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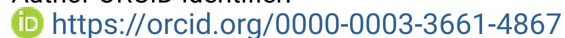
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Miles Feroli, Student

Dr. Srimati Basu, Major Professor

Dr. Jenn Hunt, Director of Graduate Studies

FEELING TRANSPARENT:
TRANS PARENTHOOD AND THE AMERICAN FAMILY SYSTEM

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By

Miles Lynn Feroli

Lexington, Kentucky

Advisor: Dr. Srimati Basu,
Professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Anthropology

Lexington, Kentucky

2022

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https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3661-4867

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

FEELING TRANSPARENT:
TRANS PARENTHOOD AND THE AMERICAN FAMILY SYSTEM

This dissertation explores the contemporary lived experiences and representations of people who are transgender and parents (trans parents) in the United States. I employ an intersectional framework that primarily uses trans theory, motherhood studies, and affect theory. After conducting 36 semi-structured interviews with trans parents across the US and critically analyzing the series Transparent (2014-2019), I found that enmeshed discourses and practices of family and motherhood, or what I dub the *American family system*, affectively shapes who gets greater access to material and social capital. This process primarily occurs through the ways the American family system mobilizes affects like belonging, love, and fear to move people towards gender normativity via parenting language and parenting bodies, and because of this, it overwhelmingly sticks motherhood to bodies assigned female at birth. Trans parents who cannot or will not reproduce the American family system become affect aliens and misfits, or what I see as generative locations from which we can reimagine who and how we care for one another.

KEYWORDS: transgender, affect, motherhood, politics of care, family

Miles Feroli

7/26/2022
Date

FEELING TRANSPARENT:
TRANS PARENTHOOD AND THE AMERICAN FAMILY SYSTEM

By

Miles Lynn Feroli

Dr. Srimati Basu
Director of Dissertation

Dr. Jenn Hunt
Director of Graduate Studies

7/26/2022
Date

To all who care for me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ____ *iii*

LIST OF FIGURES ____ *vii*

Chapter One | Family is what Family Does ____ *1*

Introduction | ____ 1
Family Matters? | Becoming a Family Killjoy ____ 3
Chapter Outline | ____ 9

"In the Family Way" | Critiquing the Family System and Motherhood ____ 10
Section One | Family Troubles ____ 10
Section Two | Mommy Issues ____ 18
Trans Parenting | ____ 23

I've Got a Feeling | Affect Theory ____ 26
Orienting Language and Space / Indexicality, Stance, and Spatial Analysis ____ 29
Affect Aliens | ____ 35
Mis/fits | ____ 38

Telling Trans Stories to Save Trans Lives | Trans Studies ____ 40
Trans Care | ____ 43

Methodological Choices | ____ 46
#FTM (#Figuring-out-The-Methodology while becoming #Female-to-Male) | ____ 46
Semi-Structured Interviews | ____ 50
Participant Observation | ____ 53
Media Discourse Analysis | ____ 55
Chapter Outlines | ____ 56

Chapter Two | Trans Masculine Aliens: Exploring Family and Motherhood as Affective Devices ____ *59*

Introduction | ____ 59
Chapter Outline | ____ 64

Blood is Thicker than Water | Family as an Affective Atmosphere ____ 68

Affect Aliens | ____ 77
Section One | *Body Changes: "Pregnant with Possibility"* ____ 77
Section Two | *Kinship Objects: "Momification through Famification"* ____ 90

Conclusion | Family Schmamily ____ 105

Chapter Three | Maternal Misfits ____ *109*

Introduction | ____ 109
Chapter Outline ____ 116

The Family Jewels | Situating parenthood through childhood ____ 117

Part One | Navigating Parenting Language within Institutions ____ 127
Section One | *Who's Your Daddy?* ____ 127
Section Two | Language as Liberatory ____ 136

Part Two | Navigating Institutional Spaces as a Trans Parent ____ 142
Section One | *Where's the Mom?* ____ 142
Section Two | *The Public Body* ____ 152

Conclusion | ____ 158

Chapter Four | "I Guess That Makes Us the Not-chosen Family:" Representing Trans Feminine Parenthood in Transparent ____ *164*

Introduction | ____ 164

Chapter Outline | ____ 170

Transing Media | ____ 171

Part One | Affect Aliens ____ 178

Section One | "I'm sorry, it's tradition that the mother of the family lights the candles" ____ 178

Section Two | "Maybe you guys want to call me, I don't know, Mom?" ____ 185

Part Two | Misfits ____ 191

Section One | "This is my father and he's a woman. And he has every right to be in this bathroom" ____ 191

Section Two | Born Again ____ 200

Conclusion | ____ 207

Chapter Five | Chopping Down the Family Tree ____ *210*

Introduction | ____ 210

Affecting Anew | ____ 217

Bodies | ____ 217

Communities | ____ 220

Institutions | ____ 221

Conclusion | ____ 221

Appendices ____ *224*

Table 1: Participant Demographics ____ 224

Table 2: Interview Questions ____ 226

References ____ *228*

VITA ____ *273*

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: PARTICIPANTS GENDER IDENTITIES 50
FIGURE 2: GESTATIONAL PARENTS 52
FIGURE 3: "PLACE SACRIFICE HERE" FACEBOOK SCREENCAP 53
FIGURE 4: MAURA LIGHTING SHABBOS CANDLES (SEASON 1, EPISODE 6, "THE WILDERNESS") 181
FIGURE 5: SHELLY AND MAURA TAKE A PICTURE (SEASON 3, EPISODE 3: TO SARDINES AND BACK) 186
FIGURE 6: SHELLY'S AFFECT (SEASON 3, EPISODE 3: TO SARDINES AND BACK) 188
FIGURE 7: CLAYTON (HANK CHEN) [SEASON 1, EPISODE 4: MOPPA] 192
FIGURE 8: MASCULINE PRESENTING MAURA, FEMME PRESENTING MAURA, AND NEWBORN ALI ("BORN AGAIN") 202

Chapter One | Family is what Family Does

"But I did not choose this subject; it had long ago chosen me."

- **Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (1986)**

"If we start close to home, we open ourselves out."

- **Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (2017)**

Introduction |

The late revolutionary bell hooks (2000) said, "feminists are made, not born" (7). Feminist theorist Clare Hemmings said (2012) "experience can be a starting point for thinking through both feminist process and the process of becoming a feminist" (149). So, I begin this dissertation with stories about myself, even though its core explores the contemporary lived experiences and representation of people who are trans and parents (trans parents) in the United States to better understand the maldistribution of life chances.

Broadly, I often think I became a feminist because the men in my life – besides my little brother – have never really mattered all that much to me, except for the fact that they seem to be the reasons why the women in my life have mattered *too* much to me. The men who 'fathered' my parents were relatively absent in my parents' lives. Now, not knowing them is not necessarily a 'bad' thing nor is it an uncommon situation since traditional depictions of fatherhood in the United States characterizes paternity as less hands on with the actual children and more about finances, structure, and social and economic inheritance (Douglas 2004). Yet, looking back through a feminist lens their patriarchal anonymity impacted my life due to the ways it impacted the people who were expected to take care of me.

However, care, as a capacity and a practice, has long been devalued due to the ways "the feminine" and "womanhood" – which I show in the chapters that follow – becomes stuck to bodies assigned female at birth through care acts, or acts that get valued and seen *as* care (The Care Collective 2020). The Care Collective (2020) breaks down care and caring in three ways: one can physically "care for." One can transform our worlds by "caring with" others. One can emotionally "care about." And because "care isn't abstract, but only ever manifested through practice – action, labor work," Hil Malatino (2020) argues, "it is integral to our ways of doing" (41). Thus, care acts and conceptualizations of care provide insight into how our worlds – from bodies to communities to states to the global – sustains and supports certain ways of being over others, especially through the ever-changing politicization of care.

Despite the loads of critical feminist literature that explores and critiques care, it overwhelmingly centers "forms of domesticity and intimacy that are both White and Eurocentered and grounded in the colonial/modern gender system" (Malatino 2020, 7; Lugones 2007). In doing so, we miss important ways hegemonic social, political, and affective assemblages of where, when, how, why, and who is expected to care and be cared for shape who thrives and who is left to die. Accordingly, by way of my story, then, we eventually arrive at the rich, deep, and complicated experiences the thirty-six trans parents – people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth and consider themselves parents – graciously told me during their interviews (Stryker 2017). Their experiences, despite being a representative slice of the larger, more nuanced trans community, assist in more accurately mapping out how trans identity, motherhood, and family work to maintain and destabilize the "imperialist white supremacist capitalist

patriarchy" (hooks 2000, 46).[1] Examined through an interdisciplinary and intersectional framework that primarily uses trans theory, motherhood studies, and affect theory, I interrogate my participants' interviews along with a media analysis of the series *Transparent* (2014 – 2019) to illuminate the various covert and overt systems of power that gently and violently push people towards gender normativity mediated by the American family system. The American family system, enmeshed ideas and practices of family and motherhood, mobilizes affects like belonging, love, and fear to move people towards gender normativity via parenting language and parenting bodies, and because of this, it overwhelmingly sticks motherhood to bodies assigned female at birth. This process awards greater access to material resources and social capital to people able and willing to reproduce gender normativity, a framework reliant on white supremacy, racial capitalism, and patriarchy.

Family Matters? | Becoming a Family Killjoy

My patrilineal lines are twisted, tangled, missing, broken, and/or unknown. Their paternal absence gently, and sometimes violently, coerced the women in my family to pick up the slack. D, my paternal grandmother, born in 1951, started having kids at sixteen. She ultimately had six sons with a few different men, making her dependent on various men in her life to ensure she and her sons were supported. N, my maternal grandmother, born in 1953, was a single mom who worked as a postal worker. This left

[1] Transness does not manifest in the same way across time and space. Therefore, I recognize that my sample size of thirty-six trans people, who are primarily trans masculine US citizens, does not fully capture the variance among the entire community who do not see, experience, feel, understand, enact, and imagine transness and parenting in the same or similar ways Yet, their stories are important to filling in some of the conceptual and material gaps that have been created by a cisnormative perspective of parenthood.

little time to develop a deep and meaningful relationship her with daughter (my mom), a "latch key kid" of the seventies and eighties. My mom, born in 1971, was positioned to escape the cyclical nature of teen pregnancy and working paycheck to paycheck. However, she was pulled back in through the ways my dad was unable and unwilling to provide material and emotional support for me and my mom, effectively making her a single mom.

Despite having its own quirks, my story is not unique. Families are full of unknown, hidden, and forgotten stories that are swept under the rug and stored away in closets to preserve a sense of connectedness, belonging, and outward perception that they *are* connected. In doing so, it sustains the perception that we only get true satisfaction and recognition from our families. However, feminist theorists with the help of queer theory allowed me to see that since my family did not mimic the hegemonic model of family that was common of the time (a nuclear family) it sparked opportunities for the people who made up my kin networks to "do family differently" (Foucault 1990; Weston 1991; Collins 1998). In doing family differently I developed a variety of interpersonal relationships with multiple generations of family, sparking a deep interest in cultural histories in me. I had multiple family gatherings for holidays which not only resulted in piles of presents and entertainment, but exposure to multiple lifestyles and points of view. I had dozens of aunts, uncles, and cousins with whom I spent extended periods of time with and ultimately underscored the power in developing relationships outside of one's own "immediate" family.

Yet, in doing family differently, I often found myself differently situated than my peers even though they were also overwhelmingly white and working class. The

quotidian and more extravagant moments of familial life such as dinner time, school pickups, holidays, and birthdays manifested in ways that consistently prompted people to inquire about aspects of my life that seemed relatively normal to me. For instance, my grandmothers were young, and so, they were often mistaken for my mother when I was in their care. I spent weekends with my father, which often stopped me from attending sleepovers or parties. Because my siblings and I have different fathers their (very) pale skin, blonde hair, and brown eyes continuously contrasts with my olive tones, brown hair, and blue eyes. These differences in our looks, albeit slight, would provoke people to ask if I was adopted as our looks are not 'similar enough' to signal family.

Reflecting on these moments that directly and indirectly call into question my world is partly what turned me into a "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed 2010). The feminist killjoy typically manifests because what is understood as "good," and often by extension "normal," is not unilaterally inclusive nor reflective of people's lived experience. For instance, Black feminists point out that outward projections of happiness do not necessarily signal "true" or "real" happiness. Rather, happiness when mobilized by oppressive systems can structure and justify the insidious ways white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism are seen as "good for society" (i.e.,"happy housewife; happy slave; happy family"). Accordingly, when people disrupt the fantasy of happiness by disturbing the idea that happiness can be found in certain places or by doing certain things like that of family and motherhood the people who 'kill the fantasy' of these normative ideologies and practices end up 'killing the joy.' Hence, "don't be a kill joy." Because of this, I and other feminist affect scholars argue happiness and other affects are not simply internal feelings; they are intangible entities that circulate among human, part-

human, and non-human actors 'sticking' to, or, imbuing, objects, values, and ideals with 'good' and/or 'bad' affective value (Anderson 2010; Sedgwick 2003; Ahmed 2014). It is commonly believed that things and objects are seen as being the *cause* of affects like happiness or unhappiness. Though when framed through an affect theory lens it is the histories behind and the meeting of objects that create affects (more on this later).

Considering the family histories I just dredged up, it probably comes as no surprise that by way of trans parents' experiences I wish to kill the joy of the *American family system*. Throughout this dissertation I use the American family system as shorthand to describe the idealized imagined and practiced ways people cohere to create, sustain, and participate in to form a group of persons materially and ideologically bound by legal, social, and political means and the ways it operates at individual, community, and institutional levels. Using the concept of the American family system throughout this project over other models like the 'institution of the family' or simply 'family,' incorporates and acknowledges how ideas of family are shaped by and shape overlapping ways of being like motherhood and fatherhood. In Western industrialized countries, like that of the United States, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, children, parents, and so on "make a family" and family is comprised of mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, and so on. Consequently, to explore the American family system without paying explicit attention to the ways in which the family is embodied and reproduced through pre-established identity categories like mother and father skews our understanding and perception of how gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability are made different. Moreover, my use of the phrase "system" draws on the legacies of what is broadly understood as "systems theory," a transdisciplinary field of study and a theoretical framework in which various microlevel

approaches are evaluated (Whitchurch and Constantine 2009). Utilizing the phrase "system" centers on a way of looking at how complex, dynamic systems are interrelated with one another.

One might ask then why focus on the United States when so much literature already centers on Americana? Well, I primarily focus on the United States, American culture, and the American family system for two main reasons. First, the label "transgender" was created to describe a particular concept of gender variance "constructed largely within a Western psychomedical epistemology and one that is largely white in its origin as well" (Billard et al 2020). This continuous attempt to capture the fluidity of transness moves us towards to my second reason for focusing on America and American culture. The uniqueness of American institutions that shape American's lives like lack of affordable and accessible healthcare, uneven modes of transportation and housing, exponentially high rates of incarceration within a settler colonial state that has a long history of enslavement would necessitate understanding deeply nuanced dynamics of other peoples and countries to attend to the ways gender non-conformity and parenthood are imbricated, a project too large to do justice in the dissertating space and time allotted within graduate school.

Nevertheless, these decisions and constraints do not ignore or avoid thinking through how "transgender" as a category circulates transnationally to shape American and international perceptions of racialized gender via US based activism, non-profit work, legal decisions, and media representations. Racializing and gendering ideologies that permeate perceptions of "transgender identity" in a post-9/11 militarized state secures "citizenship for some trans bodies at the expense of others, while replicating

many forms of racism, xenophobia, and class privilege (Stryker and Aizura 2014, 4). Following Toby Beauchamp's (2019) application of the *transgender critique* and *queer of color critique* in *Going Stealth*, I approach questions of gender and sexuality as inseparable from "processes of racialization and the uneven transnational circulation of bodies, capital, and knowledge" (14). For instance, many non-Euro-American cultures that have long histories of gender variant identities and community formations such as hijra in India, waria in Indonesia, katoey in Thailand, muxe in Southern Mexico, and Nádleeh in the Navajo nation are being recast as "transgender," a flattening and dehistoricization of the various gender variant identities born out of their socio-historical contexts (Billard 2020). This move to recast gender variance as "transgender" sometimes functions to associate nationalist ideologies within "LGBT rights." Which can erase ways of being that may not be fully realized or intelligible to the state in order to adhere to transnormative representations and practices of transness. Therefore, transness is not simply an identification category. I also use it as an analytic to interrogate the racializing and gendering logic that overwhelmingly recognizes and situates white gender-variant bodies as (potentially) recognizable subjects of "transgender rights," rights that are sustained and promoted by the American family system.

Even though *family*, a group of people who are materially and ideologically bound, and *motherhood*, the imagined and practiced state of being a mother overwhelmingly attached to bodies assigned female at birth, are two separate categories impacting people, places, and things in their own ways, they are deeply entrenched and entwined in one another, making them nearly impossible to pry apart because of the ways they function through one another at various sites of scale. One can be a mother without a

family. One can be a family without a mother. However, both are shaped by either the presence and/or absence of the other (Chodorow 1999; Boyer and Spinney 2016; Dalton and Bielby 2000). This means then motherhood and family are not just biological and legal situations. I argue they are also *affective,* by which I mean they physically and ideologically produce, shape, mold, and connect ideas, values, and objects. In their exploration of how mothers construct and move through space, Boyer and Spinney (2016) contend that "motherhood is an accomplishment realized in part through encounters with the more than human" like that of baby carriages, diaper bags, and milk pumps. (1117). Accordingly, by paying sustained attention to how family and motherhood are affective, a concept to be explored in the section that follows, sheds light on the material and discursive ways individuals and communities produce racialized gendered subjects. Having this perspective uncovers the often overlooked ways people can(not) access resources, participate in daily life, and make meaning of their own body.

Chapter Outline |

In the sections that follow, I situate the primary conceptual nodal points of family and motherhood studies, affect theory, and trans studies because my participant's parenting experiences along with my media analysis of *Transparent* are analyzed through these frames in the subsequent chapters. Starting with scholarship on the family, I contextualize the development of family and maternal logics to interrogate how the American family system maintains its stronghold on the various ways bodily meanings are created, perpetuated, and circulated. I do so by focusing on and using affect. Using affect as both a theory and methodology, I set the stage for how emotions, feeling, and

sensation shape and are shaped by practices of gender, race, sexuality, ability, and class from the site of the body to the global. Having discussed how ideas, values, and objects stick and circulate through family and motherhood, I then turn to trans studies. Trans studies aims to interrogate how and why gender makes differences in all people's lives, not just for those who are trans, by which I mean people who do not legally or personally identify with their gender assigned at birth and the societal roles they are expected to take up because of their gender assigned at birth. The chapter ends with methodological decisions concerning the boundaries of the project, participant demographics, and chapter outlines.

"In the Family Way" | Critiquing the Family System and Motherhood

Section One | Family Troubles

The compendium of family and motherhood scholarship is too large for me to conduct a comprehensive literature review in the time and space allotted, particularly as it spans theoretical discipline and geographic location. As an "undisciplined" scholar based in Gender and Women's Studies, however, I turn to literature that challenges modern ideologies (approximately seventeenth century onward) that promote the perception that family is created by nature and bound by biological and legal components.[2]

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were some of the first theorists who popularized the family as something that "developed through historical stages," which meant they did not see the family as static but as something that evolved over time and context. This new

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[2] "Undisciplined" is a term that was discussed at length at the 2022 Kentucky Black Women's Conference. Dr. Aria Halliday, a GWS scholar, used the term to describe themselves. According to Dr. Halliday, being undisciplined means finding new and innovative ways to work beyond and through disciplinary powers of the academe that tend to silo and silence historically marginalized onto-epistemologies.

angle shifted subsequent Western understandings of family and its function. That is, "transformations in the family were primarily precipitated by economic forces," not by social thought (Weikart 1994, 660). Marx and Engels explained that the "family played an important, though malevolent, role in the early history of humanity. Part of its importance stems from the perspective that it was within the family that private property and the division of labour first developed," which for Marx and Engels "equated with alienation and exploitation" (661). Notably, they argue that the shift from the "paring family" to the "monogamous family" occurred with the domestication of animals because "the already extant but previously innocuous sexual division of labor placed this new source of wealth in the hands of men, who were then able to use this property to subjugate women" (663). However, Marx and Engel's perspective of solely seeing the "innocuous" gendered roles as just part of the societal schema, as simply a *byproduct* of the economic structure of society, overwhelmingly ignored how "housework is a key element in the process of the reproduction of the laborer from whom surplus value is taken" (Rubin 2011, 37). To put it bluntly, Marx and Engels lacked an intersectional perspective since they primarily saw defeating class oppression as *the* primary pathway to liberation because they assumed without capitalism the family would no longer exist (Crenshaw 1989).

Even though Marx and Engels revolutionized social theory and perceptions of kinship relations, various feminists have pointed out that the transition from feudalism to capitalism was predicated on controlling reproductive labor through the demonization of "women," or as I have been teasing apart, bodies defined as women through their (presumed and assigned) bodily capacities (Mies 1986; Federici 2004; Weeks 2001;

Nakano Glenn 1992; Boris 1994). At its core, capitalism necessitates control, and because of this, “the history of the body must be told by weaving together the histories of those who were enslaved, colonized, or turned into waged workers or unpaid housewives and the histories of the children” all while keeping in mind that these categories are not mutually exclusive and shift depending on how the hegemonic powers of the time define them (Silvia Federici 2020, 11). Thus, feminist Marxists like Silvia Federici (2020) contest the ideas that class is the most important social order to more accurately understand power relations. “Gender,” Federici (2020) argues, “is the result of a long process of disciplining” and the imposition of ‘norms’ (46). Therefore, gender becomes apparent in the interplay of “the organization of work, the division of labor, the setting up of differentiated labor markets, and the organization of the family, sexuality and domestic work” (46). Put otherwise, gender is a process that is mobilized to both oppress and resist dominant frameworks of power through social organization like that of the family.

Loads of feminist literature critiques and challenges the various ways hegemonic family formations impacts various communities (Mamo 2007; Weston 1997; Franklin 2013; Spillers 1987). When faced with having to define her queer “family,” Kath Weston (1997) notes that her first inclination was to default to what anthropologists in the past have defined as “fictive kin.” However, the concept of “fictive kin” lost its credibility when areas like philosophy, post-structuralism, and feminism illuminated how “all kinship is in some sense fictional – that is, meaningfully constituted rather than ‘out there’ in a positivist sense” (105). Weston’s move to treat gay kinship formations as “historical transformations” instead of a "deviation” from the norm opened up new ways of seeing how people relate through labor, spatial practices, and affect. For instance,

Rayna Rapp (1982) notes the United States' middle class tends to delineate friendships from family through the ways in which people assist one another: friends help emotionally and family helps materially and practically with money and space. However, Weston found that (at least in the Bay Area) "lesbians and gay men from all classes and class backgrounds, regularly rendered both sorts of assistance to one another" demonstrating the innovative and different ways people live in kind and share resources (113).

My concern is that the feminist literature across disciplines lacks a concentrated interrogation of the *idea* of family in the first place (Ruddick 1989; Collins 2010; Weston 1997). Why does the family – chosen or not – need to be recuperated, fixed, helped, or cured? Family abolitionists continuously point out that "the family" was founded on legal and economic understandings of who owns what – including that of people as the modern state developed. Whitewashed versions of family, and as I will show, motherhood, "obscured the fact that the socially constructed ideals that posit women as primarily, and naturally, nurturing mothers were constructed through the subordination of racial minority women to white women, and the use of the African-American family as the foil to the idealized, white family" (Averett 2020, 287). And so, I follow in the footsteps of Indigenous feminist scholars like Kim Tallbear (2019) and Black feminist scholars like Kay Lindsey (1970), Hortense Spillers (1987) and Tiffany Lethabo King (2018) who do not seek to redeem the family. Lethabo King (2018) argues that the abolitionist framing opens up the possibility of naming and doing Black relations – and as I attempt to show gender relations –outside the categories that currently classify humanness in order to denaturalize the family as a normative and humanizing institution to which people should

aspire to belong. An institution, as Martin Manalansan (2008) articulates, that is supported by the purported logical arrangement and formula of "domestic = family = heterosexual woman = care and love."

Additionally, despite Black, feminist, queer, trans and other refashioning of the family as non-white, non-patriarchal, non-heteronormative and working against the capitalist mission of property accumulation, it is still possible to incorporate these different ways of doing family into liberal models of intelligibility via the family, like gay dads who advocate for more policing to have "safer neighborhoods." In doing so, this simply generates more ways for white supremacy, racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism and classism to thrive as the "family is not a private space or private matter, in fact, the family is intimately connected to the state and animates it power" (Lethabo King 2018). So, as Lindsey (cited in Lethabo King 2018) suggests, if the family as an institution were destroyed, the state would be destroyed. Moreover, consolidating rights for lesbian and gay families, who are more often than not cisgender, promote and rely on rhetorics of respectability. Aren Aizura (2018) shows how "transgender rights claims that rely on narratives of respectability almost always assume whiteness or seek to discipline trans of color populations into behavior that suppresses racial injustice and lays blame for violence, criminalization, and poverty on the individual trans subject" (91). And, as I demonstrate throughout, respectability politics function through ideas and practices of the American family system.

Ultimately, reformulating the family as the "ideal" kinship formation over clan or intra- and inter-tribal configurations, to name a few, molded previously "unknowable" interpersonal relationships and communities that held a variety of "genders" and other

ways of being and doing as readable to the newly forming nation-states now known as the United States (Goeman 2013). The family became a vehicle through which the consolidation of material goods like private property and capital and medico-legal definitions of racialized gender solidified. In more ways than one, those who had control of said property combined with who performed various forms of labor produced the very subjectivities people were anticipated to take up like that of patriarch and mother. These impositions disproportionately negatively impacted – and continue to impact – historically marginalized peoples, especially enslaved peoples, Indigenous communities, immigrant populations, gender non-conforming and queer people, "all of whom continue to be at once in need of its meager protections and marginalized by its legacies and prescriptions" because of the ways the idealized family form structures governmental policies and programs (Weeks 2021, 4).

Consequently, this project at times zooms outward and explores how the American family system maintains its position as the primary kinship model within the United States and does not aim to recuperate it or "fix it" to salvage the system. Throughout this dissertation I explore: how do 'family' and 'mother' mutually inform one another? In what ways do these socially constructed categories serve to create gender ideologies and gendered bodies that also shape intersecting processes of race, class, sexuality, and ability? How does the family system physically and ideologically shape the ways parents see their own and others' bodies and identities? How do familial and/or maternal embodiment impact people's ability to access material resources and social capital, especially for gender non-conforming people? Broadly, in what ways do

emotions facilitate power imbalances and inequities through the family system and keep people attached to the American family system?

Even though these questions have been asked before in different ways and from different perspectives, another reason for taking up such a project stems from the fact that there is plenty of scholarship on parenting, an increase of scholarship on trans experiences, but there is limited scholarly engagement with the overlaps of parenting and trans identity read in tandem with critical motherhood studies. To be clear, I am not searching 'elsewhere' for a different form of parenting that is 'deviant' from the presumed norm (cisgender parents) because to engage in such a framework reproduces a normal versus abnormal binary that privileges cisgender identification. Similarly, I do not suggest parents who are trans is 'new.' Sally Hines (2006) notes, historically, many "cross-dressing and cross-gender-identifying men and women would have been parents," however, "self-identifying *as a* trans parent is a recent social development" (368; italics mine) I find conducting research with trans parents calls attention to the ways in which bodies and identity are produced through familial structures and how these subjectivities both aid and disrupt entangled projects of white supremacy and cisnormativity.[3] Like other trans scholars (who will be discussed in detail later in the chapter), I maintain that trans knowledges, experiences, and ways of being in a body are not simply a 'new identity,' but actually "can be the basis for very different ways of seeing the world" (Halberstam 2018, 87). And it is through these new ways of seeing the world that I trace the racialized, gendered, sexualized, classed, ableist, and nationalist arrangements that naturalize and value certain ways of being and thinking over others.

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[3] Cisnormativity is the viewpoint that one's gender identity and gender expression align with societal expectations gender assigned at birth.

To be clear I am not fighting for trans people, and as I argue trans parents, to be included in current family structures and other institutions because this misunderstands the way power functions and obfuscates the multiplicity of ways family and parenthood do more harm than good. Misunderstanding the way power functions limits our capacity to mobilize power in transformative, more socially just ways. Drawing from Cathy Cohen's groundbreaking work, Dean Spade (2015), critical legal scholar and trans mutual aid activist, notes that

> in order to properly understand power and transphobic harm, we need to shift our focus from the individual rights framing of discrimination and 'hate violence' and think more broadly about how gender categories are enforced on all people in ways that have particularly dangerous outcomes for trans people. Such a shift requires us to examine how administrative norms or regularities create structured insecurity and (mal)distribute life chances across populations (9).

For Spade (2015), the ways administrative systems maintain their control and distribution of power is through their rhetoric. This means then administrative systems (governmental, NGOs, non-profits, and for-profit institutions) are *inventors* and *producers* of meaning for the categories (woman, dependent, immigrant, gender, child, prisoner, family) they administer, and that those categories manage both the population and the distribution of security and vulnerability. Spade's argument that administrative systems invent and produce meanings for the categories that they manage while also deciding which populations are deserving of material resources helps frame how the individual becomes the one to blame if one will not (or in many cases cannot) live up to the invented ideals like "woman," "dependent," "mother," and so on. This shift in understanding power differentials is important because exploring transphobia "may be useful in understanding the motivations underlying the actions of individuals, [however] its use as an explanation has obscured the more systematic nature of trans marginalization

by isolating the particular problem to *acts* rather than embedding the problem in broader cultural and political contexts" (Bauer et al 2009, 350).

Section Two | Mommy Issues

Despite its often ahistorical and essentialist framing by individuals and institutions "mother" is not neutral. There are good mothers, bad mothers, stepmothers, helicopter moms, stay-at-home moms, crack moms, lazy moms, working mothers, celebrity moms, and so many more. Maternal logics suggest that motherhood is the end all be all for women, a fulfillment of a lifetime, and because of this, women are not seen as "complete" until she has children. Yet, the intimate and bodily experience motherhood necessitates makes many women feel trapped by the patriarchal institution perpetuated through media, law, language, and science. Because of this motherhood scholars and activists critique and analyze the ways in which race, class, ability, sexuality, nationality, geographic distance, and gender simultaneously produce hierarchized categories of mothers and the social categories themselves. In other words, it is not that "good" or "bad" mothers reflect an identity; rather, these markers are the processes through which race, class, and gender are constructed and function as a feedback loop to naturalize "good" mothers as overwhelmingly middle-class women. Therefore, the past several decades of motherhood scholarship has pushed the boundaries of, and disrupted, the presumptive monolithic category of mother by highlighting diverse ways of enacting, resisting, and/or claiming motherhood.

Many critiques of motherhood that became popular among white feminists, primarily saw motherhood as oppressive which negated and flattened the histories of

Black, Brown, and Indigenous mothers who fought to have and take care of their children. For one, seeing motherhood as only oppressive pits mothers and non-mothers against each other in the fight for bodily autonomy and ignores the structural frameworks for why certain women are 'forced' into maternal roles while others are denied the identity and/or ability at all. Many scholars, particularly Black women, challenged the perspective that motherhood was a site of oppression. bell hooks (2007) articulated "Black women would not have said motherhood prevented us from entering the world of paid work because we have always worked" (145). She further noted that "historically, Black women have identified work in the context of family as humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care, the very gestures of humanity white supremacist ideology claimed Black people were incapable of expressing" (145). Thus, motherhood for Black women was not inherently an oppressive space, instead it was one that provided refuge from a violent society that erased the labor of Black women or hyperfetishized it. Patricia Hill Collins demonstrated how Black motherhood was taken out of the hands of the women who experience it and circulated throughout society, which silenced their voices and misrepresented the many lived realities of Black motherhood. She argued that "African-American women need a revitalized Black feminist analysis of motherhood that debunks the image of 'happy slave,' whether the White-male-created 'matriarch' or the Black-male-perpetuated 'superstrong Black mother' (Collins 2009, 190). This judgment is acutely seen in the infamous 1965 "Moynihan Report", formally known as *The Negro Family* (1965). The report pathologized and essentialized Black poverty by placing the cause of Black poverty squarely on the shoulders of Black women (Roberts 1997). According to the

report, “Black men’s riotous violence stemmed from their aggrieved masculinity because they could not find work and support their families” (Loyd 2014, 62). Not only did this assertion naturalize the white male breadwinner framework (i.e., nuclear family), it indirectly made “Black women responsible for racist and gendered hiring practices” because of Black women’s aggressiveness, lack of femininity, and time spent out of the home (Loyd 2014, 63; Hill-Collins 2000). In many ways, these (mis)representations contributed to physical and ideological violence perpetuated against women of color, like sterilization or the removal of children from their care.

Similar to the ways mothers of color were subjected to racist and classist framings of their mothering, lesbian mothers were pathologized as ‘unnatural’ mothers who risked traumatizing and destroying their children’s mental well-being. Ellen Lewin (1994) noted that when she first began to assemble resources for a study of lesbians mothers in 1976 “very few people were aware of the existence of such a category, and if they were, they usually saw it as an oxymoron” (333). Again, at the heart of this attack was the presumption that the heterosexual, two parent family was key to a healthy and happy life. By the mid 1980s, lesbian scholars took on the family system and found lesbianism was a site of resistance against the oppressive institutions that sought to eradicate them by demonstrating the transgressive and/or conventional behaviors that lesbian motherhood presented (Lewin 1997; Rich 1986; Lorde 2007). That is, “lesbian mothers are, in some sense, both lesbians and mothers, but they shape identity and renegotiate its meanings at every turn, reinventing themselves as they make their way in a difficult world” (Lewin 1997, 350).

Mothering and motherhood scholarship, however, has largely reproduced cisgender frameworks, and consequently erased and/or silenced trans experiences of parenthood. Much of the work that claims to talk about trans parents typically focuses on lesbians and gays, maintaining sexuality as the primary means through which oppressive conditions persist and stabilizing maleness and femaleness as stable categories (Averett 2020; Hines 2006). Alisa Grigorovich's (2014) analysis of Thomas Beatie, a man who was pregnant in the public eye, found that "given that culturally and historically pregnancy has been associated with female bodies, the pregnant male body exceeds the established limits of what constitutes a *proper* body" (89). Pregnant men threaten the very means through which the family system aims to delineate the features that define male and female bodies: the womb and pregnancy.

The womb, according to Alys Eve Weinbaum (2019), has dominated how social and economic formations evolved over time. For instance, "slave breeding in the Americas and Caribbean was increasingly important to the maintenance of slavery as time wore on, and thus slave women's wombs were routinely treated as valuable objects and as sources of financial speculation" (Weinbaum 2019, 7). The womb thus became the logics of racial capitalism and gender. C. Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides* (2017) explores this assemblage through Hortense Spillers "the female within." Snorton argues that "the association between being black and having a black mother was critical to maintaining the biopolitical ordering of slavery" (12). Central to this process were also patriarchal formations, aiming to solidify and consolidate whiteness through intertwined logics of family, property, and nation. Specifically,

> black and white women figured two sides of a laceration produced by 'civil society's phallic wound,' in which reproductivity for the black was 'a vector of

> spatial and temporal capacity: space cohered as place: the womb, time cohered as event: childbirth.' In contradistinction to black women's figurations as wombs, as producers of property, as always consenting and unable to (not) consent, white women's sexualities were constructed as 'inaccessible, forbidden (until marriage)'and, by metonymic extension, were made to stand in for the white family, private property, and the state (104)

Situated within the afterlife of reproductive slavery, one could argue that the fear and disgust pregnant trans men illicit highlights the constructed "male" and "female" boundaries created through medico-legal discourses that continuously affirm the body as a stable, unchanging figure. "Naturalization of the categories of 'mom' and 'dad,' T. Garner (2014) argues, "relies on a notion of biological continuity between sex, gender, and parenthood, and erases the ways in which sexed bodies are engaged in a process of becoming 'mom' or 'dad'" (174). For trans parents, then, the visibility of the body often forecloses and/or opens ways of parenting that are otherwise denied in a world that situates bodies assigned female at birth mothers and bodies assigned male at birth fathers. Margaret Gibson (2014) asserted "queering motherhood must attend, not only to motherhood as it occurs in overarching discourses and institutional restriction, but also to everyday activities, material inequities, and embodied relationships" (9). So, I take up Gibson's call but reframe it to include more than just motherhood. My research uses past scholarship on mothering and motherhood to contextualize and understand the institutions, structures, policies, and representations that reproduce stable and static frameworks of mothers and fathers built upon naturalized notions of femaleness and maleness. I explore the role of cisness to destabilize the presumption that only trans bodies trouble gender.

Trans Parenting |

Contrary to current socio-political pseudo-scientific worries that purport phenomena like 'rapid onset gender dysphoria,' gender nonconforming parenting is not a new 'concept' or way of life (Shrier 2020). However, because "most research on trans people has focused on health care access and health risks … very little has focused on more mundane, everyday processes" (Averett 2020). Out of the few studies done, one of the first scholars to document and take seriously the lives people of who are broadly understood as transgender parents is British sociologist Sally Hines. In the early to mid-aughts, Hines (2006) noticed a shift in sociological literature that was moving away from using transgender as only a theoretical category to focusing more on lived experiences. With the little available research at the time, Hines' sociological study of three British trans parents of varying ages, genders, and family structures, but not race, provided invaluable, yet skewed, insight into the ways in which trans identities facilitate alternative forms of kinship relations.[4] For example, Hines' (2006) work demonstrates that "notions of agency and choice run through the accounts of partners to illustrate how complex decisions around gender transition are *negotiated* within the context of partnering relationships and family commitments" (368; my emphasis). Negotiation ran counter to popular narratives and framings of trans parenthood at the time because the popularized narratives drew their ideological power from laws and policies that required trans people to sterilize themselves in order to be legally defined as their gender. So, wide swaths of

[4] At no point throughout Hines' study does she address the ways in which whiteness shapes the lives of the three trans parents she analyzes. Therefore, despite Hines' and others' vital contributions to the area of transness and parenting, the lack of racial analysis within trans parenting reifies the implicit whiteness within trans studies and adds to the onto-epistemological erasure of Black and Brown trans people's position within broader frameworks of gender, sexuality, bodies, normative family imaginaries, care and race.

trans and non-trans people simply could not imagine trans people as having children or being a part of children's lives because of the perceived, and quite literal, reproductive incapacitation (Karaian 2013; Norton 2013). Hines' study continues to be reproduced in different ways by different scholars. Primarily, trans parenthood scholarship centers the following themes: (1) how trans people negotiate relationships with children following disclosure and transition (Veldorale-Griffin 2014; Veldorale-Griffin and Darling 2016); (2) impact on children (Haines et al 2014; Hines 2016; Hines 2006; White and Ettner 2007; Freedman, Tasker, and Ceglie 2002; Grant et al 2011); (3) relationships with wider families (Riggs, Power, and Doussa 2016; von Doussa Power and Riggs 2015); (4) the desire to parent (von Doussa et al 2017; De Sutter, Kira, Verschor, & Hotimsky, 2002; Wierckx et al., 2012); (5) the role of professional practice (Haines et al., 2014; Pyne, 2015; Veldorale-Griffin, 2014; Von Dousa, 2017).

I suggest Hines' lack of attention to race, and many of the studies referenced above, fundamentally miss how whiteness and white supremacy is woven into normative imaginaries of gender, parenthood and trans identity, shaping how people perceive and enact both parenting and trans identity. Plainly, Hines' work fails to address the privileges awarded to white trans people an issue that plagues trans studies. Kyla Schuller and Jules Gill-Peterson (2020) point out that white trans people are often folded back into the social because of the plasticity of white gender. This allows white trans people more access to material resources like jobs and housing, not just because they are white people living in a white supremacist society, but also because of the ways the American medical establishments of the mid-20th century constructed and enshrined trans identity in heterosexual, white middle-class (and upper-class) femininity (Aizura 2018). Susan

Stryker (2017) reminds us in *Transgender History* that "many genital surgeries that became available to later generations of transgender people were developed by practicing on the bodies of enslaved back women who were subjected to medical experimentation, and that these procedures were used nonconsensually on the bodies of intersex youth" (52). Therefore, this project takes up Hines' project – but with an intersectional framework – to challenge the ways a majority of sociological, anthropological, and feminist perspectives "rest on an uninformative and naturalized binary gender model that recognizes only male or female gender categories," in relation to parenting and family formation (355).

