queerness

Three of the adults in the sample brought up their own sexuality in the interviews. Two, both 20 and from the east coast, identify as queer, and one, 35 and from the west coast, identifies as straight. The queerness of the two respondents as a stigmatized identity is inextricable from the associative stigma of being a child of LGB parents. I've broken down this connection between the participants' own queerness and their parents' into three experiences that respondents negotiate: fear of stigma, perceptions of failure, and acceptance by immediate family.

Fear of stigma. For the participants who questioned their sexuality at some point, their parents' sexuality was inseparable from that process. This connection stemmed from a fear that others would think that their queerness is a result of their parents' and use that as a reason to feel negatively about queer families. In the case of Wendy, a 35 year old with a

lesbian mom, who grew up in the 80's in the context of the AIDS epidemic and had to hide her mother's sexuality, she was afraid that she might be gay or that others would think she was if they found out her mother was a lesbian:

Even though nobody knew, it was still in my head like oh my gosh, did I say something gay, or did I dress a certain way where people will think I'm gay? There was this huge internal mental constant questioning of every move you made, everything you said, or how you react to something. I was so consumed with how others saw me and I think although that's common as a teenager, I think it was probably heightened because of that, you know?

Wendy recounts her deep fear, as a teen, that others would assume that she was gay because of her mother's queerness. Even though she self identifies as heterosexual, a huge part of her adolescent experience as a child of a gay mom was a "constant questioning" of her actions for fear that she would give others evidence to make that assumption.

The fear that Wendy expresses, of people assuming that the children of LGB people are also queer, is a reality for Jay, a 20 year old, who prefers they/them pronouns, and has a lesbian mom. Jay identifies as trans* and queer, and their queerness affects where and when they talk about their parents' sexuality,

If I'm in conversations about my own queerness I usually try to avoid mentioning my parents a little bit more...because—I'm working on this! I have often felt like people will think that my parents have made me queer, or that I'm sort of trans identified because I didn't have a father figure, or, you know, that sort of reaction.

In online spaces where they are engaging in conversations about their own queerness, they don't mention their parents' because they fear that each cannot be taken out of the context of the other once they're both on the table, and therefore the persons they are interacting with will pass judgment or assume untrue things. Jay continues,

I've always been afraid because people do—I mean it's not an irrational fear, like people absolutely do draw this connection and say like—also because

my sibling is queer and recently trans and so it's like, everyone, everyone is queer! [moves open palm hands around in a sarcastic scary motion] people definitely do draw connections there if not verbally at least, I think, they think it, I think I would think it, um, if I wasn't in that family.

Unlike the fear of negative reactions discussed in the disclosure section, this is not a wariness in the back of Jay's mind, or a fear of something that might happen, it's a fear of something that does happen, which makes it a salient, scary reality for them. Katie, the other participant who identifies as queer, also talked about online spaces in relation to disclosing her sexuality:

I've definitely thought about the whole Facebook thing and how I'm friends with people who, um, do not, like—who I'm not super close with, and if like, if I turn out to—I guess I'm kind of bisexual? But if I turn out I want to marry a woman like I have to put it on Facebook and be like here, gay people have gay children always, cause I'm a sample of one.

As discussed in the earlier section on using oneself as an example or being a case study of people with LGB parents, Katie worries that if she were to be in a relationship with a woman, people would extrapolate information from her and assume that queer people have queer children, and she doesn't want to promote that image.

Perceptions of failure. Both Katie and Jay talked in their interviews about their queerness being contrary to them being a good example of what children of queer people should be. Their queerness served as a barrier for effective impression management that challenged anti-gay narratives. Katie takes pride in the face that she, “a sample of one” is doing well in life, but fears that her queerness negates that image:

Yeah, I guess I'm psyched that I'm doing generally well in the public eye because I—yeah, I've thought about it like okay, like, at least for a sample of one like here I am like getting an education, being a successful person, being generally like socially normal person, like I got all that going for me so that's sweet but it'd be a bummer if someone attributed me being bi it to the gay parents cause it's not like that.

Both Katie and Jay are conscious of the discourses around queer parenting, and the content of the narratives for and against it. Jay discusses how this impacts their perception of their own queerness.

