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EXPLORING THE DISCOURSES OF MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND FATHERHOOD IN

MARRIED GAY PARENTS' RELATIONAL TALK

by

Benjamin Michael Alex Baker

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE DISCOURSES OF MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND FATHERHOOD IN
MARRIED GAY PARENTS' RELATIONAL TALK

by

Benjamin Michael Alex Baker

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017
Under the Supervision of Professor Erin Sahlstein Parcell

The historic 2015 Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*—which

extended marriage equality to every state nationwide—coupled with an increase in the number of

reported same-sex parent households in America (Gates, 2013) has resulted in greater social,

political, and academic visibility for same-sex families in recent years (Breshears & Braithwaite,

2014). Despite this increased cultural visibility, because gay parent families (GPFs) fall outside

the parameters of the traditional family model (i.e., a married heterosexual husband and wife

couple raising biological children) (Baxter, 2014a), they necessarily rely more heavily on

discourse to manage their nontraditional family identity (Galvin, 2006; 2014). To date, little is

known about how married gay male parents discursively create and sustain family identity and

how they position their families in relation to the dominant heteronormative discourses of

traditional marriage, family, and fatherhood. Framed by Baxter's (2011) relational dialectics

theory—a heuristic communication theory useful for investigating the meaning-making

process—this study explored the meaning(s) of marriage, family, and fatherhood in married gay

fathers' relational talk. I interviewed 13 married gay parent dyads twice to collect data from the

couples across time as well as member check initial results during secondary interviews. Using

contrapuntal analysis, I identified the following discourses at the three sites of meaning-making

in the data: the discourses of marriage as symbolic and marriage as practical ; the discourses of

traditional family structure and nontraditional family structure ; and the discourses of gay culture and gay fatherhood in addition to the discourses of heteronormative fatherhood and co-parenting. I argue that the couples' talk reflected discursive struggles and, in one case, transformation, to generate relational meanings for their family identities.

To

Yolanda and Alex

Herminia and Michael

Linda and Steve

Stephanie, Jason, and Christopher

Nancy and Terry

my nieces, cousins, and in-laws

-thank you all for teaching me what family means

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I. Introduction

The makeup of the familial landscape in America has recently experienced significant change; once dominated by the "traditional" family model (i.e., a heterosexual couple with biological children), census data indicates a majority of American households now identify outside the traditional family archetype (Baxter, 2014a). One such nontraditional form that has increased in visibility socially, politically, and academically in recent years is the same-sex parent family (Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014; Breshears & DiVerniero, 2015). Currently, it is estimated there are more than 3 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) parents in the United States (Gates, 2013). That figure is expected to continue to rise in the coming years as more than one-third of lesbians and 57% of gay men without kids have reported a desire to have children (Movement Advancement Project, 2011). Despite their higher profile visibility within the larger culture and an expected increase in numbers, due to their nontraditional or "alternative" status, same-sex parent families still regularly contend with issues of identity de-legitimization as they are judged against the traditional gold standard of what it "means" to be a family (Baxter, 2011; Baxter, 2014a; Breshears & DiVerniero, 2015; Lannutti, 2014b; Suter, 2015).

According to Baxter (2014a) Americans tend to position families on a "sliding scale," where those households that are joined in opposite sex legal marriage and include biological children are seen as the most legitimate. As family structures differ from these two core attributes, their "realness" is frequently called into question. For example, married heterosexual couples without kids, single-parent families, adoptive families, and unmarried parents are all family forms judged as "less-than" when compared to the traditional archetype—while they

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retain certain aspects of the traditional family, each lack *all* the components to meet the familial gold standard (Baxter, 2014).

Legally married same-sex parent families are therefore uniquely situated on the scale, sitting at several relational intersections that are simultaneously legitimated and de-legitimated. Although the couple is legally married, their marriage rests outside the traditional definition of a heterosexual union between one man and one woman. Despite having children, one (if a child is conceived through surrogacy or their spouse has a child from a previous relationship) or both (if the couple has chosen to adopt or foster) parents in same-sex households lack(s) a biological link to their kids. These two characteristics inherent in the same-sex parent family structure serve to disrupt the ideological family model while still retaining core aspects of the traditional family archetype, necessarily producing sites of discursive struggle for meaning-making surrounding various aspects of the family's identity (Baxter, 2011). Whether or not married same-sex parents resist or adopt the dominant discourses associated with heteronormative marriage and family in creating meaning remains an understudied issue in family communication research (Lannutti, 2014b; Suter, 2015).

In addition to the discursive tensions related to family and marriage, gay parent families (GPFs) are faced with another site of discursive tension that challenges the authenticity of their identities as fathers. In heterosexual families, fathers are typically expected to fulfill traditional gendered masculine roles, such as being the breadwinner (Mezey, 2015) and the parent that is "more distant, less nurturing and less involved" (Norton, Hudson, & Culley, 2013, p. 272) when it comes to the emotional development of their children. In GPFs, however, research shows that gay fathers challenge these expectations by neutralizing traditionally gendered parental responsibilities and dividing tasks based on individual strengths (Mezey, 2015). To date, few

studies have explored the lived experiences of gay male fathers and how they discursively handle the transition to parent/fatherhood (Bergman, Rubio, Green, & Padròn, 2010; Bigner, 1999; Suter, 2015; Vinjamuri, 2015) as they seek to find a balance between traditional masculine and feminine parental traits. Further, several lesbian-parent family studies (Koenig Kellas & Suter, 2012; Suter, Daas, & Bergen, 2008; Suter, Seurer, Webb, Grewe, & Koenig Kellas, 2015) have advocated for extensions of their methods and findings to GPFs.

A number of family communication studies have investigated how same-sex parents navigate family identity construction and communication (Bergen, Suter, & Daas, 2006; Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014; Breshears & DiVerniero, 2015; Koenig Kellas & Suter, 2012; Suter et al., 2008; Suter, Koenig Kellas, Webb, & Allen, 2016; Suter et al., 2015). That said, researchers must continue exploring same-sex family identity and meaning making (Suter, 2015), especially in light of the historic 2015 Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which declared that states could no longer ban same-sex couples from marrying. By making marriage equality the law of the land across the United States, the Court granted an estimated 150,000 same-sex couples living in 13 states that had previously not recognized same-sex marriage the option to legally wed (Jow, 2015) and added nationwide institutional legitimacy to married non-heterosexual families. Researchers have not studied the effects of this important cultural shift on creating and sustaining family identity for GPFs using a communication lens— how legally married GPFs talk about what gay fatherhood means in relation to the dominant, heteronormative traditional systems of meaning for marriage, family, and fatherhood is unclear.

Existing family communication research indicates that for same-sex couples, both having children and being legally married can alleviate some of the relational burdens associated with same-sex family legitimization (Lannutti, 2014b), but little is known about the meaning-making

process for married GPFs in discursively managing the dialectics of family identity—particularly in the wake of the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling. Moreover, family communication scholarship has overlooked the family identity work that occurs in male-male gay parent households. I sought to fill both gaps by exploring married gay parents' talk regarding the legitimization of their family, internally and externally, across three sites of discursive struggle: marriage, family identity, and fatherhood. In service of these goals, I conducted two dyadic, semi-structured interviews with each couple and analyzed the transcripts using Baxter's (2011) relational dialectics theory (RDT)—a heuristic theory aimed at identifying relational meaning-making that occurs in the interplay of discourses.

I begin with an overview of family identity communication and the role discourse plays in crafting identity for same-sex families. Next, I explore the extant literature addressing dominant cultural discourses and challenges to the three sites of discursive meaning-making and present my research questions. Then, I offer an explanation of RDT and why it serves as a useful lens for my study. For the remainder of the report, I share my study's method, findings, and conclusions.

II. Literature Review

Family Identity and Discourse

A family's identity, or the collective identity that reflects a family's shared set of values and meanings (Soliz, Ribarsky, Harrigan, & Tye-Williams, 2010), is a crucial component of the relational and social fabric that binds individual members together. Family members communicatively "perform" their identity to delineate their family boundaries from others and demonstrate their own membership within the familial group (Harris & Gonzàlez, 2015). Family identities also contribute to the development of individual identities, as members draw from communication with each other in deciding who they are and what they believe (Harris & Gonzàlez, 2015). All families (traditional and nontraditional), to some extent, create their collective family identity through discourse (Galvin, 2006; 2014).

According to Galvin (2014), a family's identity discursively manifests in two ways. First, family members tend to develop communal, familiar discursive patterns which they then use to reinforce familial bonds, such as telling family origin stories, talking about meaningful family rituals, engaging in unique naming practices (e.g., nicknames), and creating rules for member behavior. Second, individuals will enact strategic messages to talk about the form their family takes and their place in it—these messages help to illustrate the members' relational ties (their "family-ness") for family members and non-family members alike. For example, parents in visibly adoptive families might consider how they will talk about differences in members' physical appearance, their adopted children's birth parent(s), and the narrative of the adoption process (Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010).

Complex (or nontraditional) family structures require more discursive work than traditional ones (Galvin, 2006; 2014). As families deviate from the traditional cultural markers of

connectivity (i.e., blood and/or law), members "find themselves enacting a wide range of discourse strategies to create, maintain, reconfigure and/or disconfirm their overall family identity and/or specific relational ties" (Galvin, 2014, p. 18). When outsiders directly or indirectly challenge the validity of familial relationships, or insiders voice concerns or curiosity regarding their own status in the family, members utilize discourse to develop and maintain their identity as a connected social group as well as create and strengthen family meanings (Galvin, 2014). Discursive practices nontraditional families often participate in to express or, in the face of internal or external adversity, re-establish family identities and meanings include recounting birth stories, taking part in family rituals, discussing secrets about family identity, coming up with unique family words, navigating rules about how identity will be discussed, choosing symbolic names, and crafting family stories that can be shared with one another or outsiders (Galvin, 2014). For instance, in their investigation of nonbiological lesbian mother identity construction, Bergen et al. (2006) found that the nonbiological parents chose meaningful address terms for their themselves (e.g., Momma T and Momma M) and strategically used last names to create connections between children and nonbiological mothers. Through these types of discursive practices, members can reify the nuclear family structure as ideal (by privileging dominant familial discourses) and/or create alternative, nontraditional meanings of family identity (by privileging marginalized familial discourses) in their efforts to legitimize their own family form (Baxter, 2014a).

Maintaining family identity discursively is especially important for less traditionally formed families during periods of relational stress because their familial connections (sometimes not originally linked by blood or law) may become somewhat ambiguous, leading to unease regarding social support and inclusion (Galvin, 2006). Regularly expressing family identity is

also vital for parents in nontraditional families, as failing to do so can lead to feelings of shame for children when they notice the differences between their family makeup and that of the "ideal" mainstream family (Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014). Research has shown that lesbian parents, for example, respond to their children's questions about family identity by explaining the diversity of family formation, and consistently model a strong sense of normalcy and family pride as their children are growing up to steel them from outsiders' challenges to legitimacy (Breshears, 2010).

Continuing to investigate micro-level familial processes, like the discursive creation of family identity at a relational level, benefits communication studies "given its potential to unpack how culture and society interpenetrate familial interactions, processes, and practices" (Suter et al., 2015, p. 481). Additionally, by studying a diverse range of alternative family types and shedding light on the ways nontraditional families discursively construct their identities, communication scholars can widen the narrow margins for what family configurations are considered socially legitimate (Baxter, 2014a). Doing so aids in validating the identities of nontraditional families (e.g., GPFs) who have historically been marginalized in the public sphere (Baxter, 2014a). Further, Galvin (2006) argues that as nontraditional familial structures continue to grow more diverse, family communication scholars will require new models for describing and studying their relational ties and identities. In an effort to contribute to the growing body of literature surrounding nontraditional family forms, provide discursive insight into the lived experiences of gay male fathers, and offer a potential resource for same-sex parent identity management, I sought to understand the meaning-making that occurs within married GPFs. More specifically, I was interested in the management of discursive tension at three sites of family identity: marriage, family, and fatherhood. I begin each of the following sections with an

exploration of dominant cultural discourses surrounding the meanings of marriage, family, and fatherhood. Then, I relate relevant extant identity research to these three sites of discourse.

Discourses of (Same-Sex) Marriage

Traditionally, the institution of marriage has functioned as *the* primary means for the formation of family, often facilitating numerous familial social arrangements including (a) parameters for sexual relationships, child rearing, finances, living situations, and household responsibilities, (b) the bonds between other families, and (c) the decision partners make to share their life with the person they love (Mezey, 2015). The Western notion of "traditional" marriage is a fairly recent cultural construct that can be traced back to the 1950s and 60s (Coontz, 2005). Fueled by widespread enthusiasm for family stability in a booming post-World War II America, men and women married younger and at increasingly higher rates than previous decades. Individuals began to define almost every aspect of their identities though marriage—matrimony was viewed as the start of an individual's true passage into adulthood. Legal marriage became closely linked with having children, served as the social mechanism that propelled couples forward through the various stages of their lives, and was viewed as a bond expected to remain unbroken until death (Coontz, 2005). In fact, marriage had developed such social significance that it became a cultural measuring stick of moral decency, in that the culture classified unmarried men as deviant, childlike, self-obsessed, and psychologically defective (Coontz, 2005). Coontz (2005) argues that, during this period, the belief "that everyone should marry and form a male breadwinner family was like a steamroller that crushed every alternative view" (p. 229).

While the dominant discourse of traditional heteronormative marriage continues to resonate throughout the culture today, attitudes and approaches to matrimony changed

significantly over the latter half of the 20th century in America (Coontz, 2005). According to

Coontz (2005) divorce grew in popularity in the 1970s and 80s and remarriages declined while

alternatives to marriage began to emerge. By the year 1998, on average, 40% of women age 25

to 30 were unmarried, unmarried couples with children lived together at increasingly higher

rates, and the co-mixing of traditional gender roles/expectations in the household began to level

off, hitting a saturation point. Coontz claims that the traditional male-as-primary income earner

remains a stable and present structure in modern American marriages; however, the dual income

family model now enjoys widespread approval among households. This cultural repositioning of

marriage over the last 60 to70 years demonstrates that not only does the traditional

heteronormative understanding of what marriage means still permeate society, but also that

nontraditional alternatives to family formation (and deconstruction) are more readily permitted.

Within this discursive struggle, the meaning-making of modern marriage and its relational

impact on romantic couples and their families takes place for heterosexual individuals; but, how

did legal same-sex marriage go from unthinkable to universal, and what does same-sex marriage

communication research tell us about gay and lesbian couples' perception of matrimony?

By the end of the 1960s, traditional heteronormative matrimony had been firmly

established as the dominant discourse of marriage, but the attraction to the institution of legal

marriage was not limited to straight couples. When the Stonewall uprising broke out in New

York in 1969, rioters scuffling with police could be heard shouting that they had the right to

legally marry and in the 1970s same-sex couples started petitioning for marriage rights in court

(Cleves, 2015). In response to increasing legal recognition of partnerships for same-sex couples

over the last third of the 20th century, Congress established the Defense of Marriage Act

(DOMA) in 1996 (Wolff, 2017). Essentially, DOMA permitted individual states to decide their

own same-sex marriage laws, but limited federal recognition of marriage to one man and one woman. On November 18th, 2003 Massachusetts became the first state in America to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples (Lannutti, 2014a), and, over the course of the next decade, other states held referendums on whether to legalize same-sex marriage as battles waged in court. In 2013, the United States Supreme Court ruled that DOMA was unconstitutional, meaning the federal definition of marriage was no longer confined to opposite sex couples (Wolff, 2017). Then, in June of 2015, the Court heard the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, ultimately deciding that the Constitution guaranteed same-sex couples across America the same marriage rights and privileges afforded to heterosexual couples.

Beyond the vast legal implications of the Supreme Court's ruling in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, extant research indicates that the social significance of the Supreme Court's decision in legitimizing same-sex families by granting them the opportunity to marry cannot be understated (Lannutti, 2014a; 2014b). Although same-sex couples had been using a variety of meaningful symbols and rituals for years to demonstrate their love and commitment to one another—such as joint home ownership, commitment ceremonies, and civil unions or domestic partnerships—these expressions often lacked the legal benefits and social/cultural meanings associated with marriage and family (Lannutti, 2007; 2013). Importantly, Lannutti (2014b) points out that same-sex marriage "is the only opportunity for same-sex couples to institutionalize their commitment and to express family identity using the *exact same mechanism* as their different-sex couple counterparts" (p. 53, emphasis in original). However, it is unclear if married gay male couples view their own matrimonial union as a bond that holds different meanings (and privileges marginalized discourses) in contrast to those associated with traditional marriage.

Previous studies demonstrate that legally recognized same-sex marriage can change relational identity and communication for same-sex couples. For example, Lannutti (2007) interviewed twenty-six married or engaged lesbian and bi-sexual female couples via an online instant messaging program and analyzed the data from a grounded theory approach. Lannutti identified four separate, yet interconnected themes across the transcripts related to respondents' self-images, romantic relationships, social network relationships, and relationships with the LGBTQ community. Participants reported that legal recognition affirmed their sexual identity, forced them to reflect on what the "wife" role means, strengthened (and challenged) their relationships, and resulted in varying degrees of support, pushback, and invisibility from their families-of-origin, friends, and the LGBTQ community. In some cases, couples resisted what they perceived as the conventional, heteronormative nature of legal marriage by referring to each other as "spouse" or "partner" as opposed to "wife." Older gay and lesbian couples interviewed in a similar investigation conducted by Lannutti (2011) talked about the positives and negatives of same-sex marriage. She asked thirty-six same-sex couples (married, engaged, or unmarried in a long-term relationship) about their overall reaction to same-sex marriage, how same-sex marriage has impacted their relationships and/or social networks, and their decision to get legally married or not. Some respondents reported appreciating the financial and relational security afforded by marriage as well as the increased personal and political recognition they experienced; yet, others expressed concerns over the mainstream nature of getting married, argued that couples might put themselves in physical danger due to their greater visibility, and viewed marriage as an unnecessary step in their relationships. Using Communication Privacy Management as a theoretical framework, Lannutti (2013) also explored privacy boundary management between married or engaged same-sex couples and their families-of-origin after

deciding to legally wed. After interviewing 48 gay and lesbian couples twice through a popular online instant messenger platform, she employed an open coding method to locate themes in her data. Participants and their families talked about negotiating rules for privacy, news sharing, and relationship details as they dealt with issues of identity and information ownership. In 2009, Ramos, Goldberg, and Badgett surveyed 1,608 married same-sex individuals from Massachusetts five years after that state became the first to issue marriage licenses. A vast majority of the men (93%) said they decided to marry for love and commitment while 85% reported that the legal recognition of their relationship was also a significant factor. Overall, results showed that participants felt more committed to each other, felt more accepted by their communities, and believed their children were happier because of their marriage. They also reported a higher likelihood of having come out.

Based on extant research, legal marriage holds meaning for same-sex couples and their families, and, as such, the relational difficulties and successes afforded by the 2015 nationwide marriage equality ruling demand greater attention from family communication scholars. To date, however, much of the existing communication research has surveyed the meaning of marriage within lesbian relationships, while the meaning-making process for married gay couples (who also have children) remains an unexplored area.