My research dives into the ways trans parents create and develop communities in a cisheteronormative society. On the one hand, trans parents' experiences question the practices, traditions, laws, policies, and languages that erase, exclude, deny, and/or violate gender non-normative worlds. On the other hand, trans parents' experiences highlight how material and discursive ideas of kinship are normalized and naturalized. In other words, my research does not aim to get trans parents simply included in established institutions. Rather, my goal is to value trans parents embodied experiences to shatter the current systems of "recognition" and "accommodation" promoted by many leftist organizations. To turn away from recognition and rights-based identity politics and towards a model of transformative justice holds open not yet knowable and unrealized kinship structures and bodily configurations as transformative justice aims to transform the conditions that enabled the harm, while also facilitating repair for the harm by cultivating accountability, healing, resilience and safety for all. To do so, I turn to scholarship on affect and affect theory.

I've Got a Feeling | Affect Theory

Affect theory is about considering the world as movement, intensities, vibrations, potentiality, and becoming through the ways objects (human, part-human, and non-human) are capable of affecting and being affected. Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth (2010) suggest that affect is the name we give to forces – visceral forces, beneath, along, or generally *other than* conscious knowing – "that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension" (1). More plainly, Kathleen Stewart (2007) says affect is a "thing of the senses" and affect theory is exploring how those senses are mobilized, organized, and politicized. Affect theory, developed out of feminist theory, queer theory, and postcolonial theory in the early 1990s, pushes scholarship to think with and beyond the "linguistic turn," an influential understanding of power relations that developed throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. For many important scholars who followed said linguistic turn, like Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Gillies Deleuze, and Judith Butler, broadly – and very simply put – argued concepts cannot exist without being named, and thus, language "constitutes" reality vis a vis signs (Schaefer 2015). Yet, the specific focus on language, and the perception that that is where power consolidates, led to an overwhelming flattening of the way bodies and other objects co-participate in the creation and manipulation of knowing and being. Accordingly, affect theory asks what else shapes power formations?

Unfortunately, there is no single, easily defined theory of affect and there are multiple interrelated theoretical approaches that use affect/s. Generally, broken into two camps, affect studies scholars maintain that the dominant approaches to affect include an "outside-in" or an "inside-out" framework. The outside-in camp articulates affect as

explicitly separate from “emotions” – felt, “recognizable,” and named experiences (Massumi 1990; Clough 1991). Affect is an “autonomous field” that we can be affected by but do not perceive. The “inside-out” camp, on the other hand, firmly sees emotions under the umbrella of affects, despite there being different theoretical and methodological approaches to framing the differences among emotions, feelings, and senses (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2011; Hemmings 2012; Sedgwick 1998). This latter camp, the one I situate myself in, envisions affective forces as motivating factors that incorporate and exceed the conscious. The divergence between the theoretical approaches within affect studies actually helps situate and explain why I am using affect theory to explore trans parents’ narratives and representations.

Similarly, my focus on trans parents’ affective worlds adds to the perpetually growing field of affect studies in both theoretical and methodological ways. Scholars like Sara Ahmed (2014), Ann Cvekovitch (2003), and Elspeth Probyn (2005) maintain that the split between affect and emotion, and that affect is autonomously separate from the body, is a perpetuation of the masculinist perspective that “women” are subjected to the emotional ruling of the body and are unable to “control their rational minds.” Accordingly, in using an affect theory that does not distinguish emotion from affect, I reject the cartesian dualism of mind versus body that continuously and persistently molds how we think about social identities. For example, in thinking the body and mind are separate, where women are seen as “less evolved” than men, opens space for systems of power to use the racialized gender binary and ableist logics as justification for things like continuously awarding white men undeserved positions of authority because they are “more rational,” for not giving Black women enough pain medication to soothe their

ailments because they "do not experience as much pain," and for imagining disabled people as "not intelligent" because their body does not align with ableist expectations of bodies. Affect attempts to understand how we are invested, moved, encouraged, rewarded, and pushed towards various hegemonic formations of gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability.

This is different from previous interventions into feminist critiques of family that historically have relied on more material ways that people – mostly cis women and children – are impacted by the oft violent nature of familial hierarchies grounded in gender essentialism. So, I argue and my contribution to the field of affect studies is to that in order understand the success of the American family system we need to understand how people form their "affective investments" to these identities that are woven into the American family system such as father, mother, or parent. Specifically, a trans parent perspective opens up alternative perspectives for how gender is felt and what that feeling does at individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels.

The dynamic nature in which affects like love, disgust, anger, hatred, and belonging saturates, circulates, and sticks to objects (imagined or real) from trans parents' experiences creates greater understanding for what kind of knowledges count and do not count as legitimate sources. For instance, when trans masculine parents state they "feel" more like a dad than a mom the "legitimacy" of their claim depends on who or what is there to "accept" said feeling. That is, because affect – embedded in discourses of emotion, feeling, sensation – is often deemed as opposite of "fact," feelings are not deemed legitimate sites of knowledge production. Yet, the narrow emphasis on facts not feelings misunderstands the role of feeling within reasoning. Plainly, one "feels like"

their facts align with their world view (Gould 2009; Reber 2016). And so, one does not have to legitimize a trans masculine parent's "feelings" if their gender assignment, gender expression, and gender role do not align with broader perceptions of motherhood and fatherhood. Using affect studies to analyze trans parents' experiences, I argue, makes space for different ways of knowing and experiencing the world that do not rely on legally and/or medically sanctioned family structures or culturally understood norms of parenthood to bloom. Focusing on the affective dimensions of trans parenthood disrupts preconceived notions for what it feels like to be a father, mother, or parent leads to reconceptualizations of bodies, language, and social identities. It also keeps in focus how parenting bodies and parenting language are shaped through the ways in which we feel.

Orienting Language and Space | Indexicality, Stance, and Spatial Analysis

Even though discussions of affect curated from trans masculine parenting experiences may seem of concern to only a small group of feminist scholars (to be discussed at length in the chapters that follow), it should in fact concern anyone who cares to understand the interlocking systems of violence perpetuated through the institution of the family. Paul Ardoin and Fiona McWilliam (2016) explain "the meaning of emotion is and emerges from cultural and personal exchanges, and as those exchanges repeat, meaning and resonance collect, and what results is 'an accumulation of affective value'" (np). In this framework, emotions are not things we *have* but, in fact, are produced in circulation through moments of encounter, impression, and orientation. And so, on the other hand, Julia Lane and Eleonora Joensuu (2018) point out, "affect theories

afford visibility for the ways that experiences, emotions, feelings, and affects can extend beyond individuals, identities, categories, and the ability to name them as such" (5).

The everyday life of the family is not simply given nor straightforward, however. To imagine affect more clearly – which I see fundamentally related to emotions – I turn to Sara Ahmed's theorization of objects, orientation, and stickiness. Ahmed (2010) describes *affect* as what sticks, "what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (Ahmed 2010, n230). Ahmed's conceptualization of affect and her desire to illuminate how ideas, values, and objects are connected and what those connections *do* forms and propels a majority of this dissertation. Specifically, I aim to more clearly understand how ideas and practices of family, motherhood, bodies assigned female at birth, and transness play crucial roles in shaping beliefs and practices of family through the ways in which each circulate as 'sticky objects.' Trans people, for example, often articulate that their "felt sense" of their own body is different than the materiality of the body prompting feelings of non-belonging both in their own body and broader social structures (Salamon 2010). In some ways, they do not want their gender assigned at birth to stick to them any longer. In an affect framework that explores trans narratives a penis comes signifies gender because of the ways "gender becomes naturalized as a property of bodies, objects, and spaces" through what Ahmed (2010) describes as a "loop of repetition" (58). Loops of repetition are ways bodies are repetitively shaped physically and ideologically by objects (Ahmed 2006; Butler 1990; Foucault 1990). Paraphrasing Gayle Salamon (2010), this repetitive shaping is what yokes together bodily materiality to bodily feeling. In doing so, affect theory illuminates how emotions such as belonging are crucial to understanding how structures of power work.

Consequently, objects and bodies work together as we come to understand our body's limits, contours, ability, spatial perception through objects. Hence, *orientation*, the phenomenological understandings of inhabiting a body. This means that we can trace a body's history of encounters, or what has stuck to the body, through the ways said histories manifest knowingly and unknowingly through their comportment, their posture, and their gestures (Ahmed 2006; Ahmed 2010). Butler (1990) similarly discusses this effect of histories as gender performativity, a quality of gender as practice and ideology that relies on the idea "social behaviors associated with gender are performative in that they enact rather than simply reflect gendered identities" (Barrett 2017, 8). Accordingly, Butler's (2011) assertion that there is no "natural" or "inherent" essence of gender identity within a person but that gender "must be understood not as the reiterative and citation practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" destabilizes the belief gender is innate.

However, for performativity to 'work' vis-à-vis signs, argues Rusty Barrett (2017), it relies on and operates through *indexicality,* the relationship between forms of language and the contexts in which they occur. Elinor Ochs, a leader in the field of sociolinguistics, defines indexicality "as a property of speech through which cultural contexts such as social identities (e.g., gender) and social activities (e.g., a gossip session) are constituted by particular stances and acts" (Duranti and Goodwin 1992, 335). Some *stances*, or the ways people position themselves when engaging in a given interaction, are epistemic, moral, cooperative, and affective (Goodwin 2007).

I utilize these sociolinguistic interventions across my chapters and examples because they help connect the body to the discursive. Specifically, a speaker in an

individual interaction is not isolated to just that interaction but wrapped up in a dynamic interrelationship. Alexandra Jaffe (2009) demonstrates that "certain stances or clusters of stances become associated with gender through practice conducted within gendered and hierarchical social formations" (13). For example, using "mitigating" language to ask for something is not a direct index of femininity, argues Jaffe (2009), "but rather represents a kind of stance that is taken up (or imposed on) a variety of less powerful people in society, including, but not limited to, women" (13). Additionally, the political and ideological atmospheres that these interactions are entwined in can serve to naturalize certain indexical relationships making it seem like "women" are 'naturally' more accommodating, polite, and unobtrusive.

Disrupting this flat understanding of language, subjectivity, and epistemology, Jaffe's conceptualization of *metastance* objects (e.g., language ideologies) provides researchers a framework that does not essentialize social categories. Jaffe's approach examines the processes through which people come to understand themselves and their worlds through people's capacity and desire to dis/align with systems of power (Jaffe 2009; Barrett 2017). For example, in her study of sociolinguistic integration of immigrant populations, María Sancho Pasucal (2019) notes paying attention to how immigrants in Madrid construct and shift cultural identity through language illuminates how belonging manifests through the sharing of language, an element related to status and power. Therefore, evaluating my participants' stance gives information about how various flows of power move.

Iris Marion Young (2005) underscores this framework by acknowledging that "even in the simplest body orientations of men and women as they sit, stand, and walk,

we can observe a typical difference in body style and extension" (32). This suggests then that gender differences are differences in bodily orientations not just limited to the non-verbal body but also discourse. Because objects are not just material, but also abstract, gender itself is an object that one can orient (or be oriented) towards or away from. Focusing on orientation, objects, bodies and emotion provides a clearer view to see how gender is an *effect* of how bodies take up objects through the ways in which bodies orient themselves or are oriented towards or away from certain objects.

Illuminating how bodies are situated through contact with objects – discursively or materially – requires us to think about how space is integral to a body's orientation and how space is also oriented (the study as a space where writers do their writing orients the room as the study). Spatial logics insist that we can view, assess, and ethically organize the world from a stable (white, patriarchal, Euro-centric, heterosexual, classed) vantage point, naturalizing both identity and place by repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups 'naturally' belong (McKittrick 2006; Rose 1993). This means then space and body are always already entwined because not only is the body a "space," but orientation also involves aligning body and space: "we only know which way to turn *once we know which way we are facing"* (Ahmed 2006, 7). Yet, aligning body and space is not a simple, straightforward, 'natural' task. Society measures and 'agrees' upon the standardization of space which frames the direction certain bodies "should" face. This standardization becomes apparent when social or personal conflict arises because one is seen as "out of place" through their inability to align with the general flow of space. Hence why "a room of one's own," particularly if it is a study, regards children as 'out of place' due to the way children are not conducive to the spatial atmosphere writing

necessitates. For example, Hoffkling et al (2017) find in their study that a major structural barrier to trans masculine parenthood is the unintelligibility of pregnant men, making it difficult for trans men to access care during gestation and birth when they are in spaces that assist "mothers" such as the federal program of Women, Infants, and Children, lactation groups, "mother and baby" health centers, and "mommy and me" groups. This means then that because space is political and thus shapes our understanding of who should be where and what they should be doing people's capacity to show up and be seen as their authentic self becomes limited when filtered through a normative cisgender framework.

Norms are difficult to see because of their ability to operate as 'natural' components of life whether they are spatial, linguistic, or otherwise. So, I take a page from J. Jack Halberstam's (1998) exploration of masculinity at sites other than where it is most represented and naturalized (i.e., maleness and power) to help illuminate the normative powers of family, parenthood, with a specific focus on motherhood, and transness. Halberstam (1998) shows that repeated norms, myths, and fantasies about masculinity make it near impossible to pry it apart from maleness. Therefore, Halberstam argues that "masculinity becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body" because the dominant, naturalized understanding of masculinity is mobilized to mark 'other' bodies (356). Black, Brown and/or working-class bodies, in other words, are often marked as having excessive masculinity whereas Asian, white women, and/or upper-class bodies have too little, thus citing the white middle class male body as *the* marker of masculinity (Bederman 1995). For example, when a dad takes his child to the grocery store and the dad is regularly applauded for

“babysitting the kids” and “giving mom a break” it exposes the notion that women are the ones to take care of children, thus shaping how moms and dads should view their bodies and what actions they should perform. As a result, applauding a dad for simply taking care of his children sheds light on the ways a mom taking care of her children is seen as “natural,” and because it is seen as natural it blends into the white, middle class, cis heteronormative environment.

Affect Aliens |

As noted earlier, Ahmed’s theorization of emotions primarily focuses on the ways in which we are affected by emotions: in what ways do they move or orient us? This perception locates affects as directional and intentional, meaning one’s affect can be at odds with others who perhaps share the same affect. Ahmed describes these people who are not affected “in the right way” as *affect aliens*: someone who refuses to share an orientation toward certain things that other people share an orientation towards. The refusal is not always intentional or known, but sometimes just a sense of being ‘out-of-line.’ We can see this with queer and trans adults who reflect on their childhood and recognize a general sense of peculiarity due to deeply ingrained cis-heteronormative ideologies and practices. This concept of affect alienness grounds chapter two, “Trans Masculine Aliens.” Focusing on the trans masculine parents who participated in my study, I argue their experiences as affect aliens illustrate the more invisible and covert mechanisms through which affect laden parenting and family objects circulate.

In breaking down the ways my participants become affect aliens – because of the stickiness of motherhood to bodies assigned female at birth and femininity and

fatherhood to bodies assigned male at birth bodies and masculinity combined with their feelings of out of placeness – I show the hierarchies that allow systems of oppression to exist via normative understandings of family and transness. As a result of these onto-epistemological rearticulations valuable, understudied knowledge regarding family ideologies and practices emerge by reading trans masculine participants' anecdotes, stories, emotional moments, and bodily feelings through an affective lens, as they are often affectively at odds with hegemonic framings of family and motherhood. That is, trans parents who may not fit the hegemonic representation of parent's experiences provide an opportunity to examine the systems of power that do not seem to "be a problem" since a majority of people can (and are allowed to) move relatively easy within imagined and physical spaces.

For example, in 2018, at the United States-Mexico border the awareness of family separation rocketed into public consciousness. Despite having no official policy, the Trump administration was separating adults and children who "illegally" crossed the border at a higher rate than ever before. According to journalist Dara Lind (2018) approximately 2,700 children were split from their parents between October 1, 2017 and May 31, 2018 with little to no explanation for why it was happening to them or for how long. These families – who traveled vast distances to flee violent communities left destitute by Western (primarily American) governments' and corporations' extraction of land, labor, and goods – were characterized as potential threats to the "taxpaying, hardworking American families" by politicians and mutually reinforced by many members of the public (Fritze 2019). "Public feelings about 'criminality,' 'terrorism,' 'welfare dependence,' and 'illegal immigration' are not simply individual sentiments"

argues Paula Ioanide (2015); "they have been essential to manufacturing consent for military-carceral expansion and the retreat from social welfare goods" (1). She continues by asserting "emotions shape the ways that people experience their worlds and interactions…thus emotions function much like economies; they have mechanisms of circulation, accumulations, expression, and exchange that give them social currency, cultural legibility, and political power" (Ioanide 2015, 3). This means then the political power that emotions have connects the individual to the global through the family system due to anxieties concerning the "collapse of the American family" propped up by the racist projection of non-white, immigrants as enemies. In current frameworks of gendered racial difference, whiteness, and by extension white people, needs myths, fallacies, misrecognitions, and misrepresentations of historically marginalized peoples in order to structure their own meanings and identities. Accordingly, "people of color were relatively doomed to be persecutory enemies who could only approach and approximate, but never *be,* normatively valued humans" within Euro-American onto-epistemological frameworks (Ioanide 2015, 23).

Illuminating this process ultimately helps dismantle the interlocking logics of imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy that facilitate the "need" for the American family system. My participant's expose ways family, and, by extension, motherhood operate to privilege certain forms of world-making over others. There is nothing necessary, natural, or inherent about the family (Mamo 2007). However, because it is repetitively positioned as a "promise of happiness," a locus of belonging, a site of recognition and value through economic, political, religious, and representational tools it

shapes perceptions and orients people to believe that a family model is foundational for a 'good' society (Ahmed 2010, Berlant 2011; Weston 1991; Rich 1986; Lewis 2019).

Mis/fits |

Taking up the idea that flesh and environments are always already in motion and that environments are constructed for certain configurations of people, Garland-Thomson (2011) proposed the critical concept *misfit,* a concept used in chapter three "Maternal Misfits". In its most basic definition, misfit is a way to think through lived identity and experiences of disability as situated in time and place. Garland-Thomson proposed the concept of the misfit because popular (mis)understandings of disability often present disability as a lack, excess or flaw located in bodies. However, disability scholars have worked to promote a relational model of disability that situates disability as a social construction lived through the body. In doing so, relational theories of disability, like that of misfitting, hold onto the embodied aspect of disability while also illuminating how "disability oppression emanates from prejudicial attitudes that are given from the world through architectural barriers, exclusionary institutions and the unequal distribution and access to resources" (Garland-Thomson 2011, 591).

For example, Garland-Thomson defines a misfit as the moment when two things juxtapose and the subsequent awkward attempt to fit them together. Here we can imagine the classic idiom that encapsulates this attempt: it's like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. Differing from the perception that disability is a lack, excess, or flaw located in the body, relational models of disability assert there is no inherent problem within either the square peg or the round hole. However, it is "the discrepancy between body

[square peg] and world [round hole], between that which is expected and that which is, produces fits and misfits" (Garland-Thomson 2011, 593). Feminist disability scholars have demonstrated a body that 'fits' relies on an ableist configuration of "a world conceptualized, designed, and built-in anticipation of bodies considered in the dominant perspective as uniform, standard, majority bodies" (Garland-Thomson 2011, 595). (The ableist world is built for round pegs, thus the round hole.) So, when a body mis-fits, because the environment does not sustain the shape and function of the body that enters it, the body that mis-fits is deemed as in need of change due to the ability for a 'majority' of bodies to 'fit.' This means then that there is a moment of misfitting that produces the misfit, the person whose body is not sustained by the material-discursive environment.

For Garland-Thomson situating disability as not a problem in the individual's body – as the body needing to be 'fixed' – facilitates a productive tension that locates the problem as one of social justice. It is a problem of social justice because "a misfit occurs when world fails flesh in the environment one encounters – whether it is a flight of stairs, a boardroom full of misogynists, an illness or injury, a whites-only country club, subzero temperatures, or a natural disaster" (600). The "ideology of ability," argues Garland-Thomson, "produces a world into which people with the embodied particularities we think of as disability do not fit" (601). And so, to become a misfit is to be denied full participation in public and private life. Ableism constructs a vision of what both able bodies and disabled bodies can and cannot do and what they can and cannot have. Consequently, "access to civil and human rights becomes, then, a proper fit" (601). What is exciting about the misfit, and the affect alien, is the potential to form solidarity with

and among other misfits. People who cannot or will not fit ideal expectations become a misfit through their misfitting.

Telling Trans Stories to Save Trans Lives | Trans Studies

Many trans scholars argue that the contemporary understanding of 'transgender' materialized through medical and legal institutions situated within long histories of settler colonialism, chattel slavery, and capitalism, histories that very much live in the present (Halberstam 2018; Stryker 2017; Serano 2007). Susan Stryker (2017) notes "medical practitioners and institutions have the social power to determine what is considered sick or healthy, normal or pathological, sane or insane – and thus, often, to transform potentially neutral forms of human difference into unjust and oppressive social hierarchies" (51-52). Typically traced back to the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, transsexuality meant "having feelings or emotions or aesthetic sensibilities usually attributed to the binary gender other than the one assigned at birth" (Stryker 2017, 38). It was not until the 1950s, when Dr. Harry Benjamin performed the Christine Jorgensen's 'sex change', that the conflation of body modifications through medical interventions and transsexuality congealed. Transsexuality was conflated with sexuality and understood as an inversion where a woman was trapped in a man's body or vice versa. Inversion narratives were eventually dropped but being "trapped" in the wrong body remained for various versions of gender non-conformity.

Doctors soon distinguished between people who sought medical interventions to change their physical appearance (transsexuals) and people who were compelled to wear clothing "generally associated with a social gender other than the one assigned to them at

birth" (transvestites) (Stryker 2017, 39). Halberstam (2018) notes, "while the terminology of transsexuality and transgenderism was central to the quest for medical interventions in the twentieth century, its power to recognize and locate a certain relation to the body has somewhat waned in a world where we confront the incomplete project of 'sex change' (26). Pathologized terms like transsexuality no longer captured the range of embodied experiences for all trans people because hormones introduced another option for transsexual people. Hormones transformed bodies in ways that allowed trans men and women to 'pass' without having to or needing to undergo 'bottom' surgery. Not getting the "sex change," but moving about the world as a man or a woman, reconfigured the ways in which identity functioned which allowed transgender to emerge, capturing new ways bodies related to social roles. The medicalization of transsexuality, however, depended on excluding people of color, people with limited finances, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, and people who did not adhere to a heterosexual script of desire (Enke 2018). Thus, the category of transsexual, and eventually transgender, functioned as legible, and/or more easily attainable, if the person was white, able-bodied, well-educated, heterosexual and wanted and or could perform a proper femininity, a legacy that carries on today. As transgender shifted from an adjective to a noun, though, it stopped becoming a "way of being a man or a woman, or as a way of resisting categorization by those labels" to a descriptive term that marked a separate type of person.

In the 1990s, David Valentine (2007) explored the development of "transgender" as a novel category in New York City. Throughout his book, *Imagining Transgender,* Valentine (2007) asserts that the institutionalization of "transgender," via neoliberal

capitalist endeavors such as non-profits, scholars, and LGBT activist groups, was central to "a broad and ongoing shift in U.S. American understandings of those human experiences we call "gender" and "sexuality" … rather than [transgender] being an index of marginality or 'an out of the way category'… it is in fact a central cultural site where meanings about gender and sexuality are being worked out" (14). Consequently, Valentine argues that institutions that categorize individuals *as* transgender, rather than letting individuals present their own abstract and material understandings of gender, sexuality, and race situates individuals who do *not* identify as transgender – especially those who are African American and Latina fem queens of the balls – as unintelligible within 'progressive' frameworks of gender and sexuality. Ultimately, he maintains that "the goals and logics of identity politics themselves produce this apparent unintelligibility and erase an analysis of the entrenched inequalities that underpin them" (Valentine 2007, 109). Enke (2013), describing how transness was co-opted by the white-capitalist-patriarchy similarly points out, "neoliberal rights discourses that feed on identity politics further promoted the sense that people are *either* transgender *or* cisgender; cisgender, that is, did not simply name privilege, but also could be used to describe individuals" (237). Accordingly, my use of *trans* in this project is similar, yet different, to how *transgender* functions as an umbrella term to encapsulate a diversity of ways gender, flesh, and language co-exist with one another. *Trans,* as an analytic and an identity category, differs from transgender, though, because transgender – as an identity – has historically erased (and arguably continues to erase) the multiplicity of descriptors trans and/or gender nonconforming life takes up, flattening the political potential of "transgender."

Understanding *transgender* in this lineage facilitates my use of *trans* as an analytic to disrupt this transnormative framework, specifically in the overlapping areas of transness and parenting. *Trans,* instead of transgender, tackles the complicated material and ideological legacies infused into terminologies produced from struggles around bodily self-determination and EuroAmerican healthcare, legal, academic and political institutions like 'transgender' and 'transsexual'. In doing so, I hold in tension the multitude of ways parenting and trans bodies, knowledge frameworks, practices, and identities are constructed, gain social and capitalist value and circulate within national and transnational spheres without denying or disregarding the complexities of trans histories. Moreover, *trans* throughout my work follows what trans studies scholars frame as a *trans critique* (Stryker and Aizura 2013). A trans critique "is concerned less with producing knowledge about a particular class of people identified as transgender and more with understanding the social, political, and material conditions through which those identifications emerge and that knowledge itself is produced" (Beauchamp 2019, 12). Ultimately, I am interested in what trans parenting does over what trans parenting is.

Trans Care |

Centering the "rhythms of the trans mundane," of trans people's everyday lives, evokes the concept of *trans care.* Broadly, the framework of trans care investigates and destabilizes how affective and political economies of care operate to privilege those who can reproduce colonial/modern, middle class, reprotypical practices of family and punish those who cannot or will not reproduce this family form (Malatino 2020, 5). *Trans* care: not only because of the overwhelming physical, emotional, and material violence

inflicted upon trans people, especially Black trans women and trans women of color, but as Malatino notes, "we're impossible without each other" (2020, 73). The concept of trans care advocates that it is through our interdependency, gender variant or not, that enables us to move towards a world that sustains us all. Moreover, transing care illustrates that trans survival is about finding ways to live with and through anti-trans logics as a way to undo them. Namely, to be trans is to create space, sometimes material, sometimes abstract by weaving in and out of degrees of visibility and drawing on diverse temporalities. As demonstrated in the chapters that follow, trans parents often fight for and find various ways to create space, not only for themselves, but alternative ways of doing kin.

Malatino proposes in his book *Trans Care,* that *care webs*, a crip-femme reworking of mutual aid developed by scholar Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018), more accurately describes the care trans people do. Care webs are defined as "attempts to get what we need to love and live, interdependently, in the world and in our homes, without primarily relying on the state or, often, our biological families – the two sources disabled and sick people have most often been forced to rely on for care, sometimes with abuse and lack of control" (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). When used in and by community, care webs put us with and besides other trans people regardless of how friendly or knowledgeable we are which ensures our flourishing and survival. In a deft conceptual move, *Trans Care* asserts that care is not abstract, and because of this, it is integral to our ways of doing. This concept in and of itself is not necessarily new as care politics have been central in feminist critique (Hochschild 2013; O'Reilly 2010;

Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018; Weaver 2021).[5] However, in combining this understanding with the view that gender is what we "do" – not who we *are* – shifts how "gender recognition is sustained by a web of forces that we don't control" and not just about the individual's ability to 'perform' a gender (Malatino 2020, 37). Put otherwise, we do a gender and hope that the other grants us the desired recognition of that gender. Thus, the crux of trans care is about "*how* we care and *who* cares for these assemblages we are" (Malatino 2020, 40). Again, stressing interdependency over independence.

Yet, as more and more middle class white trans youth (and adults) gain access to trans healthcare and are folded back into heteropatriarchal structures of family through their ability to enact and bolster transnormative logics, we need to continuously interrogate the affective orientation of obligation and commitment that undergirds the institution of family *and* care. Historically, the institution of family affectively mobilizes obligation, emotional debt, and material and abstract forms of inheritance that coerce people to into maintaining normative ways of being that harm and hurt, including that of transness. So, I simply caution – as I have no answers to this problem – we must continuously interrogate trans's relationship to family even in the moments of undoing it.

[5] For instance, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's and Ernestine Avila's (1997) exploration of transnational motherhood shows how "motherhood is not biologically predetermined in any fixed way but is historically and socially constructed" through the flows of migration and domestic labor, paid and unpaid (549). Valerie Francisco-Menchavez (2019) points out that American women, who are mostly white, hire Filipina au pairs or nannies because they are stereotyped as "more caring" and "nicer," even if their relationship with their own children is fraught.

Methodological Choices |

#FTM (#Figuring-out-The-Methodology while becoming #Female-to-Male) |

Dána-Ain Davis and Christa Craven (2016) remind us, "methods themselves are neither inherently feminist nor non-feminist … but how a feminist ethnographer utilizes and contextualizes various methods that enable them to contribute to feminist ethnographic research" (77). Therefore, my project employs a variety of methods – semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and media discourse analysis – to center my thirty-six participants experiences, knowledges, limiting the ways that my voice, perspective, and social identities cast a shadow over their stories (Fonow and Cook 1991; Davis and Craven 2016; Hesse-Biber 2012; Browne and Nash 2010; Pryse 2000). From its conception in 2017, I designed my dissertation to be grounded in trans stories because my master's degree taught me that trans experiences were either hyper-fetishized or overwhelmingly absent – even more so when trying to find scholarship centering trans parenting. Moreover, trans scholarship was broadly being produced by "non-trans" scholars. So, for a while a bit of shame ran counter to my intellectual curiosity because I was concerned about my "lack of transness" (at the time). Trans scholars like Julia Serano (2007) insisted non-trans people should leave the theorizing and research to trans folks because cis people's voices often dominate trans voices and experiences.

As much as I tried, though, there is no way to disentangle oneself from their participants' stories. In fact, the more I explored their narratives from an affect theory, trans studies, and motherhood studies perspective, I began to unravel my own narrative; consequently, looping me further into my project. Furthermore, my understanding of identity boundaries shifted and morphed as I learned more about the construction and

fluidity of subjectivity, epistemology, and ontology (Visweswaran 1994; Narayan 1993; Basu 1999; Basu 2015; Zhang 2016; Zhang 2017; Gieseking 2020). In a serendipitous moment, for example, one of my participants, Darren, happened to have on the same t-shirt I bought just a few weeks prior to the interview: a bright robin's egg blue t-shirt with the words "Trans Health Justice Now" emblazoned on the front in a late-80s retro font. [6] Though I did not know it at the time, the purchasing and donning of that t-shirt several weeks earlier partly facilitated my exploration of transness as something more personal, instead of a simple political statement of allyship or 'research interest'. Consequently, Darren's skepticism of a New England white 'woman' – albeit butch – interrogating his life for my own professional gain was definitely warranted, and something I anticipated.

While I conducted preliminary research for my project the question of me being trans never really crossed my mind. My best guess is that the more traditional trans narratives of "hating one's body" or "feeling one's gender role did not abstractly and physically compute" did not completely resonate with me. In some ways, my family's lackadaisical approach to parenting allowed me to be "me" because I was not forced into strict gendered roles. Since coming out as a lesbian in my early teens, I never felt at odds with my body as who I was being seen as through my sexuality modified my gender to a degree that felt comfortable. One day scrolling through #FTM (#femaletomale) Instagram looking for trans people and organizations who might circulate my recruitment flyer I stumbled upon a "transfluencer," a term I coined that describes someone who publicly

[6] All names and explicit identifying markers have been changed to protect the anonymity of my participants.

shares their transition to 'help' others with their gender journeys.[7] This transfluencer posted a top surgery picture to their account: shirtless, no breasts, scars visible, covered in tattoos, but with a soft masculine aesthetic mixed with leather vibes. This alternative image of transness was one of the first times that it clicked for me that my gender could be anything that *I* wanted it to be and did not have to follow the traditional path from strictly female-to-male or strictly male-to-female. Intellectually, I knew that genderqueer, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and gender variant people survived and thrived. However, like my participants described the stories told to them about parenthood, it was the stories being told *about* transness ("I was born in the wrong body") that directed me away from the possibility that I was. In June 2019, two months into recruiting and interviewing participants, a nurse injected a 'low dose' of testosterone cypionate (T) into my upper thigh and the following February I underwent chest masculinization surgery.[8]

My original recruitment flyer, all approved by IRB, solicited trans and/or gender non-conforming parents on multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at the start of April 2019. Because I wanted to recruit a variety of people, I joined multiple groups on Facebook with "transgender parent" in the name or description such as Trans Parent Lex, Birthing and Breast or Chestfeeding Trans People and Allies, Out in Appalachia, LGBT+ Kentucky, New England Transgender: trans:, LGBTQ+ Parents and Families. Additionally, I reached out to different Black, Brown, and Indigenous groups that were public on Facebook and instead of me joining the groups I

[7] Help is in quotes here because the of the nebulous nature of social media and influencers. In the United States, it is not as apparent who is or isn't attempting to sell a product – including their own brand – vis-à-vis their social media platform because of lax laws and policies. Therefore, sometimes under the guise of 'helping' others through their transition transfluencers can be simply motivated by profit.
[8] Average testosterone cypionate injections hover around .5 ml per 100 mg/dl a week. My starting does was .2 ml per 100 mg/dl a week. Currently, I inject .4 ml of 200 mg/dl a week which equals .8 ml of 100 mg/dl, quadrupling my original dose.

would ask the moderators to share the flyer. There were only three instances of people not getting back to me. No one said no. I followed various "parenting transfluencers" on Instagram to keep abreast of the latest events and discussions, some of whom had over thirty-thousand followers at the time. Twitter was the least successful in my recruiting with no one being referred to me or found me through twitter. My recruitment flyer specifically noted that participants did not have to medically or socially transition in order to be considered trans. In doing so, I allowed participants to show up as themselves at any moment of their transition (Nicolazzo 2017). Similarly, I did not require parenthood to be biological or legal. Not requiring a specific type of transness and parenthood moved away from trans scholarship that stabilized transnormative and repronormative narratives. However, I found that when I asked for "trans parents" people assumed that I wanted to speak to people who had trans children and were not trans themselves, an indication that trans parenthood did not onto-epistemologically compute in current framings of parenthood and family. Moreover, as I started interviewing participants by the end of April 2019, I began to realize that interviewing both trans feminine and trans masculine parents will cause me to have – dare I say – too much data for a dissertation, particularly because the amount of current research on trans parenting is so limited. After interviewing six trans women from Kentucky, I was inspired by the coincidental overlapping hashtag of FTM of "Female-to-Male" and "First Time Mom" to stick with interviewing trans masculine participants. So, I adjusted my flyer and only recruited trans masculine or gender non-conforming parents. In the end, I had over 100 people reach out to be a part of my study, but I decided to interview as close to forty as I could get.

Semi-Structured Interviews |

In total, I interviewed thirty-six trans parents (n=36) using a semi-structured approach which allowed participants to direct the flow of conversation (Bernard 2017). More than half of my interviews (n=26) occurred in person at public places such as coffee shops and the other interviews were conducted via Zoom. All were recorded while I took notes to actively listen to my participant. I transcribed them myself and subsequently coded interviews using an open coding method on MAXQDA, allowing patterns to arise as I coded. However, because I was interested in affective aspects of parenting and transness I paid particular attention to the moments when racialized gender and emotion popped up. Thirty participants were trans masculine and/or non-binary (83%) and six were trans feminine (17%).

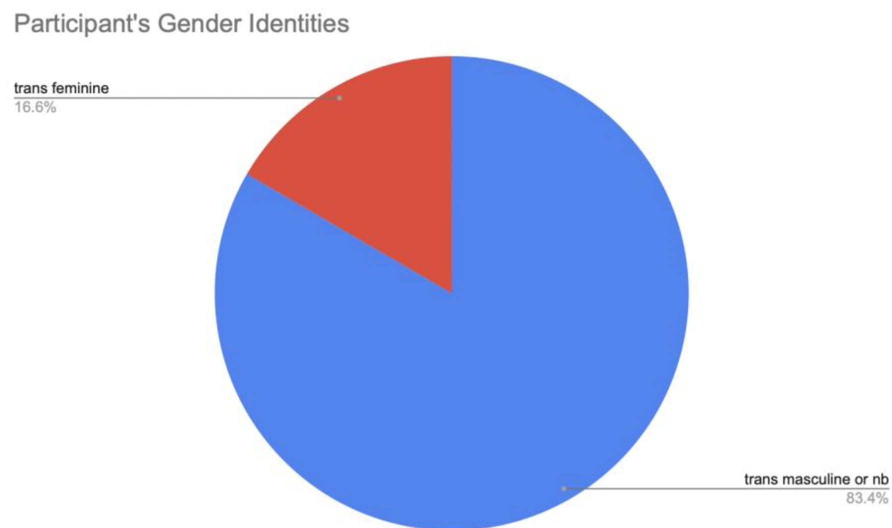

Figure 1: Participants Gender Identities

Most of my participants self-identified as white (n=24) with other participants self-identifying as Latinx (n=2), Black and/or African American (n=7), Thai American (n=1), and Mixed (n=2). Middle-class was the average participant class status (n=32) with the

caveat that most stated they "grew up working class." All of my participants graduated high school, some attended and/or graduated from college, and a few had advanced degrees. Participants all had jobs or at least had had jobs at different points in their lives. Everyone spoke English as their first language, were documented citizens, and ten (n=10) were raising their child/ren on their own or their children were old enough to take care of themselves. At the time of the interviews, two participants were pregnant – one participant was pregnant with their first child and the other was pregnant with their second. The age range for participants kids were from in-utero to mid-thirties but averaging below 18 years old. The sexuality of participants ranged from straight to queer to polyamorous with most identifying as queer and in a relationship. Participants were geographically diverse (California, Texas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Washington, North Carolina, and New Hampshire) but most were sourced from my own networks in New England and Kentucky through flyering and participant generated connections. I did not specifically ask demographics about ability, however, non-apparent disabilities such as anxiety and depression were often referenced when speaking about their parenting habits. Similarly, almost all participants (n=33) currently or previously practiced or participated in Judeo-Christian holidays and ideologies (See Appendix 1 for a table).

Out of the twenty-nine trans masculine and non-binary participants, twenty-four participants (83%) gestated their children and the other five (17%) either entered a relationship with someone who already had a child or entered a relationship and the participant, and their partner decided to adopt.

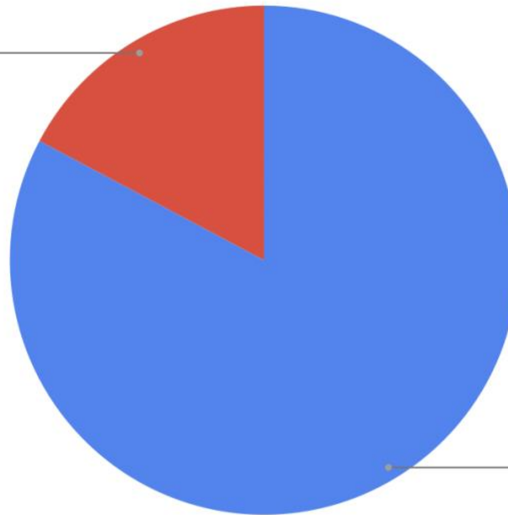

Figure 2: Gestational Parents

Similarly, ten out of the twenty-nine trans masculine parents transitioned *prior* to becoming parents which means most trans masculine parents in this study decided to transition *after* becoming a parent. At the time of my study, five trans masculine parents identified as a "pregnant man" and one identified as a genderqueer man. According to the participants, being a "pregnant man" meant prior to pregnancy the world recognized them as "men." The overwhelming representation of participants who transitioned after they had children provides an excellent lens to explore how my participants encounter various objects such as motherhood, fatherhood, transness, children, woman, man, pregnancy, birth, breasts, vaginas, and racialized and gendered bodies to understand themselves as trans and how this influences their understanding of parenthood. As discussed in the prior section understanding how people are oriented illuminates how people become affect aliens. In reading my participants experiences through an affect alien lens I trace the assemblages that both trans and non-trans people are expected to uphold in the name of 'family.' This section in particular highlights the complicated navigations people embark

upon in their time prior to and the early beginnings of grappling with their trans gender,[9] and ultimately demonstrates how parenthood facilitated an exploration and validation of their trans feelings.

As explained in the sections above, most of my ethnographic data is generated from trans masculine parents. Chapters two and three solely rely on interviews and participant observation I did with trans masculine parents. I did so for several reasons with the primary reason being the need for a tighter, more consistent through-line among my data. Having a large amount of disparate trans parents, in a project that already has multiple variabilities, became too unwieldy. Therefore, after my initial six interviews with trans feminine parents towards the beginning data collecting stage, I shifted and only engaged with trans masculine parents.