A big, big question in media whenever same sex marriage gets brought for an appeal and there are people who speak, those kind of situations, they often, if not always, include a discussion of the fact that having gay parents makes gay children, that sort of thing, which I think is a flawed way of saying that queer people make bad parents. Um, I think—I think because that's such a big deal in media and it's such a big deal that change makers and politicians make sure that everybody knows that just because you have gay parents doesn't mean you're going to have gay children, that became like the standard. I want to prove them right because somehow it's like by saying that it's a good thing that queer parents don't always queer children it's like saying this is how we can prove that marriage equality or same sex adoption is an okay thing. So, by not being that, it's like I'm proving the enemy's point somehow.

The way that pro LGBT media manages the stigma of getting married and having children, in addition to the way the anti LGBT media creates negative controlling images of the queer community has a huge impact on the way that both Katie and Jay feel about and negotiate their own queerness. Neither of them is ashamed to be queer, but they know that they have to take care when disclosing that information, because it could hurt the LGBTQ cause, and “prove the enemy's point.” They have to face a treble stigma, one of being the children of gay parents, another of being queer themselves and navigating that reality, and finally, through no fault of their own, not being able to engage in the kind of impression management that straight children of queer parents can.

Acceptance by immediate family. Despite all of this, both Katie and Jay, Jay in particular, noted that they are privileged in that as a queer person in a queer family, they had no worries or fears about whether their parents and family would accept them for who they are, which is something many queer people don't have.

Best things about my family? It's in the little things for me I guess. Um, I have always known that I would be supported indefinitely in whatever I do, um, which is something that a lot of queer folks don't have.

Jay takes comfort in the knowledge that they, no matter what their gender identity, expression, or sexuality, they will be accepted, supported and loved at home, and they acknowledge what a gift that is.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was developed as a response to a gap in literature and a lack of complexity in the conceptualization of research questions when it comes to this particular population, as pointed out by Stacey and Biblarz (2001). It is an intentional diversion from comparative analysis, which sets up heterosexual families as the standard against which all other family types are analyzed. This study supplements existing literature on children of LGB parents in addition to literature with regard to stigma management by highlighting the complexity of this sample's experience.

The adults in this sample live with the concealable, associative stigma of being the children of LGB people. They manage their stigma through the "managing of information," within conversations with others about their family. This is consistent with existing literature about how these stigmas are experienced and negotiated. Managing stigma in this way is exhausting, because the stigmatized have to constantly assess situations to determine if it is safe to reveal the aspect of themselves that is stigmatized, be prepared to engage with "normals" in extensive and potentially intrusive interactions, and to be wary and on guard in case the "normal" does not react well to the aspect of their self that is stigmatized. Despite all of this, the participants in this study particularly emphasized that one of the most important aspects of their unique experiences as children of LGB parents was pride in their families. Pride, as a tool in social movements and stigma management strategy has typically been framed as a response to feelings of shame with regard to a

stigmatized aspect of self. The participants in this study, however, spoke very little about shame during conversations about pride. It is not in the capacity of this study, nor was it the intention of the research, to measure shame or to make claims about the participants' emotions, but the participants' narratives raise the question for future researchers.

Adult children of LGB parents have been managing their associative stigma usually for most, if not their entire lives. Their management of their stigma in addition to their construction as an identity as a child of LGB parents is impacted by whether they have access to a community of peers who are also children of LGB parents. These communities provide a social location in which the managing of information is unnecessary, which creates a space for the participants to form bonds with others like them and become more comfortable with themselves and their identity as children of LGB parents.

The adult children in this research engaged in types of stigma management that challenge dominant narratives which reproduce social inequalities that their families are faced with. Via impression management, participants serve as "sample[s] of one," and try to represent their families in the most "positive" way possible in an attempt to counter preexisting negative ways of thinking about queer people and their families. This action is sometimes a source of pride for participants, but can also feel like an unwelcome obligation. The participants acknowledge the value, for the movement, of presenting the normal, "positive" aspects of their families, but they also question why they should have to do this and the idea of normalcy as a whole.

There is a particular subset of the population that has a more complicated relationship with impression management than the majority of the sample. A huge part of impression management for most of the participants was presenting themselves as examples of well adjusted, normal children of LGB people, which includes identifying as straight. Queer children of queer people occupy a more complicated space. They manage a

treble stigma, one of navigating and managing the reality of being the child of LGB parents, the other experiencing and managing the stigma of being queer themselves, and finally, not being able to always represent their family in a positive light due to their queerness.