Discourses of (Same-Sex) Family

Family is perhaps the most ubiquitous of all interpersonal relationships: humans have an ingrained desire for joining social groups and must rely on some form of familial support throughout infancy and childhood, making the continued study of family communication an important endeavor (Floyd, Mikkelson, & Judd, 2006). Yet, how does the lay person define family, and where does our cultural understanding of what constitutes a legitimate family

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structure come from? According to Coontz (2016), much like marriage, culturally dominant discourses commonly associated with the traditional family archetype are rooted in mid-twentieth century nostalgia. In the 1950s, American families adhered to what she calls the "Ozzie and Harriet" model; that is, a father as sole financial provider, a mother as homemaker, and fully dependent biological children. The decade was unmistakably pro-family: marriage grew in popularity, divorce rates dwindled, birth rates soared, and a stable family was almost universally exalted as the bedrock of society (Coontz, 2016). Concurrently, Coontz says, the post-war American economy experienced incredible growth, creating better wages, an expanded middle class, and increased rates of home ownership. Because of this "golden era" in American history, the traditional family structure became linked with societal stability and prosperity and continues to inform Americans' lay understanding of what family "means" (Baxter et al., 2009; Baxter, 2014a).

Scholarly conceptions of family and familial structures are often inclusive and broadly defined in comparison to the traditional "gold standard" characterization (Floyd et al., 2006). Floyd and colleagues offer three lenses scholars may use when engaging in family communication research: sociolegal, biogenetic, and role. The former two lenses are aligned with the cultural understanding of the traditional family form. Sociolegal, for example, views the primary marker of family as the legal recognition of familial relationships. Any relationships not officially sanctioned by a governing power would be deemed nonfamilial. Similarly, the biogenetic lens narrowly classifies familial connections based on biological or reproductive links—individuals who do not share genetic materials, therefore, are also considered nonfamilial. The role lens, however, allows for a more nontraditional approach to investigating family relationships. Through this lens, relationships are considered familial in nature "to the extent that

relational partners feel and act like family; this can involve behavioral patterns of interdependence and the provision of support, as well as emotional attachments of love and intimacy" (Floyd et al., 2006, p. 27). Essentially, the role lens posits that families are forged through meaningful communication—individuals who nurture, provide care for, and support each other are considered family. Importantly, Floyd et al. point out that these lenses are not mutually exclusive; that is, scholars are likely to find that families define themselves through both traditional (sociolegal/biogenetic) and nontraditional characteristics depending on their respective structures and identities. Viewing the lenses in this manner is an apt parallel for the current investigation: although the traditional gold standard family archetype is still culturally privileged, as nontraditional family forms become more visible, members must manage any non-legal/non-biological familial relationships and identities discursively against that dominant ideology using a role lens.

Baxter et al. (2009) provided evidence that the traditional form *remains* culturally dominant in their investigation into lay conceptions of familial structures, albeit with some signs that those definitions may be expanding. The authors surveyed 181 college students and found that respondents positioned married heterosexual couples with children as having the highest family status. However, the results also suggested a potential shift in the conceptualization of family relative to parental sexual identity—participants in Baxter et al.'s study indicated that "homosexual partners with a child were not judged to be less of a family than were heterosexual partners with a child" (p. 187). This finding demonstrates that for some Americans, lay perceptions of what constitutes family are becoming more culturally inclusive of different family types, especially same-sex parent families.

Despite this encouraging trend, family communication research shows that same-sex families are still positioned as nontraditional on Baxter's (2014) sliding scale, and must engage in additional discursive work to communicate their family identity internally and externally when compared to those cast as traditional (Baxter, 2014a; Galvin 2006; 2014). For example, a common practice employed by same-sex families to build family identity revolves around naming (Suter, 2016). Because names act as tangible linguistic representations of familial bonds, same-sex couples can use naming to communicate the authenticity of their family relationships when biological ties are partially or fully absent (Suter, 2016). Lesbian parents in Suter et al.'s (2008) study of family identity indicated that having the same last name with each other and their children legitimated their family's connectedness and conveyed a sense of commitment to others. One couple provided an example of the meaningfulness of naming, describing how even something small like receiving a package or card addressed to the family name validated their identity. In addition to naming, Suter et al.'s participants reported that family rituals were critically important. The mothers reported that attending same-sex parenting groups assisted in normalizing the lesbian family form for their kids while simultaneously reaffirming their own feelings of family togetherness. Taking part in otherwise seemingly mundane family outings like going for walks, shopping, and attending church together acted as meaningful ways for same-sex parent families to "do family" together and spur important identity building conversations with strangers and each other. In this way, because the parents used rituals and discourse they believed as "normal" for creating relational cohesion, they privileged the traditional family model in their efforts to manage their family identity with their kids. Participants did not create alternative family bonding activities or engage in nontraditional discursive tactics that set them

apart from the traditional standard—they embraced the ordinary to normalize their family structure.

Same-sex parents can also use outsiders' challenges to their identity as opportunities for discursively reinforcing familial bonds and meanings. For example, lesbian mothers interviewed by Breshears (2010) talked about how peers at school had told their children that families do not have two moms—they need to have a mother and a father present. Participants explained to their kids that families can come in many forms, resisting the discourse of the traditional nuclear family. Mothers in the study also described challenges to identity they received from other family members (especially grandparents), who told the children that they disapproved of homosexuality and characterized the parents' identities as immoral. Once again, these challenges to the families' identities provided an opportunity for the mothers to talk with their children about how being "different" is not "wrong." In a similar investigation, Koenig Kellas and Suter (2012) spoke to lesbian mothers about discursive challenges same-sex families often encounter when communicating their identity. Participants said that others had questioned their familial roles by comparing them to heterosexual family forms, that they had encountered parents who refused to let their children spend time together, and that they had heard individuals voice concerns about the mothers' kids not having a "male influence" in their lives. In some cases, extended family members refused to recognize a mother's partner or the couple's children as members of the family. Additionally, parents in the study witnessed a number of hostile nonverbal reactions when someone noticed their family was lesbian parented, such as silence, ignoring, purposefully keeping distance in physical space, and dirty looks. The lesbian mothers discursively countered these types of challenges to their familial identity in a variety of ways including directly pointing out others' misunderstandings or insensitivities, talking about their

family relationships with those who questioned them, and justifying their family structure by describing the love the family members felt for each other.

Although Suter et al. (2008), Breshears (2010), and Koenig Kellas and Suter (2012) all offer important insight into the discursive construction of family identity family for same-sex parents, each of their investigations focused on lesbian-headed families. Currently, whether gay male married fathers communicatively build and maintain their family identities in a similar fashion, and if they face the same kinds of discursive challenges as those experienced by lesbian parent families, is unclear.

Discourses of (Gay) Fatherhood

The role(s) of fathers within the context of family can be broadly defined as "how men perceive, live out and enact practices of fathering while doing so within the larger political, social, cultural, symbolic, ideological, and discursive institutions of fatherhood" (Doucet, 2007, p. 192). But what are these institutions, and how has American culture historically positioned fathers and their role in the heteronormative family structure? According to Popenoe (2004), up until the 1960s, fathers in America held a position centered around masculine dominance in the family based on their higher levels of earning power, whereas culture cast women as economically dependent full-time housewives. Although both parents had a hand in raising their kids, mothers served as the principal source of education and emotional support for the children. As a result of this longstanding cultural arrangement, the traditional discourse of fatherhood in heterosexual households became closely tied to a man's role as the family's "breadwinner," meaning that the culture expected men to provide financially for their family while women oversaw a majority of the childrearing and homemaker responsibilities (McGill, 2014).

Then, in the 1960s, as the baby boom generation started marrying, expectations for traditional gendered roles in the family began to fade (Popenoe, 2004). The culture no longer held men and women to their breadwinner and housemaker roles, respectively. Instead, families relied on a kind of "social androgyny" that required a dual-income and more shared parenting duties between husband and wife (Popenoe, 2004). This conceptualization of a more balanced fatherhood role is what McGill (2014) calls the "new father" identity. This emerging understanding of heteronormative fatherhood suggests that modern-day dads "are expected to be more equal partners in parenting (and other household work), spending time nurturing children and performing both interactive and physical caregiving activities" (McGill, 2014, p. 1090). Recent research suggests that while the breadwinner model of fatherhood has been in decline since the 1960s and the new father role is on the rise, many present-day heterosexual couples continue to see a "retraditionalization" of stereotypical gender roles during their first pregnancy or immediately following the birth of their first child (Hofner, Schadler, & Richter, 2011). This retraditionalization sees men more focused on their jobs amid concerns of providing financially for their families while women take less paid work and make use of parental leave, thus effectively re-privileging traditional father and mother parental roles and expectations.

Nevertheless, the number of fathers taking greater responsibility in childcare duties continues to rise, fathers are spending more time with their children than ever before, and fathers are more interested in building increasingly meaningful relationships with their kids (Hofner et al., 2011). Because modern dads often strive to find a balance between providing financial support and emotional support for their families when becoming parents, they "engage in contradictory discourses that either value or reject their involvement in caretaking practices and favor contradictory forms of fatherly identity" (Hofner et al., p. 670). Essentially, fathers struggle

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with traditional expectations of fatherhood (breadwinner) and nontraditional expectations (new father) as they seek a comfortable identity as parents. In addition to navigating these complex facets of fatherhood and identity, gay men who wish to start a family are forced to deal with discursive challenges heterosexual men are unlikely to encounter due to longstanding cultural beliefs regarding homosexuality.

Historically, the idea that a man could be gay and a parent was something of an impossibility in the minds of many Americans (Bigner, 1999). Society viewed gas men as inappropriate masculine role models for children (especially boys) who would likely to molest or abuse their kids; the gay community sometimes ostracized gay parents since they failed to "fit in" with mainstream gay culture—a culture that idealized being single and childless (Bigner, 1999). Even if a gay man desired parenthood, they had limited options—gay men often (a) entered into heterosexual relationships for the purpose of having children, (b) struggled with the foster/adoption process, (c) worked with children in an official capacity in lieu of parenthood, or (d) spent time with the children of relatives or friends (Langdridge, 2013). In fact, for years the idea that gay men could not be fathers was so pervasive that many gay men and their families "just assumed becoming a parent was not even an option" (Langdridge, 2013, p. 729).

Today, while gay men increasingly expect fatherhood as a part of their life trajectory due to the growing diversity of visible family forms, improvements in available reproductive technologies, and greater cultural acceptance of sexual minorities, the gay parent identity still stands in opposition to the dominant discourse of parenthood that privileges heteronormativity (Goldberg, Downing, & Moyer, 2012). Goldberg et al. (2012) point out that this heteronormative sentiment, too, continues to bleed into modern day gay culture as gay men who want fatherhood are subject to ridicule by other gay men who see parenting as a heterosexual assimilation and/or

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a foolish choice that results in lost individual freedoms. As a result of the discursive tensions created by lingering beliefs in the incongruous nature of being a gay male and a parent—within mainstream heteronormative culture and traditional gay culture—studies have shown that gay fathers face unique relational challenges and successes.

For instance, Vinjamuri (2015) interviewed 20 gay adoptive fathers regarding their young children's encounters with heteronormativity. Parents talked about the ways that they identified with their children, empathized with the kids being "different," and tried to prepare them for difficult experiences knowing they would be growing up in an overwhelmingly heteronormative society. However, despite having concerns that their children would face stigmatization and discrimination because of their family form, the fathers supported their kids when they expressed a desire to openly talk about their family structure with their parents and their peers. In this way, the participants resisted the traditional dominant discourse of fathers-as-distant and stoic communicators, and instead embraced a more nurturing, expressive role. That said, gay fathers may also adopt meanings associated with traditional father/parenthood to strengthen bonds with families-of-origin or co-workers, as evidenced by Bergman et al.'s (2010) investigation.

Bergman and colleagues (2010) spoke to 40 gay couples who had conceived through surrogacy about their experiences transitioning to parenthood. Similar to heterosexual couples, some respondents reported losing friendships after becoming parents, as their single friends felt there was too little time to socialize with the fathers and that their values and common goals had changed. However, the fathers also indicated that becoming parents improved their communication in the workplace, especially with co-workers who also had kids. Additionally, a majority of the participants said that relationships with their families of origin grew stronger, mirroring the experiences of heterosexual parents—fathers had more contact and increased visits

with their own parents, and felt their relatives recognized them as more of a "family." In this way, the privileges linked with the dominant discourse of parenthood manifested in the fathers' work and familial relationships and permitted increased intimacy because of their elevated family status. This demonstrates that gay fathers may embrace certain aspects of traditional fatherhood in order to "normalize" their family experience internally and externally; however, the way gay dads talk about their identity and how they speak to larger cultural notions of fatherhood and gay culture is unknown.

Continuing to study paternal experiences (regardless of sexual identity) in the modern family context provides "insight into the development of gender role attitudes, sensitivity, supportiveness, accessibility, and responsibility may afford particularly useful windows on the development of fatherhood" (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000, p. 131). While the extant research previously covered sheds light on some of the important discursive identity work associated with being a gay parent, no previous investigations have explored how same-sex male couples talk about what fatherhood *means*. Further, the experiences of gay male fathers remain an understudied issue in the discipline of family communication (Suter, 2015).

The three previous sections provided an overview of the dominant discourses surrounding three aspects of family identity: marriage, family, and fatherhood, in addition to relevant existing family communication research. To explore the discursive struggles for meaning that occur in GPFs surrounding these three sites of family identity, I now turn to an explication of RDT, a theory "meant to sensitize the researcher to certain processes and features of communication that facilitate understanding of the dialogic nature of relating" (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 279). RDT was particularly apt for the current investigation because it

accounts for idealized cultural discourses (e.g., the notions of heteronormative marriage, traditional family, and straight male fatherhood) and attends to how individuals either reproduce dominant calcified systems of meaning or create new ones through their relational talk (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). In the following section, I provide an in-depth review of RDT's theoretical journey and extant family communication research examples guided by an RDT lens.

Theoretical Framework

Formally introduced by Baxter and Montgomery (1996), and revised by Baxter (2011), RDT is an interpersonal communication theory aimed at uncovering the meaning-making that occurs in relational talk. Although the conceptualization of relational dialectics—the belief that reality is constructed via the interplay of opposing forces—is rooted in the historical teachings and writings of many notable intellectuals (e.g., Socrates, Plato, Lao Tzu, Kant, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx), Baxter drew from Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's twentieth century works on "dialogism" for the crux of RDT's theoretical underpinnings (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), Bakhtin posited that dialogues are simultaneously differentiated and fused as speakers in conversation attempt to connect their respective individual perspectives and retain the uniqueness of those perspectives at the same time. Speakers try to unify their viewpoints when communicating with one another but do so through dissimilar voices. For Bakhtin, this meant that all social processes are the result of an ongoing struggle between forces of unity and difference, producing a non-autonomous consciousness that is created through social interaction (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In other words, from a dialogic perspective, reality is created, sustained, and re-shaped through talk with others. Further, the self is never compartmentalized or static; instead, individual identities are always linked to relational and cultural meanings.

Broadly, Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) original version of RDT (commonly referred to as RDT 1.0) directed researchers to locate "contradictions" of meanings that occur between individuals in interpersonal relationships (e.g., spouses, friends, romantic partners, family). Although these contradictions can vary, they tend to revolve around three core oppositions in relational talk: separateness-connectedness, certainty-uncertainty, and openness-closedness. Many of the studies guided by RDT 1.0 located and explicated these (or similar) types of contradictions in their respective data sets to make sense of a variety of relational struggles and successes, often within the family context. For instance, Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) explored 50 transcribed interviews with college-aged stepchildren about stepfamily communication and nonresidential parenting using a RDT 1.0 lens. They discovered two sets of contradictions, including parenting-nonparenting and openness-closedness. The first contradiction focused on participants' desire for, yet resistance to, the awkward and challenging communication experiences with their nonresidential parent. For the latter contradiction, participants talked about wanting a more open and honest relationship with the nonresidential parent, but felt the process was problematic and segmented. In another example, Toller and Braithwaite (2009) interviewed 37 bereaved parents regarding partner communication after losing a child. The authors found that respondents experienced contradiction in grieving as individuals and a couple (separateness-connectedness) and being open and closed with one another through the grieving process. Finally, Sahlstein, Maguire, and Timmerman (2009) spoke to 50 army wives regarding their husbands' deployments, and found three discursive contradictions in participants' talk across three phases of the deployment period, including uncertainty-certainty (pre-deployment), autonomy-connection (deployment), and openness-closedness (reunion). The researchers determined the wives frequently utilized a praxis of denial to cope with the relational strains they

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endured due to their husbands' military careers. Each of these studies (and many others like them) showcased RDT 1.0's unique, groundbreaking ability to study interpersonal communication from a dialogic multi-vocal perspective and provide insight into the often-contradictory nature of human relationships.

Despite RDT 1.0's meaningful contributions to the communication literature, Leslie Baxter (one of the theory's primary authors) felt certain aspects needed greater clarification and/or explication. As such, she released a book outlining an updated version in 2011, stressing that, "A useful theory, after all, doesn't live off its past" (Baxter, 2011, p. 1). This new articulation of RDT (deemed by Baxter as version 2.0) differed from its predecessor in five significant ways. First, RDT 2.0 would use "discursive struggle" and "competing discourses" instead of contradictions to describe the tension inherent in the meaning-making process. Second, RDT's unit of analysis—called utterances—are now situated on a larger utterance chain to underscore the interconnected nature of the theory. Third, rather than viewing discourses as mostly oppositional, the interplay/interpenetration of competing discourses was the focus of RDT 2.0 investigations. Baxter (2011) argues that it is within this discursive interplay that meaning is generated for relational parties. Fourth, RDT 2.0 places a greater emphasis on the imbalance of power in discursive interplay. This is an especially meaningful turn for the theory, as RDT 2.0 was now situated as a critical theory for communication scholarship. Lastly, Baxter (2011) introduced a unique type of discourse analysis for RDT investigations, which she called contrapuntal analysis (a term originally coined by Bakhtin) that offers researchers helpful tools for locating and analyzing discursive struggles in their data. The current study employed an RDT 2.0 (hereafter simply referred to as RDT) approach to explore the meaning-making that occurs in married gay parents' relational talk. What follows is an in-depth explanation of the tenets of

RDT and examples of how the updated version has been applied specifically within the context of family communication research.

RDT uses the utterance chain as the unit of analysis for uncovering discourses—or systems of meaning (Baxter, 2011). Instead of looking at turns of talk as isolated acts of communication or direct representations of a speaker's inner thoughts, RDT views the utterance as "a profoundly intertextual social unit" where "already uttered discourses voiced by others come together with discourses anticipated in others' responses" (p. 50). In this way, meanings are constructed in the moment and linked together; they are informed by the dialectical past and inform the dialectical future. Baxter (2011) identifies four distinct links situated in every utterance: distal already-spokens, proximal already-spokens, proximal not-yet-spokens, and distal not-yet-spokens. Distal already-spokens are utterances swirling about in the larger culture. These macro-level discourses inform our general understanding what family, brother, daughter, parent, grandparent culturally "means." Proximal already-spokens are relationship-specific utterances between the speaker and hearer of the past, which interpenetrate with utterances in the present. At this link, the relational experiences and interactions that two or more parties have had influence how those individuals communicate in the moment—spouses discussing financial concerns are not just influenced by cultural expectations for spousal communication, they are also influenced by any previous conversations they have had about money in the context of their relationship. In the distal not-yet-spoken link, the speaker is trying to anticipate how generalized others (what Bakhtin termed the superaddressee) might respond to their utterance. Adoptive parents conversing over how/if they will share their adoptive status with other parents in their child's class are speaking to perceived possible issues that might arise based on larger cultural judgements about family structures. Finally, proximal not-yet-spokens are also influenced by

perceived responses, though these imagined responses are found at the relational level between the speaker and listener. A son telling his father that he "will not like what his most recent report card looks like" is attempting to soften the blow of bad news as he anticipates his dad's reaction. Individuals, their communication, and their identities are never seen as autonomous, compartmentalized, or predetermined through the RDT lens—these discursive sites of struggle are all interconnected through the four links of the utterance chain (Baxter, 2011).