Participant Observation |

Figure 3: "Place Sacrifice here" Facebook Screencap

On July 27, 2019, I boarded the Plymouth to Provincetown ferry to conduct weeklong participant observation at Provincetown Family Week 2019. My reasons for attending Provincetown Family Week were threefold. First, Provincetown Family Week is run by the non-profit the Family Equality Council, a national non-profit that aims to change inequitable policies at the local, state, and federal level. Having an understanding for how policy shapes family ideologies and how that impacts

[9] This is not to say that people did not recognize or know there was something "different" about their gender, but that before they "came out" to either themselves or others they became parents.

trans parents is critical to how trans parents come to understand themselves and others. Second, Provincetown Family Week is marketed as the only and largest gathering for LGBTQ+ families. With parenting and transness cutting across all classes and spatial locations, I felt that it was a great opportunity to know and see who attends Provincetown Family Week while providing an opportunity for me to make connections with potential interlocuters. Third, the local lore around Provincetown Family Week in Provincetown, a sexually and culturally progressive space for affluent peoples, marks a spatial and linguistic disjuncture that is explored in chapters two and three. My original methodological intentions were to work with my participants to develop my project. I thought perhaps participatory action research or critical collaborative ethnography through photovoice (Bell 2008; Nicolazzo 2017). However, as the parts got moving and things became more complicated such as time restrictions, money restrictions, and spatial restrictions, I switched to participant observation.

My participant observation at Provincetown Family Week consisted of me attending various events like the Trans and Gender Non-Conforming Pool Party, the Beach Campfire, Morning Yoga for Adults, and the Family Week Pool Party. At each of these events, I watched the interactions of parents with their children: who were the children continuously asking for things? How did the parents interact with their children? What times of names were I hearing called out? Similarly, I made connections with the staff who worked for the Family Equality Council and trans parents who were attending the event. I formally interviewed three people at Provincetown Family Week. Two of them were Family Equality Council employees. I also spoke to folks who were not a part of Family Week but frequent Provincetown often. As can be seen in the photo above that

I captured from Facebook there is contention between Family Week attendees and Provincetown attendees, a point of contention that I explore in depth in chapter three. Analyses of Provincetown and Family Equality Council are discussed at length and frame chapters two and three.

Media Discourse Analysis |

To round out my dissertation's focus on individual, interpersonal, and institutional overlaps and divergences of transness and parenthood, I turned to media analysis to interrogate trans parent representation. My fourth chapter, "I guess that makes us the not chosen family: Representing Trans Feminine Parenthood in *Transparent*," uses a media discourse analysis to investigate the Amazon Original Series *Transparent* (2014-2015). My reasoning behind choosing this series is explained at detail in chapter four. However, using the affect alien, the misfit, and trans media scholarship, I conducted a close reading of this series, with particular attention paid to motherhood and transness, to unravel the multiply layered narratives and images the series presented to its audience. I watched the entirety of the five seasons (10 episodes each at approximately 30 minutes per episode and the two-hour musical finale) twice.[10]The first time, I marked moments that centered explicit conversations of family and motherhood. The second time I watched the specific scene and transcribed it. After outlining themes that were consistent across the series, I found that the series repetitively focused on the ways familial boundaries are negotiated within and outside the family unit.

[10] I also watched their series another time prior to deciding it would be the primary object of study in my fourth chapter.

Despite occurring on screen, many feminist media scholars argue paying sustained attention to representation helps us reimagine the "real world" (Hall 1997, Mulvey 2009; Gill 2000; Halberstam 2005; Steinbock 2019). Moreover, many trans media scholars note having a variety of representations of not just trans people but trans*ness* in film and television creates possibility models for doing "life" differently (Horak, Keegan, and Steinbock 2018; Gossett et al 2017). "The *couldness* of both cinema and trans*," argues Cael Keegan (2018), "is a faith that other affects might come into perception. At the outset, we never know what will emerge. Inside the transitional space of cinema/cinematic space of transition, *we become subjunctive*—feeling in the dark toward what might happen, marking how we've become by touching back on our prior selves" (4). So, by "reading" representation we learn new ways of being helping shape people's perception of trans identity. Essentialist beliefs of bodies and gender represented on television – combined with the role genitals play literally and figuratively in reproduction – I contend aids transphobic perspectives claiming trans people are not, cannot, and should not be parents.

Chapter Outlines |

Feeling Transparent is organized into four chapters. The first chapter, "Making the Familiar Strange," contextualizes the project's overarching conceptual framework, methodology and reflexively locates my identities as a white queer trans man within the project. Chapter two, "Trans Masculine Aliens: Exploring Motherhood and Family as Orientation," utilizes Sara Ahmed's (2010) concept of the *affect alien* to investigate trans masculine experiences of parenthood. Using my semi-structured interviews, I

demonstrate how their bodily changes caused by pregnancy and (2) the ways children function as kinship objects illuminate affective structures of family and motherhood that perpetuate normative practices and imaginations of parenting bodies, parenting language, and parenting spaces. Despite this, my participants also show that their experiences with trans parenthood afforded them the capacity to reimagine parenting language and parenting spaces to combat complex and intertwined systems of oppression.

Chapter three, "Maternal Misfits" draws on feminist disability scholar Rosemary Garland-Thomson's concept of *misfitting*, a moment when a physical or imagined environment fails to support a body, to illuminate how parenthood produces structures of racism, cisnormativity, and biological determinism that result in disproportionate systemic and interpersonal violence for those who cannot or will not 'fit' normative practices of parenthood. I explore how trans masculine parents encounter binary models of parenthood in administrative policies and procedures that out them as trans. Also, spaces like recreational parks, grocery stores, schools, and hospitals all impacted the ways in which trans masculine parents were (mis)gendered due to the stickiness of motherhood to afab bodies, shaping how their trans and parenting identity were valued. I argue the trans masculine parent is a mis-fit. However, the "issue" is not the trans masculine body, but the ways in which family and motherhood are premised on cisgender logics.

Chapter four, "I Guess That Makes Us the Not-chosen Family: Representing Trans Parenthood in *Transparent"* examines how *Transparent* (2014-2019) represents how transitioning as a parent is not simply a 'dad' becoming a 'mom,' or vice versa. Rather, it is a struggle over the body's meaning as the body is always already situated in

shifting webs of relations, making us interdependent over independent. I center several scenes from *Transparent* to argue that transitioning as a parent is a negotiation of naturalized ideas about maternal bodies, mothering roles, home space, and gendered language among all people, not just the person transitioning. Furthermore, *Transparent* focused on Maura's transness not as a spectacularized pathology, but as a way of moving about the world. This shift in trans representation and media making proffers many generative thinking opportunities to make the world a little bit more trans. For as Cael Keegan says, "to survive, transgender people have had to craft imaginaries that sustain our desire to become, our belief that we might come into perception differently. *The world, and me, as we could be*" (3).

Chapter Two | Trans Masculine Aliens: Exploring Family and Motherhood as Affective Devices

"Heterosexual marriage is seen as the good and proper place for reproduction; women – good women – orient themselves toward marriage and the normative nuclear family. To be disloyal to this normative family model, to orient oneself, as I have done, queerly, nonmonogamously, nonreproductively – I am the source of unhappiness and anxiety for others, as well as myself."

- ***Lisa Poole (2018),*** **"Families We Don't Choose"**

"I didn't want to be different. I longed to be everything grownups wanted, so they would love me. I followed all their rules, tried my best to please. But there was something about me that made them knit their eyebrows and frown. No one ever offered a name for what was wrong with me. That's what made me afraid it was really bad. I only came to recognize its melody through this constant refrain: "Is that a boy or a girl?"

- ***Leslie Feinberg (1993),*** **Stone Butch Blues**

Introduction |

It was a sweaty, humid summer morning in late July as I walked along the outside of a hotel in Provincetown, Massachusetts looking for a place to park my bike. I locked it up outside the hotel reception area with all the other bikes, hoping that this meant I was near the booth to confirm my attendance at the 25th annual Provincetown Family Week. Provincetown Family Week, organized and hosted by the non-profit Family Equality Council, is a yearly tradition where hundreds of LGBTQ+ families travel to the small, historic fishing town of Provincetown on the tip of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Known in the LGBTQ+ community as a "gay mecca," particularly for white, able-bodied, cis passing gay men, Provincetown is accessible only by expensive ferryboats, personal boats, cars, and limited bus and plane services. This seclusion and summer sun invites minimal clothing, tropical drinks by the pool, and party drugs. Scholars of Provincetown (Gleason 1999; Krahulik 2006) further suggest that the town's isolated location facilitates the broad acceptance and encouragement of public sexuality that runs counter to the

conservative legacy the Pilgrims and Puritans wove into the fabric of American life (Bronski 2011). And so, what makes Provincetown "Provincetown" for many are the annual themed weeks such as Bear Week, Cabaretfest, Independence Week, Girl Splash, and more.

Provincetown Family Week is similar to other themed weeks in terms of adult demographics – overwhelmingly upper-middle-class and white gay men who had children. However, it differs from other weeks through the ways "family" transmits and elicits a multitude of meanings, feelings, and practices. I find the use of "family" in Provincetown Family Week, which is typically code for "sanitized" and "non-sexualized" (think: "family friendly") troubles the ways in which "family" rhetorically functions in this particular place where highly sexualized "families" return each year. The Family Week website claims the annual event grew from the weekend Tom Fisher and Scott Davenport (a cis gay couple) took their two kids to Provincetown in the mid-90s, where they "just so happened" to meet other gay and lesbian families. Though I am not convinced by the "serendipitous" nature of their vacation due to Provincetown's long history of queerness, Davenport's description of the gathering of the families as a "magical event at which children of gay parents – many of whom didn't know other families like theirs – suddenly felt less alone" (ptownfamilyweek.com/faq) speaks to the affective power of belonging and the parental desire to ensure their children feel it. This process is, in part, what produces the "magic" – so much so that the once simple vacation now functions as the "largest annual gathering of LGBTQ+ parents and their children in the world" (ptownfamilyweek.com/faq).

However, not all the participants get to feel that magic. As a newcomer to the event, especially a newcomer without the type of "family" Family Week advertises to – LGBTQ+ adults over the age of eighteen who have children under the age of eighteen – I worried that not having a child signaled red flags to other Family Week participants. Plainly, I felt not having a child meant "I didn't belong." Although I was there to participate in the makings of queer and trans family moments, something I have done many times in Provincetown, I was not there with any of *my* "chosen family," sheltering me from the vulnerability of "feeling alone."[11] And so, my desire to understand how trans masculine people imagine, engender, and navigate the family system at Family Week ironically positioned me as an affect alien while I was there. Yet, perhaps in some weird way, my paranoia of "non-belonging" enables my analyses of trans masculine parenthood that follow because, as Maggie Nelson (2015) paraphrases from Eve Sedgwick, "it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices" to find pleasure and sustenance in lives made overwhelmingly difficult through compounding ways the American family system works at individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels (122).

So, when I found the Family Week Check-In table where they handed me a Cool as a Moose branded tie-dye tote bag stuffed full of products from the event's corporate sponsors like Clean and Clear, Kiehls, HBO, Bank of America, and Disney, I was struck

[11] As with most anxiety, my anxieties about sticking out were unfounded. Since parents and Family Week staff already had their hands full corralling the hundreds of families in need of various items, directions, and clarifications, no one cared that I did not have a constellation of sticky, tiny humans circling around my body and if they did – and what is at the heart of this chapter – the visibility of my white, soft, butch body easily slipped into an assumed location of parent and most likely mother.

by Family Week attendees' and Family Equality Council's cognitive dissonance.[12] What I broadly mean by this is that LGBTQ+ families, particularly multiply marginalized families along racialized and classed lines, are disproportionately disenfranchised and impoverished when compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. They are disproportionately impacted through the ways companies commit racist, sexist, and homo/transphobic political lobbing.[13] Accordingly, many LGBTQ+ families lack access to secure jobs, education, housing, parental leave, and social capital accumulated through recognition *as* parents through the anti-LGBTQ+ material and ideological violence perpetuated by companies and their stakeholders. Thus, most companies sponsoring Family Week by providing their goods or services are often too expensive or unreachable for numerous LGBTQ+ families (Santora 2021).

More specifically, this disjuncture, and literal manifestation of how the American family system affectively circulates, partially indicates how massive organizations like Johnson and Johnson, HBO, and Disney shape what it *means* to be a family. Through how they market their products and situate their mission and values, organizations and companies mobilize affects like love and happiness to convince the consumer that they too can experience love and happiness (Massumi 1990; Karppi et al. 2016). Although not all people derive love or happiness from the same objects, there are societal rules and regulations around what objects – material or imagined – generally incite what affects (more on this to come in the sections below). This occurs because "over time and through

[12] One of the Family Week raffle prizes participants were automatically enrolled into was an all-expenses trip to Disney Aulani in Hawaii. The estimated worth of this trip for two adults and two children was approximately $10,000.
[13] Disney's ambiguous and halfhearted disapproval of the "Don't Say Gay" bill in Florida combined with the fact they have directly donated to Republican politicians who have sponsored the bill speaks to the insidious nature of these corporate sponsorships.

repeated iterations," states Lisa Poole (2018), "people come to associate positive or "good" objects and their affects as mutual, reinforcing our association through repetition and habit" (283). Something becomes infused as "happiness" because it is deemed the object that incited said happiness. For instance, Disney often literally recommends spending time at Disney parks and resorts, watching Disney movies, and buying Disney products will foster stronger bonds between parents and children (Giroux and Pollock 1999). It is a place where "dreams come true" as the "happiest place on earth" through its goal is "to make people happy" (Disney.com). Families show off these "strong bonds" by purchasing a company's products or participating in something like a Disney vacation or Provincetown Family Week, to imply to themselves and others that the parents are "good" parents.

As many feminists have pointed out over the years, being a "good parent" scales to and overlaps with concepts of "good" citizenship due to how the "household economy" influences ideas of the nation through capitalist logic (Gibson-Graham 1996; Plant 2010; Baldwin 2016; Ahlman 2017). Critical motherhood scholars Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels (2005) point out that the "guided missile of marketing" intensely aimed at American children since the 1970s, combined with the rise of middle-class white women in the workforce and Ronald Reagan's deregulation of advertising that extended the number of minutes per hour that could be filled with ads to kids, made it so parents, but overwhelmingly mothers, found themselves caught between powerful cross-currents of not wanting their kids to *feel* deprived nor be seen as overindulging their children. In other words, "give in, and you're a bad mother for contaminating them with such garbage. Don't give in and you're a bad mother for

denying their simple pleasures and making them cry" (Douglas and Michaels 2005, 296). And so, Family Week's mobilization of corporate sponsorships in ways that tie familial happiness to capital suggests to families who want to or do attend the event that they are "good" LGBTQ+ families: they are oriented towards the "good life" because of the companies they purchase from and events they attend, even if the companies are actively seeking to harm LGBTQ+ people (Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011).

I eventually realized the "family" attached to Family Week was what made me uneasy and situated me as an affect alien. The queer and trans people who travel to Provincetown for other weeks also have "families," but it is just not explicitly advertised *as* "a week for families." So, I started to wonder less about parenthood and more about the family system in relation to subjectivity: What is family? What does the family do? What role does the family play in creating and sustaining hierarchical difference(s), particularly through parenthood and transness? In other words, how does the family system – always already imbricated in nation-state logics – shape who and what we find as "socially" acceptable? What occurs when a trans masculine parent cannot or does not live up to idealized forms of parenthood and transness? What can we find when we look outside of hegemonic practices of kinship relations when we pay attention to the way people feel about idealized versions of family and motherhood in alternative spaces and communities like that of trans masculine parenthood?

Chapter Outline |

To answer these questions and more, this chapter primarily explores trans masculine parenting experiences I collected from my thirty-six interviews across the

United States and is framed by my participant observation at Family Week to more accurately map out what the *American family system* does in relation to trans masculine experiences of parenting. As I discussed in the first chapter, my definition of the American family system is shaped by feminist family abolitionists (Spillers 1989; Lethabo-King 2018; Lewis 2019; Weeks 2021). I define the American family system as a set of overlapping interpersonal and institutional discourses and practices that simultaneously shapes processes of domination and exploitation while also partly constructing the subjectivities that are anticipated to take them up (mother, father, parent, child, etc.) via economic constraint, juridical rule. Kathi Weeks (2021) defines this as the "manufacture of consent" (2). In other words, using trans masculine parents' experiences, I seek to understand how the American family system works to maintain "family" as the legitimate and primary form of kinship relations in the United States that all people should embrace and enact. Plainly, why is it that regardless of the proliferation of "types" of family, "family" is still a model in which we attempt to reproduce, transform, and enact despite its complicated legacy?

Utilizing motherhood studies, trans studies, and select theories of affect and socio-linguistics, this chapter adds to the growing critical scholarship that demonstrates how the family – touted as a 'unit,' 'a haven,' 'a locus of emotional support' – is an affect-laden nodal point through which social identities like *mother* and *father* are created, standardized, hierarchized, and circulated within national and global spheres (Rich 1989; Firestone 1970; Lethabo-King 2018; Spillers 1987; Ahmed 2010; Lewis 2019; Weeks 2021). Unlike other previous academic attempts at disentangling the family, motherhood, and embodiment rat's nest, this dissertation strives to demonstrate how

social categories (also referred to as family membership categories) like family, mother, and father cannot and should not be derived from essentialist beliefs about womanhood or manhood. I say this because ideas of motherhood and fatherhood are often rooted in biological, psychological, or strictly social frameworks that imagine one's gender to be "cisgender" (Chodorow 1978; Ruddick 1980; Rose 1993).

Starting with affect and discussing how people are oriented sets up my subsequent chapters. "Chapter Three: Maternal Misfits" centers the moments in which familial spaces and familial language cannot hold the complexities of trans masculine parenthood which erases or makes hyper-visible trans masculine parents' experiences of transness and parenthood. "Chapter Four: 'I Guess that Makes us the Not-chosen Family,'" explores the representation of trans feminine motherhood in Amazon Original series *Transparent* (2015-2019). In doing so, I show how the series demonstrates that transitioning as a parent is not a linear move from dad to mom. Instead, all family members negotiate, one, how maternal bodies and maternal language manifest and, two, how those "inside" and "outside" the family not only create individual identities *as* mom, dad, child, and so on but also the boundary of what "family" is. Building off one another, each chapter demonstrates that the family system is neither wholly "socially constructed" nor is it strictly "found in the biological." Instead, I highlight how trans masculine parents' navigation through the "biological," the scientific attempt to find the fundamental "natural truth" about fleshy bodies, and the "social," the approach to determine how upbringing and societal context define identity, makes visible the processes through which the American family system attempts to capture and categorize the messiness of living in a body in relation with others. Because the capture and

categorizing of perpetually fluid identities and bodies attempts to make identities and communities legible to nation-state logics.

However, before I dive into my participant's stories the following section, "Blood is Thicker than Water," focuses on the ways affect functions in tandem with logics of racial capitalism and biological determinism to shape what makes a "good" mother and by extension, a "good" family. I map out how the American family system functions as an orientation device, orienting people towards normative iterations of "mother" and "father." Throughout this chapter I utilize the *affect alien* – someone who is or feels alienated by not feeling in the 'right' way – to anchor and interrogate my participants' feelings related to parenthood and transness. The notion of affect alien allows me to explore the contours of trans parents' onto-epistemologies, by which I mean the combined nature of being and knowing, to understand how parenthood and transness impact one another. As I have argued earlier in this project, feeling is a source of knowledge that moves us towards a different understanding of the family system's role in creating hierarchical difference. The family is often 'stuck' together precisely because of emotion (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Embedded within this exploration, I also investigate how my participants feel about transness to interrogate how popularized trans narratives shape participants' conceptualization of themselves both as *trans* and a *parent*. This exploration is broken down into two main sections. The first, "Body Changes: Pregnant with Possibility," centers how trans masculine parents are affected by the changes to their parenting and trans body. The second, "Kinship Objects: Momification via Famification," looks at the role children play as kinship objects, mediating how trans

masculine parents are interpreted. In both sections, I attempt a reparative reading of trans masculine parenting as a way to move us beyond the limiting structure of the family.

Blood is Thicker than Water | Family as an Affective Atmosphere

My understanding of affect is similar to what Raymond Williams (1978) describes as "structures of feeling" or what Ben Anderson (2009) defines as an affective atmosphere. I do so because, on the one hand, Williams defines structure of feeling as a "particular quality of social experience and relationship," or, put otherwise, "the lived presence" (131). On the other hand, Anderson (2009) defines affective atmospheres as "between presence and absence, between subject and object/subject and between the definite and indefinite – that enable us to reflect on the affective experience as occurring beyond, around, and alongside the formation of subjectivity" (77). So, like Ben Highmore (2016) who usefully extends "structures of feeling" beyond literature and film to things like clothing, housing, food, furnishings to explain how formations of feeling "suture us to the social world and how feelings are embedded in the accoutrements of domestic, habitual life," I, too, aim to understand how the family is felt at individual and community levels by following how trans masculine parents *feel* in relation to their perceived, actual, and desired subjectivities. Therefore, I am not so much interested in what the family is. I am interested in how the feeling of family shapes the formation of subjectivity, and how it gives people who can align with hegemonic affective structures greater access to social and material capital.

To get at what the family does, I argue that trans masculine parents' experiences of transing boundaries of gender and parenthood shed light on the ways the family system

and motherhood affectively circulate and overwhelmingly sticks motherhood to bodies assigned female at birth, marking a boundary through which other subjectivities must consolidate around to keep the maternal boundary stable. Stickiness, according to Sara Ahmed (2014), is the outcome of repeated impressions; it is "an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs" (90).[14] Because of this, stickiness helps describes the processes in which gender ideologies – that are always already enmeshed in histories of race, class, sexuality, and ability – *become* valuable through their naturalization. The investment in cisnormative – the presumption that all peoples are cisgender and that deviations from that norm are "abnormal" – perspectives of family and motherhood shapes social norms.

In contrast to Marx and Engel, Gayle Rubin (2011) deftly argues in "The Traffic in Women," that Marx's and Engel's perspective fails once we recognize that class oppression does not fully explain societal norms and stratification along gendered lines: "why it is usually women rather than men who do domestic work in the home" (37)? Attempting to think through this oversite, Rubin coined the concept the "sex/gender system" to help explain oppressive powers and resistance. The sex/gender system is "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (34). Accordingly, Rubin's sex/gender system shows how fleshy bodies are made into certain subjects. For instance, Rubin argued that "the subordination of women can be seen as a product of the relationships by which sex and gender are organized and produced," meaning capitalism nor patriarchy can fully explain the sexual division of labor (34).

[14] Think: "they made an impression" or "to create an impression" or "to leave an impression." For me, it is like trying to ask how an index becomes the thing that indexes that thing it is indexing.

Instead, Rubin asserts kinship is central to these processes partly because "the exchange of women" regulates how kin forms. Importantly, kinship does not equate to biological relatives, but "organization, and organization gives power" (44).

Yet again, feminists who specialize in race and racialization critically point out gender and class are not the only social categories produced by controlling reproductive capacities and kinship structures. So, couched in the legacy of Marxist feminism but aiming to challenge its implicit whiteness, Alys Eve Weinbaum (2019) declares "the alienability of reproductive labor power and its products" – which Marxist feminists demonstrated sustained capitalism – "has been guaranteed by the racialized dehumanization that was slave breeding and the fungibility of the lively products that so-called breeding wenches (re)produced" (8). Explained differently, slavery, as practiced in the Americas and Caribbean for roughly four hundred years, has an afterlife that Weinbaum conceptualizes as the *slave episteme.* The slave episteme, or the thought system that rendered reproductive slavery thinkable, structures and facilitates continued "forms of gendered and racialized exploitation of human reproductive labor as itself a commodity and as the source of human biological commodities and thus value" even as the forms change over time (2). When framed in this way, capitalism emerged concomitantly with slavery and was mobilized by consolidating "family" discourses (Robinson 2020). Through violent acts such as the forced sterilization of Black, Brown, Indigenous people and no/low-income people (Davis 1981), the demonization of homosexuality (Foucault 1990), and the creation of norms such as getting married to not have "bastard babies" who cannot inherit the family wealth partly highlights how the emergence of the American family system is a part of "interlocking logics of property

and sub-humanity, privatization and punishment" that form "the template that organized capitalism in the first place and sustains it as a system" (Lewis 2017, 6).[15]

Now even though the white Christian settler family form was imposed on communities who practice care and kinship differently does not mean that it was taken up in the prescribed way. Historically marginalized women in particular have expressed how the family can and does function as a critical site of resistance and respite for communities that the state and its institutions have overwhelmingly persecuted through the police, social workers and welfare officers, immigration officers, and school administrators (hooks 1992; TallBear 2019). But again, I put forth that the broader processes of the American family system is what partly facilitates how and why chosen families come to be in the first place. In more ways than one, the family's use as a site of social reproduction means when one is unable or does not want to fit into the naturalized hierarchy modulated by racialized gender, class, ability, nationality, religion, geographic location, and other relationships to power, they need to enter a kinship formation due to the privatization of care and lack of organizations who can support folks who are denied and excluded from kinship relations. For example, trans parenting scholarship confirms

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[15] For example, these logics are made hypervisible when emancipated Black communities were no longer institutionally denied marriage. At first glance, this sounds like a "win" for formerly enslaved communities because it provided some familial protection and state recognition after two centuries of cultural decimation. According to Tera Hunter (2017), however, its administration through the 1865 Freedman's Bureau, a congressional agency that provided food, shelter, clothing, medical services, and land to formerly enslaved peoples, enabled the transition from the plantation system to sharecropping through its promotion of the nuclear family as the primary labor force for family farming. In doing so, this process further concretized connections between property, ownership, marriage, family, and the state. Through this consolidation, laws generated from this agency like adultery and child support requirements and the denial of widow's pensions were eventually used to punish Black and Brown communities in the name of protecting and regulating the family through ideas of "deserving" and "undeserving." Around the same time, Indigenous communities were similarly offered state recognition in the form marriage. Again, rather than genuinely being a beneficial legislative act (if there ever can be such a thing), it facilitated the dissolution of collective ownership of tribes and distributed private property to married heads of households (Cott 2000; Goeman 2013; Theobold 2019).

that trans parents who want to transition often avoid articulating their desires out loud for fear of psychologically "damaging" their children, losing custody of their children, and/or being excluded from their "family" (Hines 2006; MacDonald 2016; Karaian 2013). Primarily, the American family system is critical to the managerial command of institutional powers that lay out the society in which white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy thrives, and thus contributes to the unequal distribution of life chances and material resources. And I further add it is the threat of isolation – of "non-belonging" – that helps maintain the material structures through which people cling to.[16]

Feeling, or what can be consider both affect and emotion, played an enormous role in the ways institutions developed racialized gendered discourses, how those discourses produced identities, and how those identities were applied. Unlike popular opinions of today that imagine biology as "natural" and "never changing," Schuller's scholarship interestingly asserts that concepts of racial and sexual differences in the nineteenth century were actually not seen as immutable, static qualities of the individual body. Rather, "race and sex functioned as biopolitical capacities of impressibility and relationality that rendered the body the gradual product of its habit and environment, differentially positioning the claims of individuals and races for belonging in the nation-state" (Schuller 2017, 6). When approached from this perspective, the dialectic between Black and/or enslaved women as always already accessible through their lack of "feeling," or incapacity to be "impressed" or "affected," frames white women as overly

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[16] To be clear, I am not attempting to take away people's capacity to collaborate, participate, and be "in-kind" with one another (Weaver 2013). To take that away would actually be the opposite of what I am thinking through. I seek to explode the limiting, binary structures that shape people's imagination of what they are expected to reproduce in the name of "family." What can emerge if "family" is not a linchpin fastening the non-static, ongoing processes of *becoming* to individual subjectivities dependent on imagined and practiced commitments to patrilinear genealogies?

emotional, "as inaccessible, forbidden (until marriage) and, by metonymic extension, made to stand in for the white family, private property, and the state" (Snorton 2017, 104).

Therefore, mobilizing pain, and other affects like love, has historically impacted who is thought to be essential and valuable. These ideologies define "appropriate" arrangements of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, thus impacting all peoples but disproportionately harming non-white, non-straight, non-cisgender, non-abled peoples by physically and ideologically coercing peoples to adhere to rules of white supremacy. "Recognizing that corrupting and distorting basic feelings human beings have for one another," Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues, "lies at the heart of multiple systems of oppression opens up new possibilities for transformation and change" (185). Feminist scholars repeatedly point out how the American family and its descendants – blended families, broken families, single-parent households, etc. – engender power differentials that manifest as categories of social identity and propagate belief in the emotional attachment of the family (Mamo 2007; Ross et al. 2017; Lewis 2019). In *Capitalism and Gay Identity*, John D' Emilio (1993) examined the ways "white colonists in the seventeenth-century New England established villages structured around a household economy, composed of family units that were basically self-sufficient, independent, and patriarchal" but by the nineteenth century, this system of household production was in decline and slowly shifted the means of production away from the family and into the capitalist market (469). For white families, this shift worked in conjunction with political and economic investment into the family as an *affective unit*, meaning the family was an institution that no longer produced goods "but emotional satisfaction and happiness" (D'

Emilio 1993, 469). And as I previously pointed out, the mobilization of emotion was biopolitically applied unevenly across racialized gender and adhered to bourgeoisie values. So, the push to produce emotional satisfaction and happiness over "goods" reworked interpersonal relationships, which ultimately impacted racialized gender ideologies. D' Emilio's work shows that "gay identity," or what we now see as a gay identity, flourished because young men could work for their pay and could exist outside of the interrelations of "family." Thus, new forms of relationality grew.

The family grew into something more than a site of bequeathing property and the (re)production of labor; it also became another baseline from which modern American men and women were judged through their affective roles as "fathers" and "mothers." Something that trans parents consistently contend with through the repeated assertions that to be a good parent one must love their child in specific ways that align with precise ways of doing. Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey (2007) note that despite being treated as such categories of mother and father are not ahistorical but were created through the "shifting needs of the child," needs that should ultimately be met by their "mother" who is "naturally" their caretaker. The proposition that children's needs are "best met" by their mother makes "mothering a function that is central to the ways our modern state educational and social welfare practices operate," and because of this, hierarchies of normal and abnormal, correct and incorrect, good and bad form. Furthermore, I find tying it to emotional "satisfaction and happiness" expects and grounds the family as always already being a supportive, comfortable, receiving place; so, when it is not like this something is "wrong." Similarly, placing "good" motherhood and "emotional satisfaction" at the site of the family further knots together the biological

and the social as a new set of skills that were explained away as “internal” and “instinctual.” In doing so, the mother must constantly be regulating herself through regulating others, and if she cannot or will not, it becomes a matter of character or “illness” (Castelinni 2018).

So, circling back to reproductive capacities – a critical site in which individual, interpersonal, and institutional powers mesh together for trans parents through affective orientations – I found that reproductive justice scholars further demonstrate (re)productive alienability was made possible through the creation and circulation of ideas about the Black female body as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Weinbaum 2019; Schuller 2017; Ross 2017; Collins 2000). Dorothy Roberts (2021) articulates that many of these ideas were born from enslaved Black women’s wombs through the concept of *partus sequitur ventrum,* “the offspring follows the belly,” and the anxieties enslavers harbored as the colonies grew. Through various laws passed in the mid-1600s, a new legal regime differentiated the political status between Black and white people via the enslaved Black woman’s womb. Consequently, Europeans developed moral and social codes around respectability and embodiment that “enabled the enslavement of those whose reproductive labor could be racialized and thus treated as the product of a less than human laborer” (McKittrick 2006; Weinbaum 2019, 38). The moral and social standpoint that purported Black women do not experience pain and, at times, are “disinterested” in childbirth connects the body, affect, and reproduction (Stein 2015; Morgan 2015). This relationship between feeling, racialization, and subjectivity, argues Kyla Schuller (2018), partially developed through the ways biopower, the administration and regulation of human life at the level of the population and the individual body,

emerged through sentimentalism, a discourse of emotional and physiological feeling, temporality and materiality in the nineteenth century across the United States. She states that "delineating and managing the varied impressibility, [the capacity to be transformed by one's environment and experiences], of the national population functioned as a key strategy of biopower." So, sentimentalism shaped onto-epistemologies of the time and facilitated the belief that "civilized bodies," and its distant ideological relative, "normal bodies," can be affected and can affect in a controlled manner.

Explored in the previous chapter, being "out of line" or orienting away from objects, values, and ideas that are understood as the "good life" is a refusal to reproduce the predetermined, naturalized markers of normativity and by extension, intelligibility to one's own "family" and the state more broadly. Familial orientations are reproduced by loving objects related to family and the family itself like that of a mother loving her child. The American family system simultaneously circulates through objects (family photographs, a holiday, government discourse, a table, a board game) and is an object that people are oriented towards. Ahmed (2006) suggests, "not only do we inherit 'things' down the line of the family, but we also inherit family as a line that is given… [and so], when given this line we are asked to follow the line…which 'presses' the surface of bodies in specific ways" (Ahmed 2006, 125). Trans masculine participants' experiences show that those who do not orient themselves – intentional or otherwise – towards the familial "good life" by way of cis passing motherhood or fatherhood are *affect aliens* because they do not invest in the same objects (nuclear family, motherhood, big breasts, "mom") as 'good' and others as 'bad.' In the following section, I situate and explore how my trans masculine participants are affect aliens through their feelings relating to

motherhood. I show how trans masculine participants feel about (1) bodily changes caused by pregnancy and (2) the role of their children as kinship objects in social spaces.

Affect Aliens |

Section One | Body Changes: "Pregnant with Possibility"

Trans masculine participants in my study noted that gestation was a primary situation in which they experienced affective alienation because of the ways their bodies changed.[17] Focusing on this these bodily changes, or, as I see them, "bodily objects," highlights how participants become affect aliens through the ways motherhood sticks to afab bodies. In other words, gender is not something we have or something we are: a penis does not make one a "man," nor does having enlarged breasts make one a "woman." According to Ahmed (2006) and Fausto-Sterling (2019), the naturalization process occurs through loops of repetition where bodies are repetitively shaped physically and ideologically by objects, and in this case, the American family system. Touched on in Chapter One, objects within our reach – literally or imagined – are there not because they just simply are there. Phenomenologists argue they are in our bodily horizon because of what they allow us to do according to what we are expected (or at times want) to do (Ahmed 2006; Salamon 2006; Fausto-Sterling 2019). Consequently, objects (including the body) work together as we come to understand our body's limits, contours, ability, and spatial perception through objects. This means that we can trace a

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[17] This is not to say cis passing women do not experience forms of alienation. Rather, I am using trans masculine parents' experiences to highlight ways all people born with uteruses, who overwhelmingly align themselves as cis passing women, experience technologies of power and subjectification routed through family and motherhood. Focusing on trans masculine parents leads us to different understandings of parenting bodies, parenting language, and trans identity.

body's history of encounters, or what has stuck to the body, through the ways said histories manifest knowingly and unknowingly through their comportment, posture, and gestures (Foucault 1990; Butler 1990; Ahmed 2006; Ahmed 2010).

For example, Emerson, a white, middle-class, early thirties, self-described "twig" who barely weighed 100 pounds before getting pregnant, pointed out that once he got pregnant,

> people would be like, 'Oh, Whoa, look at you, you have boobs!' And I was like, 'yeah…'. Like *everyone expects me to be really happy about this, but I'm not*. People were just like really commenting on the feminine attributes of my body in a way that they just hadn't before because they weren't there before. So, that sort of helped me like figure it out.

The affective value of specific bodily characteristics, and in this case, "big breasts" during pregnancy, shows how emotion, specifically happiness, is directive, shared, and linked to racialized gendered scripts (Ahmed 2006). Lisa Poole (2018) notes "there is a cultural imperative to become a mother, which paints motherhood in an idealized way as a virtuous pursuit and as completing us as women. It is assumed and expected that all women will become mothers and that having children is what will bring us true happiness, love, and fulfillment" (275). So, "figure it out," by which Emerson means coming to understand himself as a trans masculine parent through his pregnancy, points to (1) a way motherhood sticks to afab bodies and (2) how trans normative narratives limit trans flourishing.

First, Emerson's discomfort with everyone else's happiness situates him as an affect alien because he is not affected in the 'right way' nor is he invested in the same objects that are supposed to incite happiness according to maternal logics. Emerson's experience shows bigger breasts equate to presumed happiness. As he points out,

Emerson was *not* made happy by his growing breasts, a sensation he did not have prior to pregnancy because his breasts "weren't there before." Motherhood studies scholars (Rose 1999; Nast 2017; Boyer 2018; Poole 2018) repeatedly point out that pregnant bodies blur the boundaries between public and private because pregnant bodies, especially if they are white birthers, are imagined as "reproducing" the social body allowing people to comment on and physically touch pregnant and nursing bodies, often without their consent. This means then people's comments on Emerson's body ("whoa, look at you! You have boobs!") provide insight into the complex web that ties – or makes sticky – metastance objects like that of motherhood and womanhood to afab bodies through the circulation of affect. So, by indexing affective (emotional) and epistemic (knowledge) stances on "feminine" attributes of his body commenters highlight the disciplinary nature of motherhood scripts, construct Emerson as a social actor who is meant to be happy about his growing breasts triggered by pregnancy, and underscores their stickiness to motherhood, womanhood, and femininity. When people assigned male at birth seek surgery for gynecomastia, trans women purchase breast plates to ease chest dysphoria, people assigned female at birth whose breasts do not develop to a size they find appropriate obtain breast augmentation, and trans men who have breasts obtain mastectomies to remove them the stickiness of breasts to womanhood and bodies assigned female at birth is repeatedly congealed and demonstrated. "Because interactions are evaluated on the basis of normative assumptions regarding the links between identity with social groups and contexts of interactions," warns Barrett (2017), "most interactions occur under an ideological assumption or expectation of heterosexuality," and, as I contend an expectation of cisgender bodies, especially when woven into reproduction

(17). So, the expectation of Emerson's cisness, emphasized by his pregnancy as is presumed "only women get pregnant" in our current gender/sex system, facilitated his affect alienness and illuminates how motherhood aims to standardize the diverse *becomings* of bodies. In other words, until Emerson was made uncomfortable by encountering the happiness people felt about his breasts, he did not fully realize the possibility he could be or was trans because transness, especially for trans masculine people, mobilizes disgust or hatred of one's body as a signal of trans identity (Cavanagh 2013). In the end, Emerson's trans sense of self was not explored until he felt unhappy by everyone's happiness about his pregnancy and breasts.

Other participants echo Emerson's complicated and messy situation that stems from the changes to their body. Damien, who realized his transness just prior to getting pregnant, found it extremely difficult to feel comfortable in any of the available clothing for people who are pregnant as most of them are covered in flower petals and emphasize "female" attributes. Ryder, a trans masculine parent who transitioned prior to their pregnancy, mentioned "it takes a lot of work to be seen if you want to be. And even if you try, you're not necessarily going to be seen. So, it's like, how tired am I? Maybe it's just easier to go sit in my recliner." Ryder shows that even within queer communities trans masculine parents experience alienation through the intelligibility of masculinity, maleness, and pregnancy. Reed goes as far as to "prepare" their eleven-year-old son by talking to him about how their body is going to change now that they are going through medical transition (taking testosterone, top surgery). Reed feels like they need to prepare their eleven-year-old son because they noticed he becomes withdrawn when the two of them discuss Reed's transness. Reed feels that their child is worried and sad about

"losing their 'mom.'" Because of this, Reed mentions they modulated the "speed" of their transition which shifts the boundaries of how they want the world to interact with them according to *Reed's son's comfort* with Reed's transition. Many of these decisions made by trans masculine participants occurred through the ways they were affected by people's interactions with their changing body.