The limitations of this study are the homogeneity and size of the sample. Despite efforts to recruit a diverse range of participants, this sample reflects existing literature in that the sample is made up of mostly college educated, straight, white people with lesbian mothers (Goldberg 2007a). Taking this into consideration, future research should address the questions of how race, gender, sexuality, or gender of parents affects the lived experience of adult children with LGB parents. Additionally, the discussion of community in this project could be furthered with future research that examines interactions as opposed to individual narratives.

To conclude, this study highlights not only the complex lived experience of this particular population but the intense need for contextual analysis of this population and others who experience and manage associative stigma. This research on the lived experience of adult children of LGB persons identifies the creative ways the participants manage stigma, and the multiple reasons they perceive for doing so. This identification assists in alerting stigma management research to the immediate salience of context, social identity, and subject positionality in understandings of the ways persons perceive stigma. Within traditional comparative analysis, this complex experience is flattened, and so important aspects of the lived experience of this population are left by the wayside.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A. Introductory Questions/Meaning

Tell me about your family? (Number of parents, genders, sexualities, who you lived/alternated with)

If I were to ask you what sticks out in your mind about growing up with LGB parents, what would it be? (probe this answer)

B. Interactions/Rhetoric

Tell me about the last time you told someone about your family?

Is that a typical response (from previous question)?

Do you ever describe your family differently?

Is there anything you've ever hidden because of your family?

Have you ever felt a pressure to be active politically? (potential probes: if yes, how did you figure out you need to have a position, what was that process like?)

I've heard a quote that children of LGB parents describe their lives "as an expose." Do you feel like this applies to you? (clarification: do you feel observed or in the spot light because of your family?)

B. Bullying

Were you ever bullied because of your parents?

Tell me about a time that you remember.

Tell me about the conversation you and your parents had about that incident

C. Ideas about Identity

When was the first time you realized your parents were queer?

When was the last time you felt conscious of your parents sexuality?

How/when/did your parents talk to you about sexuality?

Has having queer parents affected how you feel about yourself at all? Explain

D. Final Check-In

Tell me the best and most challenging thing about having queer parents.

Is there something else I should've asked you? Is there anything else you think is important to add?

E. Demographic Questions

What is your age?

Number of Siblings?

Parents occupation?

What is your education?

If college educated-what was your major/year if you're still enrolled?

What is your race?

What is your sexuality?

Where are you from?

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

I chose this topic because I have two lesbian moms and a gay dad. I went into this project expecting it to be empowering, stimulating, and relatively pain free. This has not been my experience. My insider status, which I anticipated to be exclusively an advantage, has been an unexpected challenge. One of the first steps to being a good feminist researcher is to acknowledge your social position, as well as the bias you might have while doing the work. I knew I had bias going into the study, but I thought that bias was my commitment, as an insider, to provide a different narrative for kids with queer parents. I am an upper middle class white woman from New York City, who was bullied as a child because of my family, which instilled a deep sense of shame that I didn't really overcome until I was in my later years of high school. I'm also queer myself, and my coming out process, both to myself and then to others, was inescapably intertwined with my parents sexuality. I knew these things about myself, but I don't think I have ever been so intensely conscious of them as when I began to do this research.

I was first confronted by my experiences and emotions regarding them when I did my first interview. While I was talking to my participant, I had an extreme, visceral emotional reaction to her story that affected my interview process. She is from an incredibly liberal part of the country, was raised in a community of other people with queer parents, and didn't even have to think about how to explain it to others until she reached high school. I, who had to explain my family to people from the age of three, found myself feeling a deep, deep sense of resentment towards her for our entire interview. It was in that moment that I realized that this project was not going to be easy at all.

As I continued to interview, I would get wrapped up in my own memories while I was talking to people, and afterwards I would attempt to sort through a mess of different feelings about experiences that I still can't articulate in a way that others will understand.