In addition to the connected nature of communication, RDT calls the researcher's attention to the imbalance of power in the discursive struggles responsible for meaning making (Baxter, 2011). According to RDT, power does not reside within an individual or group; instead it resides in discourses which have "the discursive capacity to define social reality" (p. 124). Discourses located closer to the center of the discursive struggle are referred to as centripetal, whereas discourses moving away from the center towards the margins are called centrifugal. Centripetal discourses are characterized as normal, natural, or legitimated and act as the baseline for evaluating whether or not other discourses are considered deviant, whereas centrifugal discourses, are positioned as non-normative, unnatural, and are delegitimized. Importantly, centripetal discourses claim a privileged, more powerful position over centrifugal discourses.

RDT also holds that there is a continuum of interplay for these discursive struggles for power, ranging from monologue on the far left pole to dialogic on the far right (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Monologues are so dominant they silence any sort of alternative discourses, forcing meanings to remain stagnant and unwavering, while dialogues have the capacity to transform meanings. Generally speaking, most discursive struggles fall somewhere in between the two poles and are considered either diachronic or synchronic. In diachronic interplay, one discourse is privileged at one point in time while another, competing discourse is privileged at a

different point or in an entirely different context (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). In synchronic polemic interplay, multiple discourses occur at the same time. Put simply, diachronic interplay occurs across parts of the utterance chain versus synchronic interplay which takes place in a single utterance.

RDT-based studies, such as this one, tend to employ a data analytic technique called contrapuntal analysis developed by Baxter (2011), which offers researchers useful tools for investigating the meaning-making process in relational talk. Contrapuntal analysis is a unique type of discourse analysis focusing on "the interplay of contrasting discourses (i.e., systems of meaning points of view, world views) in spoken or written texts" (Baxter, 2011, p. 152). After investigators identify the discourses in their respective data, they seek to understand how these discourses speak to broader cultural already-spoken and not-yet-spoken systems of meaning in addition to how they are used to create meaning in the moment within specific relational contexts (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2010). Identifying discourses for contrapuntal analysis begins with a thematic analysis of participants' talk as the researcher pays special attention to both manifest themes (what is actually said) and latent themes (what is implied) (Baxter, 2011). As Baxter (2011) points out, locating manifest themes in the data is a rather straight-forward process— speakers explicitly introduce discourses into their talk through direct and indirect reported speech. Direct reported speech refers to quotes that can be attributed to the speaker themselves, whereas indirect reported speech refers to second-hand quotes or paraphrases the speaker includes in their utterance. Baxter notes, however, that finding latent themes in data is potentially challenging. She recommends starting a contrapuntal analysis with a comprehensive understanding of the discourses surrounding around a given subject or relationship type (e.g., cultural discourses of marriage, fatherhood, motherhood, family), but also an open mind. While

it is likely the researcher will be able to identify dominant discourses in participants' talk, they also need to remain intellectually vigilant and nimble—an investigator cannot know for certain what hidden themes will emerge during a contrapuntal analysis, so malleability is key.

Much like its previous incarnation, the updated version of RDT has been an extremely useful framework for exploring relational meaning making and family communication. For example, Baxter, Norwood, Asbury, and Scharp (2014) analyzed 100 stories posted to an adoption information website to determine how the users made sense of their adoption experiences. Baxter and colleagues found discursive struggles in the parents' narratives that characterized adoption as a worthwhile, smooth, viable alternative to pregnancy. Further, the stories stressed that adoptions are not private events between a husband and wife couple; rather, they are communal "kinning" endeavors that require assistance from biological and nonbiological relations to achieve parenthood. Norwood (2012) used a RDT framework to discursively explore transgender family communication. She interviewed 37 family members of trans-identified persons who had taken one or more steps toward transitioning. Participants made sense of the transition experience by positioning it a "living death" resulting in feelings of grief that they then attempted to either endure, overcome, or avoid altogether. Moore, Kienzle, and Grady (2015) spoke with 27 married heterosexual individuals who had cohabitated before engagement. Employing an RDT lens, Moore et al. conducted a contrapuntal analysis to identify the discourses inherent in the participants' relational talk. The authors discovered an overarching discursive struggle between discourses of tradition and nontradition centered around emergent themes of pragmatism, risk, romance, partnership, privacy, and revealment during the cohabitation process. Collectively, RDT investigations like these demonstrate the ways in which family communication is often wrought with discursive interplay that creates contested systems

of meaning (i.e., adoption and biological ties; grief and acceptance/support; expectations for tradition and nontradition) in relation to the gold standard, nuclear family model.

Suter et al.'s (2015) study of the interplay of discourses regarding motherhood in female-female co-mother relationships is most similar to the current investigation in terms of family context. Suter and colleagues discovered that the mothers spoke to two competing discourses in their talk: that of essential motherhood and that of queer motherhood. Essential motherhood framed the role of being a mother more traditionally; that is, biological ties are necessary for legitimate familial relationships, children can only have one true mother in their lives, children need a father's presence for proper development, and biological motherhood is moral motherhood. On the other hand, the discourse of queer motherhood rejected and resisted each of the characteristics of essential motherhood in kind (biological ties are not necessary, children can have more than one mother, etc.). Ultimately, Suter et al. concluded that while the discourse of essential motherhood still acted as the centered, centripetal cultural discourse, the mothers privileged the discourse of queer motherhood as far more important in their relational meaning making. The latter discourse disrupted the traditional patriarchal family form, instead championing the ability of two women to raise kids without the presence of a father.

While Suter et al. (2015) provided important findings surrounding the meaning making process for co-mother families, when they collected data for their investigation, neither of the states in which the participants resided recognized same-sex marriage. Further, their study also failed to address the discourses of fatherhood in male-male co-father families—a detail the authors themselves note as a much-needed future area of research. To date, no studies have examined married gay fathers' talk using RDT as a guide to identify meaning making in the

interplay of discourses surrounding family identity, marriage, and fatherhood. With this in mind, I posed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do married gay fathers remake or resist the dominant discourses associated with marriage?

RQ2: How do GPFs resist or remake the dominant discourses of family?

RQ3: How do married gay fathers resist or remake the dominant discourses associated with fatherhood?

III. Method

Qualitative Rationale

This investigation employed qualitative research methods (i.e., interviewing, a discourse analysis, an interpretivist lens) to explore meaning-making and identity in married gay fathers' relational talk. This approach to data gathering and analysis was selected for a few reasons. First, qualitative, interpretivist research aims to "achieve deep understanding of human actions, motives, and feelings" and "should illuminate how humans use cultural symbol systems to create shared meanings for their existence and activity" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 9). In this vein, I sought to illuminate the ways in which cultural and relational discourses inform gay parents' understanding and communication of their family identity internally and externally. Second, while quantitative methods are useful for quantifying, aggregating, and comparing numerical data sets, qualitative inquiry can provide researchers with more robust, descriptive responses in their collected data (Babbie, 2004). Because I was focused on increasing understanding the sense-making process for GPFs, qualitative data offering richer meaning and depth was a necessity. Third, interviewing is a useful tool for accessing knowledge about the lived experiences of individuals surrounding a particular phenomenon (in this case, GPF identity communication)—interviews permit the researcher to gain access to participants' perspectives, insights, and reflections on significant relational experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Further, the social rapport granted by interviewing can help generate trust between researchers and their participants, especially if the subject matter is potentially sensitive in nature (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). As I asked these men to talk about their families, romantic relationships, and marginalized identities (all areas that could be fraught with difficult, emotional experiences), building trust

with them was an important part of the research process. For these reasons, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate framework.

Theoretical Considerations

According to Halliwell (2015), although existing RDT-based studies have contributed a great deal of valuable knowledge regarding the meaning making process for myriad relational types (especially within the family context), future research should undertake two important theoretical tasks: (a) expanding the methods of data collection for analysis and (b) embracing the conceptual complexity of RDT. Halliwell offers some innovative, concrete steps scholars can take when constructing RDT studies.

First, researchers can expand their methods by capturing data both longitudinally and from dyadic interactions (as opposed to one-on-one interviews), granting RDT researchers access to longer, interactive pictures of the interpersonal relationships they are interested in studying (Halliwell, 2015). Second, researchers can embrace RDT's conceptual complexity by not only attempting to find and categorize dialectical tensions in their data but also by attending to how the interplay of those discourses creates meaning for the relational parties. Additionally, scholars can continue to highlight the theory's critical approach to studying the imbalance of power in interpersonal talk—Halliwell (2015) argues that this is especially important in the context of family communication research because nontraditional family forms and relationships are often marginalized by dominant traditional family discourses. To ensure that this study represented Baxter's (2011) original vision for RDT relative to understanding family identity communication and meaning making in gay father households, I incorporated Halliwell's (2015) theoretical suggestions in a number of ways.

I interviewed parents on two separate occasions with a one-month interval, giving me a longitudinal look into how the couples talk about challenges to their family's identity, their marriage, and their roles as fathers. This type of longitudinal approach to gathering interview data for RDT studies is valuable when conducting analysis, in that the researcher can "examine the ways relationship parties respond to past meanings and utterances from prior interviews to (re)construct their relational identities in the present" (Halliwell, 2015, p. 78). Additionally, longitudinal data provides a clearer picture of the superaddressee (i.e., the generalized other as audience) because researchers can see how participants react and respond to their imagined distal listener over time—this aids in determining meaning making at the distal not-yet-spoken discursive site in participants' talk (Halliwell, 2015).

I interviewed all of the couples in dyads to gain access to their relational talk in situ. Dyadic interviews can help participants recall the details of past events and foster the co-construction of relevant narratives during the interview process (Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). As family identity is largely created through discourse between members (Galvin, 2006; 2014), allowing the couples to talk through memorable relational moments in their collective past together will offer unique insight into how each dyad "does" family communicatively.

Lastly, my study showcases the heuristic, critical nature of the theory when reporting conclusions in an effort to demonstrate the value RDT has in making the complex world of family relationships (especially nontraditional ones) and communication more intelligible. I critically examined the discourses at play in parents' talk to determine whether GPFs resist or remake the dominant discourses of family, marriage, fatherhood, and how their discursive interplay marginalized or championed the GPF form. Moreover, I will share the study's findings

with local LGBT group representatives to identify any opportunities for translational applications

of the results, such as suggestions for potential same-sex family identity-building events based

on any relational needs the participants express, a presentation of the study's results with

members of the group, and opportunities for future same-sex family research that representatives

feel need more attention.

Participants

I interviewed 13 married gay parent couples and conducted 10 follow-up interviews. The

study was open to married couples who achieved parenthood through any available means (e.g.,

adoption, surrogacy, previous relationships, and/or foster care). Participants' ages ranged from

29-60 years with an average age of 40. A majority of the participants ($n = 22$) identified as

Caucasian, while several other individuals identified as Latino, Asian American, Filipino, and

Hispanic. On average, participants had been legally married for three years. Each couple had

between 1-4 children ($M = 2$), ranging in age from 1-18 years old ($M = 7$). All couples reported

that their household income was above $100,000 per year.

Procedures

Recruitment. After securing IRB approval (see Appendix A) initial recruitment took

place through a local same-sex parent Facebook support group and with the help of local LGBT

organizations. I contacted the Facebook group's founder and the organizations' leaders and

asked for permission to post this study's call for participants (see Appendix B) to their respective

social media sites. I also asked to have an e-mail call (see Appendix C) sent out to lists of

member e-mail addresses. I asked any contacts I made through initial recruitment to participate

in snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a useful approach for getting in touch with

populations that are otherwise difficult to identify or recruit, and involves asking those who have

already been interviewed to reach out to others in their own social network who fit the study's selection requirements (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant, & Rahim, 2014).

Couples sent a message indicating their interest to a password protected e-mail address created specifically for this study. I followed up with a response e-mail from the same address with details about the study (see Appendix D), possible dates/times for initial interviews, and a non-signature consent form (see Appendix E) that respondents had to read before being interviewed. Using a non-signature consent form made long distance interviews more expedient, because participants did not have to print out the document, sign it, scan it, and send it back to me. If a couple lived close enough to me, I made all attempts to meet with them in person at a comfortable location of their choosing. For participants living farther away, we conducted the interviews through a video/audio chat platform such as Skype or FaceTime. For every couple that participated, I donated $20.00 to an organization of their choice that supports the LGBT community and their families as a thank you for their time.

Interviews. According to Baxter (2011), conducting interviews when engaging in RDT investigations is extremely useful for exploring relational identities and discourses. Baxter views the interview process for RDT research as a type of speech event with at least two participants (the interviewee and the interviewer) who jointly engage in the meaning making process. With this mindset, the interviewee's "language use is viewed as identity work, an occasion in which the identity of the relationship is presented and constructed to the interviewer to render it intelligible" (p. 155). Based on this philosophy, I interviewed married gay fathers to understand the discursive construction of their family relationships and identities.

Before each interview began, I asked both participants if they had read the verbal consent form, if they had any questions regarding the form, whether or not they consented to continue

with the interview, and whether or not they agreed to have the conversation with the researcher recorded. I conducted each interview with both parents present and used a semi-structured interview approach. Although semi-structured interviews cede some control over the interview process and may take longer to complete, the format helps the researcher build rapport with participants, permits greater flexibility in direction, facilitates deeper exploration into previously unknown areas of interest, and tends to generate richer, more robust data (Smith, 1995). I interviewed couples twice, with the second interview occurring approximately one month after the first.

The first interview tended typically lasted 45 minutes to an hour, whilethe second interview often lasted 15 to 20 minutes. Initial interviews explored the couples' interpersonal experiences related to getting married, being a member of a GPF, and becoming fathers. Questions revolved around discursive challenges (e.g., a friend or family member questioning their status as a family or parent) and successes (e.g., receiving validation of family structure from a relative after getting married or having children) the couple had experienced. I also asked parents to jointly reflect on important events (e.g., how the couple met, talking about their decision to get married, talking about marriage with friends and family, the decision to have children, the birth or adoption itself, talking with their kids about family connectedness, past family holidays and/or vacations) in their family histories and discursively co-construct stories and relational meanings surrounding these events. The first set of questions was intended to elicit talk about how the participants perceive their marriage (RQ1) (e.g., *When you were discussing marriage, what were some of the things you talked about? What reservations, if any, came up about getting married as a same-sex couple? Did you feel that your family and friends accepted your decision to get married? Do you feel like a "normal" married couple?*).

The remaining questions were aimed at learning about the discursive construction of family and fatherhood (RQ2/RQ3) (e.g., *When you first met, did you talk about having kids some day? Did you decide to have children before or after getting married? Tell me about the process of having children – did you choose to adopt? When you told your friends and family that you were going to have children, how did they react? How do you talk with your children about your family structure and how it's different from traditional families? Have they ever asked about differences between their family and others? What role(s) do each of you play as parents? How important is it to spend time with other same-sex parent families? Why?*). For the first interview protocol, please see Appendix F. At the conclusion of the first interview, I arranged dates and times for the second interview.

In between interviews, I encouraged participants to write down a brief synopsis of events each time they felt the family bonded or overcame challenges to their identity (e.g., a family outing at a restaurant, attending a school function for their children, questions about the structure of their family). To facilitate this process, I gave parents a handout (see Appendix G) at the end of the first interview with instructions and space for them to jot down stories or notes. Also, I instructed them to read their notes prior to the second interview and then have them on hand during the discussion. The second interviews lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, and focused largely on any meaningful events/conversations the couple had regarding their family identity over the past month; however, the first part of the interview was used to member check themes identified from the first interview (for the second interview protocol, please see Appendix H).

Recording data. I recorded interviews using a small hand-held digital audio recording device. I transferred these files to a password protected folder and have them transcribed by a trained undergraduate research assistant. The transcription process produced 382 total pages. All

identifying information, including participant names, the names of their children, and specific locations, was camouflaged to protect the couples' identity.

Data Analysis

      Establishing data credibility. Because this study was intellectually situated in a qualitative/interpretivist paradigm, it was critical for me to establish a high level of validity with my findings while conducting my data analysis. Creswell and Miller (2000) define validity as "how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them" (p. 124). To ensure credible analysis of qualitative data, Creswell and Miller offer useful methodological guidelines that I followed throughout the study process. For example, investigators should carefully document their decisions, activities, and research notes to create an audit trail. In this way, the audit trail can provide readers with a step-by-step breakdown of the investigator's timeline and thought process as they moved through their analysis of the data. For the present study, I kept detailed, handwritten notes for every transcript in a small notebook (each divided into three categories: marriage, family, and fatherhood) in addition to initial and advanced interpretations of my findings[1]. Creswell and Miller also suggest that qualitative researchers can demonstrate credibility by describing their findings in vivid, rich detail. Doing so allows the reader to feel as though they have (or could have) experienced the participant exchanges themselves—a concept known as transferability (Shenton, 2004). To meet those standards of thick description and do my best to ensure transferability was possible, I took great care to not only provide a deep analysis of the data, but also carefully chose transcript exemplars that I felt would offer readers a window into the fathers' meaning-making experience.

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[1] These handwritten notes are available upon request.

Conducting the contrapuntal analysis. Much like Harrigan and Braithwaite's (2010) and Carr and Wang's (2012) RDT-based investigations into family discourses, the current study used Smith's (1995) guidelines for conducting interpretive analysis of interview transcripts in order to generate initial themes as part of the larger contrapuntal analysis process outlined by Baxter (2011). I started the analysis started by reading one transcript several times to sensitize myself to the participants' talk. During each reading, I wrote notes regarding anything that seemed especially meaningful, and I searched for key words that "capture[d] the essential quality" (Smith, 1995, p. 19) of findings in the text. I created lists of themes and then looked for connections between them, deciding whether some themes functioned at higher levels or acted as magnets that drew other themes together. Throughout this process, I constantly referred to the original transcript of the interview to ensure the emerging themes connected with what the participants expressed.

Once I verified themes in subsequent readings of the transcript, a concrete list of themes was constructed. When I read a new transcript, the same process began again. Next, I compared themes across multiple transcripts to generate a master list. After a master list was generated, I checked back with members in the second interview to verify the existence of initial themes emerging in their talk from the first interview. Member checking allows participants to add additional trustworthiness and authenticity to the study's results (Carlson, 2010)—in this case, members clarified or elaborated on their previous statements and confirmed that preliminary findings corresponded with their experiences. Eventually, these "checked" themes served as identified discourses that I applied when I re-examined the data to verify my initial analysis and search for discursive interplay. For example, Ethan indicated in his first interview that he was resistant to the institution of marriage early on in his relationship with Leon. Wanting to explore

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this further, at the beginning of their second interview, I had Ethan confirm his position and asked him to elaborate on what changed his mind and whether marriage meant anything different to him now that they are a married couple. In their first interview, Randy and John talked about how Randy's mom was initially not very accepting of their relationship but had since come around to embracing their family. Curious as to what motivated this change, in the follow-up interview I asked them if having a child made their connection with Randy's mom stronger. The couple confirmed this, spoke more about their relationship with Randy's mom, and discussed why becoming parents "normalized" them in her eyes. Being able to not only verify important facts but also have the fathers expand upon meaningful family stories and themes permitted me to explore the participants' relational sense-making at a deeper level.

Interviews continued until I reached saturation in the data. According to Francis et al. (2010), saturation refers to the point in the data collection process when no new concepts emerge from a study's existing data set. Francis and colleagues argue that finding saturation is an important step in interview-based studies because it provides much needed content validity for the sample. For the current study, when I began to see the same discursive struggles and themes surrounding marriage, family, and fatherhood in participants' talk, I knew I had reached a saturation point.