This brings us to the second normative line of direction, one reproduced by trans normative framings of transness and bodies. On a lesser-explored level in trans and affect literature, Emerson's indifference towards his chest is unlike the trans masculine narratives popularized by psychological and medical framings of transgender identity that purport trans masculine people need to dislike their breasts and/or other parts of their body in order to *be* transmasculine (Heinz 2016). Many trans men repeatedly discuss how puberty sparked intense dysphoric feelings because of the development their assigned female at birth secondary sex characteristics like breasts, hip growth, and fat distribution (MacDonald 2016). However, Emerson's discomfort with his chest did not manifest until his pregnancy was underway, making it difficult to disentangle how Emerson's trans narrative story troubles trans normative logics. Nonetheless, I suggest that despite Emerson 'not knowing' or even exploring the potential of him being trans until he became pregnant, his indifference towards his chest prior to comments does not *not* make him trans. In other words, because trans normative narratives circulate via medicalized co-optation of racialized gender Emerson felt alienated from broader trans normative frameworks which originally oriented him away from transness. However, through his unhappiness sparked by people commenting on his chest did he then imagine the possibility of him being trans. Thus, Emerson's story highlights the potential that the

disgust and or hatred trans masculine people experience (or are expected to feel according to the DSM-V) may not have to do with one's own physical body, but the ways body parts are seen and affectively enforced as the ultimate signification of gender. And in Emerson's case, his breasts growing only occurred because of his pregnancy.

My participant Adam, who is the birther and primary caretaker of their two kids, Anna (5) and Elsa (2), discussed a similar story to Emerson's.[18] As I asked a question about their gestational status, Adam cut me off explaining how they gestated both kids and why their kids call them "Mom," even though they move about the world as a "guy." They explained, "I kind of actually prefer it even though I know for a lot of people it's like… that's not a title that ever in their minds they thought they would use, and they don't. They're dad from the beginning, but I don't know." Without me prompting them to explain further, they said, "I always wanted to be a mom even though I never identified with being a woman or a girl. I just knew I wanted to have babies. And I think that's one reason I kind of played along as long as I did with a female presentation. It was because I knew I wanted to have kids and the easiest way to do it was to just have them." Digging deeper I questioned, "if you had saw pregnant men when you were younger, do you feel you would be 'dad' now?" Without skipping a beat, Adam responded with a resounding and absolute, "Yes. I think that would have totally changed everything and I might not have waited as long as I did to transition or to have kids." Adam's thought process that the easiest way to be a 'mom' was to ignore their alienation from womanhood and to "play along" with seeming like a woman (expressing femininity with what they wore and

[18] Now in their late thirties, Adam grew up in Texas and moved to Massachusetts several years back with their "straight-cis-male-husband," Dave, to work as a preschool teacher. Adam almost got their PhD in human development making it to ABD but obtained a masters instead. After a couple of years educating preschoolers, Adam retired from their job and now works as a case manager for an autism organization.

how they styled their hair, getting married to a cis man, etc.), a sentiment shared by many of my participants. Adam felt that in order to achieve their goal of caring for children, which for many people is synonymous with motherhood, signifies the intense stickiness of motherhood as an object.

Some participants who arrived at their transness during pregnancy already had 'negative' or complicated feelings about their body. And so, for Nathan pregnancy solidified their trans feelings. During our interview, I asked Nathan how they felt about their pregnancy to which they stated:

> So it was, it was really hard. I'm trying to use good descriptive words instead of just saying it was terrible, cause it's like everything that I hated about my body was just growing and became super accentuated, and people were paying attention. And like, I've never… it just… it really helped after I had her. It was when I really started putting stuff together. But at the time I just kind of associated it with like, 'I just really hate being pregnant,' you know. Some people really love being pregnant. There's like weird mythology around it. And I'm like, no, this is the worst thing that's ever happened to my body.

Again, similar to Emerson, we see in Nathan's response the increased attention paid to their body impacted how Nathan understood themself: increased attention enhanced their own hatred towards their own body. At first, Nathan attributes their increased hatred to their pregnancy, suggesting once their pregnancy was over perhaps their hatred would subside to pre-pregnancy levels. However, Nathan's affect alienness – not being made happy by what pregnancy is doing to their body and the attention paid to them – eventually oriented Nathan towards transness because their feelings of hate persisted.

Because Nathan felt that perhaps they just did not like pregnancy Nathan's observation that "there's like weird mythology" around pregnancy demonstrates how the maternal mythology eclipsed their feelings of gender dysphoria. Lundquist (2008) finds cis women who deny or reject their pregnancy could potentially find themselves

pathologized with a subtype of gender identity order because of the deep rooted believe that reproductive capacities signal gender identity and pregnancy is the solidification of the two. Despite Lundquist's framing that attempts to broaden and push back against the ways in which pregnancy is not 'magical' for all, she still sticks femininity to pregnancy, relegating the experience of pregnancy as feminine and for afab peoples. Furthermore, Lundquist's framing suggests that in the process of even having to pathologize a woman's rejection of pregnancy as "a sign of incomplete gender identification" highlights motherhood's normativizing power: why punish/pathologize unless there is something "wrong" with not wanting to gestate? In certain respects, then, Nathan, Adam, and Emerson felt like they could not be trans because they were pregnant. These logics rely not only on white, cisheteronormative framings of family, but also on the circulation of trans normative stories that in turn stabilize the gender binary through the belief that men do not have children. Not being made happy by the hyperfeminization of their bodies but desire to have kids in conjunction with their ability to gestate exemplifies how 'mom' is an object that one must orient toward by giving up other objects like transness or fatherhood because of how motherhood sticks to bodies assigned female at birth and womanhood.

Like Emerson, Adam, and Nathan, Juan's experience illustrates two important things: (1) how gestation reoriented his understanding of transness and bodily agency, disrupting the idea of "being trapped in the wrong body" and (2) the American family system's affective atmosphere. At 14, Juan socially, medically, and legally transitioned to affirm his trans masculinity, but due to his transphobic family and a lack of socio-economic support, found himself in and out of foster care homes. After a couple of years,

Juan met Selena, got married, and were quickly dreaming of a “big family of their own.”[19] Juan admits he knew nothing about pregnancy prior to becoming pregnant at 17. He just knew that he “wanted a family” and, like other participants, figured that the easiest and cheapest way was to use his and his wife’s original plumbing.

After pausing testosterone, Juan got pregnant, but quickly fell into a depressive state. The effects of stopping testosterone led to some of Juan’s facial hair to fall out and pregnancy hormones triggered parts of his body to morph into a more “feminine” aesthetic which instigated his dysphoria. In his words, “it was really fucking difficult.” Yet, he insisted that the “worst parts” were the looks and comments from people and not so much the gender dysphoria. Juan described that because he “looked like a fourteen-year-old boy” but had a pregnancy bump people constantly leered at him, asked him invasive questions about his body, and consistently misgendered him despite having male marked identification documents on his birth certificate and license. Plainly, Juan was unintelligible as a pregnant man, but because pregnancy is so recognizable, he was often reduced to “the feminine.”

Now, I cannot verify if people actually leered at Juan, and in some ways, it does not matter if they did. What is important is that Juan’s perception that they might have affected him to such a degree that he quit his job, was “miserable for a while, and hermited in the house.” Simon Ellis’ (2015) study that tracked transmasculine birthers found that loneliness permeated across participants’ experiences, social interactions, and emotional responses at almost every stage of gestation. This estrangement Ellis (2015) proposes is connected to navigating identity internally and externally. He states, “some

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[19] Juan and his wife, Selena, are a young, Latinx, trans for trans (T4T), working class couple who live in Southern California with their one-and-a-half-year-old.

degree of conflict existed between [participants'] internal sense of self and dominant social norms that define a pregnant person as *woman* and a gestational parent as *mother*…and the process of navigating identity formed a constant backdrop of daily life that required considerable energy and attention. With a lack of clear models of what a positive, well-integrated, gender-variant parental role might look like, navigating identity extended into parenthood as well" (Ellis et al 2015, 68). Ellis' statement reifies how the family system contributes to ideologies of gender, and because of this, Juan's alienation stemming from the lack of diverse birther representation and non-acceptance of his identity as a man and a pregnant person materially and emotionally impacted Juan's ability to care for himself and his family. It quite literally made him feel like he could not participate in daily life.

After hearing Juan's pregnancy experience, one shared by multiple trans masculine participants, and because the family system is a primary reason for Juan's instability throughout his adolescence and young adulthood, I asked him why he wanted to have a big family.[20] I did not get a straightforward answer. Instead, Juan replied with a generalized "I have always wanted a big family" sentiment; yet, when I pushed further asking what parenthood meant to him, he explained, "indescribable happiness:"

> like when I'm just walking down the sidewalk with my kid, and they're holding my finger all cute. I'm like this is all I want. I don't want anything else. The little things add up. You're proud of how fast their growing, all these milestones they're hitting. It is a lot of patience and a lot of learning, but I see it as you're learning from your child. They're this new, fresh, spirit in this world. Yeah, you guide them, but you're learning from them there on.

[20] Juan and Selena were homeless for eight months immediately after Juan gave birth to their first child.

In his emotive explanation, Juan's return of investment in family is "indescribable happiness," a happiness that as an adolescent was denied by his family of origin but taken up by Juan and Selena and manifested through their child. Juan's investment in family by way of his pregnancy, I argue, underscores how the American family system functions as an affective atmosphere and orientation device. This is not to say that Juan is a "dupe" or stuck in a "false consciousness" narrative, but that the concept of happiness is routed through family. Plainly, it is continuously suggested that *to be happy* one must have a "family." Berlant's (2011) description of *cruel optimism*, a relation in which "what you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing," helps frame Juan's experience (1). Berlant explains cruel optimism

> might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relations are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.

Berlant's arrival at cruel optimism as a modern condition of life, as part of the affective infrastructure among the social and material, grew from their desire to understand how and why people stay attached to conventional "good life" fantasies (couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets) when the evidence of their violence and cost are seen and intimately felt. The American family system helps regulate what is considered "normal" and "abnormal" and is both a facilitator and object of cruel optimism. So, Juan's desire to have a family to make up for the family support did not have is partly what triggers his overall sense of alienation because he "does not belong" in the world as a pregnant man. In other words, the American family system creates standards for what a "normal" father or mother is, and because of Juan's inability to reproduce said standards,

it situates him as an affect alien. Ultimately, Juan's desire and investment into having a big family of his own reproduces the affective attachment to the "family" as a norm, a norm that has historically marginalized Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, disabled people, people with little to no income, gender non-conforming people, queer people, and undocumented people from accessing the material resources and social capital awarded by institutions in the name of maintaining and supporting family (Malatino 2020). Let me be clear: I do not take issue with Juan's – or anyone's – desire to reproduce. However, Juan's experience as a pregnant trans man demonstrates how the American family system affectively structures people's lives and limits a flourishing of care networks and caring subjects that are not reliant on bodily capacity and racialized gendered scripts.

After several months, however, Juan's perception of his body shifted. He said, "at the end of the pregnancy I started to realize actually, this is a really amazing thing that my body can do. And so, I started to just try to respect my body. It was also helpful to remind myself that I will go back on T. I went on it like right after birth in the hospital (laughs)." Juan's reformatted stance – his realization that his body is actually doing something "really amazing" – aids many trans masculine parents in their gestational journey but is rarely explored past that (MacDonald 2016). Because of this, I argue Juan's onto-epistemological rearticulation of the very aspects of his bodies that interpellate him as "woman" and "female" and make him feel alienated from public life disrupts how the family system mobilizes belonging as a disciplinary tool orienting people towards objects, values, and ideas presented as 'natural,' like the idea only women have babies. In fact, Juan's experience as a pregnant man oriented him towards bodily respect and appreciation: an orientation "that might not have otherwise been reachable

within the body horizon of the social" due to the unintelligibility of both transgender identity and trans parenting more broadly (Ahmed 2006, 101).

In other words, despite the increasing acceptance of trans people across various parts of society – expanding trans inclusive policies and procedures in professional spaces, codifying of trans rights in laws, growing popular media representation – how one can *be* trans still relies on transnormative logics, which means reproducing a white, middle class, homo/heteronormative, cis passing articulation of gender. Depending on one's geographic location, it is relatively ok to be trans masculine, especially if one is white (Noble 2013). But it is not ok to be trans masculine and pregnant because wanting and participating in pregnancy "disrupts the 'naturalness' of the heterosexual matrix and threatens the hegemonic construction of the mythical 'Family'" (Alisia Grigorovich 2014, 82).[21] And ultimately, to threaten (or reject) the mythical family, even though there are numerous iterations of it, destabilizes the fantasy of the "good life" maintained by the family itself.

To reiterate, trans masculine parents are often affect aliens through the ways in which motherhood and trans identity create structures of feeling, or "the lived presence" regarding bodily capacities and racialized gender (Bachmann-Medick et al 2015). These structures of feeling impact trans masculine parent's view of themselves in both negative and positive ways. Some participants, like Emerson, Adam, Nathan, Ryder, and Damien note that they did not think they could be trans due to their desire to have children because it contradicted common trans narratives popularized by the medicalization of

[21] This framework is also seen in moments where trans masculine people attempting to get approved for top surgery avoid asking their surgeon to try and save their milk ducts in case of a future desire to chestfeed. The patient fears if they were to request this the doctor would think that the trans person is "not trans enough" and therefore will deny their surgery (MacDonald 2016).

trans identity and the limited representation of trans experiences in media. Others like Juan who knew they were trans prior to their pregnancy experienced intense feelings of intelligibility. However, my participants show that their experience of parenthood opened up perceptions of their bodies and identities in ways they have never seen before. In doing so, they were oriented towards values, ideas, and concepts like transness and/or parenthood that were unavailable in their previous bodily horizon. Yet, as the next section shows, once having a child in one's bodily horizon opens of a whole host of other ways children become the object through which trans masculine people are made un/intelligible.

Section Two | Kinship Objects: "Momification through Famification"

Trans masculine parents are not only affected by aspects of their bodies stuck to femininity and motherhood. Attention paid to their emotions demonstrated they are also gendered differently depending on whether or not they have their child(ren) with them which often positions participants as affect aliens. The trans masculine parents in my study discussed how their children impacted the ways their gender was perceived by others, despite participant's outward gender expression, identity, and role. I previously pointed out research that examines "trans families" primarily centers work around shifting family dynamics and identifications when a child comes out as trans (Gurr 2014; Meadow 2020). Barbara Gurr (2014), for instance, declares, "I am a queer mother. This queerness isn't based on my own sexual or gender identity…my 'queerness' derives from my daughter's transgender identity" (114). However, less is known about the reverse: how do children impact a trans parents' subjectivity?

This section explores how participant's child(ren) serve as a *kinship object* impacting how their gender was perceived and thus interacted with. Kate Boyer (2018) proposes a kinship object can be understood as an object that implies a particular kind of kin relationship and for their standing in as an almost definitional object to the practice of a particular identity. For example, in her study that explores spaces and politics of motherhood, Boyer (2018) shows how her participants were positioned in relation to others via the pram (also called baby carriage or stroller). She found that her participant's identity as 'mum' became fixed and overshadowed "by her (physical) relation to the pram, by 'going around with it'" (41). This is not to state that others do not push prams. But that the pram when pushed by people perceived as women meant that the pram (2018) "not only marked maternal identity but also threatened to subsume 'other-than-parent' aspects of the self," effectively reducing her multifaceted identity to just 'mom' and solidifying the romanticized image of motherhood as the ultimate identity (41). In this framework, kinship objects such as prams – and as I show children – work to 'fix' or 'stick' identities to bodies through the co-constitutive production of identity through of human-object or human-human orientations (Puar 2012). In some ways, the pram helps facilitate the process of mother = caretaker = woman. By exploring how children function as kinship objects we can more clearly understand how racialized gender becomes naturalized as "property" of bodies. Moreover, exposing how my participants are affect aliens through this naturalization demonstrates how this reliance on the American family system primarily limits but at times expands trans masculine parent's capacities to affirm their identities in a gender/sex system that flattens trans experiences.

I asked Luke if they think the world perceives them differently if Cynthia, their two-year-old toddler, is not with them.[22] Luke said,

> Absolutely. If you are of a certain age and you've got some mammary glands, a smooth, smooth face and you're toting a toddler with you, you are mommy. I have kind of… it's not like a typical everyday experience, but really stands out in my brain and causes me *rage* still. … Last summer I took [Cynthia] to North Central Pennsylvania pride …We go to the thing, and I'm there and I'm dressed as I typically dress. So, in masculine clothing with the binder. And I'm pushing the toddler in the stroller, and it was amazing how consistently and pervasively I got slotted into, "oh, a mom."

Since Luke consistently gets slotted into the category of mom when Cynthia is with them, Luke's experience demonstrates that the nearness of their child impacts how *Luke's* gender is perceived, regardless of how it is expressed. Some might suggest that the persistent perception Luke is 'mom' occurs more often than not because masculinity can be taken up by all bodies, maybe people imagine themselves as being "inclusive" because they are not "seeing" Luke as a "man" (Halberstam 1998). Put otherwise, it is not that people are not seeing Luke's masculinity, since people embody butch/masculine aesthetics and still identify as and be comfortably referred to as women. Rather, I offer up that maternal essentialism and the family system dominate discourses and practices of parenthood, family, bodies, and care, reproducing binary visions of "who is who and who can do what," particularly along racialized, gendered, and classed lines. Due to the proximity of their child functioning as a kinship object, slotting Luke into the role of "mom" – in spite of their white masculine gender expression – speaks to the overwhelming unintelligibility of trans masculine parents and the stickiness of motherhood to afab bodies.

[22] Luke is in their mid-30s and is a white, middle-upper class, academic, masculine presenting person.

A reworking of Adrienne Rich's framework of compulsory heterosexuality to compulsory cisness helps explain why Luke's parent identity is oriented away from fatherhood (or something other than motherhood) and towards motherhood (Nicolazzo 2017). In 1980, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" debunks heterosexuality as 'natural' and intrinsic. Instead, she argues it is an institution imposed upon peoples through political, economic, and emotional mechanisms that encourage, and at times directly coerce, people to participate in heterosexuality by rewarding those who reproduce it. For instance, heterosexual relationships are broadly supported through legal and political mechanisms such as healthcare, taxes, and immigration. They receive greater media representation and familial support, all reaffirming the societal value of heterosexuality. As a result, Rich (1980) articulates how heterosexuality is an orientation that denies and flattens the complexities of human sexuality.

Taking up and extending this concept, Ahmed (2006) articulates "compulsory heterosexuality produces a 'field of heterosexual objects'" (87). She argues heterosexuality is not 'in' objects as if 'it' could be a property of objects; "rather, heterosexuality would be an effect of how objects gather to clear a ground, how objects are arranged to create a background," that allow her to arrive and do things (Ahmed 2006, 88). This "background" like that of what one has "inherited" or "comes from" provides a sense of direction, pointing out the ways to be in alignment with others, especially one's family. Yet, for trans masculine parents who are in alignment in some ways if they reproduce the "familial line," the proximity of traditionally understood heterosexual kinship objects like child(ren) combined with the ways sexuality, gender, ability, race, and class modulate one another, situates trans masculine parents as

something other than what they internally and externally identify as (Luke as "mom," an identification Luke does not want to be recognized as).[23] In fact, framed by scholars who explore the way identities are produced through relationality like Jasbir Puar (2006), C. Riley Snorton (2018), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), and Brian Massumi (1990), I contend it is the relation between the mother-child dyad along the backdrop of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory cisness that produces "woman" as a category.[24] So, only seeing sexuality as the primary site of power differentials limits the understanding of how gender also impacts our worlds.[25] Accordingly, Luke's gender is partly produced and reoriented through their child since their child is a kinship object through which people imagine Luke as "mom."

Furthermore, Luke's rage in an affect framework marks the disconnect between what Luke imagines themself to be and their coming up against the boundaries of maternal imaginaries that produce Luke as "mom" (toting a toddler, smooth face, bound breasts). These maternal imaginaries rely on logics of femaleness and femininity that are built through histories of whiteness, class, ability, and heterosexuality, and maternal essentialism. Maternal essentialism created the conditions through which "mom" stuck to Luke. Centering Luke's rage – that they are not made 'happy' by maternal recognition, despite engaging in practices that purportedly "make one" a mother (gestation,

[23] Not all trans masculine parents mind being referred to as "mom". Several studies show that a connection to the family membership category 'mom' signifies the importance of the physical and emotional labor the trans masculine parent did/does and the level of comfort the child feels in regard to their parent's trans identity. Rather than a gendered category, 'mom' signifies a certain relationality. However, I maintain that "mother," and at times, "mom" work to privilege some and oppress others.

[24] It is critical to imagine both gender and sexuality – mediated by class, nationality, race, and ability – as working together because trans people can be straight.

[25] It is interesting to point out that the media consistently sensationalizes that millennials are having less human children than generations prior and are turning towards pets as objects of love and affection. This might signal that the line that historically delineated between genders – the capacity to gestate – is manifesting in other ways.

childrearing). Essentially, Luke's role as mom manifested because of the "notion that 'mother' is a role that belongs exclusively to women" (Poole 2018, 278).

However, their affect alienness is productive. Luke's rage and discomfort highlights the stickiness of motherhood to afab bodies in ways people assigned female at birth may not register, because it does not cause a sense of alienation towards their own body or maternal identity. Another participant, Beck, echoes and supports Luke's experiences of (mis)recognition if their kids are with them or not.[26] Beck states,

> When I don't have my kids with me, I will be gendered male, or people will like conspicuously use non-gendered language. "I don't know what I'm looking at!" (laughing hard). Yeah, when I'm with my kids, I definitely am mis-gendered frequently and I think, people get much more confused.

Interestingly, in both Luke's and Beck's accounts they laugh while telling me their stories of misrecognition. Their laughter however is not necessarily an indication of pleasure from their recounts of misgendering. Rather, "to laugh compulsively, even violently, at the reasoning of Law, at gender as reason, is to expose its violence" (Ahmed 2017, 205). The violence my participants expose here is the reproduction and maintenance of cis passing gender as "the norm" sustained through the family system. The pressure to perform and engage in cis passing gender – or compulsory cisness – inflicts material consequences that participants might not have engaged in otherwise. For instance, in order to mitigate the violent, affective structures that contour Luke's life as a trans masculine dad, Luke states,

> Like, I'm going to start hormone therapy. I'm probably going to get top surgery. I'm not super comfortable in my skin, but I don't think that I would be as uncomfortable as I am. And I don't think that I would feel the need to medically transition if I weren't going to be constantly and pervasively assumed to be a woman and a mother based on how I look.

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[26] Beck is a masculine presenting, nonbinary, white parent to three kids.

Even though, Luke's desire to start hormone therapy and get top surgery is a common narrative for trans masculine people, it is not everyone's narrative due to the infinite ways transness manifests. Medical transition is rarely covered by insurance, necessitates a support system for recovery, and forces people to take time off work. Social transition, as we have seen with participants, is emotionally and physically difficult to navigate and can also be cost prohibitive with court and policy fees for name change documents. Therefore, Luke's decision to medically transition underscores the impact of the affective push towards cis passing gender through the attribution of 'motherhood.'

Another illustration of the affective infrastructure of the family system by way of motherhood is my participant, Darren. Specifically, Darren's story indicates how participating in the family system works to stabilize structures of violence that perpetuate transphobia. Before Darren transitioned to Darren, he unintentionally became pregnant while in college. Not wanting to abort the fetus for a host of complicated reasons meant for about two years Darren moved about the world as a Black single mom to Adam until he realized he was trans.[27] From then on, he and Adam only use masculine terms like dad and he/him pronouns. A few years later, he met his now wife, Holly and they currently co-parent Adam together. Holly was in the process of legally adopting Adam when Darren and I had our interview. Darren explained that he and Holly were interested in pursuing legal adoption to ensure that if anything were to happen to Darren there would be less of a chance for any "discrepancies, or the past coming up in any way" – insinuating his transness – that would keep Adam from Holly. Darren stated, "She's been

[27] Darren's story is elaborated further in Chapter Three: Maternal Misfits

a part Adam's life like pretty much his entire life by now. And I think it would be unfortunate to go into the system or go with a family member when he identifies my wife as mommy and always identified her as mommy."

Despite Darren's desire to *not* reproduce or embody motherhood, he recognizes how Adam would be impacted if Darren were no longer his primary caregiver or legal guardian due to the ways local, state and federal government shape the definition of "acceptable" next of kin. Adam, a 6-year-old Black boy, would be subjected to entering a state sponsored facility or creating new relationships with other family members Adam is not as close to because Holly has no legal rights to Adam, even though Adam recognizes Holly as "mommy." Darren's worry about Adam and Holly in the unlikely, but very real threat of his death or incapacitation, is mainly because mortality and incarceration rates for trans and/or Black people are compounded, is more about Adam's recognition and emotional bond to Holly *as* 'mommy.'

In other words, Darren recognizes that if Holly and Adam are not legally bound, Adam's could be placed in state or alternative family care. Even so, Darren's fear is intimately bound up in Adam "losing his bond with his mommy." Feminist anthropologist Srimati Basu (2015) points out "marriage tends to be represented as a transparent good, assuming at its center the universal cultural unit of the heterosexual couple," which in the eyes of the state is what Darren and Holly technically are (15). Her ethnography of marital dissolution in contemporary India, however, demonstrates "marriage institutes legitimacies and secures regimes of property and labor, as seen in legal strategies for negotiating alimony, violence, residence, or custody" (Basu 2015, 15). Therefore, if ideas of property and labor are extended to children (property) and who

cares for them (labor), Darren attempts to mitigate (potential) state violence through the affective attachment to "mommy," marriage, and family. Again, reproducing the norm that "moms" need to care for their children through the legal consolidation of "family."

Furthermore, Darren's concern about Adam's bond with Holly underscores that maternal essentialism has immense immaterial and material impact; so much so that I argue it paradoxically influences Darren to participate in heteronormative and legal institutions that have historically harmed low/no income peoples, Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, and queer and trans peoples such as marriage and adoption. Darren's participation in marriage and legal adoption to maintain Adam's and Holly's 'mommy' bond is paradoxical because it sustains frameworks that create and exacerbate the transphobia and racism Darren, and by extension his son and wife, experience. The 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey notes thirteen percent (13%) of respondents reported courts limited or stopped relationships with children, "with Black, Asian, and multiracial respondents experiencing higher rates of court interference" (88). Similarly, fifty-seven percent (57%) of respondents experienced family rejection and nineteen percent (19%) have experienced domestic violence at the hands of a family member because of their transness.

Securing legitimacies via the American family system is similarly seen with affect alien, Damon, stepdad (who was formerly also her stepmom) to his wife's daughter.[28] Damon discussed how his daughter's presence elicits friendlier reactions from strangers in public, exposing a few different perspectives that are overlooked if only relying on a white cis passing viewpoint of parenting. Like other's ability to feel the contours of

[28] Damon is in his mid-30s and a Black veteran working his way through an undergraduate psychology degree.

maternal essentialism because of their transness, Damon's socialization as a Black girl and a woman provided him the embodied knowledge for how it feels to maneuver the world as a cis passing Black woman and man. In doing so, Damon's experiences highlight how the imbricated ideas and practices of whiteness, cisness, and parenthood are felt. Damon said in our interview,

> Parenting obstacles are kind of more of the stigma around Black fatherhood and how they kind of view me as this unicorn because I'm in her life. So yeah, just being kind of only seen as a good person because I'm in my daughter's life rather than a good person, period. Because if I'm with her people are more likely to be friendly than without her. (laughs) … If I'm without her people, I guess, perceive me as like a younger black guy. And, I guess, they don't feel any sort of connection or understanding about who I am as a person. Some people do smile and stuff like that, but the amount of people that smile and speak and stuff like that is exponentially more when I'm with her… I guess it takes me down…it brings me down to some more softer person. I guess that they can be more free…

At first glance, Damon's story shows how children as kinship objects facilitate an alternative public perception of subjectivity, and in this case, Black masculinity. Black feminist scholars like Patricia Hill-Collins (2004), bell hooks (1992), and Che Gossett (2017) expose how the media historically have reduced Black masculinity to racist images of sexual promiscuity, aggression, and violence that bleed into people's everyday reality by way of economics, politics, and legislation. Anti-Black racism engenders intimate and institutional forms of violence that force Black and Brown bodies, and Black masculine bodies especially, to modulate their affect along white structures of feeling in public (Ahmed 2014; Haritaworn 2015; Schuller 2018; Roberts 1997; Snorton 2017). Paradoxically, the violence Black and Brown bodies experience stems from the overwhelming misrepresentation of Blackness and Black masculinity created by white media platforms in the first place. As we have seen anything from rumors of smiling at a white woman (Emmett Till) to selling CDs (Eric Garner) to going for a run (Ahmaud

Arbery) incites anti-Black violence that culminates in death. Media misrepresentations and white affective structures of belonging impact Damon's daily experiences as he is hyper aware of the ways people perceive him and affectively react.

A deeper analysis of Damon's story shows that Damon with his Black daughter signifies, or points towards, an orientation of following the "family line." What I mean by this is Damon's experience as a Black trans dad demonstrates how a child (contingent on age, race, and proximity) also signifies to others his reproduction of and investment in 'family,' 'the future,' and 'public good,' which "softens" – or reorients – people's racialized and gendered perception of Damon. In the previous chapter, I argued how whiteness and heteronormativity are bound to conceptualizations of family and reproduction. Importantly, these conceptualizations are not just limited to the individualized bodymind.[29] They are affective, and thus circulate outside of bodyminds to shape public feeling (Cvekovitch 2012). By way of heterosexual images on billboards, commercials, advertisements, and public displays of affection Gill Valentine (1996) notes "repetitive performance of hegemonic asymmetrical gender identities and heterosexual desires congeal over time to produce the appearance that the street is normally a heterosexual space" (150). As a result, the heterosexualization of public space alienates non-heterosexual people from the body politic since they are unable to 'relax' or (safely) take up public space. The inability to (safely) take up space reinforces the image that heterosexuality is the norm and makes those who experience discomfort affect aliens (Ahmed 2014).[30]

[29] The use of bodymind stems from feminist disability studies. For example, Sami Schalk (2018) imagines and understands the body and mind are not ontologically or epistemologically separate. They are an integrated unit that impact and work through one another.
[30] This understanding of public comfort can be extended to practically all historically marginalized peoples.

Utilizing this framework to explore how the family shapes our daily lives, it becomes clearer a "famification," or repetitive performances of hegemonic family forms partly sustained through the circulation and stickiness of affects, contours Damon's daily life and impacts the ways in which he and others think about bodies, identity, and who is "valuable" (D' Emilio 1991; Lane and Josenuu 2018). The family system, despite its continuous restructuring as it responds capitalist demands, is a white supremacist institution – founded on rights of property and inheritance – that bestows unacknowledged and unearned benefits to those who reenact it. These benefits are not just instantiated in U.S. laws, policies, and practices but family relationships (spouse-spouse; parent-child; sibling-sibling) are granted more legitimacy, leniency, and flexibility in social or work situations (Weston 1991; Mamo 2007).[31] Consequently, "being part of a family" becomes a marker of the good life: "for a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course" like that of fatherhood (Ahmed 2010, 21). The "good life," then, becomes interlaced with fatherhood.

Following this line of thought, the father is also metonymically associated with the nation. The father, a literal bastion of patriarchal expression, becomes a reinstatement of white privileges and rights awarded by and through the nation (Sawicki 1991; Plant 2010). One way patriarchy sutures fatherhood to the nation is by making fatherhood integral to heterosexuality and thus a vehicle to national belonging as one is "reproducing

[31] For example, a parent who needs to leave work early because their child is sick is often a scenario that no one blinks twice at. However, if a friend needs to leave work early because their friend is sick will not be given the same sense of urgency or value. The COVID-19 crisis has really hammered this home.

the nation." Jasbir Puar (2007) states, "familial structures of the nation work both to consolidate heterosexuality as indispensable to national belonging and homosexuality as inimical to it," since a "homosexual lifestyle" historically suggested a lack of family (50). Yet, over time through a posturing towards nationalist ideals by way of "gay agendas" like marriage equality, adoption rights, and repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell", white homosexuality, both imagined and practiced, quickly became an exception to the rule that aided structures of whiteness woven into the national imaginary (Esteban Muñoz 2013). "This brand of homosexuality," also known as "homonationalism," argues Puar (2007), "operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects" (2). These racial, sexual, and national norms are built on and through the family system, and so, they necessitate one another.

Similarly, trans(homo)nationalism, a framework linked to transnormativity, centers gender as a perspective over sexuality. First, transnormativity employs comparable tactics of homonationalism by fighting for access to things like adoption rights, gender inclusive/neutral birth certificates, the "right" bathroom, and the military. Consequently, C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn (2013) point out "it is necessary to interrogate how the uneven institutionalization of women's, gay, and trans politics produces a transnormative subject, whose universalized trajectory of coming out/transition, visibility, recognition, protection, and self-actualization largely remains uninterrogated in its complicities and convergences with biomedical, neoliberal, racist, and imperialist projects" (67). Heeding their call, my focus on family – and in this moment fatherhood – interrogates how Damon's daughter, functioning as a kinship object

and a signifier of fatherhood, assists in his proximity to whiteness, and by extension, aids in the production of a transnormative subject. To be clear, Damon is not white, nor will he ever *be* white. However, we can see with life stories such as Damon's how compulsory cisness and transnormativity similarly work in the name of family to reorient certain nonnormative bodies towards imagined and practiced arrangements of cis-hetero-patriarchy, white settler colonialism, and capitalism while continuing to degrade, demonize, and punish others who cannot or will not reproduce normative structures of family. Therefore, when Damon is deemed a "softer" person when his daughter is with him, I argue it is because he contradicts the racist images of sexual promiscuity and violence wrapped up in the "stigmas of Black fatherhood" that shore up the sanctity of fatherhood and family structures. Accordingly, through heteronormativity *and* transnormativity he is incorporated within white structures of feeling (i.e., the "good life"). As Puar would say, through his daughter's presence he effectively was (re)produced as an "exceptional American subject," thus allowing enough flexibility to incorporate Damon's 'difference' while supporting and obscuring the violent systemic social structures and cultures that inflict social, economic, and political harm upon Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, gender nonconforming people, undocumented people, disabled people, no and low-income workers, and queer people.

Yet, I must point out that regardless of one's racialized subjectivity being folded back into the "good life" – especially, one that is predicated on white cis-heteronormative understandings of bodies and identities – is a covert form of violence in the name of inclusion (Halberstam 2018; Spade 2014). Similar to the ways "colorblindness" and "multiculturalism" function by flattening difference, current popularized transnormative

narratives push the idea that being trans is not necessarily prohibitive to a "happy" life anymore. So, being supported by one's family is a primary and crucial way to actualize one's trans identity (Meadow 2018). This is repeatedly evidenced by the often-reported statistics functioning as affective plea that not using your child's/young adult's correct name and pronouns exponentially increases the child's/young adult's chances for death by suicide (Grant et al 2011). Halberstam (2018) argues "when trans* youth route their desires through their parents…they become part of a more or less seamless transition from trans* youth to gender normative adulthood… [this flattening of gender variance] calls attention both to the ways in which bodies are inscribed within the family and to the many causal forms of erasure that normativity demands" (Halberstam 2018, 73). So, when Damon is folded back into the public sphere, he is coerced to flatten the complexities of kinship, identities, bodies, and affect that reaffirm structures of the American family system that facilitate anti-Black racism, transphobia, sexism, and ableism.

Damon's and Juan's experience in contrast to Luke's and Beck's highlights how Black and Brown parents' experiences are obviously deeply influenced by racialized framings of gender, sexuality, and parenthood that determine whether or not someone is given social, political, and economic capital. Yet, much trans and parenthood literature continues to ignore intersectional approaches to trans lived experience. Regardless of whether Luke and Beck are seen as 'mom' or 'dad' they are always already seen as being oriented towards the "good life" and potential parents because of their whiteness. Unless his daughter is with him, Damon is not. This is not to say that Black and Brown parents *should* be reincorporated back into the folds of the family system, since I ultimately argue

for the abolition of the family to aid in the collapse of white supremacy. Nevertheless, understanding the assemblages that position Black (trans) dads as "being viewed as a unicorn for being in his daughter's life" or a different family member other than 'mom' or 'dad' but as a sibling, uncle – or even a volunteer "Big Brother" like that of my other participant Damien[32] – speaks to the affective mobilization and hegemonic arrangements the family system enables awarding some ways of life social and material capital.

Conclusion | Family Schmamily

It was the last day of Family week and I hopped on my bike and rode it back into town to meet my best friend, Steph, and her family at the wharf. They took the ferry to Provincetown from Plymouth as a way to spend the afternoon doing some shopping and sightseeing with me. A few weeks before my pilgrimage to Provincetown, I posted a status on Facebook inviting anyone to come stay or visit while I was there for Family week. Steph and her family were the only ones to take me up on my offer. We walked around for a few hours, popped into different shops, gossiped about mutual friends, and ate some lunch until it was time to see them off a few hours later.

At the beginning of the chapter, I mentioned that despite my excitement to be able to spend a week in Provincetown, I had never spent such a long period of time by myself in Provincetown, and honestly, I had never spent such a long period of time by myself full stop. But I had a good time by myself in Provincetown: I could eat whatever I wanted. I could do whatever I wanted whenever I wanted. Importantly, I felt like I could

[32] One time Damien was playing in the park with his kids and several men came up to him expressing how awesome it was for him to be so kind in volunteering his time. Damien said, "they offered me 'props for my service' and thanked me for 'being a good "Big Brother"'. Confused, Damien just replied, "their mine" and left the park.

be whomever I wanted. Yet, watching Steph, her mother, her father, her sister, her brother-in-law, her niece, and her nephew wave at me from the ferry as they pulled away, I was suddenly struck by an array of feelings. I became acutely aware that despite the happiness I found by myself that week it was far more enjoyable to share in happiness with others, even if the people I was sharing it with at Family Week were not "actually" my family.

As it is for most people, my relationship to family is complicated. In fact, it is a primary reason for why I traveled to Family Week in the first place. The more that I explored literature that centered critical assessments of family, and its related concepts like motherhood and fatherhood, there lacked a standpoint that wondered why we continue to use "family" as a model for relationships in the first place. Do not get me wrong, there is a corpus of anthropological (Basu 2015; Rubin 2013; Weston 1990), sociological (Dalton and Biebly 2000; Pfeffer 2018), geographical (Rose 2007; McKittrick 2006), and gender and women's studies (Eng 2010; Douglas and Michaels 2005; Haraway 2016) literature that critiques and interrogates the family system but a majority of it attempts to diagnose power imbalances and oppressions in order to rehabilitate it. However, by drawing on trans masculine participant's experiences, this chapter intervenes in motherhood, affect, and trans scholarship to demonstrate the need to leave the family behind. As Hil Malatino (2020) says, "for far too long, both hegemonic and resistant cultural imaginaries of care have depended on a heterocisnormative investment in the family as the primary locus of care" (6).

To sum up, I use Sara Ahmed's concept of the *affect alien* to ground my participant's stories. When my trans masculine participants become affect aliens (when

their feelings do not align with expected or desired feelings) their experiences illuminate how affective structures of power – that are built through and sustain white supremacy and cisheteropatriarchy – impact the way individuals see their bodies, see other bodies, and move about the world. By reading trans masculine participants' anecdotes, stories, emotional moments, and bodily feelings through an affective lens valuable, understudied knowledge about family ideologies and practices emerge that can re-shape our understanding of gender, race, sexuality, ability, class, and so on. That, in fact, despite the repeated claims of parenthood, family, and social identities are natural these categories are not innate or biological. Rather, they are relational.

Reading trans masculine parenthood through an affective framework also emphasizes how the American family system maintains its position as the protected and primary model of relationality in America. Illuminating this process ultimately helps dismantle the interlocking logics of imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy that facilitate the "need" for the independent family in the first place and exposes ways family and parenthood operate to privilege certain forms of world-making over others. That is, there is nothing necessary, natural, or inherent about the nuclear family (Mamo 2007). However, because it is repetitively positioned as a "promise of happiness," a locus of belonging, a site of recognition and value through economic, political, religious, and representational tools it shapes perceptions and orients people to believe that a nuclear family model is foundational for a 'good' society, and by association the "good life" (Ahmed 2010, Berlant 2011; Weston 1991; Rich 1986; Lewis 2019).

For example, in the first section "Pregnant with Possibility," Emerson, Adam, and Nathan demonstrate how their experiences with pregnancy oriented them towards a trans understanding of gender, a concept that was inconceivable prior to their pregnancy. As we saw with Juan, his desire to have a family aids in the oppressive structures that inflicted state and interpersonal violence upon him when he was younger and sparked his longing for a "big family". In the second section, "Momification via Famification," Luke, Beck, Darren, and Damon show how the proximity of their kids reorient the way people perceive their racialized gender. However, Darren's and Damon's positionality as a Black trans man compared to Luke and Beck's exposes how anti-Black racism mobilizes a sense of belonging to facilitate transnormative subjects. In doing so, the transnormative subject aids in the abjection and subjection of those who cannot or will not reproduce normative practices of the world. And again, this process coerces trans subjects to participate in systems that lead to theirs and others material and ideological violence.