As a social scientist, I began to become frustrated that my emotions were getting in the way of my role as a researcher, and I began to doubt my ability to do the project at all. As a feminist, though, I thought there might be another way of looking at things. Emotions are so often thought of as the polar opposite to objectivity or “good science,” and as impediments to the production of knowledge. I had a long talk with my thesis advisor about how my emotions were “clouding my vision.” While they might have that affect some of the time, Alison Jaggar, in her piece, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” takes a different perspective that completely changed the way I look at my research process. She argues that emotions are key ways that we engage with and construct the world, and therefore can be helpful sources of information, even essential to doing research. She describes the positivist idea that emotions are disruptions in the pursuit of reason as “The Dumb View,” and purports that instead, emotions are intentional acts, not things that happen to us involuntarily. She also argues that the emotions that subjugated groups have in resistance to our hierarchical social structures, which she calls “outlaw emotions,” can help us to see and research the world in a different way, because they point out inequality and injustice (387). One of her final points is that the potential positive changes that could occur within research if we acknowledge emotion, particularly in ourselves as researchers, should not be ignored. She does acknowledge, however, that not all emotions can be trusted all of the time, so she posits that those feelings that can be trusted are ones which “are characteristic of a society in which all humans (and perhaps some nonhuman life too) thrive, or if they are conducive to establishing such a society” (387).

Reading this completely changed how I engaged with at my emotional responses during my research. I felt validated, because it was, in fact, my emotions as a member of group that some would call subjugated that brought me to my initial question. I also felt that it was appropriate for me to look at my research as an emotional process, and that I could

actually learn from what I was feeling. I came back to that resentment that I felt when I was talking to my first participant. Instead of feeling like that reaction could only blur my vision and negatively affect my results, I asked, what could I learn from it that could help my research process? I realized that the emotion of resentment is not one that is characteristic of a society where all people thrive, and so maybe wasn't the most productive thing I could have felt. However, it still taught me something. That gut reaction, and the memories that have been brought up during my conversations with my participants, tell me how personal and close to my heart this project is. That alone is motivation for me to strive to produce the best piece of work that I can.

Feeling those emotions also made me realize that I had expectations before I started my research that I didn't want to acknowledge. I think I expected my story to be everyone's story, and I wanted my interviews to be spaces where they got to share their experiences and I would feel validated. When that didn't happen I was saddened, disappointed and discouraged. I had made the assumption, going into things, that I knew what my participants were going to say; I just needed them to say it so that I could prove a point that I had already decided on. Feeling that resentment woke me up to acknowledging that expectation, and it has helped me move on from it. In rejecting my previous assumptions, I had to look at my results a different way. When I wasn't preoccupied with being disappointed that my participants' experiences didn't fit my narrative, I could get excited about and emphasize how diverse and complex our experiences are. That is a crucial and important observation that I might not have seen. If I hadn't had that visceral reaction, I wouldn't have been forced to acknowledge my preconceptions, and I would have carried out a piece of research that was extraordinarily disrespectful to the people who took time to speak with me about their lives. Recognizing my emotions not as hindrances but as

meaningful reactions allows me to learn from myself, and, hopefully, serve my participants in a more thoughtful, conscientious, and intentional way.

Through reframing my emotions as important, helpful, even necessary elements in my research process, I have acknowledged the important role that subjectivity plays in carrying out good research. But where does that leave objectivity? Do I throw it out the window as an unattainable, problematic ideal or do I strive to rework objectivity and make better science? Maybe I don't have to think in either/ors. Naomi Scheman offers an alternative conception of objectivity that might work as a compromise. Scheman proposes that we think less about what objectivity is, and more about what it does, or what its purpose is. She argues that the problematic notion of objectivity could be reframed as trustworthy science. This definition allows for a multiplicity of methodologies, all with the common goal of producing knowledge that can be trusted by a wide range of people from different backgrounds, biases, and experiences. I really appreciate this outlook not only because it finds somewhat of a middle ground between two perspectives I am torn between, but also because it makes a point of holding researchers and institutions accountable for the knowledge they produce. Scheman argues that if an institution promotes unjust policies or acts in a manner that furthers the subjugation of marginalized groups of people, the credibility of the science and knowledge that is produced suffers, and it ought to. When researchers are held accountable for the trustworthiness of their science, the "outlaw emotions" of marginalized groups are taken seriously, and not just brushed off because science is always objective and therefore irrefutably true. My subjective viewpoint and emotions have motivated me to yield results that are trustworthy, to my participants in particular. I feel a deep sense of accountability to them, and I would be disappointed in myself if I were to produce a piece that ignored or disregarded their experiences.