After I established the discourses based on the thematic analysis and saturation, I identified how those discourses competed. Baxter (2011) states that there are three kinds of markers which indicate counterpoint relationships for discourses: *negating, countering, and entertaining*. When a discourse is *negating*, it supplants or disclaims another, rendering the oppositional discourse irrelevant. Speakers can negate relational partners' discourses who are present with them during an interview or refute a discourse attributed to a non-present relational

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party. When a discourse is *countering* it "replaces or supplants an alternative discursive position that would normally have been expected in its place" (Baxter, 2011, p. 167). Conjunctions like *however*, *but*, *yet*, and *nonetheless*, and adjuncts such as *even*, *just*, and *still*, are common signals that demonstrate speakers are countering discourses. Lastly, when a discourse is *entertaining*, the speaker acknowledges that the discourse is just one possible discursive position among many others, indicating as much by saying things like *it's possible that*, *it seems*, or *it appears*.

In addition to counterpoint relationships, discourses can also be transformative in nature, meaning they "lose their zero-sum relation of opposition and become open to the possibility of newly emergent meanings" (Baxter, 2011, p. 139). According to Baxter (2011) there are two types of transformational possibilities—hybrids and aesthetic moments—and she uses metaphors to explain each of these discursive transformations. Baxter likens discursive hybridization to a salad dressing created with oil and vinegar: the discourses retain their unique systems of meanings, but are no longer positioned as oppositional. Aesthetic moments, on the other hand, are more akin to a chemical reaction between molecules that fuse to produce a totally different entity (Baxter, 2011). While the salad dressing (or discursive hybrid) contains ingredients that retain their distinct qualities, the individual properties of the chemical mixture (or aesthetic moment) are intensely altered.

Once I located discursive competition or transformation in the data, I determined whether the speakers privileged the dominant, centripetal discourse or the marginalized, centrifugal discourse to uncover the relational meaning making in their talk and/or creating new meanings altogether. Like the process used in Suter et al.'s (2015) exploration of co-mothers' talk about motherhood, I sought patterns that signified if/how participants negated, countered, entertained,

or transformed the dominant discourses of marriage (RQ1), family (RQ 2), and fatherhood

(RQ3) and how those processes created relational meaning for the parents.

I begin the current chapter by identifying the discourses at play that produced meaning for the participants at three sites of meaning: marriage, family, and fatherhood. Then, I provide examples of discursive competition and/or discursive transformation and analysis of the discursive interplay.

Identifying the Discourses of Marriage as Symbolic (DMAS) and Marriage as Practical (DMAP)

The DMAS. A contrapuntal analysis of the data identified two competing discourses present in participants' talk about marriage. The first, the discourse of marriage as symbolic (DMAS), embraced the distal already-spoken traditional meanings of marriage as a lifelong bond between two individuals who love each other deeply. Many participants described themselves as traditional individuals in traditional relationships, and wanted their wedding celebrations to reflect that feeling of normalcy. For example, Brian characterized himself as always having been a traditional person who was raised in a very traditional household. He knew he wanted to create a lasting partnership with someone someday, regardless of the government's position:

> I've never let being gay, um, you know sort of um, I've never let that take away from my feelings of, towards tradition and wanting sort of, the sort of family structure and the kind of relationship I saw from the people around me growing up…whether it was a commitment ceremony or it was a legal marriage or a domestic partnership, I knew that ultimately, I wanted to have that kind of bond with someone. (I-1, 97-102[2])

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[2] All participant quotes will conclude with either an I-1 (indicating the quote came from the couples' initial interview) or I-2 (indicating the quote came from the couples' follow-up interview). The subsequent numbers indicate the line(s) where the quote can be found in the respective transcript. Transcripts available upon request.

Although Brian realized that being a gay man might have meant never receiving legal recognition for a lifelong relationship, he still desired forming a symbolic bond with the person he hoped to fall in love with based on the cultural meanings ascribed to traditional marriage. This sentiment of tradition, symbolism, and commitment frequently appeared in the participants' discussions of matrimony. When the couples spoke about their marriages, they often emphasized the importance of togetherness for their commitment that had formed years or even decades before they legally married. This commitment was often crystalized symbolically through a ceremony. Although participants knew their nuptials would not conclude with the signing of a legal marriage certificate, their celebrations often closely mirrored that of legal heteronormative marriages. Chris and Steve described their wedding day as:

> C: …a big party we had at um, downtown.

> S: We called it a wedding. We called everyone and told them we were getting married. And we were like, we used all the same language everyone used even though it wasn't official. And yeah, we had a big reception. (I-1, 139-142)

Acknowledging that the ceremony was not "official," Steve and Chris embraced the symbolism of traditional by specifically labeling the event as a wedding and making it a point to use language that they believed "everyone" uses when getting married. Similarly, Timothy and Jack emphasized the importance of the symbolic meaning of their nonlegal ceremony, saying:

> T: I think of our wedding in 2000.

> J: That was our wedding. That was our marriage. (I-1, 149-150)

Both Timothy and Jack agreed that their wedding took place in 2000, years before they would be granted legal recognition of their vows. Jack flatly states that within the context of their relationship, the ceremony was "our wedding" and "our marriage."

The DMAS also reflected common wedding traditions that participants wanted to take part in. For example, during heterosexual wedding celebrations, the bride and groom are often expected to physically showcase their newly formed bond by kissing throughout the day. Rick and Michael talked about how they consciously monitored their public displays of affection before their wedding. Although family members had been accepting and supportive of their relationship, the couple had purposefully conditioned their families to see them as roommates or friends. On their wedding day, however, Michael said it was "the first time where we put our foot down and said, 'This is a wedding. Of course we're going to be kissing'" (I-1, 149-150). Michael first naturalizes the relational symbolism of the event, stating that it was in fact a *wedding*. Further, Michael's use of "of course" indicates his view of what weddings and being married meant for them as a couple—a unique opportunity to visually express love for one another through a symbolic ritual. The fact that family members immersed themselves in a traditional (and thus, familiar) wedding event made it easier for Michael and his husband to feel confident in their displays of affection.

John and Randy, who began dating in the early 1980's, also evoked the DMAS when they characterized their 1990 wedding—which took place roughly two and a half decades before same-sex marriage was legalized—as "traditional." The couple spoke more to the impact the event had on their relationships with each other and family:

J: Um, the experience, ah, incredible. We kind of didn't, didn't anticipate how um, significant-

R: How powerful it was.

J: It was gonna be in terms of really feeling like we were full-fledged members of our family. There was a sense of acceptance that I hadn't felt before, from extended family.

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Um, and just ah, just, yeah. Felt so much more like, ah, we were a married couple now.

(I-1, 177-181)

Having been in a committed relationship for years, the couple was still taken aback by the relational significance of their traditional ceremony and celebration. The symbolic event granted them a level of acceptance they had not experienced before with extended family members and seemingly changed their own perceptions of the relationship—devoid of legal recognition, the wedding still allowed them to *feel* like a married couple.

The DMAP. In contrast to the symbolic meanings/rituals associated with the DMAS, the DMAP emerged specifically when couples talked about their *legal* marriages and mainly focused on the practical, non-emotional, and mainstream nature of the event. This characterization of legal marriage was a departure from the distal already-spoken meanings of commitment and symbolism associated with traditional marriage, but was relationally accepted/embraced at the proximal site of the couples' talk. Essentially, legal marriage offered important protections for their families. For instance, Jack labeled his courthouse marriage to Timothy as a "purely legal" event that:

> protected us a lot…if you get sick, [or] I get sick. One of us died, the boys…all the legal, hundreds of legal things happened. It, that was, that was what was important about the courthouse. The marriage or wedding was in the church. (I-1, 159-162)

Jack's talk of their trip to the courthouse undoubtedly positions their legal marriage as significant but not in a symbolic relational context. According to the DMAP, the value of legal marriage can be found in the medical protections (among others) it affords the couple and their kids. Jack's last remark—that the true marriage began during their nonlegal wedding in a church—resonates

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with the DMAS's emphasis on the relational importance of traditional celebrations and meaning-making for the participants.

The DMAP also positioned financial advantages as a driving force in participants' decisions to legally wed. Brian stated that his legal marriage to James was more about the monetary gains they saw and in the end "didn't have any other effect on the relationship. Because we already viewed ourselves as being married" (I-1, 150-152). Other couples characterized the process in a similar manner, such as Steve who described his legal marriage to Chris as akin to a "financial transaction" that allowed them to claim useful tax and financial benefits based on Chris' workplace policies. The two emphasized that their legal marriage did not change their perception of legitimacy or commitment to one another, with Chris remarking in jest that "…we celebrate our commitment ceremony date. We don't celebrate the, the legal date. He doesn't even know what the legal date is" (I-1, 179-180). Culturally, romantic couples are expected to observe and commemorate their legal wedding anniversaries. By resisting this expectation, Steve and Chris evoke the DMAP when discussing how they approach their legal marriage. Other couples also had difficulty remembering the date of their legal wedding, and, in some cases, further stripped away characteristics typically associated with legal matrimony, such as the cultural expectation that the event should be romantic for the couple. For example, Leon and Ethan, who also struggled to pinpoint their legal wedding day, flatly stated:

L: The only reason, this is how romantic it was. The only reason we did legal marriage was-

E: Tax.

L: The tax. (I-1, 53-56)

Leon speaks to the DMAP in this description, and situates his legal coupling with Ethan in a more practical place—one that improved their taxes but did not fundamentally alter their relationship. Their legal marriage is not associated with "romance" but instead is linked with "the tax" benefits that Ethan and Leon receive.

Summary of the discourses. Overall, the DMAS positions marriage as a meaningful link between couples (same or opposite sex), often marked with a symbolic celebration that effectively alters the status of the romantic relationship. Despite a lack of legal recognition, the distal-already-spoken meanings of marriage informed the symbolic marriage rituals and relational milestones, such as moving in together, and legitimized the couples' decision to spend the rest of their lives together at the proximal discursive site. On the other hand, the DMAP eschewed the traditional relational impact placed on legal marriage, instead stressing the importance of legal protections and portraying the event as purely practical. The couples undoubtedly saw those legal, medical, and financial advantages as significant; however, they felt legal marriage provided a sense of material/legal security rather than furthering the couples' lasting commitment to each other. In this way, the DMAP stands in contrast to the distal-already-spoken symbolism of a traditional marriage ceremony, and embraces the legal and financial relevance at the proximal site of the utterance chain. Having discussed the themes inherent in each of the discourses of marriage, I now offer examples of their discursive interplay located in the participants' talk.

The Interplay of the DMAS and the DMAP

When speaking about their marriages, the struggle between the DMAS and the DMAP occurred synchronically (i.e., in the moment) and revolved around negating one discourse or

entertaining both discourses for the participants. Additionally, there was an instance of discursive transformation, resulting in an aesthetic moment.

Negating. Almost all the couples negated the DMAP and privileged the DMAS—especially before legal same-sex marriage became an option for them. For example, Bill and Thomas discussed how, prior to the 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling, some of their same-sex friends traveled around the country to states where marriage was recognized and got legally married to have the certificates as proof of their legitimacy. The couple explained:

> B: We didn't need to go that far. We just, we weren't missing anything?
>
> T: No. I don't think we really thought about it. I think it was more about having a celebration of our union in general. It was more to me, it was not just about marrying him, it was about combining my family with his and the boys. And being a part and making my commitment to them as well. So, it was really about the commitment itself, not about the paper. (I-1, 95-99)

In this synchronic interplay for meaning, Bill starts by highlighting the fact that he and his husband did not feel as though they missed any of the relational legitimacy offered through legal marriage by "clowning" the DMAP. Baxter (2011) defines clowning as a discursive device that enables a speaker to challenge a discourse in a playful manner. Bill clowns the practicality of legal marriage by suggesting that he and Thomas did not "need to go that far." Further, Thomas talked about the importance of having a ceremony to celebrate the couples' existing commitment and cement the relational ties of their newly-formed family, as Bill had three children from a previous marriage. Thomas elevates the importance of the DMAS and emphasizes that, for them, marriage is "not about the paper," clearly negating the DMAP.

In a similar example of the DMAS negating the DMAP, Chris and Steve talked about what they wanted in a relationship when they first met, saying:

S: Well, I think we were both looking for something committed.

C: Yeah. I was thinking about commitment. I don't know if I was necessarily thinking about marriage since it wasn't legal at the time.

S: Well, yeah, right. I mean, that part. But, I mean very committed, in terms of- I don't know if you're ok with me telling this story but-

C: I was totally looking for something committed. Yeah.

S: But, you would, we would have conversations and you were like, "Ok, within a year we're going to get engaged and within this time we'll get our, I'm sorry, we'll move in together, and this is the time we'll get engaged." So, I think it was always, it was on my mind. We would always have some kind of commitment ceremony or-

I[3]: Something in the future. Yeah.

S: Something in the future or some kind of formalization of it. Whether it was legal or not. (I-1, 107-118)

Here, a synchronic interplay between the DMAS and the DMAP is reflected. Both Steve and Chris acknowledged their mutual desire to find a committed relationship when they first met privileging the DMAS. Steve then recalls the early conversations they had as a couple, wherein they mapped out a fairly traditional trajectory with one another (i.e., moving in together, getting engaged) that would result in "some kind of commitment ceremony." At the end of the exchange Steve emphasizes that although they did not know exactly what shape it would take, they wanted a symbolic formalization of their bond "whether it was legal or not." Importantly, Steve's use of

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[3] For this and all other examples, "I" represents me in my role as the interviewer.

the phrase *or not* is significant in that it negates the DMAP, placing more value on the meaning

of symbolic rituals associated with the DMAS. Steve confirms that the ceremony would serve as

a worthy formalization of their relationship and long-term commitment, with the DMAS being

privileged in the end.

In a third example of negating, Eddie described how he and his husband, George, felt that

even having a ceremony was an unnecessary step in defining the context of their romantic

relationship and commitment, stating:

> E: You know, we've been together for over ten years at that point. You know, we've
>
> owned houses together. We had a kid together. Everything, our lives were like totally
>
> intertwined. Like everybody, all of our friends and family thought we were married
>
> already. You know, and so like, what is, what is throwing a party? How does that make it
>
> any different? (I-1, 87-91)

In this example of synchronic struggle, Eddie negates the DMAP, which is usually celebrated

with a legal wedding and favors the DMAS, albeit without the need for having even a

commitment ceremony as a ritual of symbolism. Eddie questions the cultural expectations of

legal marriage altogether, essentially adopting the discursive stance of the "fool." According to

Baxter (2011) the fool is similar to the clown in that the speaker playfully challenges a discourse;

however, the fool renders that discourse as seemingly incoherent through "feigned

incomprehension" (p. 137). Eddie makes a fool out of the "party" commonly associated with

legal marriages by wondering what purpose a party serves and why such an event would change

their feelings as a couple, negating the DMAS. Instead, Eddie adheres to the symbolic relational

marks reflected in the DMAS. Eddie and George's lasting bond was already proven by symbols

associated with marriage, such as spending ten years together, owning a house, becoming

parents, and having family and friends recognize the couple as "married." In this way, the traditional, symbolic markers of matrimony such as time, large financial investments, children, and relational legitimacy are all part of what marriage and commitment means to Eddie through the DMAS—not the extravagant heteronormative legal wedding negated in the DMAP.

Entertaining. Although a majority of the couples consistently negated the DMAP and privileged the DMAS, this was not always the case. Sometimes, the DMAS still functioned as the dominant discourse in creating meaning for their marriage, but the DMAP was also entertained (i.e., acknowledging other discourses) *because* the GPFs viewed the inherent legal protections as significant. Rick and Michael provided an example of entertaining when they discussed the progression of their relationship:

> M: I would say we, um, I don't know if we ever used the word marriage. I think we both, I would say from the first day we were open and honest about what our hopes were. And I think we both knew we wanted more, we were looking for a relationship that was going to be a lifelong relationship and a committed um, monogamous relationship. Um, and pretty soon after that, when we talked about kids, marriage came along as a viable option legally.
>
> R: I would agree. I think very early on when we were getting to know each other, we knew what type of relationship we wanted to have with whomever we ended up with. Um, and that most closely mirrored what a traditional marriage was, in terms of monogamous relationship, and committed legally. (I-1, 68-76)

Michael begins by talking about the wants they had as a new couple, such as a lifelong, committed relationship with someone they loved, aligning with the DMAS. When the possibility of children came into the picture, the practicality of legal marriage was then entertained as an

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important part of their family's journey. Rick echoed Michael's assessment of the relationship, stating that they both desired a traditional relationship (DMAS) but that being committed legally (DMAP) was eventually similarly important.

Although in most cases the DMAS was privileged and the DMAP entertained, in a few cases the DMAP served as the dominant discourse of marriage but the DMAS was entertained. This happened, for instance, when Albert described his approach to marriage with his husband Dale:

> A: Um, I was really pushy and he didn't really want it. He wasn't in a hurry for it. I think for me, a big part of it was, um, I think it was us having a kid and then having another kid, wanted the aspect of it, as far as the, insurance purposes, and just, I guess because we're having children as two men, trying to normalize it as much as we can for them, as far as what society considers normal. (I-1, 56-60)

Albert notes that getting legally married was a necessary step for him primarily because they had children together but also for the insurance benefits—the need for those practical protections demonstrate a privileging of the DMAP. That said, Albert also felt that marriage reflects a certain normalization of relationships, especially when considering the larger cultural meanings and how that might impact their children's perception of their union. According to Albert, because "society" considers marriage a "normal" symbolic commitment for parents, it was important for him and Dale to have a wedding ceremony. Therefore, while the DMAP may have acted as the dominant motivation for marriage, the traditional, relational meaning of the DMAS was also entertained.

Aesthetic moment. For Elliot and Connor, marriage took on a transformative meaning in the form of an aesthetic moment. When discussing their matrimony, Elliot began by talking

about how important getting married was for them in the context of their relationship, emphasizing the importance of the DMAS:

> I think it's something that we both wanted. And in fact, um, Connor moved in with me, I don't know, seven or eight months into our, nine months into our relationship. And he said he wouldn't do it until, I had kind of asked him to marry me. So, I did.

Elliot acknowledges that they both wanted the symbolic commitment of marriage; so much so that Connor refused to move in with Elliot until they became engaged. That said, Elliot also spoke to the significance of the DMAP, explaining that their wedding—which occurred prior to the 2015 *Obergefell v Hodges* ruling—was initially set to take place in a state that was granting legal same-sex marriage licenses. However, before the couple could marry, the state reversed its position on same-sex marriage, meaning Elliot and Connor would not receive the legal recognition they were seeking. Elliot then described what prompted their decision to go through with the ceremony anyway:

> …it was, in some way we decided it was a political act. And, um, we wanted to be normal. Or rather we wanted to do something that other people perceived as normal. Um, and so it was for us, the expense, it was in some way, our contribution to the movement. (I-1, 153-156)

Having already established marriage as a symbol of relational commitment, Elliot also positions their marriage in terms of practical change for "the movement;" that is, the larger cultural and political movement towards same-sex marriage equality. This practicality is admittedly somewhat different than the characteristics of the DMAP outlined previously, such as couple-specific legal protections, financial gains, insurance purposes, but was still viewed as a step for the *larger* LGBT community in gaining those practical advantages. By adopting the DMAS to

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talk about the relational meaning of their engagement and marriage in addition to recognizing the potential practical, broader societal gains in following through with their ceremony, Elliot creates an aesthetic moment of marriage as a political act. His marriage to Connor became just as much about the message they sent politically as it was a milestone for them as a romantic, committed couple.

Overall, the meaning of marriage for the study's participants was grounded in the discursive interplay between the DMAS and the DMAP—the couples either (a) negated the DMAP of legal marriage and privileged the symbolic nature of commitment reflected in the DMAS or (b) entertained the DMAS or DMAP while simultaneously privileging the other. Additionally, one couple created an aesthetic moment from the DMAS and DMAP by positioning the meaning of their marriage as a symbolic, yet practical political act in the public sphere. Just like the multiple meanings of marriage the couples generated in talking about their relationships, the meaning of family that emerged in participants' talk also included two types of discursive interplay: entertaining and negating. I explore these forms of interplay in detail in the next section.