The following chapter, "Maternal Misfits" continues the interrogation of trans masculine parenting experiences. Primarily utilizing the disability justice scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *misfit*, I demonstrate how trans masculine parents misfit – a situation in which body and environment juxtapose – within institutions that interact with the family system such as hospitals and schools. More often than not, trans masculine parents misfitting results in trans masculine parents becoming misfits, a generative political identification category that destabilize oppressive structures and open up new ways being.

Chapter Three | Maternal Misfits

"The elderly woman behind me was quite taken with one of the twins (who wouldn't be) and started chatting to him. He responded by reaching out with a straw and babbling at her, and then turned to poke me with the straw, at which she said, "Is that your daddy?" How terrible to feel both joy and sadness in response to such a simple question. Yes, I'm his dad, but if I turn around or say something would you still think so?"

-T. Garner (2014) "Becoming Papa"

"Families constitute primary sites of belonging to various groups: to the family as an assumed biological entity; to geographically identifiable, racially segregated neighborhoods conceptualized as imagined families; to so-called racial families codified in science and law; and to the US nation-state conceptualized as a national family."

- ***Patricia Hill Collins (1998) "It's All in the Family"***

Introduction |

I cycled my way along Commercial Street towards the Provincetown Public Library, weaving around clumps of wandering adults and children who carelessly strolled to various restaurants and shops. It was a hot and humid late-July morning. Per usual, I was running late and was rushing to make in time for Family Week's "Drag Queen Story Hour." Upon arrival, I quickly found a spot to lock my bike up between the strollers and other bikes that were kitted out with child seats and attachments. I made my way inside the 160-year-old building that was originally built as a Methodist Episcopal Church. In 2002, the Provincetown Public Library moved into the building after several other organizations occupied it over the years. The building smelled of old books, sweaty people, and had beautifully vaulted ceilings. Contrasting the silent beauty of the building were children's squeals and whines combined with care taker's attempts to calm or excite their kids for the impending event. I followed the chattering groups of people who I

assumed were also running on "gay time" for "Drag Queen Story Hour" and maneuvered my way to a spot near the back of the cramped room. Kids and caretakers alike filled every available spot – from floor space to the folded chairs to the upper gallery where kids were propped on shoulders to get a better look.

At the front of the room stood the 6-foot-tall drag queen, Roxy Pops. She was wearing an emerald green sequined dress and had on a brunette wig with blonde highlights, bright red lipstick, and dark eye shadow. As time crept closer to the top of the hour, Roxy began pacing around the front and asked the first few rows of people questions about their time at Family Week and how they were enjoying Provincetown. People's attention slowly shifted towards the front of the room and caretakers worked to quiet down their kids in anticipation of a bit of emotional and physical respite. As it was "Drag Queen Story Hour" Roxy was there to capture the attention of their kids by reading a few queer and trans children's books. In a swift, seamless movement, instead of pulling out a book, Roxy pulled out a folded fan, and *clacked* it open to fan herself. The sudden noise directed attention to the front of the room where the now un-folded black fan displayed the red airbrushed word, "DADDY." A majority of adults, myself included, laughed at the multilayered provocation of the word "daddy." Was it the tender, loving supportive father figure or the sexy leather clad muscle daddy that got us laughing? Perhaps both. Perhaps neither.

Drag queens, despite not really being known for late-morning children's gigs, have a long history of activism and community organizing within the queer and trans movement (Stryker 2017). They are part-entertainer and part-educator. Now, whether or not this particular drag queen intentionally brought her 'daddy' folded fan, I will never

know. However, the conditions through which the 'daddy' fan manifested as a multidimensional joke of sorts was possible because of the spatial-temporal context with which we were in and the indexical, or sign pointing, nature of words.[33] Provincetown, Massachusetts, as briefly discussed in the second chapter, is widely known as a "gay mecca," particularly for cis white, middle-upper class, able-bodied gay men. It is a small, historic fishing town located on the tip of Cape Cod – accessible only by expensive ferryboats, personal boats, cars, and/or limited bus service – where the summer sun and ocean breeze invite minimal clothing, tropical drinks by the pool, and party drugs. Scholars of Provincetown (Gleason 1999; Krahulik 2006) suggest that since the town is nestled in an isolated space, and the majority of residents and vacationers are white gay men with a sprinkle of lesbians, there is broad acceptance and encouragement of public sexuality that runs counter to the conservative legacy the Pilgrims and Puritans peppered into the fabric of American life (Bronski 2011). So, more often than not open displays of sexuality and sex are invited, celebrated, and supported throughout the summer months in Provincetown with themed weeks such as Bear Week, Cabaretfest, Independence Week, Girl Splash and more.

However, "Drag Queen Story Hour" was a part of Provincetown Family Week which increases the number of families vacationing in Provincetown because of the various kids and "family friendly" events put on by the event coordinators, COLAGE and

[33]According to Elinor Ochs, a leader in the field of developmental pragmatics, indexicality is "depicted as a property of speech through which cultural contexts such as social identities (e.g., gender) and social activities (e.g., a gossip session) are constituted by particular stances and acts" (Duranti and Goodwin 1992, 335). Ochs further explains that unlike previous theories that explore the social meaning of gender and the social meaning of language flatten the complex ways language-gender relations work to create meaning. Three main characteristics that help describe the relation of language to gender are: non-exclusive, constitutive, and temporally transcendent. The primary characteristics I am interested in throughout this dissertation are the non-exclusive and constitutive.

the Family Equality Council.[34] When I spoke to multiple long-term Provincetown residents and service industry workers during my stay almost all of them stated that Family Week was the "worst week" during the summer because of the increased number of "families." Even though I was unable to find concrete evidence that LGBTQ+ families desexualized Provincetown, the residents and service industry workers stated families ate out less, tipped less, and went to bed earlier than "non-families." At the start of Family Week, The Boatslip Resort, a popular bar and cruising spot that hosts tea dances on their beachside deck, posted a Facebook status alerting potential customers to a "Poolside Pop-up" with the following info: "Get a free chair and towel all week! Hang by the pool. Grab lunch at the grill. Be where the boys are and the kids aren't." Despite 'kids' and 'boys' conjuring youthfulness, The Boatslip's use of "boys" in contrast with "kids" – even though their customer base typically consists of white, gay adults over the age of twenty-one, thus technically 'past' the age of boyhood – illuminates the slippery overlaps of how gendered language is mobilized within the LGBTQ+ community, marking divisions among those who are investing in more traditional and normative forms of kinship and care such as a family with parents and children.

On top of all this, it was explained to me by the liquor store cashier that one of the worst aspects of Family Week is that the "families" had "lots of stuff" with them making it extremely difficult to maneuver around the already tiny town of Provincetown. Even José Esteban Muñoz, a "critical optimist" always looking for hope, points out in his critique of Lee Edelman's cynical argument in *No Future* that he agrees and feels hailed by much of *No Future.* Like those in Provincetown, Muñoz notes, "when I negotiate the

[34] For a more in-depth discussion of the Family Equality Council and COLAGE see chapter one

ever-increasing sidewalk obstacles produced by oversized baby strollers on parade in the city in which I live, [New York City,] the sheer magnitude of the vehicles that flaunt the incredible mandate of reproduction as world-historical virtue, I could not be more hailed with a statement such as, 'queerness names the side of 'not fighting for the children,' the side of outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the value of reproductive futurism'" (92). One could imagine, then, that the presumption Provincetown is "less gay" during Family Week is not because Family Week requires it to be so. Rather, the increase in families, and the connotations wrapped up in "family," convinces the frequent Provincetown partiers to avoid Provincetown for that week, ultimately creating a self-fulfilling prophecy that makes it "less gay" because there are simply less people to display the dominant gay aesthetic.

However, excavating this feedback loop a bit further helps map the complicated rat's nest of family, children, and queer sexuality. On the one hand, the "Family Week equates to a 'more sanitized' version of Provincetown" feedback loop underscores the child-free attitudes that historical have circulated throughout the queer and trans community. Queer kinship scholars like Gayle Rubin and Kath Weston maintain that increasing political attention paid to the "safety and health" of "the Children" through affective statements such as "think of the children" combined with the political, economic, and social privileging of normative familial arrangements (mixed gender couple who procreate their own children), especially post WWII, sparked much of the queer and trans child-free, and by extension, 'chosen family' attitudes (Rubin 2011). Pre-marriage equality days, particularly throughout the 1980s and 1990s, queer and trans communities would often jokingly disparage "breeders," or people who engage in the

type of sex that can lead to the production of a new human (Gieseking 2016). Yet, on the other hand, the feedback loop is founded within and maintains the homo and transphobic ideologies founded in the belief that queer and trans people should not or cannot have children because of their "sexualized" lifestyles, typically collapsing gender and sexuality under the umbrella of "sexual perversion" (Rubin 2011). [35]

The daddy double entendre, then, not only evoked the sexualized daddy trope that is conceptually and physically embedded into Provincetown's geography. It also conjured the more sanitized daddy version (snot wiper, stroller pusher, toy buyer) who is at odds, or misfits, within the broader image and practice of the domineering, sexually promiscuous Daddy that so many of Provincetown's partygoers are looking for or trying to be. Juxtaposing these two versions of 'daddy' – a daddy dialectic if you will – illuminates how language indexes connections and power relations among identity, contexts, and interactions. Furthermore, situating and analyzing the event in its spatial context we can explore how gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability are built into our physical environments and imagined landscapes, which play into our conceptualization and use of language.

Similar to the queer travelers who make their way to Provincetown hoping to be "taken care of" by a Daddy, I was hoping to see and speak to trans masculine people who take on the parental role of daddy (or dad, pops, papa, etc.). Yet, despite the

[35] This perception is so deep that two of my participants, Nathan and Tom, turned to the gay dating app Grindr overwhelmingly used by cis gay and queer men to find sperm. They did so because the cost prohibitive and racial essentialism of donor banks did not appeal to Tom and Nathan. At first, this novel approach seemed entertaining and a great work around. However, when I asked them in their respective interview, why Grindr, they both mentioned that they assumed people who are on Grindr are not "ready to settle down and be parents." This perception undergirds the belief that gay men are promiscuous which is incompatible to parenting and parenthood. To be fair, their desire to find sperm from someone who may not be ready to be a parent was motivated by the fear of future legal battles over who the true parents are because of the ways biology justifies legal decisions and policies.

overwhelming presence of LGBTQ+ families, I quickly figured out what was there exposed just as much about what was "not there." Trans dads, trans moms, and trans parents were, unfortunately, few and far between at LGBTQ+ Family Week.[36] But the lack of visibility, and for reasons that will be elaborated on throughout this chapter, does not mean trans parenthood, and trans masculine parenthood specifically, was absent at Family Week. That is, the role of dad/daddy/father for trans masculine parents manifests in ways that often create visual and linguistic disjunctures – or *misfits* – that both stabilize and trouble normative linguistic and spatial associations that suture bodies assigned male at birth and fatherhood, thus making it difficult to see trans masculine parenthood *as* fatherhood.[37] Accordingly, this chapter centers unique social locations of trans masculine parenting to explore how trans masculine experiences are shaped by and shape practices of cis normative parenting that are built into systemic social structures and cultures and work to sustain hegemonic assemblages of intelligibility. I wonder: what are the experiences of trans masculine parents who are a part of a world that sees parenting as a "natural" extension of one's gender assigned at birth? How does cisnormative parenting functioning at institutional levels and in what ways does that materially and emotionally impact trans masculine parents? And what can we learn from trans masculine parents' experiences as *misfits*?

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[36] I attended and observed numerous events marked for various "types" of families (Families of color, moms, dads, trans parents, international) and the trans events were far less attended than the others. However, it was mentioned that this year had the greatest number of trans families.
[37] An indexical disjuncture is a moment in which "a sign (or set of signs) indexes an interactional component that is not normatively associated with the context involved" (Barrett 2017, 17). An indexical disjuncture, or what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson might conceptualize as misfitting regarding the body and environment, is important to focus on because it illuminates intentional and unintentional ways dominant ideologies are rejected, transformed, and maintained. For instance, Rusty Barrett (2017) argues "because interactions are evaluated on the basis of normative assumptions regarding the links between identity with social groups and contexts of interactions, most interactions occur under an ideological assumption or expectation of heterosexuality" which marginalizes and subjugates LGBTQ+ culture (17).

Chapter Outline

"Maternal Misfits" follows a similar pattern and builds off of the previous chapter where I utilized Sara Ahmed's (2010) concept of the *affect alien*, or those who do not desire in the "right" way, to follow and explore how trans masculine parents come to understand themselves as trans and/or a parent. I do so because affect, by which I mean "what sticks or sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects," influences and organizes how we move about the world, shaping perceptions of ourselves, others (human and non-human), and our socio-political environments (Ahmed 2010). I showed how my participant's experiences illuminate the ways in which diverse configurations of trans masculine and parenting bodies, at different states of medical and social transition, encounter and evaluate material and abstract objects such as motherhood, fatherhood, breasts, children, transness, vaginas, pregnancy, and more. My participants' trans masculine experiences as affect aliens demonstrate how current frameworks of familial and maternal "structures of feeling" are constructed and destabilized through their everyday experiences building and navigating their material-discursive individual bodies, identities, and families. Therefore, affect alienness shows that there is nothing inherently wrong or bad with trans parents. Rather, it is the affective conditions that stick certain values, ideals and objects together, situating trans parenthood as something to avoid or not reproduce. Reinforcing this warped and oppressive perception that trans parenthood must be avoided occurs through individual and institutional harm like not allowing children of trans parents to have playdates with other kids, being excluded from community events, increased surveillance by state child

services, being denied the correct gender marker on birth certificates or other bureaucratic forms, and the pathologization of trans identity broadly.

This chapter begins by contextualizing the complicated nature of 20th and 21st century hegemonic parenting, with a particular focus on pro- and anti-family sentiments within straight and queer culture, to show how cisnormativity is built through parenting, supporting those who 'fit' and harming those who 'misfit,' and thus become *misfits*. The two main sections of this chapter primarily focus on and explore: (1) how trans masculine parents navigate institutionalized parenting language such as "mother" and "father," and (2) how trans masculine parents navigate spaces that are saturated with binary parenthood ideologies like school systems and public recreational areas. Despite the multitude of negative experiences participants told me, there were also moments of intentional and unintentional forms of resistance embedded within their stories. Therefore, I explore more than just repressive and violent moments of transphobia, I also explore how my participants enact and engage in the radical potential of *transing* care. As noted in previous chapters, transing care maintains trans' radical potential of crossing, moving beyond, being on the outside of dominant modes of cis-centric capitalist familial structures rooted in racism, settler colonialism, and patriarchy by refuting individualism and fundamentally reworking bodily relationships to care and identity (Malatino 2020).

The Family Jewels | Situating parenthood through childhood

In March 2019, the international weekly newspaper *The Economist* tweeted, "Should transgender people be sterilised before they are recognised?" Attached to the

tweet was the article titled, "Japan says transgender people must be sterilized"[38] (Walker 2019). The "clickbait" article outlined Japan's decision to uphold various legal requirements that transgender Japanese citizens must abide by in order to legally transition to obtain gender identity documents that match one's gender. The laws require transgender people to be single, without children, and under the age of 20. They also require the person to undergo a psychiatric evaluation to receive a diagnosis of 'gender identity disorder,' and they must be sterilized (HRW 2019). The tweet has since been deleted and apologies from *The Economist* have been made. Yet, the original question remains floating in the ether: should transgender people be sterilized before they are recognized?

I pose this question *not* because I believe that they should. Rather, I pose the question because in many respects the question reflects the ways in which transgender people can be recognized as 'not-trans' in relation to reproduction and care practices because of the deep-rooted connections between biological capacities and parenthood. The requirement that Japanese trans people must be childless and single prior to their legal transition, for instance, fundamentally ties kinship (parenting and partners) to Japan's heteronormative conceptualization of trans identity and experiences. That is, in the eyes of the state trans people cannot be trans if they have biological children or some legitimized relationship (wife, husband, domestic partner). Harkening back to the mid-20th century "realness" tests required by doctors and psychiatrists in the United States, Japan's laws imply having had children and being in a relationship precludes someone from "really" being trans *because of* their previous participation in seemingly hetero-

[38] *The Economist* later stated they 'mistakenly' pulled the quote out of context

cisnormative frameworks of relationships. Even more telling is that these relationships seem to be imagined through the ways penis-in-vagina sex is marked as the "gold standard" of sexual relations that ultimately should produce a child. Current modern gender logics, in other words, foreground genitals and other secondary sex characteristics like breasts to indicate one's gender identity, expression, and role which maintains the gender binary through binary parenting ideologies.

Moreover, part of this imagined Japanese trans citizen instantiated through law similarly implies that if one were to transition "too late in life" (after 20 years old) with pre-established kin networks – that always already exist as we are never not born into a social system – could potentially harm their partner, but especially their children. Feminists have consistently demonstrated the ways eugenics and reproductive control are embedded within the development of the United States and how that shapes the ways the US projects the image of the "American Family" (McKittrick 2006; Snorton 2017; Schuller 2018). And so, weaponizing sterilization and reproduction for state purposes is not new (Davis 1981; Roberts 1997). For example, Kath Weston (1991) work on how the New Right's rhetoric during the 1980s not only situated lesbian and gays outside the imagined family and unable to reproduce (read: without family), but that lesbians and gays were also fundamental threats to the family. Weston (1991) exposes how "the plausibility of the contention that gay people pose a threat to 'the family' (and, through the family, to ethnicity) depends on a view of family grounded in heterosexual relations, combined with the conviction that gay men and lesbians are incapable of procreation, parenting, and establishing kinship ties" (25). The logical leap from "gay men and lesbians are unable to procreate" to "trans people are unable to procreate" is not a far one

particularly because separate issues of gender and sexuality are often collapsed together and seen as the same. Some trans scholars like Jules Gill-Peterson (2017) and Susan Stryker (2017) argue that it was the pathologization of gender non-conformity into transsexuality during the 1950s and 1960s that helped solidify the cisgender heterosexual underpinning of what "real" masculinity and femininity is, and thus, what "real" fatherhood and motherhood is. Thus, discourses of parenthood implemented through idealized forms of masculinity and femininity produced acceptable understandings of sexuality as well.

Furthermore, as Lee Edelman articulates in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), the figure of the Child propels people's desire to create "better futures" for the Child. "The Child," according to Veronica Hollinger (2018), is not separate from but integral to ones understanding of parenting, as it exists as a form of an archive; "it anticipates the future from a moment in the present. It is the archive of past and present that we send into the future as a guarantor of our continuity, of our immortality, of our extension into a time we cannot foresee" (np). However, the "our" invoked in reference to the Child as an archive does not include equitable access to said future, particularly if the role of trans and gender non-conforming parenting to broader conceptualizations of parenthood remains overlooked. In other words, the future – an extension into a time we cannot foresee – is no less constructed or abstractly imagined by and through hetero-cisnormativity and white supremacy. And so, this imagined future only allows some to 'fit' because Edelman's argument that the "better future" that is imagined and actively sought after relies on the homophobic and misunderstood claim that homosexuals "cannot reproduce." Turning this homophobic claim on its head and

utilizing it as an interrogation point, Edelman argues investment in a future that is tied to the reproduction of the present derived from the past hinders queerness, as a destabilizer of power and not an identity, refusal of the social and political order that deeply invests in the concept of the family. Again, this perception reflects how misfit is “a term that describes both a situation and a person, someone considered odd, who is therefore rejected by others” (Roberston 2014). Yet, it is well-known and documented that non-LGBTQ+ people need and seek assistance for reproductive issues. However, the stigma of needing assisted reproductive technologies (ART) because it insinuates something is “wrong” with one’s body, situating one as a “failing” parent-to-be, often leads non-LGBTQ+ experiences with ART to be kept hidden. Similarly, because non-LGBTQ+ peoples’ bodies and couples are seen as the ‘norm’ their experiences using ART does not ‘misfit’ within the broader conceptualizations of reproduction. Put otherwise, conservative groups that span across political party and other social identities argue because LGBTQ+ people are “incapable of reproduction,” or, at least in need of assistance with reproduction – sperm banks, eggs, surrogates – LGBTQ+ have no investment in affairs of the public “good.”

With the rise of homonationalism, the imbrication of LGBTQ+ sexualities and nationalist ideologies to promote US exceptionalism particularly after 9/11, the investment in the figure of the child, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991) argues in “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay,” is a pathway through which LGBTQ+ youth – and I demonstrate parents – are ‘normalized’ by medical, legal, and educational institutions saturated with homophobic policies and procedures to maintain normative models of racialized gender and sexuality. However, over the past twenty years, public discourse

that aimed to ‘erase’ LGBTQ+ children vis-à-vis assimilation by harmful means like conversion therapy or bullying (“That’s so gay!”) that can lead to things like depression, anxiety, and suicide has shifted to the belief that “only the family can make things better for queer kids living in a world that is so very bad” (Jacobs 2014, 319). Plainly, it was no longer “acceptable” to denounce or deny your child’s queerness. Rather, Jason Jacobs (2014) points out that the shift from family as a site of queer violence to family as the nexus point through which children’s queer sexuality is “accepted” means sexuality must stay within the acceptable boundaries of their family. This new model of integrating a child’s queerness ignores all of the ways that “heterosexual parents – even those determined to tolerate, love and protect their gay children – are still unable to familiarize their children with the traditions, habits, social codes, aesthetics, or values of specifically queer communities, especially those who insist on seeing their heterosexual and nonheterosexual children as ‘the same’” (319). With these entwined histories of parenthood and childhood in mind, what I find telling about Edelman’s, Sedgwick’s, and Jacobs’ commentary on queer children, and supplemented with recent works that focus on trans children such as Jules Gill-Peterson’s (2017) *History of the Trans Child* and Tey Meadow’s (2017) *Trans Kids,* is that parents are *also* coerced into reproducing normative ways of being through trying to “accept” (and at times through “fixing”) their child in the hopes of maintaining the figure of The Child. So, I suggest that scaling outward past the figure of The Child to the family system makes visible the material-discursive assemblages that play a part in the grid of intelligibility that upholds white supremacy and biological determinism.

To be extremely clear, Japan is *not* the only country to place restrictions on the ways one can legally change their gender and how that impacts kinship relations. Many, if not all, countries, territories, and states around the world require trans people to jump through some sort of administrative hoops ranging from petitioning a judge to allow for a legal name change to obtaining 'sound mind' documents from multiple mental health clinicians to having to "live as your gender" for several years to ensure that it is something "real" to undergoing "gender reassignment surgery." But because gender reassignment surgery, or sometimes referred to as gender confirmation surgery, is not a unilateral surgery there is no one type of gender confirmation surgery. Therefore, trans people can be sterilized (whether through personal choice or force as in Japan's laws) through gender confirmation surgeries like vaginoplasty and certain types of phalloplasty. Trans people can lose their capacity to nurse if their surgeon severs their milk ducts. And on a more basic level, trans people can lose the ability to reproduce biological kin if they do not have the money, time, or resources to cryofreeze their reproductive gametes. Ultimately, defining and controlling trans bodies and trans experiences shores up the boundaries of the "body that fits." In various legal frameworks, then, the body that fits becomes the one that is not-trans because the not-trans body is perceived as "natural," as not in need of medical reconfiguration. However, the trans body is only deemed in need of medical reconfiguration because the state requires it. Accordingly, the body that fits within broader conceptualizations of reproduction and gender does not align with trans people's imagination and practice of children and parenting. Taking such an approach ensures misfitting as a concept allows for greater opportunity to disrupt the material-discursive frameworks through which conceptualizations of motherhood stick to bodies

assigned female at birth and fatherhood sticks to bodies assigned male at birth. And so, to get at what gender *does* in relation to parenthood and trans masculine identity, instead of what it *is,* I turn to feminist disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson.

As discussed at length in the introduction chapter, the concept of *misfitting* is particularly useful for my project as it centers three main components. First, misfitting relies on the co-constituting relationship between flesh and environment. This framework, as noted, enhances our ability to understand how systems of power are produced and intimately entwined in body and environment. Second, misfitting emphasizes how our worlds are actually interdependent rather than independent. An interdependent understanding of the world or, the belief and practice that all peoples are vulnerable depending on space, time, and context, destabilizes the masculinist perception baked into liberal individualism that structures traditional models and expectations of care-giving relationships (e.g., the historical erasure of women's reproductive labor). Last, but certainly not least, misfitting confers agency and value upon subjects who are viewed as 'the problem' by demonstrating the *misfits* "adaptability, resourcefulness, and subjugated knowledge as potential effects of misfitting" (Garland-Thomson 2011, 592).

It is through this framework that I extend the concept of the *misfit* to cisgenderism, an "-ism" that fundamentally cannot be divorced from ableism.[39] As a reminder, cisgenderism, according to Erica Lennon and Brian Mistler (2014), is the "the cultural and systemic ideology that denies, denigrates, or pathologizes self-identified

[39] Eli Clare (2013) argues "trans people who seek to medicalize their gender transitions should not expect medicalization to confer normalcy, or to offer a cure for the social stigma of being different" (261). He continues that this frame of mind "is a longing rooted in shame," requiring all to trouble what a "normal" body is as a way to move us towards bodily self-determination, a concept rooted in disability and crip politics.

gender identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth as well as resulting behavior, expression, and community" (63). Therefore, the cultural and political standards that exist within, alongside, and through ableism also work to solidify cisness as *the* ideal means by which gender is performed and idealized. According to these ableist and cisgender logics, it is expected that mothers are women, and they are women because they have vaginas.

Misfitting, as a concept, has popped up in other areas such as queer and trans studies but has not been specifically theorized as such. In his book *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam's (2002) discussion of the "bathroom problem" helps situate how gender is not simply biology reflected into our built environments, but more so a manifestation of when flesh meets environment. Halberstam discusses how gender binary bathrooms and their signifiers – "Ladies" and "Gentlemen" – do not indicate that there are *actually* men and women. "The bathroom," argues Halberstam, "is a domestic space beyond the home that comes to represent domestic order, or a parody of it, out in the world" that contribute to violent feedback loops of gender and sexual repression (368). Namely, "bathrooms operate as an arena for the enforcement of gender conformity," demanding the performance and expression of ideal forms of masculinity and femininity (369). If gender is not signaled or seen in satisfactory ways that align gender expression with gender attribution (what someone outwardly expresses and what the other perceives them as) various forms of physical and conceptual violence can be and are enacted upon gender non-conforming peoples (Beauchamp 2017). Consequently, the existence of and policing within men's and women's bathrooms demonstrate that "naming confers, rather than reflects, meaning" (Halberstam 2002, 368). A woman does not use the women's

bathroom *because* she is a woman. Rather, a body becomes a woman through their use of the "women's room." And because of this, "the bathroom problem is much more than a glitch in the machinery of gender segregation and is better described in terms of the violent enforcement of our current gender system" (369). Yet, little scholarship discusses, or even acknowledges, the additional layers of gender enforcement trans masculine people who have their children with them experience within the bathroom.

For instance, my participant Adam expressed that for over two years they would enter the "Gentlemen's" bathroom if they did not have their kids with them. If they did have their kids, which was quite often, Adam and the kids would use the "Ladies" room because their girls always complained that the Men's room was too "different and gross." However, as Adam progressed further into their transition (top surgery, testosterone, short hair) they were so nervous about bathrooms that Adam stopped bringing their children into the "Ladies" restroom because they were "tired of the looks" and the threat of violence in the form of police or child protective services. It is in this moment, that we can see how Adam's gender non-conforming and masculine presenting body, specifically with their two daughters in proximity, troubles their ability to "pass" effectively as either a lady or gentleman. Gender segregated bathrooms, then, are not reflections of the types of bodies that exist in the world. They are spaces through which bodies that cannot or do not fit ideal expectations of men and women are exposed, policed, marked as 'other.' People who cannot or will not fit ideal expectations become 'misfits' both within the bathroom space and modern gender logics. Consequently, centering the co-constituting relationship between flesh and environment Garland-Thomson argues we are better equipped to disentangle the mechanisms through which flesh and environment misfit.

Misfitting brings us to *trans care.* Garland-Thomson's investment into the generative value of misfitting makes space to see the ways in which trans care also resists cultural imaginaries and practices of care that depend on and facilitate a cis-heteronormative, patriarchal, white supremacist, middle class, settler investment in the family as the locus and pinnacle of care. And so, using the misfit as a framework to analyze my trans masculine participants experiences reveals how those who become "the problem" are not actually *the* problem but oppressed by linguistic and spatial social structures and cultures that uphold cisgender parenthood as "natural" configurations of bodies and experiences. In the section that follows, I draw from several participants stories to demonstrate discursive misfitting and the productive trouble that ensues. Collectively, their stories and experiences demonstrate dynamic encounters between flesh and the world, moments of misfitting and fitting.

Part One | Navigating Parenting Language within Institutions

Section One | Who's Your Daddy?

Peter exemplifies one of the many ways trans masculine parents 'misfit,' and thus become *misfits*, within in a society that bases intelligibility on social categories, particularly when it comes to gestation and childbirth, due to the ways language is a process of socialization, and thus a part of material-discursive becomings. Material-discursive perspectives of the world emphasize the "entangled inseparability of discourse and materiality" (Barad 2007; Garland-Thomson Orlikowski and Scott 2015). So, according to Elinor Ochs (1993), people are not only socialized through language but are also socialized in various ways to use language. "Through repetitions of particular types

of interactions," notes Rusty Barrett (2017), "we come to associate specific ways of speaking with various attributes associated with different contexts of interactions" (11). This occurs, as previously mentioned, through indexicality, by which I mean the relationship "between forms of language and the contexts in which they occur" (Barrett 2017, 10). Furthermore, through the ways indexical signs operate at different levels of indexical orders and may be associated with multiple linguistic forms language also serves to index *stance* (Barrett 2017).

Stance, a concept that describes how speakers orient themselves in an ongoing interaction, is "the mediating process between linguistic forms and social identities" (Jaffe 2009). Speakers can take up multiple categories of stance that range from categories such as epistemic, affective, moral, cooperative, and instrumental (Barrett 2017; Jaffe 2007; Goodwin et al 2012). In doing so, scholars can explore how speakers situate themselves from the site of the body to more "metastance objects" like language ideologies (Jaffe 2009). For instance, partly due to Peter's relative access to power through things such as their class privilege and educational status, and experiences as a Thai American, Peter let the hospital staff know to skip the use of traditional birther language like 'mom' and 'mommy.' Moreover, Peter did not have top surgery until after he gave birth but dressed in masculine style clothing, had short, cropped hair, and identified as genderqueer and trans prior to, throughout, and after his pregnancy. So, this preventative misgendering attempt, as the previous chapter stressed, was partly put in place because having breasts – even if one's gender expression is masculine – is a primary way gender non-conforming bodies who are parents (and in some cases are attributed *as* the parent even if one is not) are interpreted as "women" through

motherhood because of the stickiness of breasts, motherhood, and afab bodies. Likewise, hospital spaces, especially birthing wards – typically labeled or categorized as “Maternity Wards” or “Women’s Health Centers” – are highly gendered spaces that play an active role in creating and perpetuating medicalized framings of binary gender like that of birthing and breastfeeding discourse which feeds into our linguistic structures (Gill-Peterson 2018). Therefore, by Peter telling the hospital staff to skip the traditional birther language, Peter’s use of epistemic stance (indexing knowledge and perceptions related to an interaction), moral stance (behaving in a way to demonstrate that the speaker can be trusted to collaborate in the activity involved in the interactions), and affective stance (conveys the emotional state of a speaker) constructs an identity for himself that acknowledges he knows his masculine body misfits within a space that overwhelmingly relies on maternal essentialism (Barrett 2017). Yet, through his request he also opens space for the hospital and its staff to legitimize his identity through cooperative stance (physically or verbally orienting toward participation in the activity at hand) by asking the hospital to interact with him differently. So, Peter’s request also constructs the hospital and its staff as one of authority mixed with care and support.

During our interview, Peter spoke about his time in the hospital after giving birth. Two of his and his wife’s close friends visited him, the new baby, and his wife in the hospital, resulting in an awkward exchange among the hospital staff, their friends, and themselves. Peter explained he was lying in the hospital bed and a nurse that had been consistently checking on him, his wife, and his newborn, all the while using the correct language, came in to check on them again when the other couple was present. The nurse looked around and saw Peter’s friend holding the baby and said, “Oh look at that! Dad

holding the baby." Immediately, everyone froze, signaling a disruption to the atmosphere sparked by the nurse's exclamation. Peter stated it felt "bad" and he "got mad" at the erasure of his and his wife's connection to their child. The friend holding the baby uncomfortably mumbled, "Whoa, no. This is not my baby. What??" and continued to awkwardly ask if it was his fault that the nurse messed up because he was there, just adding to the uncomfortable, curdled atmosphere.

Trying to get at what might have occurred within that time and space, I asked Peter what he thought the nurse was thinking when she referred to Peter's friend as "Dad." They said, "I actually have no idea. It could be that she's thinking that he was a sperm donor or could be that my wife was not related and was just like a buddy hanging out with me until the dad could come? I don't know but … yeah, it was weird." Peter's use of epistemic and affective stance suggests that his 'weirdness' stemmed from the nurse relying on heteronormative logic built through biological determinism which was underscored by her use of the family membership category of 'Dad,' positioning Peter on the outside of his self-defined connection to his son and negating his manhood because it is attached to a body assigned female at birth (Wilce 2009; Duranti 1997). So, in many ways Peter's friend is not wrong. Him being there absolutely affected the ways in which the nurse perceived everyone's relation, both literally and abstractly, in the room. But how?

The nurses use of the family membership category of Dad, I argue, partly occurred through the ways family membership categories "are specific, gendered social locations evoking particular expected behaviors in families, but also in interactions with social institutions" (Dozier 2014, 134). Because of these normative expectations Celia

Kitzinger (2005) points out that these family membership categories primarily (if not only) function through the ways in which people use norms to make sense of the activities they observe, not just for themselves, but also for others. In explaining this idea further, she states that "norms are used to 'see a family'" because of the very 'ordinariness' of heteronormativity, which cannot be divorced from the 'family' (479). Laura Mamo argues (2007) "nothing within biology demands the nuclear family. It is a cultural and social system enforced by regulations and reinforced by legal discourse, medical practices, and cultural norms [meaning] the institution of the family [is] the grounds upon which dichotomous gender is reinforced and maintained" (3-4). And so, normative understandings of bodies and discourse, specifically parenting bodies and discourse, can allow certain people to 'pass' as members of categories to which they do or do not belong because of the norm that leads them to be seen that way. Accordingly, Peter's friend was called Dad because "indexical signs may thus convey both membership and the attributes that serve as the basis for categorization of individuals into identity categories" (Barrett 2017, 12). "Dad" despite looking different for different people still carries with it normative associations of relationships, gender, age, race, and so on. And since, "passing" in discursive ways relates to Garland-Thomson's framework of *misfitting* as not everyone is able or willing to 'fit' within linguistic norms that allow people to 'pass' as certain identities, the nurse calling Peter "Dad," (even though "Dad" is not necessarily how Peter imagines himself) but calling the friend "Dad" in conjunction with the affective intonation of "oh would you look at that," demonstrates that 'Dad' is someone who looks masculine and also does not have the (assumed) ability to give birth. In this moment, the stickiness of Dad to bodies assigned male at birth resulted in Peter's

misfitting, upholding the biological deterministic framework that people with vaginas are "not-Dads" and therefore "moms."

Some might state that Peter's experience is just a misunderstanding among those in the room. However, I draw on Peter's experience in the hospital because it highlights the complicated nature of indexicality, gender ideology, and misfitting. Peter's masculine birthing body in a space that is overwhelmingly discursively and spatially coded as maternal and feminine simultaneously positioned his masculinity and manhood as moot and framed 'Dad" as something other than what Peter created. To put it another way, the hospital's use of binary gender parenting logics could not support nor sustain Peter, rendering him a misfit.

The erasure and invalidation of Peter's trans masculine parenting identity – because of the ways in which his body misfits within broader societal discursive framings of what bodies gestate and who cares for children – is also a part of many other participants stories. For example, Xavier, a Black trans man who gestated his child, discussed how prior to his pregnancy most if not all people in his life validated and confirmed his gender identity by using his correct name and pronouns. However, once Xavier had his child in the hospital people positioned him as "mom" almost immediately. He stated, "there was definitely a shift. Some was good and some was bad. Bad being because I was his birth parent, it was like, 'Okay. Well, you're his mom.' And I would be like, 'No, I'm not mom.' That's so hard to explain that to people. They're like, 'Ok. Well, why would you have a kid if you know you're male?' And it's not exactly, you know, cut-and-dry." Xavier went on to explain that it was not just "random strangers in the grocery store" who asked invasive questions about his relationship to his son, even

people who have respected his gender identity from the beginning, people who he considered "friends or close acquaintances who are gay and queer themselves" would ask intrusive questions. Xavier's decision to gestate, within essentialist understandings of racialized gender, discredits his masculine identity and embodiment and exposes the stickiness between afab bodies and motherhood. It also demonstrates how even within LGBTQ+ communities cisnormative ideas of parenting and parenthood continue to marginalize trans parents because of the ways maternal essentialism functions. Similarly, another misfit, Ryder, discussed how they became a misfit because were unable to find any trans inclusive birthing support groups in their area, even if the groups were specifically targeted for queer pregnant people due to the ways all of the language about the pregnant person defaulted to femininity, femaleness, and womanhood whereas the gender neutral language was primarily mobilized to be inclusive for same gender couples, but over looks cisnormativity.

Juan, who I discussed in "Trans Affect Aliens," became a misfit during the processing of medical records at the hospital for his newborn, even with the help of his social workers and birth doula, two resources that many trans parents do not have access to because of fear of state intervention or cost. Prior to his due date, Juan and his wife, who is also trans, made it a point to talk to the hospital records department to ensure that he would be labeled as "father" on his kid's birth certificate despite the fact he was the gestational partner. Being labeled as "mother" on a child's birth certificate for trans masculine parents is a facilitator of potential violence (and in some cases gender affirmation if labeled how the person wants) because of the ways birth certificates legitimize biological and legal connections among parents and children in the eyes of the

state and other institutions like hospitals and schools. The ways birth certificate language functions as a technology of state power to stabilize similarities and differences among "intelligible" bodies similarly mirrors the ways anti-trans "bathroom bills" are mobilized by politically conservative, right-wing groups aiming to police trans women's use of "women's" restrooms. Trans scholars suggest (Beauchamp 2018; Spencer 2019; Murib 2020; Cox et al 2021) "bathroom bills" are less of a commentary on the practices of trans women in women's restrooms, as there is little to no evidence of trans women enacting violence on girls or that cis men are "dressing as women to harm girls," but that it is more so a fear based reaction to the permeability and plasticity of gender, especially for white (trans) people. For instance, the US's Center for Disease Control recent roll out of their updated language on vaccines and pregnancy to state "pregnant people" instead of "pregnant women" sent right-wing politically bent groups into a panic. Right-wing "disinformationists," or people who purposefully spread ill-informed and wrong information, like Ben Shapiro, were quick to "correct" the CDC's language by arguing "women" are the only "biological sex" that get pregnant by tweeting, "'pregnant people' and 'trust the science' are mutually exclusive phrases" (Shapiro, 2021). Shapiro's response specifically, and the reactionary responses more broadly, simultaneously erase trans masculine and non-binary experiences of gestation while reproducing biological determinism through literally asserting pregnancy only occurs to bodies assigned female at birth, and the tweet implies the science and institutions that supports vaccines is bunk because it also supports trans experiences, another bunk science. And so, if gender markers are not correct on birth certificates it can cause the trans individual to experience

dysphoria vis-à-vis their child's birth certificate and/or potentially out the parent as trans, opening them up to onto-epistemological harm.

According to Juan, their trip to the hospital records department before giving birth ensured that their records matched both his and his wife's relation to their child as father and mother respectively. A couple of days after Juan gave birth and were about to leave the hospital, Juan and his wife were called down to the medical records department. Upon arrival Juan and his wife were asked to sign some paperwork. Looking at the birth certificate Juan realized that the office switched Juan to "Mother" and his wife to "Father." Juan noted that these designations don't even make sense because both of their gender identity documents are marked "correctly," meaning they have been updated to reflect their wanted and desired gender. Therefore, simultaneously confused and infuriated, Juan demanded to know why the labels were switched despite being correct before. Ignoring Juan's questions, the administrative assistant kept pushing Juan and his wife to "just sign the paperwork." Recalling the situation, Juan said that

> she was basically saying, 'c'mon, just sign the paperwork!' Acting we're being the crazy ones, insinuating a lot of negative things and threatening that she will sign it for us. We decided to wait in my hospital room for her supervisor. She came with two other employees to our room, with like our three-day old baby, but kept telling us to just sign it the way that it was. And I didn't feel comfortable arguing with someone with a little baby right there. We eventually got a lawyer on the phone, and I just handed the woman the phone, who kept saying, 'you can't do this, this is illegal.'