Identifying the Discourses of Traditional Family Structure (DTFS) and Nontraditional Family Structure (DNFS)

The DTFS. The discourse of traditional family structure (DTFS)—the "gold standard" archetype consisting of a heterosexual husband and wife couple raising biological children—consistently emerged in discussions about family identity and communication with the participants. That is, they acknowledged that the traditional structure informs or historically informed cultural understandings of what families "should" look like, and, in some cases, has even influenced their own family identity. For example, Brian talked about how the traditional

family form provided a welcome guide in some respects for how he and his husband James see themselves:

> B: Um, you know, we, you know, consciously and unconsciously have sort of embraced the traditional um, family dynamic. And, some of the traditional um, family traits um, that have existed in our society for decades. And um, it's just because, I guess, for me anyway, it's what I grew up with. It's what I feel comfortable with. You know? I didn't grow up in a family that really had many alternative, what would be considered, alternative traits. You know, we were very very traditional. We sort of did have that *Leave it to Beaver* sort of family. (I-2, 120-125)

Brian speaks to the fact that the DTFS has been the culturally dominant discourse "for decades." Although, as a GPF, Brian acknowledges that their family may not resemble the traditional family form exactly by saying "sort of" and "some," the perception that traditional structures can provide stable, comfortable households has resulted in Brian and James willingly embracing certain aspects of the traditional system of meaning. Brian even uses the classic TV show *Leave it to Beaver*—not too far off from Coontz's (2016) "Ozzie and Harriet" model—to describe what he recognizes as a traditional family model. This positions traditional families as functionally useful in that the traditional dynamic can offer parents and children a map to family cohesiveness. Similarly, George and Eddie resisted but also embraced the traditional label in some respects to describe their own family. They said:

> G: I feel like just the word, the phrase, traditional family, has a lot of baggage with it. So, my instinct is to say, "No. We're not." But, you know, there's-
>
> E: We're just family, you know?
>
> G: Yeah. I guess that there's traditional types of things that we like to do. (I-2, 105-109)

Just like Brian, George recognizes the existence of the DTFS and the negative "baggage" he associates with traditional identity, contesting the label somewhat; however, George also accepts that their family does engage in some traditional "types of things," once again speaking to the traditional identity as a somewhat aspirational, helpful guide to family relationships. Regardless of whether they see themselves as fully traditional or not, the DTFS is present in Eddie and George's talk of family identity.

At times, the existence of the DTFS was also demonstrated through challenges to identity for some for the participants. Rick, for example, talked about a recent experience he had at his child's kindergarten book fair:

> And the teacher would say "Your moms and dads." No, she didn't say…she didn't say, "Moms and dads." I wish she would. But she said "Your mom and dad." You know, we just kind of glanced at each other. Ugh, yet again. Um, and it's innocent but it's just this constant little ping all the time. (I-1, 410-413)

Because of instances like this, where the teacher invoked the traditional heteronormative structure of "moms and dads," Rick and Michael are consistently reminded of the DTFS and how their family is positioned outside of that traditional identity. The "constant little ping," as Rick describes it, serves as further proof that the DTFS animates his talk about family. Regardless of how the meaning of traditional family functioned for the participants—either as useful cultural tool or as an occasional burden to their identity—the DTFS was undoubtedly present in the participants' discussions, generally, about family structures and communication.

The DNFS. Participants also spoke to the discourse of nontraditional family structure (DNFS) when describing their identity. The DNFS revolved around the existence, legitimacy, and functionality of family structures that do not mirror the traditional family archetype. In one

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example demonstrating the presence of this discourse, Connor described how he talks with his daughter about their family identity, stating "I think probably, actually, the answer is, is I'll go out of my way to teach her that families are formed in different ways, and, there are parents who are married, and parents who are not" (I-2, 64-66). Connor acknowledged that families are created in a number of "different ways," offering an acceptable alternative to the traditional family model in the form of the DNFS. In a similar example of parent-child communication, Wes recalled the initial struggle with nontraditional identity he experienced when reading to his young son:

> And we, you know, we would read to him children's books sometimes, there would be a mommy in there. At first I would try to change it to 'parent.' And I was like, "This is stupid. He lives in the world. Moms exist." So, we explained that this family has a mommy and a daddy. You have two daddies and he was, "Cool, I get it." (I-1, 382-385)

Again, while Wes recognized that the traditional family form (a mommy and a daddy) is still regularly perpetuated culturally—here, in a children's book—he allowed for the existence of the DNFS (two daddies) as well.

Additionally, the DNFS appeared when couples talked about how the presence of children helps remove the burden of having to explain their non-heteronormative romantic relationship, providing a visual example of a functional nontraditional family to strangers. For instance, Steve reasoned that everyone "can put us in context a little bit better" (I-1, 93-95). By putting them "in context a little bit better," others recognize that Steve and his husband Chris are not two male friends spending time together, but fathers who are part of a nontraditional family. Similarly, Aaron said that although it is not necessarily a matter of being more accepted, when they have their kids with them "people can kind of figure it out. And they figure it out on their

own. Whereas before…people would sort of have to explain it" (I-1, 189-191). Aaron added that when others see him and his husband together with their children, it more closely fits the "narrative" of family. Because they retain one of the core components associated with the traditional family structure—children—Steve and Aaron feel that their respective families normalize their nontraditional status and the DFNS for others.

The DNFS was also present when participants described their own family identity. For example, because Bill and Thomas adopted a girl in addition to the three sons that Bill had from his previous marriage, he described their structure as "a severe modern day of the *Brady Bunch*. All around." (I-1, 210). By invoking a classic example of a nontraditional TV stepfamily in the *Brady Bunch* in conjunction with the "severe modern day" descriptor, Bill speaks to the existence of the DNFS in the larger culture using a known TV touchstone.

Summary of the discourses. To summarize, the DTFS that emerged in the GPFs' talk about family communication and identity closely mirrored the dominant cultural understanding of the heteronormative "Ozzie and Harriet" model (Coontz, 2005) covered in chapter two. Under the DTFS, the GPFs perceived the traditional structures and dynamics as relevant, culturally persistent, and, at times, challenging to the couples' family identity. Through the DNFS, participants positioned nontraditional identity as being "othered" in comparison to the traditional archetype because of structural differences. This discursive characterization matches Baxter's (2014) explanation of nontraditional family forms, in that GPFs lack the markers of heteronormativity and biological ties consistent with the traditional family makeup. The fathers spoke to the existence of alternative family models via the DNFS when talking about how they communicate what family means to their kids or how they describe their own families when prompted.

The Interplay of the DTFS and DNFS

The DTFS and DNFS engaged in two types of discursive interplay to create meaning for family for the couples: entertaining and negating. Each of these forms of discursive interplay are explored in greater detail below.

Entertaining. As participants described their communication of family identity internally and externally, the DTFS was often positioned as the dominant cultural meaning for family at the distal-already-spoken site. However, the couples also emphasized that non-traditional families are equally as valid and functional by entertaining the DNFS. Participants talked about how critical it is to reinforce and normalize nontraditional structures, even though they recognized that the traditional model still exists. This reinforcement was especially important for the couples' children. Wes provided an example of the DTFS entertaining the DNFS when speaking about how he and his husband, Riley, made it a point to teach their son early on that all families are structured differently. Wes said they try to make it clear to their son that "some families have two daddies, some families have two mommies, some families have a mom and a dad, and some families have one or whatever it is…and explained things to him a lot…he soaks it in and kind of gets it" (I-1, 374-377). The consistent use of the word "some" to quantify the number of family types indicates Wes and Riley's desire to create a level playing field for the DTFS (a mom and a dad) and the DNFS (two daddies, two mommies, one parent). In this way, their children will grow up knowing that family does not need to fit into the traditional discursive definition; rather, family can be many things to many people by entertaining the existence of alternative approaches to family formation. In another example of parent-child communication that situated the DTFS as the centripetal discourse while still entertaining the existence of the DNFS, Brian described how he hopes his young son will view their family structure:

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…there's nothing wrong about the way my family is. Um, in certain groups I might be

different. You know, I might have a different type of family from the other families. But

um, I'm just as, you know, as normal. I fit in just as much. And you know, I think that

growing up seeing other families like ours will help him feel that way. (I-1, 485-488)

For Brian, the message he and James wish to consistently send to their child and others is that

although our family may look a little different, different is normal and okay. The DTFS still

dominates the cultural understanding of what family means, but the DNFS offers their family an

opportunity to "fit in just as much." In the follow-up interview, Brian spoke more to this

discursive interplay, describing how he and his husband, James, feel they have a certain social

responsibility to show the normalcy of nontraditional family forms in the public sphere. Greater

numbers and visibility, Brian reasoned, will make it more difficult to openly discriminate against

families like his. By showcasing a "positive example" of a same-sex parent household, they can

demonstrate "how committed we can be, how selfless we can be, how loving we can be, how

functional we can be" (I-2, 257-258). In presupposing that others will negatively judge their

family based on his relationship with James, Brian believes the traditional American family

archetype is still culturally privileged in some ways, but that there is also an opportunity to

dismantle that privilege by entertaining the emerging normality of nontraditional forms. As for

those who consider it an impossibility to raise healthy, well-adjusted children in a same-sex

parent family, Brian argued that "it's important for us to disprove that. To dispel these suspicions

and fears and, and ah, and stereotypes and show people um, you know, that we're the same as

them" (I-2, 261-263). Brian once again entertains the DNFS in that he does not fully accept the

discourse of traditional family nor does he totally negate it; instead, he desires to showcase his

nontraditional family's "sameness" in an effort to promote their strength, capability, and success.

In a similar example of the DTFS entertaining the DNFS through the public presence of nontraditional identity, Elliot and Connor argued that same-sex parent families like theirs have the ability to educate detractors and serve as a political message for greater cultural acceptance. Elliot described how he positions their family identity in relation to the traditional form, stating:

> we're not trying to be a model of something else, but we're trying to demonstrate that what we are doing is normal and valid and worth the love and respect that is accorded all other families. So, I see our banality as a little act of defiance if you will. (I-1, 709-712)

Elliot privileges the DTFS, saying that his family deserves the legitimacy "that is accorded all other families;" yet, at the same time he positions his family as "an act of defiance." He believes that by simply living well in a banal manner, they can resist the dominant DTFS and create a comfortable legitimized space for same-sex parent households. When asked to further elaborate on the concept of political opposition to the traditional family structure in their follow up interview, the couple said:

> E: For me, I consider our, our being married and our having a bi-racial child to be, I wanna recast as an act of defiance. And, that's-
>
> C: Or at least, it's, there's a politicism to the reality of our family. Which we need to be more vocal in celebrating I think and actively protecting.
>
> E: Yeah. Like it's very um, radical normality if you will. (I-2, 281-285)

This "radical normality" that Elliot refers to embodies the spirit of the DTFS entertaining the DNFS. Same-sex parent families may not resemble the privileged *Leave it to Beaver*-type structure that continues to inform cultural expectations, but by embracing certain normalizing markers and behaviors while advocating pride in diversity, they create and participate in a nontraditional discourse of family.

Negating. The participants also privileged the DNFS and negated the DTFS at times. In some cases, this occurred when the couples talked about communicating a message of nontraditional inclusivity to their children by making it a point to spend time with other same-sex families. For instance, because Ethan and Leon anticipate more questions from their young daughter about family structure as she gets older, Leon stated that he and his husband:

> try to make sure that we have same-sex couple friends that have kids, that so, she can see other families that look like hers. And so, we're trying to expose her to all sorts of family structures, so that she realizes that, the, the *Leave it to Beaver* type family structure, that you have a mom and dad and a beautiful house and kids, is, is not the norm. (I-1, 405-409)

Leon specifically references *Leave it to Beaver* and distances the meaning of family from that archetype. The new normal for family, Leon contends, does not resemble the idyllic household presented on *Beaver*, but instead is made up of more diverse structures and forms. Note that he specifically argues that the DTFS is "not the norm." In this way, Leon privileges the DNFS and negates the DTFS. By exposing their daughter to other families that look like their own and generating a new meaning for family, Ethan and Leon hope to normalize the nontraditional family discourse and mitigate concerns she may have as she grows up.

The negation of the DTFS in favor of the DNFS also manifested when the couples described conversations they have had with their kids about family structure and identity. For example, Albert recalled a recent exchange he had with his son about whether there are other gay parents at school:

> So, I asked him, "Like, you know, do you and do you have other kids in your school that have two dads?" And he was like, "No." And he was like, "Just me." And I was like, "Oh

really." And he was like, "It's unfair." I said, "It's unfair that you have two dads?" "No,

it's unfair that they only have one." So, I love that he's totally cool with the fact that he

has two dads. (I-1, 262-265)

Based on this retelling, Albert's son has adopted the DNFS, and specifically the GPF form, as

the dominant meaning of family that Albert and Matt have demonstrated and communicated—so

much so that their son is saddened that none of his classmates have the same family structure.

This privileging of the DNFS while negating the DTFS is a source of pride for Albert, who is

happy his son sees their family as something others can aspire to. Timothy, who said he believes

that children have an "amazing ability to think that whatever they grow up with is normal" (I-1,

278-279), also talked about a conversation he had with his son, Joe, regarding family structures

wherein the DTFS was negated by the DNFS. When Joe found out his friend had two moms and

not two dads or a mom and a dad, Joe told Timothy that he thought it was "ridiculous." Timothy

and his husband, Jack, had normalized two-dad households so much for their children that they

positioned other nontraditional family types, such as lesbian parent families, as nonnormative

and, as in their son Joe's characterization, "ridiculous." Interestingly, in this case, Joe negated

both the DTFS and certain aspects of the DTFS, because his understanding of family included

GPFs but marginalized lesbian families.

Overall, the meaning of family for the study's participants was overwhelmingly rooted in

the discursive interplay of the DTFS and the DNFS. For some, the DTFS remained the dominant

discourse of family, but the DNFS was entertained in a way that positioned it as just as worthy

and functional. For others, the DTFS was negated by the DNFS, situating nontraditional family

forms as the new cultural norm.

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the emergent discourses of fatherhood found in the men's' relational talk. Two sites of discursive struggle emerged within the larger meaning-making process for fatherhood: (a) the interplay between the discourses of gay culture (DGC) and gay fatherhood (DGF) and (b) the interplay between the discourses of heteronormative fatherhood (DHF) and co-parenting (DCP).

Identifying the Discourse of Gay Culture (DGC) and the Discourse of Gay Fatherhood (DGF)

The DGC. In the couples' discussion of what becoming fathers meant to them, gay culture frequently emerged as a discourse. The DGC featured two central themes found at the distal-already spoken link that the participants discursively distanced themselves from. The first theme of the DGC positioned gay fatherhood as an unachievable goal at an early age for the participants. These men often described how accepting their identity as gay men resulted in fears that they may never be able to have kids someday. For Bill, being gay growing up meant that starting a family was not a "feasible option" for him. He explained that 20 years ago, becoming a dad:

> didn't seem to be something I would see in my lifetime. Um, so not that I necessarily
> gave up on the idea, but it wasn't something I pursued in anyway, because I didn't really
> think it was going to happen. Um, so, it kind of just, well, always wanted but didn't
> necessarily felt it would ever be. (I-1, 162-166)

Despite a strong desire to become a dad, Bill believed that being a gay man was mutually exclusive with being a parent. Eventually, Bill met his husband Thomas and they adopted a daughter, but for an extended period of his life, not being able to see himself as a father through the lens of the DGC prevented him from pursuing avenues to achieve his goal. For Eddie, it was

more a case of gay fathers not having enough cultural visibility, meaning it was difficult to see himself in a parental role. When he came out, he said he did not have any "kind of gay family role models that you could look to and think, 'Oh, that's possible for me one day too'" (I-1, 152-153). Because Eddie did not have prominent examples of gay fathers available to him, he doubted there was a chance he could one day become a parent. In this way, the DGC rendered Eddie's understanding of fatherhood as strictly heteronormative and, thus, not possible.

The second theme associated with the DGC was the participants' characterization of gay identity as self-centered. As James succinctly put it, embracing this attitude of selfishness has led to a cultural belief that "a lot of gay men don't want children" (I-1, 236). Indeed, several of the men described gay culture as a largely childless one, with gay non-parents too focused on themselves to make room for the time and sacrifices necessary to raise kids. For instance, Albert talked about why he waited until he was in his mid-thirties to have children with his husband, Matt, and said:

> And I think it's, it's not, um, assumed as much that we would have, that gay men would
>
> have children. So, I think you kind of just fall into that pattern of being a little bit more
>
> selfish and whatnot. (I-1, 162-164)

Here, Albert attributes the assumption that gay men do not want kids because their identity is tied to a "pattern" of selfishness. Because the DGC encourages a high level of self-centeredness, gay men do not believe they can give enough of themselves to their children. This aspect of the DGC outlined by Albert was internalized by John when he was younger. John said he was worried about being a good parent because of the DGC's tradition of selfishness he felt he had accepted. John was concerned that he:

…wouldn't be sort of generous enough to be a parent. I thought I might resent having a child around. Being able to pursue things, of you know, things that I did for myself. And there was a lot of sort of internalized homophobia there. Around um, you know, not sort of seeing myself in that position. Or, sort of, maybe some ideas, that especially gay men are sort of self-centered around doing things for themselves. (I-1, 370-374)

John equates parenthood to a higher level of generosity, love, and care—this characterization of identity is positioned in contrast to what gay culture allows. In becoming a father with his husband, Randy, John has separated himself from the "internalized homophobia" and self-centered identity he associates with the traditional gay lifestyle and the DGC. The couples also talked about their gay friends in comparison to how they viewed themselves as gay fathers, providing further insight into the disconnect between gay identity and fatherhood associated with the DGC. For instance, Ethan and Leon talked about how negotiations with friends have changed since they became parents:

L: Since a lot of gays don't have kids, don't get the whole kid thing.

E: Yeah.

L: Not that they don't want to or are disapprove of it or dislike it, it's more like, we'll say "Let's have dinner." And their like, "Great. So you wanna do dinner at 8." We're like, "She goes to bed at 7:30."

I: Right, right.

L: "So we were thinking more like 5:30." And they're like, "Oh. That's really early." But when you have gay friends that have kids, they're all like, "5 or 5:30?" And we're like, "Let's do 5:30." They kind of just get what's going on. (I-1, 585-593)

Because their gay friends without kids do not "get" fatherhood, Ethan and Leon attribute their trouble adjusting dinnertimes to the DGC. However, their gay friends *with* children "kind of just get what's going on" when it comes to scheduling.

The DGF. Essentially, the DGF was tied to the experience of becoming parents for the first time and what the transformational nature of that event meant for their identities as both fathers and gay men. For example, James described how he felt when his son was born:

> And I didn't know how I was going to think before this because obviously a new experience for both of us to be now, you know, a same sex couple, raising a child. But you know, I think from the minute he was born, he was brought to us, you know, you are now the parent. And you figure it out like any parent. (I-1, 423-427)

James admitted that he was unsure how he would process the event beforehand, especially being in a same-sex relationship; however, he quickly learned that becoming a gay father through adoption was like anyone else becoming a parent—you "figure it out" and embrace the roles and responsibilities of parenthood. In this way, the DGF resists the historical cultural belief (informed by the distal-already spoken discourses of traditional gay culture) that being gay necessarily equates to non-fatherhood.

The DGF also rejected the "selfish" designation of the DGC—the participants distanced themselves from traditional gay culture by providing examples of their adventures in parenting. Elliot, for instance, was discussing the first Christmas he and Connor had with their daughter, Sarah. Because Connor and Sarah both felt terribly ill, all three wound up in the E.R. Elliot talked about the unique perspective being a parent gave him in that moment, especially in comparison to their gay friends without children:

E: I mean it was just, it was one of the lowest moments of my life. And then, you know, I'm like, "So this is parenting?" What the fuck? I can't even be with my family on this holiday. And I'm being nurse to Connor and Sarah. And so they, they are, especially our gay friends that don't have kids. They don't understand that form of sacrifice. (I-1, 602-606)

Note that Connor did not just position the experience as a normal part of being a spouse and/or parent. He explicitly used their "gay friends that don't have kids" as an oppositional identity to his identity as a gay father. Whereas the DGC is steeped in self-absorption, the DGF is marked by self-sacrifice and generosity for family.

Summary of the discourses. The DGC contained two themes relative to gay fatherhood, both of which were informed by the cultural distal-already-spoken links in the utterance chain: being gay and being a father are historically incompatible identities and gay culture emphasizes selfishness. The DGF, on the other hand, opposes those themes, instead contending that gay men can in fact be fathers/parents and that gay fatherhood means a shift in priorities from the self to the child or children. Having outlined the core concepts inherent in the DGC and the DGF, I now turn to examples of their discursive interplay in the data.

The interplay of the DGC and the DGF

The discursive struggle between the DGC and the DGF was primarily diachronic in nature since the participants often spoke about how their thoughts and opinions about fatherhood changed over time. The interplay of the DGC and the DGF manifested in two discursively competitive ways: entertaining and negating.

Entertaining. Coming out for the first time to friends and family was a turning point in many of the participants' lives that contributed to their fears surrounding fatherhood. During

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those moments, the DGC's rejection of a gay father identity dominated the discursive struggle for meaning of fatherhood. That said, the DGF, while marginalized, was still entertained at a latent level. For example, when I asked Michael and Rick if they had always planned on having kids from the start, Michael said:

> I think part of our building our relationship talked about our coming out process and both of us, um, you specifically felt like coming out as a gay man closed, was closing a door to being a father. (I-1, 199-201)

For Michael, coming out meant closing the door to parenthood in the future—because of the cultural limitations on fatherhood associated with the DGF and gay identity, being a dad was simply not possible. Rick agreed with his husband's sentiments, stating that when he came out, he believed that he:

> was kind of flipping that switch to saying, "Okay. Now I'm choosing that and that means…I'm not going to have a family. I'm going to be different." When all I wanted to do was that other piece of it. So, that was hard. (I-1, 206-209)

The DGC was represented for Rick in the form of a metaphorical "switch" that effectively rendered the DGF off, at least temporarily. Even though both he and his husband, Rick, wanted to have kids, the incongruous nature of gay identity and parenthood still resonated with them years into their relationship. As Rick continued his story, however, it was clear that the DGF eventually was entertained:

> …very early in our relationship and I remember we would be sitting in the same pew every week. And there were families with young kids around us. And I just remember that, we'd leave church, (sighs) "We want that." And we just didn't know how to do that,

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or if it was possible, and I think once we knew we were solid in our relationship and that

feeling wasn't going away…. (I-1, 211-215)

While the DGC was the dominant discourse distally and proximally for some time, the DGF

slowly gained a foothold for Michael and Rick as their desire for children of their own grew

stronger. The DGF was so marginalized in the discursive struggle that they "didn't know how to

do that, or if it was possible" but was entertained and present on some level—the strength of

their relationship and the acknowledgement that fatherhood was something they truly wanted

permitted the DGF to gain prominence in the meaning-making process. For them and other

participants, becoming a father meant overcoming a significant social barrier (wrapped up in the

DGC) that had long been associated with gay identity. In another instance of discursive

entertaining, George talked about the successes and struggles along the pathway to gay

fatherhood, saying:

I think it's definitely more visible and it's definitely more of an option. And there's still

lots of barriers unfortunately. Especially for gay men. So, I think, um, you know, we have

younger gay friends who are interested in having families but are concerned about, you

know, all the things that they would have to go through, whether it would be adoption or

surrogacy. The legal process and the cost and all that. So, um, so I think people are aware

that it's an option but there are certainly barriers that make it challenging. (I-2, 20-25)

Here, George privileges the DGC when he points out that there are "still lots of barriers" for gay

men who want fatherhood; namely, the legal requirements and the high cost associated with

either adoption or surrogacy. The DGF, while marginalized, is entertained by George as he

positions gay fatherhood as "more visible" culturally and "more of an option" than it was in the

past.

Negating. In some cases, the DGF negated the DGC, as the fathers distanced themselves

from the selfishness of the DGC. Elliot recalled a humorous exchange he had with a friend as

they went out for the evening while Elliot's husband, Connor, was staying in:

> I find, especially among gay people, they don't understand that a kid is nothing like a
>
> dog. Like, you can't just leave the dog at home…like I remember I was going out with
>
> this friend. And Connor stayed home to watch Sarah, as we were walking out the front
>
> door. He was like, "Oh, is Connor coming?" And I said, "No. Connor has to stay with the
>
> baby." And he said, "Oh, right. You're right. Your baby is nothing like a dog. I don't
>
> know why I thought you could just leave a child at home." (I-1, 527-532)

Elliot is discursively clowning the disconnect between fatherhood and gay identity that

permeates the DGC. His friend's delayed recognition of the fact that a child and a dog have very

different needs is being playfully challenged by Elliot's identity as a gay father. Elliot went on to

say that this mindset is common among their gay friends who still value the DGC—there is a

certain "cluelessness" about childcare that even straight friends without kids do not exhibit. In

this way, Elliot positions gay fatherhood as a rejection of the detachment from fatherhood

responsibilities associated with gay culture, negating the DGC in favor of the DGF—gay dads

must be more giving, selfless, and careful than their non-parent counterparts.

Overall, the meaning of gay fatherhood stood in direct opposition to the dominant

traditional discourses of gay culture (historically non-parental gay identity and gay culture) for

the participants, and the couples' talk about how they see their roles as parents consistently

embraced the DGF while negating the DGC. The following section shifts to the other discursive

struggle that emerged in the participants' talk about fatherhood: the competition for meaning-

making between the discourse of heteronormative fatherhood (DHF) and the discourse of co-parenting (DCP).

Identifying the Discourses of Heterosexual Fatherhood (DHF) and Co-Parenting (DCP)

The DHF. Participants routinely acknowledged the existence of the traditional, 1950s style heterosexual fatherhood role when speaking about what fatherhood means. This distal-already-spoken characterization of fatherhood identity—a masculine breadwinner, disciplinarian type who avoids nurturing—was crystalized in the DHF. Thomas, for instance, said "I think with the questioning of, you have the stereotypical dad who's the TV dad or whatever. I grew up with my dad always working 3rd shift. So, he wasn't there for a lot of the conversations (I-2, 29-31). Thomas references both the "stereotypical TV dad" and his own father in constructing an identity for the traditional father role. Similarly, Leon spoke to the traditional expectations for heterosexual dads (and moms):

> …if you're in a heterosexual relationship with a kid, there's kind of, there's some unwritten rules about, "The woman does this, the man does this." And part of it stems from um, for the first two months of the child's life, the child is physically dependent upon the mother for nourishment, so from that stems that, mom does this, mom does the baby stuff and dad does this stuff (I-1, 459-463)

According to Leon, by virtue of being in a heterosexual relationship, fathers are naturally restricted from participating in some of the early moments in their child's life based on a combination of "unwritten rules" and the physical requirements of the mother. John echoed those thoughts about gendered heteronormative parental roles as well, stating "…lots of times when there's a mother and father there's certain kinds of roles that are assumed based on gender. So, this is what I do with Mom, this is what I do with Dad" (I-1, 603-605). In this way, the DHF

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represented expectations for heteronormative fathering responsibilities in the home for the participants—heterosexual fathers simply do not take part in certain household duties and/or activities with their children based on societal positioning of what dads "should" do within the family structure.

The DCP. Standing in stark contrast to the DHF, the DCP was firmly rooted in an approach to childrearing responsibilities that sees the line between heteronormative mother and father gendered expectations blurred. Essentially, this blurring resulted in nongendered, comprehensive, co-parenting roles for the participants and their families. Connor summed up this "co-parent" style he shares with his husband, Elliot, stating:

> I don't look at it as being a father. I look at it more as being a parent. I think the role, the traditional roles of mother and father, being more equally, ah, more equally shared. You know, each of us have certain strengths and weaknesses and we, you know, play to our strengths in the parenting role that we take. But I don't see myself as a father as much as I see Elliot and I being co-parents. (I-1, 376-380)

As co-parents, Connor and Elliot can pick and choose childrearing duties based on their respective strengths and weaknesses. They are not tied down to traditional expectations for mothers or fathers; rather, by adhering to the DCP, they can easily share those roles more equitably in order to raise happy, healthy children. Michael said he was excited that he and Rick found themselves "rewriting the book about how I have been raised on what a father is…it means that...there's nothing pre-defined about how I should parent" (I-1, 395-397). By indicating they are rewriting the script for how they parent, Michael is adopting the nontraditional, undefined DCP approach.

Some GPFs indicated that they feel traditional mom and dad responsibilities have eroded significantly in *all* households over the last few decades, regardless of sexual orientation. For instance, James, referencing the dominant traditional gender parenting roles that developed in the middle of the last century, said:

> Going back to the fifties is, I don't think you have too many families, regardless of gay or straight that have those roles. I mean, we're both working parents so we both share the duties of raising Billy and do what we have to do around the house. Um, and ah, you know, both of those roles I think are blended. (I-2, 105-109)

James rejects the idea that modern couples raising children (straight or gay) still adhere to traditional mother and father childrearing tasks. Participants like James positioned most contemporary families as an untraditional blend of roles and responsibilities that render traditional meanings and labels for moms and dads as largely irrelevant through the DCP lens.

Summary of the discourses. While the DHF was grounded in culturally informed notions of traditional heteronormative fatherhood as an uninvolved approach to childrearing, the DCP that emerged in the participants' talk favored gender neutral roles that positioned the fathers as co-parents first. For some of the GPFs, the DCP represented a culture-wide, universal shift in parenting expectations for straight and gay parents; yet, for others, their non-heterosexual status affords them an even greater opportunity to embrace the DCP since they are never bound by traditional gendered models. Either way, the DCP clearly competed with the DHF consistently as the participants described their identities as fathers/parents. This discursive interplay is further explained in the next section.

The interplay of the DHF and DCP

The discursive competition for meaning between the DHF and the DCP was mostly synchronic in nature, with the DCP negating the DHF in the participants' talk.

Negating. Because the notion of heteronormative fatherhood represented a bygone era of restrictive parenting responsibilities that the participants wanted to avoid, the DCP almost universally negated the DHF when the couples spoke about their roles as parents. For example, Wes, who self-identified as a more of a parent than a father, talked about how his perceptions of fatherhood came from his own dad, who embodies the discourses of the traditional father:

> I think what's funny to me is my idea of what a dad is, of course, a straight man. My dad
> was unemotional and kind of held off. And we're not that. And so I think that I constantly
> don't think of myself as a dad, because I'm like, "Oh I'm not what I pictured dads as to
> be." (I-1, 355-358)

Wes's father represents traditional characteristics (heterosexual, emotionally unavailable, noncommunicative) of fatherhood, and because Wes and his husband Riley do not replicate that approach to raising their son, Wes negates the DHF. In fact, he does not even see himself as a "dad." Instead, he described himself and Riley as normal parents who regularly take on whatever tasks are required and aligns fully with the DCP.

Victor said that he and his husband, Ryan, recognized as soon as their daughter was born that their lives changed and the DHF simply would not work for their family structure. He explained:

> …for heterosexual families I think there are gender roles that are prescribed a little bit.
> Especially like, say, there's a mother and father and the mother is breastfeeding or
> something. Then it's assumed that she's going to be feeding the kid the entire time.

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Whereas for us, there's nobody breastfeeding, so it's delegate responsibility. Kind of,

divide and conquer and stuff. (I-1, 242-246)

Neither Victor nor Ryan feels pressured into fulfilling a traditional motherhood role because

certain gendered responsibilities (in this case, feeding) can be tackled together—as Victor puts it,

they can "divide and conquer." This divide and conquer mindset of the DCP negates the

gendered expectations and rules found within the DHF. Leon said he and Ethan are also able to

avoid the "unwritten rules" of the DHF and heterosexual relationships and use a similar "tag-

team" method for feeding their young daughter. Leon believes this has forced the couples'

heterosexual male friends to take stock of how they handle parenting responsibilities with their

partners:

They see us, you know, they see me or Ethan, you know, if I'm out of town, I'm taking

care of the baby by myself and I don't bitch and complain about it. And then, the guys are

kind of like, "Well, shit. Maybe I have to kind of step my game up 'cause, he can, I don't

want to be outgunned by the gays." (I-1, 484-487)

For Leon, the DHF dictates that dads are prone to complain about feeding or having to watch

their kids by themselves—the behaviors they have seen their straight friends engage in and that

they tend to associate with heteronormative fatherhood. Leon engages in an act of discursive

clowning as he describes his straight friends' concerns about being "outgunned by the gays." In

this way, Leon distances himself and his husband from that traditional notion of fatherhood, and

takes pride in what he perceives of as a more equitable approach to parenting in the DCP,

necessarily negating the DHP he perceives remains in his heterosexual friends' family dynamics.

V. Discussion

Guided by Baxter's (2011) RDT, I employed a contrapuntal analysis to explore the meaning-making that occurred at three sites of family identity in married gay parents' relational talk: marriage, family, and fatherhood. My analysis of the data identified two emergent discourses of marriage, including the discourse of marriage as symbolic (DMAS) and the discourse of marriage as practical (DMAP), answering RQ1. Through the DMAS, the couples framed their nonlegal marriages as meaningful lifelong bonds rooted in traditional symbols and rituals of commitment, such as ceremonies and long-term relational milestones. The DMAP was connected to the important protections and advantages afforded by legal marriage, but lacked the romantic/relational significance of the DMAS. I identified two kinds of discursive struggle for meaning between the DMAS and the DMAP—negating and entertaining—and one instance of discursive transformation in the form of an aesthetic moment, wherein marriage was positioned as a political act.

At the meaning-making site of family (RQ2), my analysis of the data recognized two discourses: the discourse of traditional family structure (DTFS) and the discourse of nontraditional family structure (DNFS). The DTFS aligned with the culturally dominant understanding of family as heteronormative; that is, a married heterosexual husband and wife raising biological children. The DNFS, on the other hand, spoke to the prevalence, legitimacy, and strength of nontraditional family structures. The DTFS and the DNFS engaged discursively through entertaining and negating.

Finally, when the GPFs talked fatherhood, four discourses emerged at two discursive sites of interplay to answer RQ3. At the first site, the discourse of gay culture (DGC) and the discourse of gay fatherhood (DGF) struggled for meaning. The DGC was tied to the historical

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positioning of gay men as childless in addition to the perception that gay men are too selfish to want fatherhood. The DGF, however, allows gay men to see themselves *as* dads who are selfless individuals capable of giving children the time, effort, and love they need. The GFPs either entertained or negated these discourses. At the second site of fatherhood, the discourse of heteronormative fatherhood (DHF) and the discourse of co-parenting (DCP) emerged. Within the DHF, cultural stereotypes of fathers as emotionally detached breadwinners who are unwilling to take part in nurturing their children rooted their expectations for fatherhood. The DCP shed the gendered, heteronormative roles of mothers and fathers in favor of a "divide and conquer" co-parent approach to childrearing. The DCP negated the DHF in the participants' talk about their identity as fathers. I discuss the implications of these findings within the context of same-sex parent family research in further detail below. Next, I discuss this study's theoretical contributions to RDT, and then I conclude with limitations and suggestions for future directions.

The couples' talk of their marriages produced two discourses in the present study. The first, the DMAS, offers insight into the relational meaning gay couples assign to the symbolic nature of ceremonies and milestones experienced prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage. Participants often labeled themselves and their relationships as traditional and adopted discourses of traditional marriage when describing their wedding celebrations. These symbolic ceremonies tended to take on a traditional wedding format and signified a meaningful relational shift for the couples and their families. By using rituals and language reminiscent of legal wedding ceremonies, the couples not only created legitimacy for their commitment, they also provided loved ones with a familiar context in which they could celebrate the relationship together (Liddle & Liddle, 2004). This finding is consistent with extant research into long-term same-sex relationships prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide—non-heterosexual

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couples frequently held ceremonies and engaged in "married life without marriage" (Lannutti, 2008, p. 246). Indeed, previous studies have noted that non-legal same-sex commitment ceremonies symbolized legal marriage, with couples indicating they put more effort into their relationships and handled important life decisions jointly after having a ceremony (Reczek, Elliott, & Umberson, 2009). Respondents in Lannutti's (2011) investigation of older same-sex couples' opinions on same-sex marriage also characterized their ceremonies as equivalent to that of traditional weddings despite their lack of legal recognition, much like the couples interviewed for the current study and the DMAS that emerged in their talk.

The second discourse of marriage identified in the data was the DMAP. The DMAP was, in some ways, a significant departure from the existing same-sex marriage literature. In talking about what legal marriage meant to them, the participants emphasized the importance of the legal protections and financial advantages afforded to the couples and their families. Essentially, legal marriage was characterized as a practical step forward for the GPFs' existing long-term relationships. This aspect of the DMAP does reflect previous research into the meaning-making process for same-sex couples. For instance, some of the LGBTQ respondents in Lannutti's (2005) exploration of the meanings of same-sex legal marriage indicated that parity with heterosexual couples was a driving force in seeking equal marriage rights—legal marriage signified an elevation of citizenship, financial benefits, and family security. Similarly, the older couples in Lannutti's (2011) investigation also stressed the importance of fiscal and medical protections. However, the current study breaks with extant same-sex marriage research in that participants *did not* view their legal marriage as an event that had any impact on the legitimacy or meaning of their relationship at the proximal meaning-making level. This discursive theme runs counter to the responses generated by Lannutti's (2005) LGBTQ participants who suggested

that "same-sex marriage will make same-sex couples take their relationships more seriously and strengthen same-sex partnerships in a variety of ways" (p. 10), and the lesbian and bisexual couples in Lannutti's (2008) investigation of same-sex marriage who reported that legal marriage reinforced the strength of their romantic relationships, increased their sense of love for one another, and created tighter emotional bonds. Further, Lanutti (2014a) argued that legal marriage may help same-sex couples communicate relational legitimacy to their social networks and society-at-large, while Lannutti (2014b) also contended that same-sex families could employ legal marriage to aid them in creating and sustaining family identity.

Neither the results of earlier research into legal same-sex marriage (Lannutti, 2005; 2008) nor Lannutti's (2014a; 2014b) predictions about the impact of legal marriage on same-sex family relationships and communication resonated with the participants of the present study. Instead, the couples made it a point to describe their legal marriage in strictly practical terms, referring to their commitment ceremonies (if they had them) as the date their marriages began. Friends and family often followed suit, showing support by both being at the event to celebrate and accepting the legitimacy of the couples' relational commitment to one another after the ceremony. In fact, several participants had difficulty even remembering the day of their legally recognized marriage, and frequently labeled the occasion as non-romantic and/or non-meaningful in the context of their romantic relationships. In this way, through the DMAP, legal marriage was positioned as a romance-less, non-significant step for the participants' identities as long-term committed couples.