Even though Juan never clarified what the "negative things" were or how it truly got sorted other than him having a lawyer handle the situation, they ultimately signed the paperwork. But Juan said, "even then we were scared that though we signed it correctly they were going to change it back. So, I don't even remember how it official came out, but that was the whole fight."

Interrogated from the in/visibility of the trans masculine identity and body in parenting spaces, institutions that use written or verbal hegemonic family membership categories (e.g., paperwork, signage, mother, mom, father, dad) such as hospitals exposes how the stickiness of motherhood to bodies assigned female at birth works to construct material-discursive gender meanings that play a part in the grid of intelligibility that upholds biological determinism. And because, as previously argued, white supremacy cannot be divorced from the ways whiteness and other categories of race have been built through the creation of gender, the processes in which gender is enforced also aids projects of white supremacy (Wynter 2003; Snorton 2017). However, as I will show in the next section, language is not unilaterally repressive. Through language's indexical nature it also opens pathways towards more flexible and intra-personal identity categories that are not reliant on white, western conceptualizations of bodies, care, and family. In doing so, it can slowly but surely lead to new ways of doing, which leads to new ways of being.

Section Two | Language as Liberatory

Reed, a participant who gestated their child, but started medically transitioning when their son was ten, discussed that the word 'mom' should not even exist, even if one identifies as a woman. They articulate that having the categories in the first place, similar to Kitzinger's framing, engenders people to reproduce the gender binary and the siloing of those who are capable of bearing children and those who nurture into feminized or feminine roles. Alisa Grigorovich (2014) supports Reed's suggestion by stating "given that culturally and historically pregnancy has been associated with female bodies, the

pregnant male body exceeds the established limits of what constitutes a *proper* body" (89). However, drawing on socio-linguistic observations of trans masculine online communities, Lal Zimman (2014) argues the ways trans masculine speakers talk about and reference 'female' body parts demonstrates there is no natural or concrete division of "female" and "male" but instead a socially constructed one. Zimman critically points out that in the moment of rearticulation and reappropriating various gendered terms for body parts or functions "language provides tools to refashion this binary in ways that better suit a community's vision of how gender should be conceptualized, whatever those vision may be" (14).

Therefore, despite Peter's experience – and others like Xavier, Juan, and Reed – that invalidated his conceptualization and relationship to himself and his family, Peter finds ways to push back against the binary gender and racist frameworks of parenting discourse used by public institutions that bleeds into and supports biological essentialism. To do so, I argue Peter engages in practices of *trans care*. Picking up threads from Malatino's work on care work outside of repro-normative spaces like the family or home, trans care refutes individualism and encourages dynamics that make each other's lives more possible and worth living. It refutes the structures and the systems that do not sustain the life forms of those who are unwilling or unable to reproduce normalize bodies, identities, and practices. So, one-way trans masculine parents engage in transing care is through creating their own family membership categories.

Like other trans masculine participants in my project, Peter refers to himself as something other than 'dad' or 'mom' due to the discomfort associated with the attempt to occupy such loaded family membership categories. In rejecting the most popular

membership categories that do not sustain his material-discursive assemblage, Peter came up with 'O.Pa.' He describes O.Pa. in the following way:

> My kids call me O.Pa. It's an acronym. It's something that I made up myself. It actually stands for "other parents." But also, O.Pa. – like the word oppa in, I think, Korean – is like supposed to be like male brother or like your father. That kind of thing. In German, it supposed to refer to like your grandpa…different cultures where that word is kind of used in the more like masculine term, but the acronym makes it for me. It's not like Dad.

"Dad" for many trans masculine parents is a family membership category that *feels* the most comfortable. However, with it comes a variety of heteronormative expectations that trans parents feel unwilling or incapable of sustaining. "The naturalization of the categories of 'mom' and dad,'" T. Garner (2014) states, "relies on a notion of biological continuity between sex, gender and parenthood, and erases the ways in which sexed bodies are engaged in a process of becoming 'mom' or 'dad' (174). Moreover, the ways in which 'mom' and 'dad' are entrenched in white, western perspectives of care, and thus family, also puts pressure on peoples to engage in language ideologies that are twisted up in legacies of domination that were put in place through language assimilation. Peter's resistance to 'dad' defies and destabilizes this naturalizing process all while being able to reclaim authority over his body through the schema of O.Pa.. And so, Peter's invented membership category of O.Pa. is transnational and intergenerational, reflecting and nurturing his attachment to his Thai identity.

As I discussed at length in chapter two, his racial identity deeply influences the ways in which he imagines himself as O.Pa. Being genderqueer his entire life, Peter was used to, and quite enjoyed, disrupting people's stereotypical picture of masculinity. Yet, when he became a parent, it was difficult for him to signify to outsiders how he was

involved in his family's life due to the differences in his and the rest of his family's skin tone. He remarked,

> I'm kind of a darker Asian because I'm southeast Asian; whereas both of my kids are blonde and white, but they have Asian features, you know. So, they look more like my wife than they do me like super, super blond. Both of them. So, even though they're half Asian, they're white looking. Sometimes when we're out and about and I don't have my arm around my wife or am holding her hand, sometimes people think that I'm sitting by myself and that my wife and the kids are like their own family, like when we go to restaurant and stuff.

This example perhaps seems more fitting to be in the navigating space section. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate language, space, and bodies are inseparable as they function in ways that maintain or disrupt naturalized beliefs of parenting discourse and bodies. Consequently, Peter's construction of a family membership category, that in many ways, does not rely on a bounded or even normative understanding of family and racialized gender demonstrates the productive power of misfitting.

Two other participants who disrupt motherhood and fatherhood frameworks and the normative associations derived from their 'membership categories' like 'mom' and 'dad' are Nathan and Tom. Nathan and Tom are a white, middle-upper class couple living in a mid-sized metropolitan city in a midwestern state. They have two kids Natalia, who is about 6 years old and Michelle who is less than a 1-year-old. Nathan is non-binary and gave birth to Natalia prior to meeting Tom. They became pregnant by sourcing sperm from a donor who is not as involved in Natalia's life as much as Tom is. The way in which Nathan and Tom obtain sperm was through a popular gay dating app. Their presumption and motivation to use the popular dating app was twofold. The first was to avoid all of the restrictions and regulations placed on purchasing sperm at sperm banks. The second was their assumption people who were on dating apps weren't particularly

interested in “keeping their sperm to themselves”. Despite the problematic nature of their assumption, their use of a popular gay dating app for sperm adds to the creative aspect of transing care. Tom is a trans man who medically and socially transitioned many years before meeting Nathan. After several years of living and co-parenting Natalia together, Tom and Nathan decided to have a child together (Michelle). Despite not really being into gestating, Tom gestated because Nathan had a hysterectomy. And so, Tom and Nathan agreed that him gestating was “the easiest and cheapest way to have a kid.” However, when it came to family membership categories, particularly with Natalia, Tom and Nathan had ways for linguistically embodying care relationships through the ways that they mis/fit in the broader categories of ‘mom,’ ‘dad,’ and even ‘parent.’

Nathan, Natalia’s birth parent, remarked that Natalia calls them “Beans” and Tom noted that Natalia calls him “Home Pal.” These family membership categories that are derived from a cartoon character (Beans) and a literal association of home and support via friendship (home pal) index ways in which even the categories ‘mom’ and ‘dad’ hold too much authoritative power and gendered connotations. In fact, Nathan stated “even though it doesn’t really make sense, it replaced mom. And I’m really happy about that cause she has a dad, and I don’t feel like a dad.” As mentioned in chapter two, ‘not feeling like a dad’ is often a catalyst for someone to reimagine their relationship to gender and their body. However, here ‘Beans’ reimagines and allows for space for Nathan and Natalia to redefine how they interact and rely on one another without ascribing gender roles and dislodging care from biological determinism.

Similarly, ‘home pal’ for Tom is an ambiguous label that was detached from ideologies of parenthood and presents a reciprocal atmosphere of respect between Tom

and Natalia. Tom states, "I'm fine with that [being called home pal]. I mean, I think that you don't have to be necessarily labeled a parent to be influential or any of that stuff, but I can't really speak to her experience." Not wanting to speak for her experience, and rejecting labels as a signifier of influence, defies 21st century normative parenting logics that the 'child is innocent,' the 'parent' is not only foundational to a child's development, but also knows 'what's best for the child'. Nathan, Tom, and Natalia work together in a non-hierarchical fashion to refute the individualism bred through the normative American family. They are *transing care*. Barrett (2017) notes that "the construction of the self as a social actor through indexicality is perhaps the most fundamental form of human agency, in that it is through indexicality that individuals assert their position within and across interactional contexts" (16). Natalia, Tom, and Nathan, then, work together, asserting agency to find ways each member of their unit is discursively seen and valued. "Practices of care," argues Malatino (2020), "are always part of an emergent ethos. Because care isn't abstract, but only ever manifested through practice –action, labor, work – it is integral to our ways of doing" (41). In doing so, they open up possibilities for doing family differently in such a way that can one day, lead to not doing family at all. As I and other feminist scholars argue, 'family' functions as a nodal point through which individuals and institutions decide who belongs, who does not, who lives and who dies (Malatino 2020; Aizura 2017; Lethabo King 2018; Spillers 1987). Therefore, trans parents *transing* of care in discursive ways expose ways of destroying, or at least destabilizing, the state. As Hil Malatino (2020) writes, "trans collectives and communities are deeply interwoven and interdependent, enmeshed in a way that makes distinguishing between the roles of career and recipient difficult – they're rotating,

interchangeable, and reciprocal" (24). Trans care refutes individualism and encourages dynamics that make each other's lives more possible and worth living. It refutes the structures and the systems that do not sustain the life forms of those who are unwilling or unable to reproduce normalize bodies, identities, and practices.

Part Two | Navigating Institutional Spaces as a Trans Parent

Section One | Where's the Mom?

In June 2019, on a warm summer morning, I met up with Darren. We agreed to meet outside the building of his part-time job. He is a barista at a regional small coffee chain in Kentucky. And when he is not working there, he works full-time as a social worker. When I approached, Darren was sitting at a round concrete table located on the corner of a busy intersection. He was casually smoking a cigarillo and had on a bright robin's egg blue t-shirt with the words "Trans Health Justice Now" emblazoned on the front in a late-80s retro style. Darren was straightforward and giggly with a round face and smiley eyes. Yet, he had a hardened, skeptical air about him. After a bit of chatting, his skepticism slowly eroded as we talked about his parenting experiences as a Black and Native American trans man in the mid-west/Southern region of the US.

I started each interview by asking: "So, when did you become a parent?" The question, purposefully ambiguous, allowed participants to being their narrative at a time and space they felt was critical to their story. Darren story started when he was 21 years old and working his way through college, several years before transitioning was even a sparkle in his eye. He wound up getting pregnant through "an awkward one-night stand". Things did not work out between Darren and the 'One-Night-Stand,' but for various

reasons (religious, abortion shame, complications with his own mother's death) Darren chose to gestate his fetus. Similar to several other participants, when Darren got pregnant, he mentioned he was not completely cognizant of his trans feelings or desires. He talked about how they were most likely so buried he forgot they even existed. With help from his local drag community that he occasionally performed with as a drag king, combined with his out of place feelings related to motherhood, he decided that 'mommy' was an identity that he no longer occupied and came out to the "world" on Facebook as a trans man. And so, from conception to about 18-months post-delivery, Darren moved about his world as a Black single "mom" to his son Adam until his persistent feelings of "out-of-placeness" were too much to handle.

As Darren and I explored his relationship to Black fatherhood and transness he consistently talked about times and places where his identity as a Black, Indigenous trans dad were devalued and twisted up in ways that could not absorb the complexities of Darren's identities and body, rendering him a *misfit*. I asked him if there were any times in particular that stood out in his mind. He mentioned that he ran for the local school board because when he tried enrolling Adam into the public school system, they challenged his parental connection to him. When I prompted him to talk more about his decision to run for the position, Darren told me this:

> I ran for school board because I almost couldn't enroll my son. They almost didn't let him into kindergarten because *his birth certificate* did not match *my gender name*. So, it was a huge thing of like here's *my certified piece of paper that says my name* has been changed. They're like, "Well, where's the mom?" And I'm like, "I technically am your idea of what the mom is." And they're like, "But you're a man." I'm like, "I'm a trans man." And they're like, "Where's your proof?" And I'm like, "do you want to see my vagina? Like what proof do you need?" Mind you, this is all happening in the main office. Someone had to bring in a supervisor and they had to recreate their system to allow me to enroll Adam in school. Even then it enrolled him incorrectly. It enrolled me as both parents: the

> dad and the mom. I was like, "No. What are you all doing? That is the same person you have listed twice." That was one of the reasons I ran for school board because [the local school system] doesn't have enough knowledge to be accepting of both of those identities as once. (emphasis mine)

Darren's recount of this racist and transphobic story demonstrates how he is a misfit. His misfitting is partly facilitated by the pathologized images of Black motherhood and fatherhood. Numerous Black feminist scholars have pointed out the ways in which ideas of "good" motherhood support and idealize white womanhood which then create systemic structures and imaginaries that demonize Black parenthood. Patricia Hill Collins (2007) argues that there are three implicit themes baked into white perspectives of motherhood: (1) an assumption that mothering occurs within a private, nuclear family household where the mother has sole childrearing responsibilities, (2) a strict sex-role segregation, and (3) motherhood is a full-time occupation. The combination of these frameworks denies and elides the ways white supremacist policies, laws, and representations have shaped Black parents' ability to emulate white models of family. For instance, during the 1970s and 1980s the "War on Drugs" sparked an exponential increase in the policing and imprisonment of people who used substances. This initiative disproportionately impacted communities of color, and especially impacted Black men. Therefore, the ability for Black families to maintain a private, nuclear family model where the mother stayed home full time was practically, if not literally, impossible. However, rather than providing support for Black mothers who were impacted by the decimation of their communities, they were demonized by law makers and news outlets for having to rely on the state for support ("Welfare Queen") and/or chastised for not being in the home enough (Ross 2017; Roberts 1997; Hill-Collins 2007). On the flipside, being incarcerated often meant Black men were unable to partake

in the everyday moments of family building and responsibility which led to the stereotype of the “deadbeat Dad”. These pathologized images of Black motherhood and fatherhood ultimately shape the perception of who will show up to enroll their child in school. This is seen in Darren’s encounter with his son’s administration office, the school’s environment does not sustain the shape and function of his body: Darren is a dad who gave birth to his son. As mentioned earlier, misfitting is fundamentally tied to conceptualizations of built and imagined space. Garland-Thomson (2011) notes, “one of the hallmarks of modernity is the effort to control and standardize human bodies and to bestow status and value accordingly” (598). Accordingly, despite space and discourse’s entangled frameworks, I focus primarily on the affective and political role of space in Darren’s story to understand how the school is a space through which human bodies are controlled, standardized, and valued.

Many things happened at once in Darren’s story. There is no proverbial smoking gun that can clarify how the overlapping mechanisms of transphobia and administrative violence resulted in the jarring juxtaposition of Darren’s Black and Indigenous trans masculine parenting body and the public-school administration office. Darren’s frustrating, and quite frankly, disturbing experience does reveal, however, a variety of complicated, tangled problems trans men and gender non-conforming afab people face when they are the primary caretakers of their children but exist in a society that supports and perpetuates maternal essentialism. I argue maternal essentialism obfuscates the multitude of ways care, bodies, and parenting labor manifests among peoples through the ways in which the ‘maternal’ is deemed and revered as an essential aspect of womanhood, particularly in racialized and classed terms. And so, people who do not or

will not recreate normative understandings of parenting bodies and practices – cisgender, hetero/homonormative, white, able bodied – are punished, shamed, and made hypervisible by systems that define and produce the definition of what a 'mom' and 'dad' is (hooks in O'Reilly 2007; Spade 2014). Moreover, Toby Beauchamp (2018) asserts "it is not that surveillance identifies bodies or subjects that are already deviant, but that surveillance is one mechanism through which gender nonconformity is produced as such" (15). Darren's story, then, shows how the school system furthers and maintains cisgender logics through school enrollment, and administrative paperwork more broadly.

One way Darren's story highlights the school's maintenance of cisgender logics is his encounter of heteronormative assertions and assumptions when he entered the office and the office clerk inquired where the "mom" is. Darren 'passes' as a man due to his many years of taking testosterone and accessing body modification surgeries. The office assistant's emphasis on wanting to know "where the mom is," I argue, rests on several presumptions that collapse the body, racialized parenting stereotypes, 'who belongs where' with 'who does what.' In other words, Darren's identity as Adam's dad did not onto-epistemologically compute for the office clerks because of his Blackness, his bodily capacities, and his role as Adam's primary caretaker. Heteronormativity, of course, cannot be divorced from the ways gender is only legible through racial logics, particularly in the settler nation state of the United States, and because of this, there is no divorcing gender and race because the United States' modern/colonial gender system was formed by objectifying and abjecting Black, Brown and Indigenous flesh (Snorton 2017; Malatino 2020).

To elaborate this point, I briefly put aside trans parenting and turn to overlapping areas of critical race studies and feminist geography. I do so to demonstrate the racializing practice of situating the body - as integral to the production of space - through the "space between the legs" (McKittrick 2006). I draw on these areas to highlight the long, entwined histories of collapsing and conflating the womb and social reproduction with femaleness, which in part, facilitates the misfitting Rosemarie Garland-Thomson theorizes. Specifically, I utilize Black feminist scholars to demonstrate how womanhood and place-making was built through black enslaved flesh and that these practices live on today, resulting in the public school's system demand of "proof" of Darren's trans parenting identity (Weinbaum 2019). Alys Eve Weinbaum (2019) articulates, "as feminists across the disciplines have shown, women's reproductive labor, broadly construed as the reproduction of workers and the relations of production, has powered dominant social and economic formations in diverse geographic locations" (5). Accordingly, racist patriarchal configurations and demands of women's reproductive labor has shaped – if not (re)produced – the modern systems through which people are expected to participate in, making analyses of transness and parenting integral to discussions of space, race, gender, and embodiment.

Broadly, colonizing practices driven by "God, Gold and Glory"[40] in the 15th and 16th centuries situated Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples as objects, as things to be exploited, public entities, and work equipment. White (or white passing) peoples, specifically white landowning men, functioned as masters of their own lives. And it was through geographic domination that white men rationalized their own perceptions of their

[40] Christianity, capitalism and desire to be the most powerful empire

racial and gender superiority (Rose 1993). Geographic conquest, part and parcel to colonizing projects both before and after Geography's academic institutionalization several centuries later, argues that we can view, assess, and ethically organize the world from a stable (white, patriarchal, Euro-centric, heterosexual, classed) vantage point.[41] Supported by economic, social, and political processes the idea of the "stable vantage point" solidified the relationship between identity and place: identity was the determining factor *for* one's place and one's place determined one's identity (McKittrick 2006; Rose 1993).[42]

However, as feminists continuously argue this is not 'natural,' but naturalized. In an effort to destabilize the 'stable vantage point' feminist geographer Katherine McKittrick (2006) illuminates how during the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade "the black female body was viewed as a naturally submissive, sexually available, public, reproductive technology" (44). By placing the enslaved black female body in conversation with theories of Geography[43], McKittrick exposes how the displacement of difference does *not* describe human hierarchies but rather demonstrates the ways in which these hierarchies are critical categories of social and spatial struggle" (McKittrick 2006). By rendering the enslaved black female body as a public object, McKittrick (2006) establishes that "black women's geographies move between two important bodily processes: the social construction of 'the space between the legs' and the racial-

[41] The concept of a stable vantage point relates to Donna Haraway's (1990) development of standpoint epistemologies and the "God's Eye Trick." That, in fact, there is no stable vantage point and no way of ever knowing the 'Truth.'

[42] For example, white women are considered to be altruistic, passive, and caring and so their place within the home makes 'sense' as the home is a respite from the cruelties of the world.

[43] "Geography, then, materially and discursively extends to cover three dimensional spaces and places, the physical landscape and infrastructures, geographic imaginations, the practice of mapping, exploring and seeing, and social relations in and across space" (McKittrick 2006, xiii)

patriarchal uses of the space between the legs" (46). Critically, the space between the legs is not limited to the literal body space. Instead, it is deeply connected to the material environment, the actual movement of bodies, and the construction of gender and racial ideologies. That is, the body is multiscalar. It exists and impacts geographic divisions, or scale, at various hierarchies (psyche, body, home, community, region, nation, globe). The space between the legs,

> genders both the black diaspora and European geographic patterns… it moves *out* of the body and reinscribes the invention of the black woman/woman-slave as knowable reproductive machine; it re-enters her body and shapes her captivity and other geographic material conditions; it subverts inner/outer and active/passive dichotomies by speaking through time/place/histories; it reproduces New World children; and it signifies threat, reclamation and violation

Taking this a step further, and critical to my argument, McKittrick argues "the space between the legs" genders both the black diaspora and European geographic patterns because of how black female sexuality and bodies are used to define and underscore white women's bodies and sexuality as pure and chaste. In other words, white gender dichotomies cannot house the ways in which the space between the legs disrupts normalized gender categories: "male-aggressive, female-passive, male-public, female-private" (McKittrick 2006, 47).

Put differently, rendering the black female slave as public, through the space between the legs, differentiates Black femininity from white femininity and from masculinity. "The feminine flesh is not just blood, muscles, hair, skin; it is also womb, breasts, the space between the legs. These physiological differences," argues McKittrick (2006), "are purchased because they are not white and not masculine, they are materially and ideologically distributed in and amongst slave geographies to fulfill various violent racist-sexist demands" (81). Dorothy Roberts (1997) powerfully points out that "the

white founding fathers justified their exclusion of Blacks from the new republic by imbuing them with a set of attributes that made them unfit for rational thought, independence, and self-control that was essential for self-governance" (8). She continues that "because race was defined as an inheritable trait, preserving racial distinctions required policing reproduction. *Reproductive politics in America inevitably involves racial politics*" (Roberts 1997, 9). C. Riley Snorton (2017) articulates, "the association between being black and having a black mother was critical to maintaining the biopolitical ordering of slavery" (12). Yet, enslaved women, deemed property of their enslaver, were denied motherhood. And as discussed in the first and second chapter, motherhood is what "makes" a woman a woman. For example, white childbearing is generally thought to be a beneficial activity: it brings personal joy and allows the nation to flourish. Black reproduction, on the other hand, is treated as a form of *degeneracy*" (Roberts 1997, 9; original emphasis). The simultaneous mobilization of race as an inheritable trait and subjugation of enslaved women's motherhood demonstrates how motherhood is a constructed category used as a way to control and enact violence through the 'space between the legs.'

In the moment of requiring Darren to 'prove' that he is Adam's birth parent (mom according to the school's definition), despite having the appropriate paperwork that explains the name discrepancy *and* his clarification that he is technically the schools "idea of what the mom is," Darren is forced to subject himself to scrutiny, examination, and ultimately, denial. The school's suspect of Darren's relationship to Adam, I contend, stems from (1) the rendering of Black and Brown bodies as public objects, as available to be being challenged and questioned, and (2) the ways in which gender is dependent on

reciprocity. Consequently, Darren's "proof" that he is both a trans man and Adam's birth parent due to the fact that he has a vagina reduces motherhood to the vagina and reinscribes gender onto and through the body in racialized ways. The re-inscription of reducing the vagina to motherhood (or at least the capacity to give birth) stems from the "long and ongoing history in which those positioned as other, based on the assumption of their inherent difference (or perversion), became objects of the medical gaze" and I put forth the administrative gaze (Mamo 2006). These gazes – reliant on colonial and capitalist undercurrents – create and administer who is what and who deserves what. Moreover, this legacy originates not just from the geographic domination of Black women's bodies and the 'space between the legs', but Susan Stryker (2017) reminds us in *Transgender History* that "many genital surgeries that became available to later generations of transgender people were developed by practicing on the bodies of enslaved back women who were subjected to medical experimentation, and that these procedures were used nonconsensually on the bodies of intersex youth" (52). Again, linking transness to racial domination through the site of vagina.

Ultimately, I argue Darren's experience reduces care (or the potential to care) to gender assignment (i.e., vagina at birth = woman) as the school's demand for the "mom" suggested Darren was incapable or not the right person to be signing Adam up for school. And even when they finally let him sign Adam up for school, the school's administrative system slotted Darren as "mom" and "dad," ultimately misgendering him in the process. As Weinbaum (2019) states, "just as it is the reproductive process that racializes reproductive labor and laborer, this same process can retroactively feminize a body that has not previously been gendered thus" (10). Trans people can either have their gender

affirmed or denied because of the ways normative parenting practices are woven into abstract and material ideas of gender, race, class, ability, sexuality. Those of which are encountered in more than just administrative spaces.

Section Two | The Public Body

In the current socio-economic climate, trans parents, just like non-trans parents, are not only legally responsible for their children, but they are also generally expected to entertain their child. Parenting norms differ and change depending on broader political, economic, and cultural conditions (Jacobs 2014; Mamo 2007). Scholars point out this societal expectation stems from the ways in which current markers of "good" parenting link to how actively engaged the parent is with their kid(s). My participant Kendrick, who transitioned (FTM) a few years after he gave birth to his daughter, Kennedy, is a *misfit* who demonstrates the complicated nature of 'good' parenting expectations. His experiences navigating the enmeshed ways parenting impacts trans lives and how transness impacts parenting reveal how trans parents come up against obstacles that are not just created by state apparatuses. His experiences, along with other participants, illuminate misfitting in public spaces that are imbued with ideas of binary parenthood derived from the body. That is, Kendrick's experiences demonstrate how our bodies are not fixed. They are inherently unstable and are interpolated depending on where the body is and what it looks like.

Kendrick's Christian background pushed him to gestate his fetus even though getting pregnant was an "accident," was something he never felt comfortable doing, and would result in him raising Kennedy on his own. He felt it was his responsibility to "deal

with the consequences," and like Darren, was Kennedy's mom for three years until he no longer felt like "mom" was how he wanted the world to see him. Kendrick's straightforward attitude about responsibility became quite apparent the more we discussed how being an African American, Mexican, and white trans single dad was tiring but rewarding.

Kendrick discussed that as he got older and became aware of his trans identity he encountered compounded moments of racism and transphobia that influence his parenting decisions. For example, Kendrick quickly moved up the ranks at his company despite having no prior experience. However, after three years working at the company he was fired shortly after he came out as trans. Because of getting fired, he told me he tries to "live a life nobody can argue with." When I probed further, he talked a lot about how he legally and socially organizes his life in ways to ensure he "comes out on top" like living near a large liberal city in a conservative state that actively antagonizes trans people through laws and policies like bathroom bills and extensive medical gatekeeping. I argue that Kendrick's drive to "come out on top" is integrally tied to his conceptualizations of his parenting and because of this, his parenting is informed by his trans masculinity, and vice versa. He notes that on a day-to-day basis his trans masculinity typically functions as just another part of his identity: one that he does not flaunt but also tries not to hide. "I have no problem telling people," states Kendrick, "as long as it's not Kennedy's school or school function or at a place where she could be negatively impacted. I don't mind telling people I'm trans." Kendrick's parenting spatial practices are impacted by his trans identity: he will only make his transness visible in spaces that he perceives to be 'safe' for Kennedy.

Kendrick's decision to choose where and when he discloses his transness is posed as a way to protect Kennedy's wellbeing. Yet, his understanding of 'wellbeing' is deeply influenced by racialized and classed discourses that stigmatize trans identity and consistently highlight the potential "negative" impacts transness has upon and through children. To date, there is a growing variety of literature that explores trans kids, parents who have trans kids, and trans parents' impacts upon the family unit, particularly upon their children and partner (include citations). However, it lacks an analysis and understanding of how the trans parent feels *being* a trans parent and how they navigate their transness in relation to their children. As I have noted elsewhere, the parent-child coupling (historically perceived as a mother-child coupling) is a mutually reinforcing system of oppression (Firestone 1970). And until we more clearly understand the ways in which the family organizes racialized gender and how racialized gender organizes the family, we are limited in our ability to transform the basic fabric and hierarchies that allow systems of oppression to exist.

Although Kendrick's ability to decide where and when he discloses his trans status is not as easy and straightforward as it sounds. In the city that he lives just outside of, for example, it is legal for AFAB breasts to be visible in public. So, even though Kendrick has not obtained chest masculinization surgery, he "passes" in other ways from several years of injecting testosterone which deepened his voice, developed his musculature, and caused facial hair to grow. Because of his ability to "pass" Kendrick realized that a majority of the obstacles he faces as a trans parent stem from "summer." Summer for many parents is difficult because children are not in school, and parents are often still at work. Specifically, for Kendrick, Kennedy's love for activities and being

outside is the difficult part because of how his body differently marks him, making him stand out more, especially when Kennedy wants to go swimming.

Standing out is not just about the social discomfort, but also the legal implications related to Kendrick's transness. Like many other trans and non-trans men, Kendrick affirms his gender by wearing 'men's' bathing suits while swimming topless. Trans masculine people who have not had (or will not obtain) top surgery, but want to masculinize the look of their chest, manipulate their chests in a variety of ways to achieve their desired aesthetic. Kendrick masculinizes his chest by taping his breast tissue down and back to flatten the curves of his chest when he goes swimming with his daughter. Yet, like other forms of chest masculinization – surgical or not – when his shirt is off other people can see the "difference," and in this case the tape stands as visual marker indicating that 'something' is different.

Kendrick notes, "I'm ok if I'm taped up" suggesting that his dysphoria from not having a "traditionally" masculine chest is diminished, easing his discomfort at the public swimming hole. Nevertheless, he continues that

> it's more dealing with other people. Because I'm taking my kid to go swimming, there's obviously more parents taking theirs to go swimming. But my kid isn't going to ask questions because this is her everyday life and understands it. But your kid is definitely going to ask questions. And I don't need a parent coming at me upset because I'm negatively affecting their child by making them ask questions while I'm just trying to go swimming.

I asked him if anyone has ever confronted him, and he said that all summer people would come up to him and ask him what was up with the tape. Interestingly, Kendrick mentioned that the inquiry was not about his transness per se. Rather, the people, according to him, were "asking [him] because they think [he's] a cis-dude with some

weird nipples going on or something. They want to know why this random dude has tape all over his torso."

Kendrick's body in the public swimming hole demonstrates *misfitting*. To be clear, I do not deny or negate Kendrick's presumption that people are just interested in his "weird nipples," trans or not. However, it is the very idea that people can and do come up to Kendrick *because* he has 'weird nipples.' Without them, Kendrick would be able to 'fit' in the broader imaginations of cisnormative bodies. Kendrick's body misfits because he is a man with breasts, despite them being taped up. On a day-to-day basis, with his shirt on, the spatial and temporal juxtaposition of Kendrick's body does not invite a questioning of his body and experiences. Yet, when Kendrick's taped chest is exposed the visible nature of his tape disrupts the cis-centric world; similar to that of Darren being in the school's main office.

Trans parents, particularly trans parents of color, continuously assess where and when their transness might pose an issue. Chance – a participant who gave birth to his son, Andre, over sixteen years ago but had his custody taken away by the man who got him pregnant – told me about the time him and his son were in Walmart killing time, looking at different things to buy. After a bit of walking around, they purchased their items and went to leave. Before they could leave, they were stopped by Walmart security and were accused of stealing candles. Chance suggested to me that it seemed the security officers mistook them to be brothers, as Chance was only 18 when he had Andre. Here, we can call on the ways in which Kitzinger discussed how people "pass" as certain membership categories. The security officers demanded proof of identification from both Chance and Andre and were threating to call the police. Since, Chance had been unable

to get his gender marker changed on his license because insurance kept denying his top surgery claim, he was frantic to get out of the situation as he feared the security and the police would escalate the issue due to his trans status. Again, the disjuncture of Chance's visible masculine body with his incorrect license gender marker posed a very real threat for Chance and Andre as the arrival of police often increases the opportunity of violence, particularly for Black men.

However, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson notes being a misfit generates the potential to form, not only a misfit community, but a politics and framework through which a more liberatory world emerges. Chance felt that his transition allowed him to empathize with his son's pubescent feelings now that he takes testosterone. Similarly, Damon is proud of his blackness and transness because it allows him to show his daughter how Black masculinity can and should be performed healthily. For instance, he discussed how he braids his daughter's hair, not only to remind her that her Blackness is beautiful, but that masculinity can and should engage with "feminine things." He aims to empower her by imparting the knowledge and tools to dismantle white logics from an afab perspective. Damon stated that his daughter will come home saying "white" things about her body, like calling her locs "dreads." So, to combat this relative form of white-washing, Damon tells his daughter to "correct them, let them know that they're locs and not dreads." Similarly, Emerson looks forward to being able to stave off the toxic masculinity pumped into boys, and particularly white boys, from infancy. He notes that because he was socialized female, he's better equipped to thwart negative forms of masculinity in his son. Therefore, as Garland-Thomson (2011) notes, "misfits can be agents of recognition who by the very act of misfitting engage in challenging and

rearranging environments to accommodate their entrance to and participation in public life as equal citizens" (603). Ultimately, exploring how trans parents end up in positions of misfitting, by way of Peter, Darren, Kendrick, and other participant stories, I show how trans parenting highlights how cisnormative logic circulates in parenting language and parenting spaces.

Conclusion |

Roxy Pops finished her last book, and the sweaty, increasingly agitated bodies made their way out of the library. I hopped on my bike and rode towards a coffee shop to wait for the next Family Week event. Later that day was the trans and gender non-conforming pool party, an event that was *only* for trans and gender non-conforming families. The closer I got to the event time the word 'only' increasingly caused concern as I continuously questioned my "right" to be a part of the event. Would they question my participation because I was not "trans enough" or a part of a family? How do I signal that I "belong," that I "fit"? Like that of the word "daddy," I increasingly reflected on the ways "trans" and "family" were capacious categories that indexed a variety of ways of being but at the same time functioned in ways that facilitated fits and misfits. So, wearing my swim trunks and toting a backpack stuffed with a towel, sunscreen, and a notepad, I strolled up to the Crown and Anchor, the site of the pool party. Outside the building was a sign stating "THIS IS A GAY ESTABLISHMENT: ALL PEOPLE ARE WELCOME. BUT, WHILE ON THIS PROPERTY, YOU ARE A GUEST OF THE CROWN AND ANCHOR. IF YOU ARE NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THIS, DO NOT COME IN. IF YOU CAUSE A DISTURBANCE, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO LEAVE AND YOU

WILL NOT BE ALLOWED BACK ON THE PREMISES." Adding to my confusion, I questioned, how do we know when, where, and what is a disturbance?

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011) argues that a "fit" is generally a "positive way of being and positioned on an absence of conflict" whereas a misfit, as a result of misfitting, results in one standing out or being visible. So, an argument can be made that a "fit" lacks disturbance, the very thing that the Crown and Anchor, wishes to avoid. Yet, as I have been demonstrating throughout the material-discursive worlds in which trans masculine parents often find themselves lodged in result in their misfitting, and therefore a disturbance for themselves and others, through the ways their parenting bodies and family membership categories do not match with the particular shape and structure of modern American institutions. Therefore, by interrogating trans masculine parents' experiences of misfitting fosters intense awareness of social injustices that point towards a more liberatory politics not based in deterministic presumptions of bodily capacity.

My purpose exploring how trans parents experience misfitting in relation to both transness and parenting, then, attempts to highlight how motherhood is a contested category that functions as a technology of power and sustains the perspective that the family is the ultimate source of love, belonging, and the thing in most need of protection. In other words, motherhood is a site through which power operates and is distributed and reinforces the *need* for the family system. Scholars like Dean Spade and Cathy Cohen articulate the classification of "types" of people by government programs, non-profits and other administrative systems hold people to definitions of racialized gender and class, even though they are purported as "increasing the health, security and well-being". Think: homeless shelters, prisons, jails, foster care, juvenile punishment, public benefits,

immigration documentation, health insurance, Social Security, drivers licenses and public bathrooms. My research adds to that already long list with things like schools, public recreational areas, and birth certificates. According to Spade (2015), these administrative systems and seemingly banal places, "are designed in ways that reflect and amplify contemporary understandings of who is "inside" and who is "outside" of the group …which means they always include determinations of who deserves protection and who is a threat" (75). As a whole, I argue throughout that the misfitting of my participants illuminate the more invisible and naturalized processes through which gender conformity is regulated and enforced because of their mis/fitting. By this I mean people who are able and willing to live up to cis-centric familial structures in conjunction with their ability to perform middle class values and/or have a proximity to whiteness tend to glide, or, at minimum, are allowed to pass through institutional and interpersonal moments that otherwise ensnare and make visible non-normative identities and bodies. This reliance on visibility, a complex notion in and of itself, lends itself to the concept of "being stopped" because of the ways less visible bodies are able to 'blend,' assimilate, extend, or flow into the "skin of the social" (Ahmed 2006, 139). "Stopping", explains Ahmed (2006), "is a political economy that is distributed unevenly between others, and it is also an affective economy that leaves its impressions, affecting the bodies that are subject to its address" (140). She further explains that "being stopped is not only stressful, but also makes the 'body' the site of social stress" (Ahmed 2006, 140). This moment of 'being stopped' reifies dominant structures that allow systems of oppression to exist and relies on a politics of visibility that continuously haunts and harms trans people (Ahmed 2006). Accordingly, I argue trans parents' experiences of 'being stopped,' or as Garland-

Thomson similarly theorizes as *mis/fitting*, fosters an awareness of social injustice and enables us to engage in transformative praxis.

We cannot and do not live outside of our bodies. They are quite literally our vehicle in and through the world. On the one hand, I explore in this chapter the processes through which parenting language, parenting bodies, and parent saturated spaces collapse and conflate categorize the diverse ways bodies show up in the world often reinforcing dominant and hierarchical perspectives of gender. Thinking back to Peter's experience in the hospital and being misrecognized as "not-Dad" denied the radical potential trans parents manifest through their dislodging of bodies assigned a gender at birth and parenthood. One the other hand, other participants' experiences like Nathan and Tom, demonstrate that normative understandings of parenting language can be re-deployed to place self-identification and self-definition at trans parents' material-discursive becoming. This means that trans parents' ability to reclaim authority over their body through manipulating family membership categories generates a radical sense for what is possible for bodies, space and language outside of dominant modes of cis-centric familial structures. Similarly, exploring how the geographic legacy of the 'space between the legs' impacts trans parents highlights the more innocuous seeming systems – like the public school system – that uphold white supremacist understandings of bodies, race, gender, and sexuality. Kyla Schuller (2018) puts forth that "the racial history of sexuality was a pathway for white women's political agency and the cisnormative logic that women's subjectivity was intimately linked with genital morphology" (132). Over time, medical pathologization underpinned by State apparatuses solidified the connection between genitals and personhood. They did so through the growth and use of identity

documents like birth certificates, licenses, social security, and more. Plainly, genitals became a primary site of control and identification that were confirmed by government or medical documents (Stryker 2017). As exemplified by Darren, Kendrick, and Chance, the overlapping mechanisms of administrative violence via identity documentation programs such as birth certificates and trans name change documents – in tandem with an investment in a strict parenting binary derived from normative family structures and the indexical nature of family membership categories – perpetuates racist and sexist practices of mapping reproductive capacities on to and through Black and Brown bodies as a way to maintain structures of white supremacy. That is, a majority of studies focus on the quality of life within current systems and because current systems are enmeshed within frameworks of middle-class values, whiteness, and heteronormativity the trans folks who are able to recreate these respectability politics further entrench the oppression of trans and non-trans people of color.

There are a variety of projects that home in on the complexities of trans parenthood to understand how gender shapes institutions and the impacts that has upon trans parents. Unfortunately, however, the research disproportionately represents white trans masculine people, skewing analyses of trans parenthood. Moreover, the repackaged narratives of trans parents' experiences as "this happened when a trans masculine body entered a lactation space. Here's how to make it more inclusive…" across different areas of trans parenting literature fails to incorporate the ways in which the world is always in motion. It collapses and bypasses the processes that create the conditions through which white, middle-class, cisheteronormative ideals of racialized gender, parenting spaces, motherhood, parenting bodies and language emerge as the 'normal' and 'natural.' Put

otherwise, much of the current literature centering trans parents fail to assess, challenge, and destabilize the structures that onto-epistemologically harm trans parents in the first place. Therefore, by recognizing parenting bodies, gendered spaces, and parenting language are not matter of fact but are inherently unstable and dynamic maintains a "margin of maneuverability…[giving] the feeling that there is always an opening to experiment, to try and see" (Zournazi and Massumi 2003, 211). The following chapter takes up this call by highlighting different ways of "seeing" in order to facilitate valuing different ways of "being."