Talk of family communication and identity also generated two discourses for the study's participants: the DTFS and the DNFS. These discourses discursively interacted through entertaining and negating. While the DTFS was often still situated as the dominant cultural form

of family, the couples frequently entertained the DNFS as not only a worthy and functional approach to family construction, but also the emerging "new normal" at the societal level—a sentiment that reflects the now-majority nontraditional American family landscape (Baxter, 2014a). It was important for the fathers to consistently send a message to their kids and others that there is nothing wrong with a family's identity being aligned with the "different," nontraditional nature of the DNFS. In entertaining the DNFS with the DTFS, the participants made it clear that, for them, Coontz's (2015) "Ozzie and Harriet" style family that was once the standard for legitimacy is in decline, and that nontraditional families (not just two-dad families) should be increasingly accepted and celebrated. GPFs in the current study talked about seeking out diverse populations and areas to live, the joy they felt when their children expressed pride in their nontraditional family structure, and the political statement their family was making by raising happy, loved, well-adjusted children. In some cases, championing the DNFS resulted in negation of the DTFS for the couples and their kids; that is, the fathers distanced themselves and their family identity completely from the DTFS, positioning the gold standard as a bygone model for family structures. Instances of discursive interplay, either through entertaining or negating, between the DTFS and DNFS aligns with Floyd et al.'s (2006) conceptualization of the "role" lens of family formation. Participants embraced this normalizing discursive approach to nontraditional family identity communication with each other, their kids, and their communities through the DNFS, even when the DTFS was still present in their talk.

This finding is similar to the results from previous same-sex parent studies. For example, the respondents in Suter et al.'s (2008) investigation of how lesbian parents negotiate family identity talked about the importance of seeking out other same-sex families (often through same-sex family support groups) to normalize their family form for their kids. Likewise, in Breshears'

(2010) exploration of lesbian parent family discourse, participants discussed their efforts to model normalcy every day with their children and provide positive examples of nontraditional family structure through interaction with other non-heterosexual families and with books depicting gay and lesbian families. That said, the discourses of family generated by the couples in current study is unique in two ways. First, no other discourse analyses of same-sex parent families have specifically focused on gay male parents' relational communication. Second, although the participants in both Suter et al. (2008) and Breshears (2010) normalized their family structures by exposing their kids to other lesbian and gay parent families, the GPFs in this study promoted an even more inclusive definition of family for their children that extended beyond parent sexual orientation—even though in some cases (e.g., Albert's and Timothy's) this led to an over-privileging of the GPF family form.

Finally, my analysis of the meaning-making process for fatherhood identified four emergent discourses in the data across two sites of discursive interplay. The was wrought through the struggle between the DGC and the DGF. The DGC had two inherent themes that the couples necessarily had to distance themselves from in order to realign their identity with the DGF. One of these was the belief that coming out as gay meant closing the door to fatherhood. Participants talked about how, especially as young gay men, they struggled to see a future wherein becoming a father would be a possibility. Some attributed this to the lack of feasible options, whereas others pointed to a culture devoid of visible gay parents to model their own lives after. This finding is consistent with larger cultural stereotypes that have historically cast non-heterosexual individuals as unfit parents and rendered gay fathers as a socially invisible identity construct (Bigner, 1999; Vinjamuri, 2015). The other characteristic of traditional gay male culture that participants discursively separated themselves from was the perception that gay

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men are too self-centered to be loving, generous fathers—a sentiment Lewin (2009) similarly located in her interviews with gay dads about their romantic relationships and friendships after becoming parents. Having internalized aspects of the DGC, some GPFs described their own fears prior to having kids that they would be too selfish to properly raise a child. Additionally, the couples frequently used their own single gay friends as examples of the alleged self-centered mindset associated with the DGC. Participants described individuals who either fail to understand the parameters of fatherhood duties or chose not to become dads themselves because of recreational time commitments (e.g., parties, vacations, the gym). As a result of their shift in priorities with the DGF, the couples found stronger connections with other parents (gay or straight) who could better identify with their responsibilities as fathers to young children.

At the second site of discursive interplay for fatherhood, the DHP and the DCP struggled for meaning. In this discursive struggle, participants privileged a conception of co-parenthood via the DCP that removed the constraints of gendered roles in childrearing and instead favored a more balanced approach to household tasks and responsibilities. Further, the fathers talked about their desire to break from the emotional stoicism associated with the DHP and engage their children in open, honest communication. For some couples in the present study, the blended-parent DCP identity was reflective of larger cultural shifts towards non-gendered parenting in all households, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation. Other couples saw their two-parent family structure as an opportunity for even greater equitability in the home arguing that due to logistical childcare issues (e.g., feeding, sources of income), heterosexual couples still often fall into the traditional gendered stereotypes typical of the DHP. Indeed, previous research indicates that gay male couples do tend to co-parent more equally than heterosexual parents (Biblarz & Savci, 2010). Lastly, some participants also spoke to the extreme lengths they consistently had to

go to in order to achieve fatherhood—these choices set them apart from traditional heterosexual fathers, as they had no cultural/legal scripts to guide their decision-making processes as parents.

The participants' positioning of fatherhood as a blending of parental roles embodies the "new father" role outlined by McGill (2014); however, the fathers in this study were forced to define their roles outside the context of a heterosexual relationship. Based on cultural expectations, heterosexual dads must necessarily explore traditional and nontraditional fatherhood identities as they balance workplace pressures and childrearing responsibilities what is best for their families (McGill, 2014). Gay dads, however, become parents with few expectations for their respective roles as fathers. In the present investigation, the couples' discussion of their egalitarian approach to fatherhood in the DCP suggests that gay fathers have greater control over shaping their own identities and communication styles with their kids, and enter parenthood with a *tabula rasa* that tends to favor the "new father" role for both parents.

In addition to providing a better understanding of the meaning-making process for GPF identity, this study also offers theoretical contributions to the larger, ongoing study of nontraditional family communication scholarship. By adhering closely to RDT as my guide throughout the course of this investigation, I have responded to Baxter's (2014b) call for more nontraditional family research firmly rooted in "theoretically informed work." Baxter argues that making good use of a sensitizing theory "helps a researcher determine what to pay attention to in the overwhelming sea of phenomena available for study; it helps us sort out what patterns in data are more and less important" (p. 34). Theoretical work of this kind, she contends, is especially important for studying nontraditional families as scholars continue to investigate how members "remake" the meaning of family communicatively.

Indeed, for the present study, I was overwhelmed by the numerous potential themes surrounding GPF identity as I read through the transcripts in search of three different sites of discursive interplay. However, because RDT acts as an effective sensitizing tool for researchers as they explore their data, I was able to distill the myriad themes down to a point where I felt confident I had located the representative discourses of marriage, family, and fatherhood present in the participants' talk. Baxter (2014b) also maintains that theoretically-driven nontraditional family scholarship can (a) displace the public-private binary approach to family communication, (b) attend to the critical nature of nontraditional family forms, and (c) aim to uncover the ways in which nontraditional families remain resilient in a culture that still regularly de-legitimizes their identities. Because RDT (a) seeks to remove the public-private binary in data collection and analysis, (b) serves as a critical theory focused on locating dominant and marginalized discourses at the distal and proximal levels, and (c) adeptly explores identity work in relational talk, it met Baxter's criteria for conducting effective nontraditional family research. Using an RDT-lens for analysis, I discovered how the GPFs communicate their identities internally and externally, and how the distal and proximal links in the utterance chain informed the emergent discourses in their talk. Additionally, I identified how the GPFs either critically marginalized or elevated the discourses. Finally, by locating the specific discourses in their talk, I illuminated how these gay father families might discursively demonstrate resilience in relation to the traditional meanings of marriage, family, and fatherhood, such as when they entertained or privileged the DMAS, DNFS, DGF, and DCP.

In light of these contributions, the present investigation continues to strengthen RDT's viability as a critical lens of study for nontraditional family communication. When Baxter (2011) updated RDT to version 2.0, she lamented the fact that interpersonal scholars had largely avoided

using the theory's earlier iteration to call attention to the imbalance of power at relational and cultural levels, especially in the context of family research. Since then, scholars have used the updated theory to critically examine various nontraditional family forms, such as adoptive families (Baxter et al., 2014), transgender families (Norwood, 2013), and lesbian-parent families (Suter et al., 2015). The current study adds GPFs to this growing list of critical family communication research. This study also confirms the usefulness of certain methodological approaches that can be utilized in conjunction with the theory to produce rich and complex discursive insight. For instance, Halliwell (2015) advocated the use of dyads and longitudinal data to help RDT researchers gain access to communication in situ and over time, respectively. Having employed both of these approaches to data collection, I can confirm that they provide two major benefits: the opportunity to explore discursive interplay at an in-depth, proximal/relational level, and the ability to member check initial themes on the route to identifying emerging discourses.

Ultimately, RDT helped illuminate the ways in which this study's participants manage three significant aspects of their identity—marriage, family, and fatherhood—through the discursive interplay of traditional and nontraditional discourses. The results contribute to a growing body of nontraditional RDT-based literature, and demonstrate the value of the emerging RDT research techniques prescribed by Halliwell (2015). Further, it continues the ongoing exploration of the lived experiences of nontraditional family forms in an effort to provide a voice for historically marginalized familial structures, and gain insight into how those families discursively construct and manage their identities in a society that still largely favors heteronormative, traditional archetypes.

Limitations

One limitation for the current study was the homogeneous nature of the participants' socioeconomic status. Each of the couples I interviewed reported a combined household income of over $100,000—an important factor in gay fatherhood considering the relatively steep costs associated with adoption and/or surrogacy. Further, the fact that the participants had healthier finances likely contributed to their ability to seek out more socially liberal, accepting, and diverse communities. Beyond a few instances of discomfort in public, the couples rarely talked about any challenges to their legitimacy or times they felt discriminated against due to their family structure. Researchers should seek out lower income gay dads to explore if they have experienced additional pushback and/or different forms of discursive resistance as a result of their identities. Another limitation was the lack of race/ethnic diversity among the couples I interviewed. Most of the participants identified as Caucasian. Based on the ongoing cultural struggles surrounding race/ethnicity in America, it is possible minority gay fathers have significantly different experiences raising their children and warrant more attention.

Although I am confident that the fathers talked authentically about their experiences in our interviews, another potential limitation surrounds the notion "silence" in the participants' responses; that is, respondents may have felt compelled to present unflawed examples of GPFs by focusing more on their positive experiences with marriage, family, and fatherhood when answering questions. It is possible that the fathers in the current investigation sometimes shied away from sharing negative feelings towards internal and external communication in an effort to avoid damaging the emerging cultural identity of the GPF. Because I was able to establish a fairly in-depth portrait of the participants' familial experiences by (a) employing a semi-structured interview approach, (b) conducting multiple interviews with *both* parents, and (c)

engaging in member checking, I believe I limited any "silence" that might have occurred; that said, it is difficult to be certain this never occurred. Therefore, future investigators examining *any* culturally marginalized family form should take this potential limitation into account when designing their methodological process for gathering/analyzing data and plan accordingly.

A final limitation of my study was that I did not include the voices of the GPFs' children. Future researchers could also investigate how gay parents' children talk about family—the GPFs in this study taught their children that all family structures should be celebrated and valued equally, but some continued to privilege GPFs over other family types (even other nontraditional family forms). Therefore, results likely differ with those found by Baxter et al. (2009) in their survey of college-aged adults, which found that respondents positioned traditional families as being the most legitimate family form, but until scholars seek the voices of GPF children directly we will not know their views about marriage, family, and parenthood.

Future Directions

Because this study is the first to examine GPF identity and meaning-making from a family communication perspective, there are questions scholars interested in exploring the unique relational challenges and successes experienced by gay fathers and their children should ask. For example, the men in this study discussed not only their conversations within but also outside of their families, and the challenges of such talk. Future research could explore the question of how gay men prepare for and/or make sense of their conversations with others about their family plans. A theory GPF research could employ is Imagined Interaction Theory (IIT)—an interpersonal theory useful for investigating anticipated conversations or revisiting past interactions with others (Honeycutt, 2015). Studies guided by IIT could provide a better understanding of the internal talk gay fathers engage in before or after they tell friends and

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family about their decision to have children, including concerns about how much the process costs or what steps are required for adoption, fostering, surrogacy, or co-parenting. A second line of inquiry could focus specifically on the stories GPFs tell about their experiences. Communicated Narrative Sense-Making (CNSM) offers a rich option for this research. According to Koenig Kellas and Horstman (2015), CNSM is unique in that the theory views narratives through a postpositivist lens and "offers a way to see how narrative operates in the family in patterned ways associated with family health and well-being" (p. 80). Essentially, CNSM affords researchers an opportunity to investigate what certain kinds of stories "accomplish" for families. For example, a study focused on GPFs using CNSM as a guide might explore how gay parents use adoption stories with their kids or others to build family identity, or how they talk about legal or nonlegal wedding ceremonies to legitimize their romantic relationships externally. Finally, given the challenges GPFs face across their lifespans, family communication scholars should ask questions about how these men manage significant and/or stressful events in their familial lives. GPF researchers could utilize relational turbulence theory (Solomon, Knobolch, Theiss, & McClaren, 2016) to guide future research into the communication processes of GPFs. The relational turbulence model specifically focuses on how relationships are affected by tumultuous, difficult moments during times of transition (Knobloch, 2015). Although the present study asked gay dads to talk about their roles and identities as fathers, the transitional time period of becoming parents was not the focus. Because gay men are unable to biologically conceive as a couple and must therefore *always* engage in family planning ahead of time, future GPF studies could use the relational turbulence model to examine, for example, how gay parents navigate the transition to fatherhood and how that transition impacts their relationships.

Additionally, I wish to offer considerations for future RDT-based investigations based on the methods and results of the present study. First, I talked to gay parents to better understand the meaning-making that occurs for them at three sites of family identity: marriage, family, and fatherhood. However, it is possible that children of gay fathers may make meaning for their experiences through similar and/or different discursive interplays than their dads. Gay fathered children might, for example, position their sense-meaning through concepts such as similarity and difference. Therefore, an RDT-guided study exploring the meaning-making that takes place for children in GPFs would provide unique insight into how they situate their personal and family identities within the larger heteronormative culture. Further, while the gay men in this study indicated that their nonlegal commitment ceremonies served as a symbol of legitimacy for them at the proximal level, it is still unclear how family members—especially those who may have been resistant to the idea of a gay wedding—make sense of non-heteronormative weddings held before or after the legalization of same-sex marriage. RDT researchers could locate talk from parents, siblings, grandparents, and extended family members of married gay men to identify the discursive struggle for meaning that takes place in their discussions of the event.

From a methodological perspective, in an effort to gain greater insight into the GPFs' relationships, I heeded Halliwell's (2015) call for longitudinal data. That said, I only interviewed the participants on two separate occasions roughly one month apart. Future RDT studies would likely find even more robust relational data by interviewing individuals, dyads, or entire families three or more times over the course of several months or longer. Additionally, although this study's participants were given a handout sheet to record any meaningful thoughts and experiences that took place during the month between interviews, not all of the couples made use of the handout during the follow-up interview. RDT researchers interested in having their

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participants engage in more rigid, consistent thought-work could ask future study respondents to regularly write in an individual or couples' journal—another recommendation that Halliwell (2015) makes. The researcher could gather the journals before follow-up interviews or at the end of the data collection period to gain access to the thoughts and daily lived communication experiences of participants' lives.

Finally, based on my experience conducting follow-up interviews for the present investigation, I would strongly advocate that future qualitative inquiries, regardless of theory, employ a form of member checking after initial themes are identified. As Thomas (2006) points out, member checking is an incredibly useful methodological tool for building higher levels of trustworthiness in qualitative findings. Indeed, for the current study, member checking was an invaluable way of confirming the authenticity of the participants' relational meaning-making experiences that also permitted me to expand upon any underexplored subject matter the fathers had talked about in their first interview. That said, member checking proved to be admittedly difficult at times, as my goal was to ask questions surrounding emergent themes without using confusing academic jargon. To ensure I was properly prepared, I set aside a reasonable amount of time to re-read the couples' initial transcripts right before their second interviews so that I could not only reacquaint myself with the data but also distill high-level discursive themes into questions that were useful for the investigation yet not overly complex.

Future longitudinal qualitative studies built around multiple interviews should use each subsequent discussion with participants as an opportunity to engage in member checking. If multiple interviews are not an option, however, researchers can also summarize initial interviews at their completion and allow respondents to answer questions immediately, partake in informal conversations (as opposed to recorded interviews) with participants at a later date, and/or provide

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preliminary copies of the study to participants to review before submitting to conferences or journals (Thomas, 2006).

Practical Implications

At the end of every follow-up interview, I asked each of the couples if they had any advice for other gay men considering marriage and/or fatherhood. In general, the sentiment was that if someone wants to get married or become a parent, they should go for it—gay men should no longer be held back by the heteronormative constraints, legal or otherwise, that were culturally heaped upon them in the past. To achieve those goals, participants recommended that simply seeking out information about what options are available, especially when it comes to fatherhood, is the best first step others can take. Therefore, I believe this research demonstrates that it is vital for gay men interested in marriage or parenthood to reach out to any available local LGBT family support groups for education, or to speak with gay men who have already gone through the process of getting married or having kids. Just as some of the individuals in the present study alluded to, because gay men were long considered to be inadequate father figures, finding role models who have already "blazed the trail" into gay fatherhood is crucial for identity-building and exploration. By connecting with other gay fathers locally, single gay men or gay couples can learn about any potential pitfalls inherent in complex processes like adoption or surrogacy, and find any support they might need in communicating family identity for themselves and their children. If local LGBT family groups are not an option, gay men can find similar help through national organizations, such as Gays With Kids (www.gayswithkids.com). On their website and Facebook page, Gays With Kids offers step-by-step guides for achieving parenthood through a variety of options, real-life stories of gay fathers and their families, and various other educational tools that provide information on things like questions to ask surrogacy

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agencies or the costs that might be incurred through adoption. These GPFs frequently talked

about the value of these groups as they embarked on their journey to fatherhood, and by sharing

their stories through this research, I hope other GPFs find this investigation as a valuable

resource as they navigate the enduring discourses of heteronormative family and fatherhood.

In conclusion, I was the first to explore the discursive meaning-making that takes place

within GPFs through an RDT lens. Throughout the GPFs' talk about what marriage, gay family,

and gay fatherhood means, a discursive struggle between traditional and nontraditional

discourses produced emergent themes offering insight into the relational experiences of married

gay dads. As LGBT+ families continue to gain visibility politically, academically, and socially,

additional studies will be needed to keep up with the shifting nontraditional familial landscape.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN

UWMILWAUKEE

Department of University Safety & Assurances

Leah Stoiber
IRB Administrator
Institutional Review Board
Engelmann 270
P. O. Box 413
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New Study - Notice of IRB Exempt Status

Date: October 20, 2016

To: Erin Parcell, PhD
Dept: Communication

CC: Benjamin Baker

IRB#: 17.100
Title: Exploring the discourses of family identity, marriage, and parenthood in married gay fathers' relational talk

After review of your research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol has been granted Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.101(b).

This protocol has been approved as exempt for three years and IRB approval will expire on October 19, 2019. If you plan to continue any research related activities (e.g., enrollment of subjects, study interventions, data analysis, etc.) past the date of IRB expiration, please respond to the IRB's status request that will be sent by email approximately two weeks before the expiration date. If the study is closed or completed before the IRB expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu with the study number and the status, so we can keep our study records accurate.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. The principal investigator is responsible for adhering to the policies and guidelines set forth by the UWM IRB, maintaining proper documentation of study records and promptly reporting to the IRB any adverse events which require reporting. The principal investigator is also responsible for ensuring that all study staff receive appropriate training in the ethical guidelines of conducting human subjects research.

As Principal Investigator, it is also your responsibility to adhere to UWM and UW System Policies, and any applicable state and federal laws governing activities which are independent of IRB review/approval (e.g., FERPA, Radiation Safety, UWM Data Security, UW System policy on Prizes, Awards and Gifts, state gambling laws, etc.). When conducting research at institutions outside of UWM, be sure to obtain permission and/or approval as required by their policies.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation, and best wishes for a successful project.

Respectfully,

████████████████

Leah Stoiber
IRB Administrator

Appendix B: Social Media Message

ACADEMIC INTERVIEW STUDY about Married Gay Fathers and their Families

Hello!

I am conducting a series of two interviews with married gay fathers for an academic study titled "Exploring the discourses of family identity, marriage, and parenthood in married gay fathers' relational talk" (UWM IRB#: 17.100). This research aims to better understand how gay fathers talk about family with each other, their children, other family members, friends, coworkers, and strangers. If you and your spouse are over 18 years of age and raising a child or children, then I hope you will consider helping me with this study. Both parents do need to participate in both interviews. Interviews may occur in person, on the phone, or via Facetime/Skype, and last no more than an hour. Every couple who participates in an interview will have $20.00 donated to an organization of their choice that supports the LGBT community and their families (Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center, the Cream City Foundation, the Human Rights Campaign, etc.) as a thank you for your time. If you are interested in more details about the study, please email me at UWMfamilycommstudy@gmail.com. Thank you!

Benjamin Baker, PhD Candidate (UWMfamilycommstudy@gmail.com)
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Department of Communication
https://uwm.edu/communication/

Appendix C: Recruitment E-mail

Subject: INTERVIEW STUDY about Gay Fathers and their Families

Hello,

I am writing to let you know about a study I am doing and to ask if you would consider participating in a series of two interviews in person, over the phone, over Skype, or Facetime for a research project about the experiences of married gay fathers and their families. The study is titled: *Exploring the discourses of family identity, marriage, and parenthood in married gay fathers' relational talk* (UWM IRB#: 17.100).

This research will explore participants' family identity communication with their spouse, their children, other family members, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, and strangers.

I hope to interview 20-25 married gay father couples. The first interview should take 45-60 minutes, while the second interview will likely be brief (20-30 minutes) but the time for both will depend on how much information you have to share at each point in time.

If you and your spouse are over 18 years of age and raising a child or children, then I hope you will consider helping me with this study. Both parents do need to participate in both interviews.

Prior to the first interview you will need to review an informed consent form that I will send to you via e-mail. We will review the form again before starting the interview. During the interview, I will ask questions about your household (demographics such as age, ethnicity, number of children etc.) as well as your experiences being married gay parents, such as your decision to get married, how you talk about your family with your kids, and any advice you might have for other married parents.

When reporting the results, I will change your name and all identifying information you might share (e.g., places you are from; names of your friends and family). Study results will be reported without any identifying information so that no one viewing the results will be able to match you with your responses.

I am very flexible about where the interview will be conducted (e.g., coffee shop, residence, UWM campus, telephone, via Skype or Facetime) and when (days, evenings, and weekends).

If you are interested in participating in our study and/or want more information, please email me at your earliest convenience to: UWMfamilycommstudy@gmail.com. I will get back to you as soon as possible.

Every couple who participates in an interview will have $20.00 donated to an organization of their choice that supports the LGBT community and their families (Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center, the Cream City Foundation, the Human Rights Campaign, etc.). Additionally, you might improve your relationships through reflecting on your experiences before, during, and each interview.

If you are not interested in participating, please consider sharing this email with people you know who might fit the study. I truly appreciate your help.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Baker, PhD Candidate
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Department of Communication
http://communication.uwm.edu

Appendix D: Sample Response E-mail

Greetings!

Thank you so much for inquiring about our study – I would love to talk with you and your husband about your family sometime soon. I have attached the study's consent form to this e-mail - I just need you to read through it before the interview takes place - if you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

For the interview, would you both be able to meet in person? If not, could we use Skype or FaceTime? What are some days and times that work well for you?

Looking forward to chatting!

Respectfully,

Benjamin Baker
PhD Candidate
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Communication Department
https://uwm.edu/communication/

Appendix E: Consent to Participate Form

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
Consent to Participate in Interview Research

Study Title: Exploring the discourses of family identity, marriage, and parenthood in married gay fathers' relational talk (UWM IRB#: **17.100**)

Persons Responsible for Research: Benjamin Baker, Dr. Erin Parcell (PI)

Study Description: This study aims to investigate the construction of family identity for married male same-sex parents through two (2) interviews. Participant interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the researchers in an effort to identify themes surrounding same-sex marriage, fatherhood, and family communication. This research will explore participants' family identity communication with their spouse, their children, other family members, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, and strangers.

We hope to interview 20-25 married couples. The first interview should take 45-60 minutes, while the second interview will likely be shorter (20-30 minutes) but will depend slightly on how much information you have to share at each point in time.

Risks / Benefits: The potential risks for participating in this study are fairly minimal – you may experience some discomfort when discussing your experiences. There is a possibility that you may feel psychological discomfort recalling situation where others may have been hostile or invalidating of your relationships. Questions about these experiences might understandably be painful for you, especially if the situations were recent. If you are asked a question you do not want to answer during the interview process, you do not have to answer that question. There will be no costs for participating other than your time. Every couple who participates in an interview will have $20.00 donated to an organization of their choice that supports the LGBT community and their families (Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center, the Cream City Foundation, the Human Rights Campaign, etc.). Additionally, you might improve your relationships through reflecting on your experiences before, during, and each interview.

Limits to Confidentiality: Identifying information such as details of your experiences as well as your personal beliefs relative to your experiences will be collected for research purposes. With the participants' approval, the interviews will be recorded with personal handheld devices, and these audio files will be transcribed and then deleted. Demographic and interview transcript data will be retained in password protected folders on password protected computers for 3 years and will be deleted after this time. Only the PI, Co-PI, and any research assistants tasked with transcribing interviews will have access to the data collected by this study. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records. The research team will use pseudonyms when reporting study findings, and all study results will be reported without identifying information so that no one viewing the results will ever be able to match you with your responses. Additionally, because the researchers hope to present their findings in academic

journals and conferences as well as want to use examples from what participants say during the interviews, it is possible that direct quotes (attributed to pseudonyms) will be used.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study.

Who do I contact for questions about the study: For more information about the study or study procedures, contact Benjamin Baker (bakerbm@uwm.edu) or Dr. Erin Parcell (eparcell@uwm.edu).

Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject? Contact the UWM IRB at 414-229-3173 or irbinfo@uwm.edu

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
By participating in this interview, you are indicating that you have read the consent form, you are age 18 or older and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Thank you!

Appendix F: First Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol-*Exploring the discourses of family identity, marriage, and parenthood in married gay fathers' relational talk* (UWM IRB#: 17.100)

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Department of Communication

Thank you both so much for talking to me today.
I'm going to ask you several questions about your experiences as a married same-sex parent family.

Before we get started may I first ask, are you comfortable having our conversation recorded? If so, I will turn it on now. If not, I will take notes during the interview. [If yes, then turn on the recorder].

Next, let's review the informed consent form mailed to you. [Review the document with them] What questions do you have? [Once all questions have been addressed...] Ok, so after reviewing the form, do you consent to continue with the interview at this time? [If yes, then continue. If not, end the meeting]

Also, just a reminder that if any time you do not feel comfortable answering a particular question, please let me know and we can move on to the next one.

Ok, then let's get started.

1. So, first I have some demographic questions.

    a. How old are each of you?

    b. What is your combined household income?

    c. What is the last level of education you have completed?

    d. What is your ethnicity?

    e. How long have you been married? In what state did you get married?

    f. How many children do you have? What are their ages and sex?

Now, I'd like to talk with you about three topics: your marriage, your parenting, and your family bonding.

We'll start with your marriage.

a. Tell me about your relationship-how did you meet and such.

b. When you were discussing marriage, what were some of the things you talked about?

    a. What reservations, if any, reservations came up about getting married as a same-sex couple?

c. So, did you talk to your friends and family about getting married? How did you talk to them about it?

    a. Did you feel that your family and friends accepted your decision to get married? Why or why not?

    b. Do they accept your marriage now?

Great, now I'd like to talk more about being parents.

d. When you first met, did you talk about either already having kids, or having kids eventually some day? Tell me about those conversations.

e. Did you have your children before or after getting married?

f. Tell me about the process of having children – did you choose to adopt? Surrogacy? Why did you choose this method? What (if any) struggles were there?

g. Was it important to figure out how your children address each of you? Why?

h. When you told your friends and family that you were going to have children, how did they react? Accepting? Questioning? Rejecting?

i. How do you talk with your children about your family structure and how it's different from traditional families? (If children are too young, ask them about anticipated conversations)

    a. Have they ever asked about differences between their family and others? How did (would) you respond?

    b. What does it mean to be a father in a gay parent family?

    c. Are you ever asked about "who does what?" How do such questions make you feel?

Lastly, I'd like to talk more about your experiences as a family in general.

j. What are some of the things you do to bond as a family?

k. [depending on their situation, tailor the question]—does anyone ever question you being "real parents" because one (or both) are not biologically connected to your child/ren?

l. How important is it to spend time with other same-sex parent families? Why?

m. Tell me about any times others (friends, families or strangers) have challenged your family's identity. How did you respond? How did you talk about it with each other and with your children?

That concludes my main questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you so much for talking to me today. (Turn off recorder)

Before we go, I'd like to set up a time/date about one month from now for us to have our second interview…this second interview should be shorter and we can complete them over the phone if that is easier. Here is a sheet that describes what we'll be talking about next time (if this interview takes place via phone/video call, the researcher will indicate that he'll be sending the couple the handout through e-mail) – feel free to write things down directly on the sheet.

I'll send you an e-mail a few days before our next interview to serve as a reminder of our appointment.

Again, thank you so much for your time – I really appreciate it!

Appendix G: Second Interview Handout

Between now and our next interview, I'd ask that any time you feel like your family has bonded (a family outing at a restaurant, attending a school function for your children) or must overcome challenges (questions about the structure of their family) together you write a short summary of the event and your feelings about it. You can also write down any general thoughts about your family identity now that we've had a chance to talk a little about it.

Family bonding:

Challenges to family:

Thoughts about family identity:

Appendix H: Second Interview Protocol

Hello again to both of you! Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me again today.

First, I need to ask if I have your permission to record our conversation? [if participants agree, turn on the recorder]. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

[Member checking for initial themes] Before we get started, I wanted to go over some of the things I discovered after reviewing our first interview…

Okay, great – let's move on some new questions.

1. Since we last spoke, have there been any meaningful family experiences we could talk about? If you took any notes, what did those say? Why were those experiences that stuck out to both of you?

2. Did you think at all about your family's identity? Tell me about that.

3. How many same-sex parent family get-togethers in the last month have you attended in the last month? What were those like?

4. How much have you talked to extended family about your kids in the last month? Tell me about those conversations.

5. How much do you feel like your family identity was challenged at all in the last month? Tell me about that.

6. Is there anything else we may have missed that you'd like to talk about related to this project?

That concludes my main questions, but before we go, do you have any advice for other same-sex couples thinking about getting married and having children?

Thank you! [Turn off recorder]

Would it be alright if I contacted you again in the future to clarify anything we talked about over the course of these interviews? Would it be okay if I shared my initial results with you when I get to that point?

Can you tell me what organization you prefer to have your $20.00 donated to? For example, the Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center, the Human Rights Campaign, etc.?

Thank you so much for your time – I truly appreciate your willingness to take part in this project and share your family's experiences with me.

Appendix I: Curriculum Vitae

Benjamin M. A. Baker

EDUCATION

PhD, Communication, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee August 2017
Emphasis: Interpersonal Communication and identity development with a focus on families and marginalized populations
Dissertation: Exploring the dialectics of family identity, marriage, and parenthood in married gay fathers' relational talk
Relevant Coursework: Philosophy and Practice of Communication; Seminar in Interpersonal Communication; Understudied Close Relationships; Sexuality & Communication; Technology and Interpersonal Communication; Qualitative Approaches in Health Research; Dark Side of Communication; Alternative Approaches to Studying Family Communication
Advisor: Dr. Erin Sahlstein Parcell

M.A., Communication, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (May 2013)
Relevant Coursework: Seminar in Mediated Communication; Technology for Health Communication; Interpersonal Influence; Intercultural Communication; Qualitative Research in Communication; Theory and Practice of Mediation; Instructional Communication in the College Classroom
Advisor: Dr. William Keith

B.A., Journalism (Advertising Emphasis), University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (May 2006)
Minor: Marketing
Relevant Coursework: Intro to Mass Communication; Fundamentals of Speech; Persuasion; Cross Cultural Communication; Communication/Public Opinion; Communication Research Methods

TEACHING/RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Fall 2012 – Present)

Communication 402: Communication and Gender; Standalone (Fall 2015-Present)
Course Director: Dr. Erin Sahlstein Parcell

Communication 103: Introduction to Public Speaking; Standalone (Fall 2013-Spring 2016)
Course Director: Dr. John Jordan

Communication 103: Introduction to Public Speaking; Lab (Fall 2012-Spring 2013)
Course Director: Dr. William Keith

Research assistant for Dr. Erin Sahlstein Parcell (Summer 2014 – Present)

Duties include gathering literature, classifying literature, working with undergrad assistants, and APA formatting of manuscripts

SCHOLARLY WORK

Publications

Sahlstein Parcell, E., Baker, B. M. A., & Johnson, R. L. (accepted-revise and resubmit). *Relational dialectics theory and military family communication: Suggestions and applications*. Article to be published in the Journal of Family Theory & Review (special issue on "Military/Veteran-connection families: Advances in theory and methodology")

Sahlstein Parcell, E., Baker, B. M. A., & Johnson, R. L. (in press). *Doing military family at a distance*. Article to be published in the NCFR Report special issue, "Doing family at a distance."

Sahlstein Parcell, E., & Baker, B. M. A. (2017). Narrative analysis. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of communication research methods.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage

Baker, B. M. A., & Jagiello, K. L. (2016). Coming out and imagined interactions. In custom material for UWM edition of S. McCornack, *Reflect and relate: An introduction to interpersonal communication* (4th ed. CUSTOM). Boston MA: Bedford/St. Martin's

Baker, B. M. A., & Jagiello, K. L. (2015). Coming out and imagined interactions. In custom material for UWM edition of S. McCornack, *Reflect and relate: An introduction to interpersonal communication* (3rd ed. CUSTOM). Boston MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Odom, L., Parcell, E. S., Baker, B. M. A., & Cronin Fischer, V. (2015). Communication and female date initiation: Differences in perceptions based on assertiveness of initiator. *Iowa Journal of Communication, 47*, 177-196.

Baker, B. M. A. (2014). Review of: Mass Effect 3 by BioWare. *Women's Studies in Communication, 37*, 239-241. doi:10.1080/07491409.2014.919198

Conference Presentations

Baker, B. M. A., & Sahlstein Parcell, E. (2017, February). *We asked, they told: Exploring LGB military service members' and their partners' relationship experiences before, during, and after Don't Ask, Don't Tell.* Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western States Communication Association, Salt Lake City, UT.

Baker, B. M. A. (2016, November). *Campaign for Houston's 'bathroom bill' and the stigmatization of transgender identity through argumentation by definition*. Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Philadelphia, PA.

Jagiello, K., Lambertz-Berndt, M., & Baker, B. M. A. (2016, November). *Distancing the B in LGBTQ: Exploring hurtful messages related to bisexuals' identity*. Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Philadelphia, PA.

Baker, B. M. A. (2015, November). *The loss of agency in reflexive inevitability: Consciousness, communitas, contingency and the Stonewall Riots.* Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Las Vegas, NV.

Baker, B. M. A. (2015, November). *Untying the 'not': What empowering divorce mediation does not look like*. Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Las Vegas, NV.

Baker, B. M. A., & Stoll, A. (2015, November). "Being female is just the 'second choice'": Exploring female video game players' online experiences. Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Las Vegas, NV.

Jagiello, K., Lambertz-Berndt, M., & Baker, B. M. A. (2015, April). *The dichotomy of dissolution in same-sex relationships*. **Competitive paper*** presented at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Madison, WI.
*Top Four Paper, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Research Division

Lambertz-Berndt, M., & Baker, B. M. A. (2015, April). *Gay and lesbian sex script initiation*. Competitive paper presented at the Equality Research Conference, Dearborn, MI.

Baker, B. M. A. (2014). *An LGBT+ video game as procedural rhetoric: Transforming intolerance to tolerance*. Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Teaching Association, Chicago, IL.

In Progress

Baker, B. M. A. & Parcell, E. *We asked, they told: Exploring LGB military members' relational experiences during "Don't ask, don't tell"*. Manuscript currently in preparation.

Baker, B. M. A. *Narrating the Transgender Family Experience: Exploring Family Identity and Communication through Familial Coming out Narratives*. Manuscript currently in preparation.

Sahlstein Parcell, E., Timmerman, L., Rafferty, K. A., Zmyslinski, A. N., Baker, B. M. A., Stoll, A., Fisher, V., Kohler, K., & Kivolowitz, P. K. *Discourses of deployment: A military child perspective*. Manuscript currently in preparation.

HONORS & AWARDS

2016-17 Amelia Lucas Trust Fund Award recipient
    This award is granted to graduate and undergraduate students in the in Department of Communication to assist with the costs associated with research. Applications require a letter of self-nomination and summary of the proposed project, and winners are chosen by the Department's awards committee.

2016-17 University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Distinguished Dissertation Fellowship recipient
    This highly competitive campus-wide annual award recognizes and supports outstanding PhD students who demonstrate excellence in academic performance and research, and showcase potential for the contribution of exceptional new knowledge to their respective fields of study.

2015-16 Renee Meyers Scholarship Award recipient
    This annual award recognizes and supports graduate students in the Department of Communication who have demonstrated excellence in research, teaching, and service. Applicants submit a letter of self-nomination and winners are selected by the Department's awards committee.

2014-15 Mel Miller PhD Teaching Award recipient

This annual award recognizes the top PhD student in the Department of Communication for teaching from the previous year at UW-Milwaukee. Selection criteria includes quantitative teaching evaluations, peer evaluations, and course director recommendations.

Public Presence Activities

Interviewed (with Arrington Stoll) on the video game-focused podcast "Spawn On Me" (Episode 39: Gaming Gets Indicted) to discuss women and gaming (December, 2014)

Interviewed (with Arrington Stoll) by UWM publications for a story regarding women and gaming (March, 2015); found at: http://uwm.edu/news/more-women-are-playing-but-gamer-culture-remains-crude-rude-and-male-dominated-uwm-study-finds/

SERVICE

Volunteer, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fall 2016

Volunteer, MilTown LGBT Families Organization, Fall 2016

Volunteer, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spring 2016

Activity Coordinator, Communication Graduate Student Council, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spring 2016

PhD Mentorship Coordinator, Communication Graduate Student Council, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fall 2015

Paper reviewer for the 2015 NCA LGBT Caucus

Volunteer, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fall 2015

Volunteer, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spring 2015
Evaluated freshman essays for UWM's 2014-15 Undergraduate Writing Assessment Project, January 2015

Faculty Meeting Representative, Communication Graduate Student Council, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fall 2014

Volunteer, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fall 2014

Fundraising Coordinator, Communication Graduate Student Council, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spring 2014

Volunteer, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spring 2014

President, Communication Graduate Student Council, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fall 2013

Vice President, Communication Graduate Student Council, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spring 2013

Co-Chair, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spring 2013; Fall 2013

Co-Organizer, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fall 2012

Activity Coordinator, Communication Graduate Student Council, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fall 2012

Volunteer, Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spring 2012