Chapter Four | "I Guess That Makes Us the Not-chosen Family:" Representing Trans Feminine Parenthood in *Transparent*

"Kinship is closeness but it's also a kind of custody."

- Dion Kagan, *Our Family Religion Transkinship in* Transparent (2015)

Introduction |

In the pilot episode of the Amazon Original series *Transparent* (2014-2019) the central character Mort Pfefferman (Jeffrey Tambor) mumbles into his hands "Oh god. I love you kids. I love you kids. I love you kids" as the camera pans in circles around the kitchen table where Mort and his three adult children, Sarah (Amy Landecker), Josh (Jay Duplass), and Ari (Gaby Hoffman)[44] are eating messy barbeque. Despite the external reminder of his love, it is unclear if the reminder is for himself or for his children. While his torment intensifies, the camera shot lingers on an empty seat at the table long enough to suggest the absence of a fifth Pfefferman member. "Listen, there's a big change going on" states Mort. He takes a deep breath to explain what the change is when his oldest daughter Sarah interjects: "It is cancer! Oh my god. Are you dying?" Launching into a frenzy of concern and cross talk, the kids demand to know if their father has cancer. Ari, unable to find the "right" cancer simply suggests "You know, the one all his friends died from. You know…". Dejectedly, and almost ironically, Mort responds, "Prostate cancer." Startled by his own response, Mort slams his fist on the table, "God, stop it. God, I don't have cancer. You kids want me to have cancer?!" Taking a breath, Mort seems to battle with what he wants to say and spits out, "alright, so…I'm selling the house. I'm done

[44] In season four of *Transparent* Ari explores their own gender embodiment. They ask people to use the name Ari instead of their birth name Ali and switches to they/them/theirs pronouns. Therefore, throughout this paper, I will use Ari instead of Ali to respect the character's most recent understanding of their gender.

with the house." Yet, the camera lingers on Mort's pained look as the kids battle over who has rights to the house and how much it is worth.

The kids eventually leave, and Mort locks the front door behind them. Turning away from the door and with his back now to the camera, he inhales deeply. Upon his exhale Mort saunters down the hallway, strips off his button-down shirt and shorts, and picks up the phone to call someone. With his body obscured by the dim lighting in the hallway, he converses with whomever is on the phone: "Hi. Uh, no I couldn't do it. My god, I had no idea it was going to be so hard. I know. Thank you. I love you too. Yeah, I'll see you tomorrow." As the camera focuses on the clothes left on the floor, Mort emerges in the background wearing a flowy, bright patterned nightgown. Now literally stripped of the masculine persona, and donned with a new set of clothes, the audience gets a glimpse into the "big change going on" that 'Mort' found too hard to tell his kids. It turns out this big change is not (just) about selling the house. Rather, Mort is not Mort: Mort is Maura, a trans woman who has been "dressing up like a man" her whole life (Season 1, Episode 2: The Letting Go).

From absent family members at the dinner table to reproductive pathologies, land-cum-fatherhood patriarchal emancipation metaphors, and the projection of kinship as restrictive to open communication, this chapter is broadly interested in the overlapping trans and parenthood themes nestled in this relatively quick exchange among the Pfeffermans, a fictional, discombobulated, Los Angeles based, Jewish family consisting of Maura, her ex-wife, Shelly (Judith Light), and their three adult children, Sarah, Josh, and Ari. Primarily set in contemporary times, *Transparent* attempts to reimagine how trans stories are told by providing viewers with nuanced representation of trans

femininity and parenthood that strays from previous mainstream representations of transness and parenthood which flatten, dehumanize, and satirize the complicated lives of trans parents, like *Transamerica* (2005) and *Normal* (2003).

Representation, a central concern of this chapter, and visibility, a running theme throughout my project, are primary means which many scholars and activists believe move societies towards social change. Believing that representation provides more visibility and visibility equates to social change is a belief that often does more harm than good (Gosset et al 2015; Neo Chen 2019). Representations like *Transamerica* (2005) rely on and perpetuate stereotypical and harmful narratives of gender that reify cisgender imaginations of transness through the ways trans characters are reduced to their genital configuration to either prove or refute one's "real" gender. Trans feminist film scholar Eliza Steinbock (2019) calls this tactic "the reveal." Like my previous chapters suggest, rooting a binary framework of gender in genitals, oft represented by the reveal, constructs trans people as "evil deceivers and make-believers," a damning perspective locking trans people into "being either visible as a [gender] pretender, or invisible and risk forced disclosure" (Bettcher 2013; Steinbock 2019, 5).Many feminist media scholars argue this representational practice is not separate from the "real world" (Hall 1997, Mulvey 2009; Gill 2000; Halberstam 2005; Steinbock 2019). Accordingly, representations of trans people – partly shaped by the "real world" – also ooze out into the "real world." This practice shapes people's perception of trans identity that become subtly and overtly reinforced by various forms of material and ideological violence like repetitive assertions "only women have wombs," talk show hosts continuously asking trans parents about their genitals, and laws defining a birther strictly as a "mother," like what happened to British

seahorse dad, Freddie McConnell in 2020 (Grigorovich 2014; Vasquez 2020).[45] I contend that essentialist beliefs of bodies and gender represented on television – combined with the role genitals play literally and figuratively in reproduction – aids transphobic perspectives claiming trans people are not, cannot, and should not be parents.

I showed in chapters two and three that analyzing trans masculine parenting experiences at individual and institutional levels more accurately maps how parenting bodies, parenting language, transness, and the American family system create and maintain hierarchical differences based in white, middle-class, ablebodied, cis-heteronormative models of thinking and being. According to the data I collected, trans masculine parenting experiences illuminate the affective contours of familial, especially maternal, identities that (1) impact how trans masculine people imagine themselves as both parents and trans and (2) influence the types of parenting bodies the American family system broadly deems valuable and worthy of social capital. Similarly, their experiences in family saturated spaces like hospitals, schools, and recreation areas mark how familial language and spaces shape hegemonic perspectives of racialized-gendered embodiment through cisnormativity, the perception that cisness is "normal" and "natural," thus impacting all peoples conceptualizations of themselves, others, and material-imagined environments (Pyne 2011). building off previous chapters, this chapter uses *Transparent* as an American cultural artifact, a piece of media reflecting and producing information about American culture, to bridge the lived experiences of my trans masculine participants with the representation of trans feminine parenthood in *Transparent*.

[45] Even the 2022 National Women's Studies Association call for papers used biological deterministic language by referring to wombs as "women's wombs."

Some critics might argue that Maura's privileged white, upper class trans feminine parenthood, a social location not accessible by many members within the trans community, simply maintains classist and racist frameworks retold through palatable white trans women's stories about motherhood (Rowden 2018). This is a salient concern of mine due to the lack of nuanced representations of Black trans women and trans women of color in the series. According to several show critics, the Black and Brown characters throughout the series, except Maura's friend, Davina, who is a trans Latinx woman and a recurring character, function as vehicles for growth for the Pfeffermans rather than standalone, developed never to be seen again (Horvat 2019; Villarejo 2016). Anamarija Horvat (2019) argues this flattening of racialized gendered complexities is partly seen through the misguided way *Transparent* explicitly refers to and uses 'intersectionality' and represents God as a Black woman to mark itself as part of current social justice discussions (Season 3, Episode 3: To Sardines and Back). Horvat's analysis highlights that the series' sporadic and "one-off" portrayal of the Pfefferman's grappling with the always already entwined dimensions of their racial and classed privilege through historically marginalized characters "risks reifying categories of race and class as monolithic" (470). Moreover, *Transparent* occurs "within what can only be described as 'a carefully constructed white world," often defined by the Pfefferman's access to material wealth, but never explicitly discussed," and because of this, whiteness serves as a "hidden referent" (12).

White-dominated trans perspectives are disproportionately represented in trans media. Therefore, I use *Transparent*'s carefully constructed white world as a point of interrogation, exploring what *Transparent*'s representation of motherhood and trans

feminine parenthood through Maura's privileged character marks the contours of, not to stabilize white trans perspectives but to destabilize them. I ask: due to the ways motherhood primarily operates through bodies assigned female at birth, combined with the lack of complicated representations of trans parenthood, what is it that navigation through maternal essentialism exposes and/or conceals regarding systems of power like cisnormativity and white supremacy? For instance, at almost seventy years old, Maura's inability to outwardly and visibly explore her transness with her family, telling them she's selling the house instead, points to how "cis-straight time" – cis-heteronormative perceptions of the life course that anticipate and expect certain milestones like marriage, buying a house, having children, etc. – trumps Maura's decision to discuss her desired gender transition (Hess 2017). In other words, since it was a "logical" step in Maura's aging timeline, one deeply influenced by class privilege, she could fall back on wanting to "be done with the house," a site she no longer feels that she "belongs," and sidestep coming out to her children.

I am not suggesting that coming out to her children was required or something Maura *had* to do, as coming out is fraught with conceptualizations and frameworks that preemptively situate non-straight and non-cis ways of being as "abnormal." Alternatively, I am interested in how power affectively moves through the family system shaping what it is people *feel* like they should do and ultimately decide to do. In this chapter, then, I argue the ways *Transparent* represents how Maura's transitioning as a parent is not a 'dad' simply becoming a 'mom' or vice versa. Transitioning as a parent, I demonstrate in the sections below, is more of a negotiation and navigation of naturalized ideas about parenting bodies, gender roles, and family among *all* family members and not just for the

person transitioning. Accordingly, I follow feminist scholars who see embodiment as intertwined, shifting, flexible, negotiable, and not fixed to illuminate how the family system ultimately manifests not as an innate, biological system, but as "regimes of practices and knowledge" (Spade 2014, 3; Puar 2006; Haritaworn 2015). When framed in this way, Marquis Bey (2022) eloquently notes the construction that is 'the body' is no longer stuck to its biological anchors. Rather, the body "*becomes* largely through hegemonic structures" promoted by projects of Western civilization "that trek along on axes of epistemology, ontology, ocularcentrism, and neuronormativity." Understanding these axes that value ableist ways of being and thinking allow us to more accurately map how discourses of race, gender, sexuality, work to privilege some and oppress others (Bey 2022, 9).

Chapter Outline |

Transparent's nuanced representation of trans experiences invites the use of the concepts I mapped out in the previous chapters: the *affect alien* and the *misfit*. This chapter interrogates the moments in which Maura becomes an affect alien and a misfit; moments that I argue expose hegemonic boundaries that work to privilege cis passing bodies, especially those that are white or light skinned (Bhanji 2013). And so, seeing Maura's story not as the representative model of trans feminine parenthood but an investigative tool allows me to sketch out the complicated and permeable boundaries of maternal subjectivity that helps produce and manifests through parenting bodies and familial language.

After situating theories and methods of trans media studies that I use in this chapter, part one, consisting of two sections, centers the affective contours of the

Pfefferman family. Like "Chapter Two: Trans Masculine Aliens" where I explored trans masculine experiences of affect alienness in relation to transness and parenthood, the first part situates how the Pfefferman family works to include Maura as a mother through the exclusion Maura's friend Davina. Section two draws on a later scene in the series highlighting how people not only need to navigate and create imagined boundaries for their family unit, but how imagined boundaries are navigated *within* a family unit itself. Focusing on these two scenes and reading them through an affective lens we see how family identity categories are not static, but contextual, co-created, and navigated together. This analysis disrupts popularized perceptions of the family system as "natural" and "biological."

Part two of the chapter, also broken into two sections, centers the concept of the misfit, like that of "Chapter Three: Maternal Misfits," to highlight the ways Maura as a trans feminine parent misfits within parenting language and public spaces like the public bathroom and the birthing center. Her experiences as a trans feminine parent illuminate the slippery boundaries of motherhood and parenting bodies that work to include some into the family system through cisnormativity based in conceptualizations of motherhood and fatherhood, for what I argue, bolsters the affective power of the family.

Transing Media |

In an interview, Joey Solloway, the creator of the *Transparent* series, discussed how the inspiration for their show developed out of their personal experiences with their parent who transitioned from "Harry to Carrie" later in life (Reynolds 2020). This might help explain why the series intensely focuses on and explores familial plotlines across geographic location and time, especially because Solloway sometimes co-writes with

their sister Faith Soloway. Solloway, who underwent their own gender transition several years after their parent and are now non-binary, notes "I went from being incredibly filled with shame about this idea that my parent could be trans to … five or six years later, identifying as trans myself and wanting to be … part of the movement" (Reynolds 2020). In 2014, just months prior to *Transparent's* premiere, Time Magazine published Laverne Cox's cover story, marking the oft mentioned "Trans Tipping Point." Accordingly, *Transparent* debuted on Amazon Prime at a time when trans experiences were obtaining greater mainstream visibility straying from the overwhelmingly violent representations of trans women as murdered sex workers. *Transparent*'s decision to center a trans character, an aging septuagenarian at that, rather than writing one as a secondary or tertiary role, made the series the first of its kind, disrupting stereotypical perceptions that transness equates to death or something that happens primarily with kids (Hess 2017). By the series end in 2019, multiple media platforms endorsed several television series that had central or reoccurring trans or gender non-conforming characters like *Russian Doll* (2019), *Pose* (2018-2021), and *Orange is the New Black* (2013-Present).

Since its debut, cultural critics have described *Transparent* as a dramedy that centers the marginalized experiences of women, queers, trans people, Jews and older people (Halberstam 2016; Hess 2017; Funk and Funk 2016; Seymour 2019). Its flawed characters combined with realistic and surreal plot lines, insists media critic A. L. Parsemain (2019), invites viewers to gain a better understanding of what it is like living as a trans woman in a transphobic society. Bridget Bedard, the head writer for the show, pointed out that in making *Transparent* a "trauma-dy" – a comedy that makes characters believably flawed – allows the creators to responsibly reflect and advance the trans

movement and not dabble in reinforcing negative trans stereotypes: "like, a trans woman looking in the mirror and crying – don't do that" (Levy 2015). However, Natasha Seymour (2019) sees *Transparent* and its use of the "transition narrative, which aims to make transgender lives visible (and consumable) to an audience of trans and non-trans folk," forces trans subjectivity into normative frames of time and place. Transition narratives flatten the lived reality of transness across social identity.

Flattening the complexities of transness is a practice not unfamiliar to feminist and queer media studies (Keegan 2016). TJ Billard (2020) contends "'transgender' is often picked up as an 'extension' of queer and/or feminist scholarship, as a new object of study belonging to these existing theoretical domains" (4500). However, on the whole, gender and women's studies heavily invests in thinking through how "men and women are discrete categories and the former subordinates the latter" and "queer studies is, at its core, invested in the deconstruction of the male/female binary as a means to 'unraveling heteronormativity'" (Billard 2020, 4500). Neither approach accurately captures the ways in which transness and trans bodies manifest and affect processes of power. Accordingly, Billard and Erique Zhang (2022) further point out when "queer and feminist theorists read trans media representations as 'good' or 'bad' based on their amenability to a counter-subordination or anti-normativity paradigm, trans subjectivities become a means to an end in furthering queer and feminist investments" (196). Plainly, a "good" trans representation are destabilize either patriarchy or straightness but are not so much invested in how transness in and of itself is a category that impacts the way people see themselves and others (Keegan 2020).

For these reasons, trans media scholars have called for different ways of "seeing" to produce and value different ways of "being." One of the first theorists to take this on was J. Jack Halberstam (2005) and their concept of the "transgender gaze," theorized from the films *The Crying Game* (1992), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), and *By Hook or By Crook* (2001). Halberstam presents a "way of looking at the world from within the transgender body" (Chapuis 2016, np). Halberstam's theorization – the transgender gaze – places agency and knowing within the transgender body. He does so because the transgender body was historically representationally mobilized as a "a metaphor for unstable identities and associated transgenderism with illegibility and monstrosity" (Chapuis 2016, np). Therefore, by theorizing from within the transgender body and thinking through how being trans is a different way of seeing and being in the world opened up possibilities within media scholarship that did not cast transness as "abnormal," but as a mode of critique.

Coming out of this work, other trans media scholars (Snorton 2017; Billard 2016: Serano 2007; Cavalcante 2016; Hamison 2020) explored numerous ways trans representations have been misguided, ill-informed, and/or contributing to "good" or "bad" forms of trans representation. Yet, Halberstam's concept, along with other evaluations of trans representation as either "good" or "bad" overwhelmingly maintain the use of "the reveal" as a central point for thinking through transness. This tactic consistently limits scholars' ability to break free from logics of being illusory ("evil deceiver or make believer") due to the ways the cisgender spectator is more often than not made aware of how the reveal feels, "rather than how it feels to *be* trans" (Steinbock

2019, 5; emphasis mine). In this moment, the trans experience and trans character only becomes legible and "real" through representations aimed at a cisgender audience.

To contrast Halberstam's transgender gaze, the reliance on the reveal, and oversimplifying the discursive complexities of transgender representation vis a vis "good" or "bad," Eliza Steinbock (2019) offers up a new theory of transgender embodiment that explores processes of film making as fruitful for imagining the practiced and imagined forms of transitioning. Broadly, Steinbock notes that diverse trans embodiments and identities emerged "together with phantasmagorical visual practices," the practices of ancient or modern optical illusions that attempt to collapse truth and illusion within cinematic practices (27). The phantasmic, created by cutting and suturing film and playing with light, lends itself as an insightful and different model through which transness, defined by Steinbock as a continuous and "a wide variety of *bodily effects* that disconnect a series of 'normative linkages'" among bodies and gender assigned at birth becomes legible (2). Scholars similar to Steinbock such as Susan Stryker (2006) argue that thinking through transness and phantasmagorical visual practices, or cinematic film practices more broadly, engenders the opportunity to see the "shimmering boundary between the real and virtual, the fantasized and the actualized" (17). Seeing the shimmering boundary disrupts the presumed static juxtaposition of fantasy versus reality, gender versus flesh, "good' versus "bad" representation (Stryker 2006, 17). Gender, in this framework, appears as a mirage, as gradations and intensities that depend on the angle of the gaze, rather than a dichotomous entity visually derived from genitals or biology like previous theorizations of trans representation.

Therefore, Steinbock constructs their concept of the *shimmer* or *shimmering* to make visible how, when, and which forms of recognition “produce being seen or what optics render visibility” than depending on a binary visual paradigm of either/or (18). This conceptualization facilitates a more liberatory politics because it focuses on movement, change, and transition, or affect. Later in this chapter, I use the shimmer for my own analysis of Maura’s trans parenting experience, but for now, suffice it to say that the critical aspect of shimmer/shimmering seeks to make visible the affective processes “guiding ontological movement and change” (Steinbock 2019, 12). By paying attention to the affective processes, trans onto-epistemologies emerge as *process oriented*, rather than appearing as an aberration to “cisgender” genders.

Steinbock’s intervention echoes critical trans media studies scholars who repeatedly argue that increasing visibility, and visibility as a concept in and of itself, does little to aid in the survival and flourishing of the most vulnerable trans people (Gossett, Stanley, Burton 2016; Steinbock 2019; Neo Chen 2019; Cárdenas 2016). In fact, trans media scholars often suggest that the drive for trans visibility to combat things like transmisogyny, the intersection of transphobia and misogyny, often increases transphobic violence, since transnormative representations of transness are traditionally couched in white, middle class medical models of transness that are unattainable for many poor trans women such as facial feminization surgery, breast augmentation, and laser hair removal (Plemons 2017; Aizura 2018; Billard 2020). Scholar Elías Cosenza Krell (2017) argues for updated language and frameworks that capture the experiences of trans women of color and Black trans women that also recognizes the oppression trans women in general face *as* trans women. Krell suggests *transmisogynoir*, an amalgamation of Moya Bailey’s

misogynoir – the intersection of racism, antiblackness, and misogyny Black women experience – with transphobia. Utilizing Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Krell also suggests *racialized transmisogyny* to describe the oppression non-Black trans women of color face as another way to combat the whitening of transness and feminism that is reflected more broadly in feminist, queer, and trans media scholarship.

Perhaps it seems counter intuitive that I invoke the call for scholars and activists to pay greater, and more nuanced attention to Black trans women and other trans women of color, but then proceed to focus on representations of white, upper class, trans womanhood. Yet, as I have been arguing, by placing the ways in which Maura becomes an affect alien and misfit – political identities that center bodily and the environment material-discursive becomings – makes visible the moments in which systems of power like white supremacy and maternal essentialism work through trans identity, motherhood, and parenting bodies that might otherwise go unnoticed. This means then that increasing trans representation without aiming to abolish similar oppressive institutions that also feed off visibility politics – like the prison industrial complex, immigration policies, medical industrial complex, and the family – mimics the same neoliberal belief that just slapping an LGBTQIA+ flag on a special section of the prison ward equates to LGBTQIA+ progress. Accordingly, as Kara Keeling (2007) argues paying attention to and interrogating visibility politics through visual media is critical as "visual media are crucial sites for the study of racism, sexism, and homophobia because they do not only represent cultural norms but also work to construct them (3-5). In the sections that follow, I attempt to think with and through the affect alien and misfit to move us beyond the

issue of "good" or "bad" representation centered on "the reveal" and move away from the trans (neo)liberal logics of visibility politics.

Part One | Affect Aliens

Section One | "I'm sorry, it's tradition that the mother of the family lights the candles"

The camera pans along an elaborately set dinner table where Sarah, Maura's eldest daughter, announces "now that the sun has gone down, cell phone rule is in place!" Maura sits at the head of the table and Davina, a trans Latinx woman and Maura's friend from the local LA LGBTQ center, sits to Maura's right. Sarah sits to her left and Sarah's kids, her new partner, Tammy, and Tammy's ex-partner's daughter are all also sat around the table (Season 1, Episode 6 "The Wilderness"). Those sitting around the dinner table – a kinship object giving "form to the family as a social gathering, as the tangible thing over which the family gathers" – are a mishmash of "biological" and "non-biological" people gathering to not only 'unplug' from technology and 'plug' into one another, but to observe Shabbat eve, the Friday night before Shabbat (Ahmed 2010, 46).

Before digging into the meat and potatoes of this part, I need to explain the importance of Judaism for the Pfeffermans. Judaism plays an enormous role in the Pfefferman's lives (Caplan 2021; Alpert 2017). Isaac Butler (2017) points out that "*Transparent* isn't just Jewish because of its subject matter, or its characters, or its setting. It's Jewish in its sensibility and concerns, even as both can prove hard to define" (np). So, according to scholar Jennifer Caplan (2021) Jewishness for the Pfefferman's, and specifically the cultures and practices of US Ashkenazi Jewishness, is not necessarily about religious practice. Instead, the Pfefferman's mark a shift toward Jewishness as

being aligned to social or behavioral practices. Caplan (2021) highlights how in the show "everyone refers to 'Jewy' stuff all the time, as if vaguely confused by their identification with a religion" (375). Critics of the show suggest because of their vague confusion and their lackadaisical synagogue attendance the Pfefferman's are only "culturally Jewish," essentially discrediting how Judaism shapes the character's lives. Caplan insists, however, the suggestion that the Pfefferman's are only "culturally Jewish" negates the ways the Pfeffermans mobilize – intentionally and unintentionally – Judaism and their Jewishness as a vehicle for exploration, understanding, and performance. For instance, food studies scholar Rebecca Alpert (2017) finds that "the exaggerations of each character, expressed by their consumption and production of [Jewish] food, operate as a way of exploring and expressing cultural norms and expectations. And they illustrate generational changes in perceptions not only about food but also gender, transition, and sexuality" (132).

Jewishness as represented in the series, then, is part of the affective atmosphere that shapes the very form of the Pfefferman family. Johnathan Freedman (2016) notes "*Transparent* stands at its most Jewy: in its insistence on perplexities. [He asks,] what could be more reflective of the situation of Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness at the current moment where everything – biology, culture, social norms, ritual meanings – is shifting daily?" So, playing with the series already shifting atmosphere, I argue it is the Pfefferman's shifting perplexities that demonstrates how the family system and 'mother' are not innate biological identities but produced through affective attachments that become stuck to certain bodies. These attachments mark the boundaries of when, where, and who is and is not considered "family" and who can and cannot be a mother. Paying

attention to boundaries, and by extension, rhetoric of 'inclusion,' argues Krell (2017), helps illuminate the ways in which boundaries are part and parcel of imperial and colonial logics. He argues that "there has been an 'inside' only as long as imperial logics have determined an outside," and because of this, "inclusion" – rather than destabilizing or questioning – is framed as the solution to the consequences of racist, classist, and patriarchal structures. I explored in "Chapter Two: Trans Affect Aliens," that the ways in which we are expected or directed to feel in order to align with hegemonic structures of feeling – loving ones changing "maternal" body, pride in motherhood – does not always match up with the way we *do* feel. In these moments of affective disjuncture, the person who cannot or will not align with broader affects situates them as an *affect alien*: "those who are alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect the world" (Ahmed 2010, 164). Paying attention to the alien affects within *Transparent* provides models with which we can explore the often overlooked and invisible ways family structures of feeling shape the ways we imagine ourselves, others, and our environments.

So, let us return to the section's opening example: standing up from the table, Sarah suggests, "Um, why don't we do the candles?" In this moment, the viewer is primed to believe that due to Sarah's desire to "do the candles" and her proximity to them she will be the one to light them. Yet, as she pulls a match from the book she turns to Maura and says, "And Moppa, you wanna do the honors?" With a surprised look on her face, and replying with, "Really?," Maura is clearly thrown off by the suggested ask. When Maura stands to light the candles, Davina exclaims, "Can I help? I would *love* to help!" Excitedly talking over one another, Sarah and Maura quickly shut Davina down.

Figure 4: Maura Lighting Shabbos Candles (Season 1, Episode 6, "The Wilderness")

Sarah states, “It’s…I’m sorry. It’s tradition that the *mother* of the family lights the candles.” And Maura quietly mumbles, while gesturing towards Davina, “No, you can’t.”

Here, two primary things occur that support and destabilize naturalized beliefs about familial, especially maternal, boundaries from an affect perspective, illuminating familial boundary making that marks systems of power. First, Maura is brought into the folds of womanhood through the Shabbat ceremony by lighting the candles through Sarah’s ‘sorry’ statement in response to Davina asking to help with the candles. According to Jewish law, Shabbat commences several minutes before sunset where two candles are lit to mark the occasion. Customarily, the mother (or woman) of the house, lights the candles and sings prayers, unless a man lives by himself. Motherhood, then, circulates through the Shabbat ceremony, affecting how individuals come to understand their racialized gender, their body, and the Pfefferman family boundaries since some genders are allowed to do things and others are not. Ahmed (2010) reminds us that embedded within the ideology of family is that “to inherit the family is to inherit the demand to reproduce its form” (46). This demand occurs, in part, through the family system’s affective value “as being necessary for a good or happy life,” gaining value as

something to be desired through repetition and habit (Ahmed 2010, 46). Furthermore, the presumption of attaining a good and happy life is through the underlying "instructive" quality of Shabbat. Jennifer Caplan (2021) points out that Maura mixes up the Hanukkah blessing with the Shabbat blessing. Because men and women light the candles together at Hanukkah, Caplan explains, Maura's messing up "is the haptic memory Maura has for performing this ritual" (376). Therefore, Maura is both symbolically and practically "becoming the matriarch of the family through the learning of Jewish rituals that are new to her," especially because Shelly is ignored and denied space within the Pfefferman family unit throughout the series (Caplan 2021, 376).[46] However, for Sarah, the rules of who is considered the "mother of the family" do not rely on Maura's biological body. Rather, Maura's inclusion in the Shabbat ceremony maintains familial boundaries through motherhood. That is, it is not necessarily that because Maura *is* the oldest woman in the household that she lights the candles, but rather, the very *process* of lighting the candles *produces* her *as* the oldest and a woman in the house. Ultimately, by lighting the Shabbat candles Maura moves from a liminal, perhaps more radical space of "Moppa," a literal conglomeration of mom and papa, to "the mother of the family."

The structure of Shabbat, then, serves as a condition of possibility through which individuals come to understand their racialized gender, their body, and the expectations of said racialized gender and roles. "Classifications," argues Laura Mamo (2007) in her research about lesbian subjectivities, "do not arise in nature, but are constituted by social and cultural systems of meaning, codified in cultural rules that define what is normal and abnormal. These discourses in turn shape subjects – and their identities – through their

[46] This is well represented in the final season (Season 5) of the series. The song, "Your boundary is my trigger," by Shelly reveals she wishes her children would have never been born (Kornhaber 2019).

labeling practices" (9). According to the framework set forth by Sarah – "I'm sorry. It's tradition that the *mother* of the family lights the candles" – Maura's label as "mother of the family" marks the others sitting at the dinner table as "not-mother of the family." Plainly, if Maura is considered *the* (and not *a*) "mother of the family" – at least in this specific place and time as Shelley is still alive – no one else can be considered "mother of the family." This supports Maura's womanhood in ways that are not reliant on biological notions of gender, offering up for viewers alternative representations to transnormative narratives, because the transnormative narratives often rely on medical or legal transitioning before the trans person can be "seen" as trans. On the flip side, however, Maura's occupation of the 'mother' subject position upholds the notion that only women can be and are mothers. This representation of trans feminine motherhood partly aids in the destabilization of biological determinism, an important endeavor. But it also bolsters the association of motherhood to womanhood and solidifies the belief that families are only allowed to have one "mother of the family."

The second moment in the scene that I situate is Davina's request to help light the candles.[47] At the same time that Maura is invited into womanhood, Davina positions herself as desiring to participate in the candle-lighting ceremony. She states, "Can I help? I would *love* to help!" Davina's proclamation (I would love to help) "becomes a way of bonding with others in relation to an ideal, which takes shape as an effect of such bonding," and because of that, Davina desire helps solidify the idealized Pfefferman family (Ahmed 2014, 124). The power of love, or "the intimate event," as Elizabeth Povinelli (2006) describes, "lay in its ability to connect the micro-practices of certain

[47] A 'sorry statement' or otherwise known as an apology is a speech act, a performative utterance where certain conditions must be met by an action (Wilce 2009; Ahmed 2014).

forms of love to the macro-practices of certain forms of state governance and certain forms of capital production, circulation, and consumption" (191). That is, Povinelli explains love is the vehicle through which social institutions and individual responsibilities that maintain these facilitate an absorption of liberal institutions and discourses that produce and maintain poverty, trauma, and death for historically marginalized peoples.

This alignment, however, requires the existence of others who have failed the ideal. In other words, Ahmed (2014) argues "love is crucial to how individuals become aligned with collectives through their identification with an ideal." So, Sarah's apology that it is *the* mother of the family who lights the candles followed by Maura's action of lighting the candle not only makes Maura the mother, but it also impacts who is seen as a Pfefferman and who is not. I point this out because Davina has the ability to help Maura with the ceremony. Maura moved out of the Pfefferman home shortly after she came out to her family, leaving her house empty. Similarly, with Shelly's physical absence at the ceremony it opened the onto-epistemological space for the Pfefferman's to play within and outside the confines of the Jewish tradition because for all intents and purposes there is no "woman of the house." The Pfeffermans can let Davina participate in the ceremony seeing as they already manipulated the process with Maura. Denying Davina's participation in a custom that was already expanded to include Maura, a white passing trans woman, as the "mother of the family," but excludes a Latinx, "53-year-old, ex-prostitute, HIV-positive woman with a dick" speaks to the more insidious, veiled ways white supremacy functions through the family system, ultimately marking the boundary of who can and cannot be considered a Pfefferman.

Section Two | "Maybe you guys want to call me, I don't know, Mom?"

To celebrate Maura's 70th birthday Ari and Josh, who have been living in the Pfefferman family home, invite Maura and her loved ones (a combination of chosen and "not-chosen" family) over for drinks, dinner, and cake (Season 3, Episode 3: To Sardines and Back).[48] When Maura and her current partner, Vicki, walk into Maura's former residence, Josh immediately exclaims, "The birthday girl is here! The birthday girl is here!" The scene cuts from Maura smiling brightly, dressed in a dark olive colored dress with a matching leather purse, wearing chunky, yet understated gold and green jewelry to Ari, Josh, and Shelly standing slightly gob smacked at Maura's makeover and her likeness to Shelly. After Maura kisses and hugs Josh and Ari, Shelly greets Maura with, "Wow! Look at you! My…We have exactly the same haircut" to which Maura snidely replies, "I don't think so" and briskly walks away to greet the other guests after Shelly gets an awkward picture of the two of them. Ahmed (2014) writes, "identification is a form of love…it involves the desire to get closer to others by becoming like them. [However,] becoming like them obviously requires not being them in the first place" (126). Clearly, Maura is not Shelly, fueling the animosity behind Maura's snide and snappy "I don't think so." Ahmed continues though that the process of identification

[48] Intriguingly, the structure of the birthday party and objects that the guests interact with (a table, candles, singing) are strikingly similar to the Shabbat service scene analyzed earlier in this chapter. A birthday party, much like Shabbat, is a ritualized practice and custom where people come together to celebrate the life of the honored guest. The birthday party setting encourages guests to follow a traditional pattern: a table that guests sit around to sing "Happy Birthday" and eat cake. Despite their resemblances, Maura's inclusion into the Shabbat service relies on the exclusion of Davina to create and reinforce the Pfefferman family boundary. The exclusion simultaneously positions Maura as the 'mother of the family' -- affirming her womanhood and linking womanliness to motherhood -- without attaching it to biological capacities of the body. But the exclusion also underscores the family system's undoing the radical potentiality of emancipating gender from its biological chokehold.

Figure 5: Shelly and Maura take a picture (Season 3, Episode 3: To Sardines and Back)

requires the undoing of the distinction that it requires: "in becoming more like you, I seek to take your place," meaning that in the end "identification is the desire to take a place where one is not yet" (126). In this framework, it is not that Maura wants to look like Shelly per se, but that her likeness to Shelly moves her closer to being seen as more than what she is now: not-Shelly therefore, not-mom, and thus not-woman.

Further underscoring their likeness, and effectively mirroring their imagined locations within the Pfefferman family, Maura and Shelly sit across from one another at each end of the long 10-person dinner table, again an object that "is something 'tangible' that makes a sense of relatedness possible…and what passes on the table establishes lines of connection between those that gather, while the table itself 'supports' the act of passing things around" (Ahmed 2006, 81). I argue one of the things they "pass around" is motherhood. Like at Shabbat, Maura's location at the head of the table invokes the specter of patriarchy and fatherhood that she is keen to leave behind but is consistently reminded of.[49]

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[49] Despite her desire to live as "her true gender," perhaps some of Maura's desire to leave behind and move away from memories of the past is through Shelly's existence reminding Maura of her "failure" as a

For example, after everyone sang happy birthday to Maura, Sarah asks Maura what she wished for her birthday. Looking down at her plate, Maura says, “Well, one of the things I wished for was, uh, that you guys don’t call me Moppa anymore,” expressing a sense of alienation from her family membership category. Sarah immediately questions, “Really?” And Josh defensively prompts, “Why? You don’t like that name? I thought you liked that name.” Josh’s immediate questioning of Maura’s alignment (i.e., liking the name Moppa) insinuates that her ‘not liking’ Moppa disrupts the familial bond (Ahmed 2010). Agreeing that at one point she did like the name, Maura says she wants to “move away from flopsy, mopsy, huggable…like a muppet” (“To Sardines and Back”). For Maura living in the ‘flopsy, mopsy, huggable’ space inaccurately reflects her conceptualization of herself, which in turn affects the ways in which other people, particularly her family, interact with her.

In the next moment, unknowingly engaging in an alternative form of creating space for Maura, Sarah’s daughter – Maura’s grandchild – simply asks Maura what she would like to be called, sparking several back-and-forth exchanges of potential names among those at the table and Maura. When one name pops up, Shelly contests due to it “being too close to [her] name” … a grandchild finally offers up “grandma” as her new moniker. Latching onto that Maura shyly, yet confidently states, “and, uh, maybe you guys want to call me, I don’t know, Mom” (“To Sardines and Back”). Immediately, the

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husband. Marital tensions that are revealed throughout the series in forms of flashbacks, the viewers come to understand that a lot of Maura’s “failings” stem from her attempt at living as “Mort,” the male head of household, marked by his role of father who was expected to provide financial stability through his career as a political scientist and sexually satisfy Shelly.

Figure 6: Shelly's affect (Season 3, Episode 3: To Sardines and Back)

camera cuts to Shelly who is looking directly at Maura with flashes of concern, anguish, and frustration on her face.

"Mom? Ha. Ha. Get a load of this. Mom. Okay," snaps Shelly. Maura, both confused and defensive replies, "Why not?" Shelly questions in return: "well, I mean were you there when [Sarah] got her period? Did you slap her across the face like a good Jewish mother? Did you show her how to put a tampon in?" ("To Sardines and Back"). Here, Shelly's mocking tone ("Ha. Ha. Get a load of this.") insinuates that Maura's request is ridiculous and out of the realm of possibility, particularly because of Shelly's understandings of what motherhood is: social and domestic duties and knowledges that a "father" does not take on. That is, Shelly's reliance on menstruation combined with her womanly wisdoms imparted on Sarah fuses motherhood to particular knowledges and conceptions of womanhood and bodies assigned female at birth such as menstruation and having a vagina for a tampon to be inserted.

From a sociolinguist perspective, Shelly is defining what is "normal" motherhood against that which is 'other' through language (Galvin 2003). Language, as discussed at length in "Chapter Three: Maternal Misfits" is affective. In fact, Rose Galvin (2003)

asserts “words are arbitrary, they have no inherent connection to the thing they describe. It is the meaning behind the words, the concepts they bring to mind when they are spoken, that gives them their power” (np.) Critical to this framework is that a word engenders meaning when it is contrasted with what it is not (Galvin 2003). Shelly’s questions indicate motherhood is about actions (‘slap her across the face;’ show her how to put a tampon in’) and these actions are what precisely makes *her* and not Maura a mother. Motherhood scholars Julia Lane and Eleonora Joensuu (2018) point out however that “the restriction of particular experiences, emotions, and feelings to the particular identity ‘mother’ is problematic because the term has been dominated by essentialist, normative, and individualistic definition” (4). Similarly, her line of questioning (‘were you there;’ ‘did you…’) not only relies on biological reasoning and ‘maternal tradition’ (“good Jewish mother”) it also suggests Maura was an absentee ‘father’ who spent more time at work than she did at home, effectively forcing Shelly to be a stay-at-home mother, a location the series suggests she never truly wanted even though it was the ‘norm’ of the times. Taken all together, Shelly’s continual linkage of the female body to motherhood strengthens the discursive power of motherhood through the ways affect sticks to certain forms of intelligible motherhood over others.

Yet, what is even more telling about *Transparent*’s representational collapse of motherhood to the vagina, compounding transnormativity and biological determinism, is the way in which the Pfefferman’s accept Maura’s desire to be seen as “mom” once she tells them she wants gender confirmation surgery. Before other members of the Pfefferman’s were able to comment on Maura’s request to be called “mom,” besides Shelly’s rebuttal, Maura segued by stating that she has been “on the internet” googling

for the best surgeons because she wants to get surgery for her “face, breasts, and vagina” (“To Sardines and Back”).[50] Other than Maura’s two trans friends, Davina and Shea, who respond with “that’s amazing” to Maura’s googling, the others around the table are concerned and surprised. A few non-immediate family members get up from the table and walk away, made uncomfortable by the discussion. Buzzy, Shelly’s boyfriend, stands up from the table to join those who have left the conversation. But before he walks away, he congratulates Maura and states something in Yiddish. Translating for others, Maura smiles and states, “it means, ‘wear it in good health’” (Season 3, Episode 3: To Sardines and Back). The scene cuts to Shelly who shrugs and nods, uttering “wear it well.” Davina and Shea excuse themselves from the table by asking if anyone wants coffee. However, Vicky stays sitting at the table as she is Maura’s current partner. But because she stays, Maura annoyedly asks Vicky if she could “have a minute.” Now with only the immediate Pfefferman’s around the table – Shelly, Sarah, Josh, Ari, and Maura – Maura and Shelly stare at one another. This moment where Maura askes Vicky to leave (after everyone else has left besides the “core Pfeffermans”), I argue, reinforces for that only certain people

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[50] It must be noted that Maura’s desire to obtain and her ability to get surgery for her “face, breasts, and vagina” is deeply rooted in conceptualizations of white, middle-class, straight womanhood built through the abjection of Black bodies and labor, especially Black women. First, the medicalized desire for a vagina and other aspects of “femininity” is rooted in the foundational belief that there are biological difference between “men” and “women.” Kate Averett (2021) points out “women’s bodies – female sexuality, their ability to procreate and their pregnancy, breast-feeding, and childcare, menstruation, and mythic ‘emotionality’– “are used as grounds for control and exclusion (290). Mainly, it is “women’s” ability to gestate and nurture children that fundamentally separates them from “men.” Moreover, Aren Aizura (2018) argues the “gender reassignment surgery” narrative – that all trans people want surgery, and particularly genital surgery – shores up “whiteness and racial hierarchies in their quest to make transsexuality legible” because of the ways white women’s transsexuality, and by extension transgender identity, was revered and seen as the standard. However, standards of femininity via gender reassignment surgery were partly made possible through the appalling American surgeon Dr. J. Marion Sims. In the late 1840s, Sims performed experimental operations on enslaved Black women without proper anesthesia to find a cure for vesicovaginal fistulas (Snorton 2017). Unfortunately, but critical to the ways in which trans identity contributes to the perpetuation of racial oppression, Sims’ work directly influenced modern practices of vaginoplasty, a form of gender reassignment surgery that molds a penis into a vagina.

are privy to conversations about bodies and identities, consolidating imaginations of what "family" is, imaginaries derived from white supremacist and cisnormative frameworks of family. Shelly throws her hands up, nods, and with a note of resignation, sighs "okay" to which Maura questions back, "okay?" They nod at one another and Maura, relieved ends with, "okay." The back and forth between Shelly and Maura, particularly with only the presence of their children, underscores for the viewer that only the most important are the ones who are left at the table. In doing so, the family vis-à-vis motherhood is once again reaffirmed as *the* ultimate form of interrelationships through the circulation of affects.

Part Two | Misfits

Section One | "This is my father and he's a woman. And he has every right to be in this bathroom"

Maura, Sarah, and Ari glide down a department store escalator on their way to the restaurant that the three of them planned to get brunch the night before (Season 1, Episode 4: Moppa). This day trip "with the girls" is a new experience and a bit of a celebration for the three of them because Maura no longer moves around the world as a "man." Chit chatting as they maneuver their way around the makeup counters – an intensely hyperfeminized space – Maura stops short as the makeup consultant, Clayton (Hank Chen), steps in front of her and interjects, "Hi! How would you ladies like to be among the first people in L.A. to sample the new plant-based skin care line by Canticle?" Hungover from a night of drugs and alcohol, Ari groans "No! No, I have to eat. I have to eat brunch" and Sarah politely declines with, "we've got brunch." From their reactions, it seems Sarah and Ari have no issue declining Clayton, used to makeup consultants peddling wares. Maura, on the other hand, immediately and excitedly states, "We'll do

Figure 7: Clayton (Hank Chen) [Season 1, Episode 4: Moppa]

it!" Ari annoyedly makes their way to the chairs with Sarah remarking in support of Maura's excitement, "C'mon, she wants to do it."

Starting with this scene, a few minutes prior to the "bathroom scene" where Maura experiences transphobic violence, allows us to fully explore the conditions through which Maura's transphobic public humiliation emerges due to her *misfitting* as a trans feminine parent.[51] Misfitting also results in misfits, "a term that describes both a situation (square peg and round hole) and a person" (Robertson 2014). Similar to my use of the *affect alien* in the previous section, I use misfitting in this section to explore how Maura fits and misfits within ideologies of womanhood. Specifically, I explore how she is folded into womanhood by way of makeup but excluded in the "women's" mall

[51] Ableism, as defined by TL Lewis (2020), is "a system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism, and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactory [re]produce, excel and 'behave." Importantly, one does not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

bathroom through the way motherhood shapes womanhood. To clarify, the makeup counter is not specifically about motherhood. Rather, the makeup counter is a space in which Maura is taught how to be a woman which gives her greater access to the realm of "good" motherhood because "good" mothers teach their daughters how to become women.

Because the overwhelming nature of those who "fit" are mothers who are assigned female at birth, Maura's moments of fitting and misfitting point to the flexible and permeable boundaries of an imagined womanhood that is influenced by practices and discourses of motherhood. Feminist scholar Averett (2021) underscores this point when she finds through her literature review the repetitive "association of women with mothering is, in part, upheld through essentialized notions that (all) women's bodies are innately different from (all) men's bodies, and that these bodies are uniquely well suited for care work" (290). These boundaries are flexible and permeable because as Lisa Baraister (2009) explains "the mother' after all, is the impossible subject…in some senses she is everywhere, our culture saturated her image in its varied guises, and yet theoretically she remains a shadowy figure who seems to disappear from the many discourses that explicitly try to account for her" (Lane and Joensuu 2018, 2). And having "the mother" everywhere and nowhere allows various institutional practices, discourses, and technologies to sanction certain ways of being over others. As a result, mapping out the boundaries of imagined and practiced motherhood, I argue, illuminates how hierarchical perspectives of racialized gender works with and through parenting bodies and parenting language, repeatedly sticking white cis, heteropatriarchal ideas and practices of "what makes a woman" to bodies assigned female at birth. motherhood

shapes womanhood through the ways in which motherhood relies on a physical and emotional connection mediated through the body, especially when the body is assigned female at birth. Specifically, motherhood is linked to and represented through the makeup counter mostly because Maura is there with her daughters. Moreover, makeup often is the intergenerational link between mothers and children. This is often reinforced in films and TV where people who do not have access to makeup like young boys and men are taught or punished by their mother's vis a via makeup (Mehta 2020).

When the three women are placed in high top chairs to receive their make-over, and Sarah leans over and whispers to Maura, "just so you know, now that you're going to spend time in this world, you need to know that the makeover is free, but they expect you to buy everything…" (Moppa 1:4). The camera shifts its gaze to focus on Ari, and the viewer faintly hears in the background Clayton lamenting Maura's ignorance about her "T-Zone," the part of the face that includes your forehead, nose, and chin.[52] Flabbergasted Clayton asks, "Do you mean to tell me you've gone through your entire life without knowing where your T-Zone is? … You poor deprived soul" (Moppa 1:4). Here we see Maura literally being taught by her daughter and Clayton, a femme queer Asian man, on how "to be in this world," the world of womanhood that she has been apparently deprived of.

Yet, the type of womanhood that Maura is learning to be a part of and is shaped by is one deeply imbricated in whiteness, American Jewishness, and money. For

[52] It is interesting to point out here that the representation of the "T-zone" here slips into some overlaps of trans masculinity and manhood more broadly. In the trans community, testosterone, the hormone that is often most prevalent in bodies assigned male at birth and thus given to trans men to "masculinize" their bodies, is also referred to as "T". Similarly, the T-zone on a face is more often than not one of the primary places that trans women aim to femininize their face through surgery or make up due to the presence of T in their bodies, if not put on hormone blockers at a young age.

example, in this same scene Maura tells Sarah that she's starting to "hoard quarters" because the laundry is coin operated in her apartment. Sarah retorts, "Dad, you shouldn't be doing your own laundry. I'll send Sylvia over. She can do it for you." (Series 1, Episode 4: Moppa). One reading of Sarah's remark could be that of left-over patriarchal notions of fatherhood that assert men are not supposed to involve themselves with menial, domestic tasks such as laundry, particularly because of Sarah's use of "Dad". Even though Sarah uses "Dad," Maura's womanhood is concretized through the ways rich white women manage the people who do the work, since rich white women are (also) not supposed to *do* domestic work. "White women's ability to closely embody ideals of femininity, including motherhood ideals," reproductive scholar Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) points out, "has been reliant upon the labor of women of color in the homes of white women" (3). In this case, then, Sarah folds Maura into rich white womanhood by flippantly offering up her domestic worker, Sylvia, who is coded as woman of color. Challenging the perception identities are innate, Puar states, "categories – race, gender, sexuality – are considered events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects" (58). That is, this quick exchange between Sarah and Maura reveals how Sylvia, or domestic workers more broadly, is used to create and mark the privileged identities that shape white, rich women's ability to have a domestic worker in the first place.

In this framework, then, in order *to be* a rich, white woman Maura must engage in practices that are seen as class, gender, race, etc.,, one that is enabled by Clayton. According to the structures of the gender binary both Clayton and Maura are outsiders to the world of womanhood (makeup, femininity, skin care) by being historically excluded

through the assertion that Man and Woman are opposite entities. However, Clayton stands in as a signal that "womanhood" is flexible and thus can and does include Maura because it aids in the objectives of neoliberal capitalism. That is, Clayton works as a makeup consultant and teaches Maura about her "T-Zone" which not only is about selling "feminine" products to keep his job, but also teaches Maura how to properly be a woman buy purchasing said products. Similar to Sarah's teachings on how "to be in this world," Clayton teaches Maura how to engage with and enact white womanhood, and because of this, the contours of white womanhood are exposed. It important to note through research that examines the lives of queer men of color, Clayton – as a representation tool that signifies "difference" – more than likely has experienced harassment in the form of misogyny and homophobia (Manalansan 2003; Ferguson 2018). Dominant structures of white supremacy structure Clayton's world thus he too knows the contours of white womanhood through his encounters at work and life experiences. Moreover, Clayton's position as a queer man of color and his reproduction of femininity could also be read as defining through the location of "not-Man." That is, queer men of color are always already femininized in structures of white supremacy, patriarchy, and racial capitalism (Bederman 1995).

However, Maura's gender euphoria via makeup tutorials and buying the product is cut short once their makeup detour is over. Complaining that they have to pee because of all the "cucumber water" they were given, Ari heads towards the bathrooms and Maura and Sarah follow. Deciding that she also needs to pee, Sarah encourages Maura to come into the women's room despite her visible reluctance. Maura literally stops in the hallway, mumbles "I…uh…I'm going to…" and Sarah comes back into the frame to grab

Maura’s hand and pulls her towards the bathroom. Sarah’s encouragement in contrast to Maura’s hesitation and concern foreshadows cis people’s ignorance, particularly multiply privileged cis people, about the dirty histories of public bathrooms. According to Toby Beauchamp (2019), public bathrooms and their occupants are not fixed or self-evident. Rather, in exploring the ways bathrooms function as a mechanism for assigning citizenship and national belonging through bodily assessment, Beauchamp (2019) argues “the creation of only men’s bathrooms in public spaces and workplaces, the absence or disrepair of accessible bathrooms, and the barring of homeless populations from public restrooms all illustrate how bathrooms concretize “architectural and political assumption[s]” of certain bodies as ideal citizen bodies (100). At their core then bathrooms function as sites of surveillance where other people assess and make sure that the bodies that enter the space are legible as “ideal citizen bodies,” and in this case, “ideal women’s bodies.” However, for trans parents the common ways trans people get clocked (outed as trans) in the bathroom – through physical characteristics like body size, the amount of hair one has, the way someone physically goes to the bathroom (standing versus sitting), and pitch of voice – is not how Maura got clocked.

As Sarah, Ari, and Maura enter the busy public women’s bathroom (yet, also private because it is located in a fancy department store similar to that of Nordstrom or Macy’s), Sarah announces that she does not have to “go that bad” and says to Maura: “Dad, if you have to go in front of me that’s fine” (Season 1, Episode 4: Moppa). While the viewer still hears Sarah and Maura discussing who is going to go first the scene cuts to two teenage girls putting on makeup in the bathroom mirror. One of the girls says to the other, “Did she just say ‘dad’? Is that a man?” and proceeds to stare in Maura’s

direction. A second later, a blonde woman steps out of a stall and walks up to the two girls. The same girl that questioned if "that" is a man says, "Hey mom. Do you see that person with the grey hair over there? I think he's a guy. She just called him "Dad". Without hesitation the woman turns towards Maura and Sarah and asks in an accusatory tone "Excuse me, are you a man? Cause this is the ladies' restroom."

Now, the viewer is just coming from a scene that wove Maura into the folds of womanhood. She is literally referred to as one of the "ladies" and given a makeup makeover. She "fits" within the space. Because of this we can imagine that since Maura's coming out this moment immediately post-makeover is one where she has the most potential to "pass" in these hyperfeminized spaces. Yet, because Sarah's use of "dad" while referring to Maura indexes to others a potential disjuncture, or, misfit, among body, identity, language, and space. To be clear, even though Dad seems to be a relational and capacious term for Sarah and Maura, Sarah's use of "Dad' for Maura at the entrance of the "Women's" bathroom facilitated Maura's misfitting because the family membership category of "Dad" indexes manhood, penises, and masculinity. Invoking Maura's parent identity, rather than using her name or some other term of endearment, conjures familial norms that rely on binaristic and essentialist frameworks of sex, gender, and sexuality, directly leading to Maura's experiencing transphobic attacks (Grigorovich in Gibson 2014, 91). As discussed in Chapter Three: Maternal Misfits, misfitting occurs when a particular environment does not sustain a body that enters it. Specifically, "misfitting emphasizes particularity by focusing on the specific singularities of shape, size and function of the person in question. Those singularities emerge and gain definition *only through their unstable disjunctive encounter with an environment*…in one moment there

is a fit; in another moment and place a misfit" (Garland-Thomson 2011, 595; emphasis mine). In the space of the bathroom, the definition of "dad" took on an alternative meaning because of the disconnect between Maura's gender presentation and the application of the word. Pushing back against the woman's transphobic attack of her dad, Sarah at first tries to tell the woman that she knows they are in the 'ladies' restroom. However, as the woman continues to inquire about and assert Maura's "manhood" Sarah states, "This is my father and he's a woman and he has every right to be in this bathroom" (Moppa 1:4).

In reading Maura as a misfit, viewers are shown how the world is built for certain kinds of bodies. As Garland-Thomson (2011) notes, "inequality occurs not purely from prejudicial attitudes but is an artifact of material configurations misfitting with bodies," and extends beyond disability discrimination to other areas such as institutional racism, sexism, and classism. We see the inconsistent application of the gender binary in Maura's drastically different exchanges in the hyperfeminized spaces of the makeup counter and women's bathroom resulting as a "fit" at the makeup counter and a "misfit" in the bathroom. Therefore, "the recognition that bodies are constituted through multiple forms of knowledges, spatial relations and practices, institutional and political regulations, and other culturally and historically located social 'imaginaries,'" argues T. Garner (2014), "provides a way of thinking beyond the natural versus constructed binary, a binary that is often used against transgender people" (173). This means then that when thinking through the complex ways misfitting occurs, we need to also take language into consideration for the ways in which language indexes a potential misfit for trans parents.

Section Two | Born Again

Throughout the series' progression, *Transparent* experiments more with flashbacks and temporal disjuncture to provide historical context for why the Pfefferman's currently act the way they do. Maura's desire to live her life outwardly as a woman and her complex navigation of figuring this out while being a part of a family is not a new framework for viewers by season four. They are told in the second episode ("The Letting Go") of the first season when Sarah and her ex-partner are caught in an affair that Maura has been "dressing up like a man" for her whole life. Yet, it is not until the episode "Born Again" (Season 4, Episode 5) that viewers get an in-depth look for how her journey as a father impacted her capacity to live the life she tried to imagine and enact. Unlike season one where viewers are introduced to basic trials and tribulations trans people, especially older trans women, experience early on in their coming out period and transition, season four of *Transparent* explores the complicated and entangled ways family membership categories and their relation to how we imagine bodies and care affect our ability to comfortably fit within hegemonic models of family. Drawing on a short scene from the episode "Born Again," this example demonstrates how Maura's transness misfits within the imagined family and is underscored by her physical misfitting within the birthing center. Maura's misfitting within the family and birthing center show how the family and motherhood are only built for certain bodies to fit.

"Born Again" is set in the early 1980s and starts with young Maura – presented as Mort – at a therapy appointment working her way through her desires to dress like a woman. Her therapist essentially explains that her penchant for dressing in women's clothes is a symptom of homosexuality, a stereotypical narrative expounded by medical

professionals of the time (Stryker 2017). Clearly confused and dissatisfied but lacking another clear path forward, Maura attempts to live out this 'gay life' by cruising in the woods for an anonymous sexual encounter. Eventually realizing that it is not for her, Maura heads home to crawl into bed with Shelly, but a few hours later Shelly wakes up Maura and lets her know that her contractions have started.

Maura and Shelly make their way to the hospital for Shelly to give birth. However, as Shelly labors without Maura at her side she consistently expresses something is wrong and asks repeatedly for "her husband," but none of the medical staff seem to take her concerns to heart since the shift to fathers being present at labors had only begun to increase. Jumping between Shelly's and the newborn's perspective, the viewer hears that there is "something wrong with the baby" because she is "having trouble breathing". In the background, Maura's voice cuts through the chaos, shouting: "Shell? What is going on in here? No, that's my baby! That is *my baby!* Where are you taking her?". Quite literally, Maura's body gets in the way of the medical practitioners in the birthing room, "disrupting the comfort of others," ergo misfitting (Boyer 2018, 68). From the baby's point of view, we see a glimpse of a blurry Maura being pushed out of the delivery room by a member of Shelly's medical team while being told, "Mr. Pfefferman, I need you to step outside. I need you to step outside". It is unclear exactly why, but Maura is physically pushed and then locked out of the delivery room, let to wait in the visiting room with a pained expression on her face.

In the subsequent scene, the voice of older Maura (Jeffrey Tambor) narrates young Maura's internal thoughts as she walks towards the neonatal intensive care unit windows to look at her baby. She thinks,

> Please God, I don't know why you did this to her. Is it because of me? If it is, I'll stop everything. I promise I'll stop. I'll stop the dressing, the lying, and the hiding. I promise I'll stay and be a good father. Please God, let Ali live.

The camera cuts back and forth between Maura and baby Ari in the incubator. As she pleads with God, Maura's imagined self (Maura as a femme presenting woman) slowly

Figure 8: Masculine Presenting Maura, Femme Presenting Maura, and Newborn Ali ("Born Again")

enters the frame, also looking at baby Ari in the incubator. Maura's two versions of herself now stand next to one another, both looking sullen and desperate in the window's reflection (See figure 8).

However, as quickly as Maura's femme presenting version walked into the scene, she walked out upon the promise of masculine presenting Maura staying to "be a good father" ("Born Again"). In this moment, femme presenting Maura does not seem visibly mad. Instead, she seems accepting and content, understanding that she will no longer be allowed to exist in order for Ari to survive, another act of sacrifice. In short, Maura's "true self," as a trans feminine parent, does not fit within the framework of the family and is forced to sacrifice herself in the name of "good fatherhood," illuminating how the world is only built for certain types of bodies and beings.

Now, I cannot determine whether or not Maura's bargain with God saved Ari or not, nor is it what I am particularly interested in here. What I am interested in though is how viewers are taught that "being a good father" (an argument can be made for good motherhood as well) supersedes all other aspects of one's own desires. In effect, because she believes her transness harmed her baby it reinforces for viewers that Maura's willingness to sacrifice her own happiness "by stopping the dressing, the lying, and the hiding" is the ultimate meaning of fatherhood *and* motherhood. On the one hand, Maura's sacrifice to stay as "Mort" demonstrates how fatherhood, always already wrapped in affectively laden family system discourse, demands more than just a financial or biological dimension Jack Halberstam's (2018) work on trans experiences within family units shows how "bodies are inscribed within the family" and "the many casual forms of erasure that normativity demands" (73). Focusing on trans youth, Halberstam postulates "when trans* youth route their desires through their parents rather than through older trans* activists, they become part of a more or less seamless transition from trans* youth to gender normative adulthood" (75). As I have been showing throughout, this roadmap can easily be reworked in the reverse. Parents are also defined and route their desires through their children. This scene shows how Maura is defined through her interrelation with Ari because Maura's transness cannot be present while Maura stays to "be a good father." In other words, the family and its affective circulation of belonging and nonbelonging continuously coerces Maura into staying with the family as Mort. On the other hand. Maura's experience as simultaneously experiencing fatherhood and motherhood "exposes the myth of maternal love for what it is: the unachievable idealization of an assumedly instinctual and unconditional love that eventually finds all

mothers wanting" (Castellini cited Lane and Josenuu 2018, 188). And for Maura, she is wanting both as Mort and Maura.

This scene also engenders a reparative reading of Maura's situation (Sedgwick 1997). Trans and cinema studies scholar Eliza Steinbock (2019) defines a theory of shimmering, or something that shimmers, as existing in and through minute nuances and degrees of intensities or change on film. Steinbock notes that the shimmer's conceptual power generates from the ways the visual changes according to the angle of the subject's gaze, ultimately defying a distinction between subject/object, thinking/feeling, and sight/touch through its inability to be seen or defined clearly. Namely, shimmering affords the capacity to think and see in ways that do not default to normativizing Euro/American stylized aesthetics of Man and Woman. Therefore, similar to affect alien and misfit, the concept of the shimmer offers a different way of seeing, and thus different ways of being.

As shown in the image above, Maura shimmers in the window, two versions of herself that "confounds distinctions between from within or from without" (Steinbock 2019, 11). She is neither. She is both. She "is the "shimmering boundary between the real and the virtual, the fantasized and the actualized" (Stryker cited in Steinbock 2019, 17). Shimmering as a concept, then, demonstrates how Maura's character offers up new ways to understand trans ontologies and epistemologies as "emergent, affective, and processual," disrupting the belief for viewers that transness is monolithic, static, and only stuck to a trans body (Steinbock 2019). That perhaps Maura's transness never went away, it simply manifested in other ways, times, and spaces. In fact, like Maura Ari transitioned later in life, engendering a trans-generational relationship between Maura and Ari.

Another way transness is not simply presented as an identity, but as a way of destabilizing normative scripts is when Maura dies. In 2019, the fifth and final season of *Transparent* aired as a "musicale finale" where the viewer finds out in the first five minutes Maura died. According to interviews with Soloway, it is unclear if they anticipated the series coming to an end so abruptly and in this way. Jeffrey Tambor, the actor who played Maura, was kicked off of the show because fellow co-star Trace Lysette came forward about the interpersonal violence she experienced at the hands of Tambor. Therefore, Soloway and other writers were forced to shift *Transparent*'s narrative that historically centered Maura's story as Tambor was no longer allowed to be on set. Maura's death was a way to move beyond Maura's character while also being able to wrap up the storylines the other characters were embroiled in. The cyclical temporality of the series – which I argue partly exemplifies how the American Family system and motherhood affectively function – is hammered home when Maura's children unexpectedly sit down for breakfast with Davina after Maura is found dead in her bed at the Pfefferman family home by Davina.

Recalling the opening paragraphs of this chapter where the Pfefferman children are eating messy barbeque with Maura before she came out to them, the series finale recreates this moment with Davina instead of Maura. The scene opens and Davina, Sarah, Ari, and Josh sit at the table eating toast and eggs. After a couple of exchanges where Davina clearly is confused by the ways the Pfefferman's interact with one another, Josh looks to Davina and casually says, "Hey, do you have a place lined up?" and Ari jumps in concerned asking, "yeah, where are you going to live, Davina?" Immediately, Davina looks shocked, and Sarah interjects, "Guys!" Now back peddling, Josh and Ari exclaim,

"No rush! Just out of curiosity." And state that Davina is welcome to stay but they just want "an ETA on the whole thing." Unlike the opening dinner scene in the first season, the camera work here is choppy, no longer swirling. Yet, like Maura, Davina is trying to tell the others something. Before she speaks, the doorbell rings, and Maura's estate lawyer walks in. Confused, the children look to Davina for what is happening. It turns out Maura changed her will, no longer bequeathing the house to her children. Instead, the will now states that the house is Davina's and the "profits" need to go to the trans community. Through a musical number all about Davina's frustration contrasted with the Pfefferman children singing about no longer being able to "go home," Davina makes clear that she has no idea why Maura put her in charge.

This switch up, I argue, literally disrupts the traditional settler and patriarchal guidelines of consolidating wealth and property through the "family line" and provides a model to move us beyond the affective loop of the American family system that is wrapped up in motherhood. As I have been discussing, independence is foundational to the American family system: private property, caring for one's "own," and "blood is thicker than water." Because of this, one could argue that Maura giving Davina the house simply shifts the consolidation of wealth and property, maintaining the structures that foster and circulate transphobia and the American family system. However, drawing from community care models like the Black Panthers and ACT UP that have moved beyond "the family" as a model of care, The Care Collective (2020) argues an ethics of 'promiscuous care' would "enable us to *multiply* the numbers of people we can care for, about, and with thus permitting us to *experiment* with the ways that we care" (33). So, I see Maura's decision to give Davina the house with the "profits" specifically going to the

trans community as an experiment that moves us beyond an exclusionary form of caring relations that force people to align their gender identity, gender role and expression with biological determinism. The role of the word "profits" and the flexibility of the word is what allows this process to be more capacious. Maura's privilege awarded to her by her whiteness, years of enforced masculinity, and access to a lucrative job as a Political Science professor, the Pfefferman family home is "paid off." Because of this, Davina ultimately decides to use the house as a collective housing for houseless LGBTQ+ youth in LA.

Conclusion |

To conclude let us return to Maura's 70th birthday celebration. Dinner ends and Maura stands up from the table, ringing her knife on her glass. "Excuse me," interjects Maura, "I'd like to propose a toast. As I look at this table in this room that I …I don't remember having such high ceilings and goyish lights, I am just so moved. And I am so grateful to be celebrating my 70th birthday with my family, and my chosen family. L'chaim" (To Sardines and Back). After a chorus of returned l'chaims, Shelly mumbles loud enough for all to hear, "I guess that would make us the not-chosen family." At first glance Shelly's remark is harsh, shady, and snarky. However, in reframing "my family and chosen family" to "not-chosen family and chosen family" Shelly illuminates the compulsory nature of family in and of itself. As John D'Emilio discussed in "Capitalism and Gay Identity" the family co-opts various practices over time – like shifting from a unit of material production to a unit of emotional sustenance – in order to maintain its hegemonic status. Family, as practiced and imagined, is an institution that morphs.

Throughout this chapter, and the dissertation more broadly, I have focused on situations and instances that reify and destabilize the various ways cis-hetero-patriarchal family function to create and maintain hierarchical difference through family and motherhood. *Transparent* (2014-2019) provides audiences a frame of reference that pushes back against transnormative logics, demonstrating that transitioning as a parent is not simply a 'dad' becoming a 'mom,' or vice versa. Rather, it is a struggle over the body's meaning as the body is always already situated in shifting webs of relations, making us interdependent over independent. The first section explored how familial tradition and boundaries are produced through the circulation of affect that led Maura to be folded into white womanhood via motherhood. However, it left Davina on the outside as an affect alien. It also explored how the maternal dialectic between Maura and Shelly was settled through Maura's reliance on a trans normative narrative based in white, Western models of racialized gender. Section two explored how Maura and her transness misfit within motherhood. Specifically, Maura's fitting in the makeup counter aided in the insidious mechanisms of racial capitalism because her inclusion into womanhood boosted Clayton, the makeup artists, sales. And then Maura's subsequent misfitting in the "women's" bathroom illuminated the messiness of parenting language and parenting bodies. Moreover, Maura's misfitting within the hospital space led her to "give up" her trans identity in order to be "a good father." However, I suggest that perhaps, Maura's transness never truly went away, but morphed and transformed.

Ultimately, *Transparent* shows us how transitioning as a parent is a negotiation of naturalized ideas about bodies, parenting roles, domestic space, and gendered language among all peoples, not just the person transitioning. Through her inclusion in the family,

and compulsory nature of family itself, Maura's character shows that if we were to move beyond the institution of the family, we can truly transform our social and material worlds to allow for a multiplicity of beings. Having access to medical, emotional, and intimate care, housing, and food should not be dependent on a "genetic lottery" Sophie Silverstein (2020) argues. Rather, all peoples should have access to what they need and want by shifting individual responsibility to interpersonal frameworks of care work.

Chapter Five | Chopping Down the Family Tree

The demand to abolish the family has served as a way of imagining life beyond compulsory heterosexuality, misogynistic subjugation and familial violence.

- **M. E. O' Brien, *Communization of Care (2019)***

Introduction |

On my maternal side legend has it that my great-grandfather did not let my grandmother, N, marry the man she fell pregnant with at seventeen because he was ten years her senior. Several years back N professed no picture of him exists and "he's probably long dead from drugs." Out of personal curiosity, sparked by my own gender transition, I recently dug up the taboo subject. After some trepidation, I texted N to see if she remembered if my mom's "bio dad" was hairy because according to trans masculine internet lore, hair patterns, particularly for facial hair, comes from our maternal grandfather. And I wanted to know what my newly budding, testosterone induced facial hair might turn into. Her response: "Really. Don't remember that to be true. I think he was at least 90% English. Caldwell. He had [to] have a lot of dental work done. That is very English. But hair? Don't remember. He had a beautiful car. That's what got me pregnant."

Now, my father's side has a bit more information about paternity. My paternal grandmother, D, apparently did not know how one got pregnant, except that it was somehow connected to breasts. In 1968, even though she did not let her boyfriend touch her breasts, she had her first son, my uncle, at seventeen years old. The doctor tried to convince my great-grandmother to put D on birth control, but my great-grandmother refused, stating that she will not have sex again. About a year and a half later, seemingly befuddled, D fell pregnant with her second son, my father. The man who fathered my

father apparently wanted to be in their lives, unlike her first son's father, however, his use of intravenous drugs prohibited his capacity to care. My father rarely saw him, and I only ever saw one picture of him. My father, a handsome, able-bodied, white, middle-class guy with a funny demeanor and a desperate people pleasing tendency, had many privileges. Yet, despite his kind, gregarious nature, my dad ultimately fell to the wayside as a "part-time Dad" who was not around much due to his own complicated relationship with mental health and drugs, a byproduct of his complicated relationship with his own fathers.

Even though my peers and I similarly griped about our families and parents in various ways growing up – lack of privacy, not enough personal freedom, unreasonable expectations, annoying siblings – I felt my resentment, frustration, shame, and unhappiness towards my family were not (outwardly) reflected in my peers' relationships with their parents or in popular media representations of family and parenthood. The Euro American shows and movies on Disney, Nickelodeon, ABC, and many others unfailingly framed motherhood as the ultimate physical and emotional bond between woman and child; that a mother could and would do anything for her children. In the rare case she chose otherwise, she was deemed monstruous; but this ideological transformation still overwhelmingly negatively impacted her children (Feroli 2016; Castellini 2019). Through all of these mixed messages various questions consistently bubbled to the surface of my consciousness: Why did I not feel at "home" while at home? Why did I yearn to belong elsewhere? Why did I expect my mom and dad to be people they were not? And most confusing to me, why did people say "blood is thicker than

water" when *I* could clearly see and feel the damaging impacts of obligatory and mandated familial relations?

It was not until I turned twenty-one, the ages my parents were when they had me, did I really begin to register the affective dimensions of what it means to "be responsible," especially when that responsibility entails raising a child. In other words, I began to register how people evaluated "good" and "bad" parents in ways that were not just about financial and material support. At the time, I could barely keep myself afloat let alone provide resources for a dependent such as an infant or small child, people who fundamentally are reliant on wage earners. As I gained new perspective, my feelings did not dissipate. Rather they transformed and shifted. I was still angry, frustrated, and unhappy, but I no longer envisioned my family, and especially my mom, as the primary generator for those feelings because I could see and feel that the decisions various members of my family made across time and space were made under the duress of "family." That is, on the one hand, the family is seen as a promise of love in a harsh world and the only protection against state violence which encourages people to maintain systems that embolden and strengthen family discourse and practices. On the other hand, the family – in its current atomized state where people are expected to live in independent, self-sufficient homes – is also a "private" space where there is little to no protection from the risk of internal abuse, violence, and heteronormativity (O' Brien 2019). Like that of capitalism, family, as an ideal and practice, promotes and undergirds legal, medical, and social systems that foster structural vulnerability, effectively forcing people to make decisions that are in their own individual best interest out of fear of losing their social value and material capital (Holmes 2011).

My personal and professional investment in this work, then, does not aim to take away people's relationships, affection, and communities. Instead, as M.E. O'Brien (2019) explains, "care in our capitalist society is a commodified, subjugating, and alienating act" and so by abolishing the family we "free our capacity to care for each other in more humane ways" because the family is no longer a mediator for violent hierarchies that manifest through prefigured identity categories such as mother, father, daughter, and son. People would be liberated from the confines of prescribed roles managed and policed through the division of labor, interpersonal domination, and/or sexual violence. Accordingly, by mainly drawing on affect studies, trans studies, motherhood studies, and some other theories related to queer linguistics, spatial analysis, and feminist disability studies, I demonstrated how the imagined and practiced concept of family, or what I dubbed the *American family system*, shapes people into ways of being that promote static understandings of gender and sexuality that have material impacts on people who cannot or will not reproduce hegemonic forms of relationality.

Thus far, I have been wondering what it means for the American family system – and other subjectivities like the "mother" – to be affective. How is family more so "about the way things feel, the things we want, the way our bodies are guided through thickly textured, magnetized worlds? Or the way our bodies flow into relationships – loving or hostile – with other bodies? (Schaefer 2015, 3). In other words, what if the family was not something derived from nature nor culture but made up of an amalgamation of "clustered material forms, aspects of our embodied life, such as other bodies, food, community labor, movement, music, sex, natural landscapes, architecture, and objects" that exist in and outside the boundaries of language (Schaefer 2015, 3)? These questions

prompt a different approach to examining flows of power. As Foucault and his followers have argued endlessly, power can never be escaped. So, how do we work with power in order to ensure a more equitable world where people can thrive and flourish according to their own wants and needs?

As I have intensely argued throughout this project, feeling is a source of knowledge that sheds light on different conceptualizations of the American family system's role in creating hierarchical difference. Chapter two demonstrated affective, "sticky" ways the American family system, and especially motherhood, circulate affectively creating normative framings of how people should feel in relation to their racialized gendered body and various identities that emerge from and get stuck to the body. Interrogated from a trans masculine parent perspective, I found these feelings deeply shape how people take up, enact, and think about parenting language and parenting bodies. Specifically, throughout chapter two I utilized the *affect alien* – someone who is or feels alienated by not feeling in the 'right' way – to anchor and interrogate my trans masculine participants' feelings related to parenthood and transness. By paying attention to the way trans masculine parents feel when maternal identities become stuck to them, I argue two things: (1) that the changing pregnant body simultaneously limits and expands one's understanding of their own gender and (2) children act as kinship objects shaping the ways trans masculine parents are interpellated. Firstly, the hyper-feminization of pregnant bodies triggered many pregnant participants in my study who did not recognize themselves as trans prior to gestation to feel anger, frustration, sadness, annoyance, shame, and hatred. These feelings alienated participants not only from motherhood – as "mothers" are overwhelmingly told through depictions of

motherhood to feel joy, comfort, excitement, and a sense of duty – but also from their gender which eventually led them to conceive of themselves as transgender. In other words, many pregnant cis women dislike being pregnant for a multitude of reasons like morning sickness, shifting body size, and the dissolution of bodily autonomy and respect. Yet, many of these issues do not disrupt their imagination and practice of womanhood making it difficult to see and discern how pregnancy and motherhood become stuck to afab bodies. However, trans masculine people's narratives of their experiences during and post-gestation illuminate the affective atmospheres that orient afab bodies towards motherhood, and by extension, the American family system. Secondly, children function as kinship objects mediating how trans masculine parents are seen and valued. My trans masculine participants who transitioned while raising children discussed the variety of moments in which their capacity to move through the world as a man was hindered or enabled depending on if their child was with them because of the ways caring practices shape our understanding of racialized gendered relations.

Building from Chapter Two, Chapter Three explored how trans masculine parents ideologically and materially mis/fit within parenting language (mom, dad, etc.) and parenting spaces like that of schools and doctors' offices. This chapter demonstrates how trans masculine parents are "misfits," a moment in which someone's body is physically and/or ideologically unsupported by the environment it comes up against. Through their misfitting, a concept developed by feminist disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011), I expose cis parenthood's linguistic and spatial assemblages and landscapes that work to maintain cis gender as the "normal" and "natural" gender. By presenting cis gender as the "natural" gender through parenting bodies and parenting

language, transness manifests as an Other. Therefore, I argue trans masculine parents' experiences moving about the world generate a productive perspective from which we can challenge and destabilize the mechanisms through which racialized gender and parenthood allow some to 'fit' and others to 'misfit'. Misfitting, like being an affect alien, highlights how the world is built for certain kinds of bodies and ways of living, privileging those who can maintain white supremacist and homo/heteronormative ideologies and practices and harming those who cannot by restricting access to welfare programs, stable jobs and housing, and community support.

Chapter Four combined both the affect alien and misfit to explore the ways in which motherhood affectively circulates via the American family system within the Amazon Original series *Transparent* (2014-2019). *Transparent* (2014-2019) gives audiences a different perspective that pushes back against transnormative logics, demonstrating that transitioning as a parent is not simply a 'dad' becoming a 'mom,' or vice versa. Instead, it is a struggle over the body's meaning for those inside and outside the family's boundaries, as the body is always already situated in shifting webs of relations. By demonstrating this, I show how we are more interdependent over independent. The first section explored how familial tradition and boundaries are produced through the circulation of affect that led Maura to be folded into white womanhood via motherhood, situating Davina as an affect alien. It also explored how the maternal dialectic between Maura and Shelly was settled through Maura's reliance on a trans normative narrative based in white, Western models of racialized gender. Section two explored how Maura and her transness misfit within motherhood. Specifically, Maura's fitting in the makeup counter aided in the insidious mechanisms of racial

capitalism because her inclusion into womanhood boosted Clayton, the makeup artists, sales. And then Maura's subsequent misfitting in the "women's" bathroom illuminated the messiness of parenting language and parenting bodies. Moreover, Maura's misfitting within the hospital space led her to "give up" her trans identity in order to be "a good father." However, I suggest that perhaps, Maura's transness never truly went away, but morphed and transformed.

Affecting Anew |

With all of this in mind, instead of a traditional conclusion that reiterates and repeats, I seek to provide some ideas and practices that could help move us away from reproducing limiting caring capacities that historically manifest in the shifting, hegemonic form of the American family system. Plainly, I wish to provoke more than prescribe. So, drawing from family abolitionists who learned practices developed out of historically marginalized communities that have long sustained survival outside the purview of "traditional" family models like poor and working-class people, Black and Brown communities, Indigenous tribes, and queer and trans people, I offer a few ways to move us closer towards family abolition at bodily, community, and institutional levels, all of which are interdependent.

Bodies |

We do not get to decide whether or not to be born. We also do not get to decide who gives birth to us and under what conditions. However, abolishing the family opens opportunity for greater individual expression and bodily autonomy as we will not be born into prefigured individual units but within permanent communes of collective social

reproduction. Reproductive labor expands across all peoples and not just placed in the hands of women or femmes. In doing so, "new forms of gender freedom and human flourishing not available in the limited, truncated form of the nuclear family become possible" (O'Brien 2019). Similarly, people who have been trapped by abusive parental relationships or violent partners can leave a complicated family dynamic because everyone is cared for. As note in chapters two through four, many trans parents feel unable to transition for fear of being kicked out of, shamed by and/or bring shame to their family.

Gender reveal parties in the United States demonstrates how the anxiety about the fluidity of gender, bodies, language, and space has literally and figuratively exploded within the last five to seven years.[53] Themes such as "Bowties or bows," "touchdowns or tutus," "guns or glitter" maps out what it is their "correctly gendered" fetus will be interested in as a fully formed tiny human. However, studies suggest (and as feminist scholars have articulated for decades) these gender reveal parties create hostility, anger, and resentment among family through the ways parents project their presumptions and desires into the fetus and the fetus' future (Jack 2020). Mothers who are invested in having a "girl" but are met with a popped balloon full of blue confetti, for example, explain feeling let down and sad because of the assumption boys and girls are simply biologically and culturally different. What I and others have learned from trans parents' experiences of parenting are a variety of ways parents and children can have more

[53] Multiple gender reveal parties made their way into the news because they resulted in death and destruction. For example, in February 2021 a "father-to-be" died by explosive devices he was putting together for his family's gender reveal party (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56159731). It even has had environmental destruction. In September 2020, a gender reveal party caused multiple wide fires in California resulting in 90,000 acres of destroyed land and the death of a firefighter.

equitable and freeing relationships that are not dependent on gender essentialism and the anticipatory roles that come with them. For many trans parents, particularly trans parents who realize they are trans after having children, become vulnerable in ways that cis gender parents typically do not. Trans parents need to ask their children and other family members to respect a new way of interacting with them that does not always align with broader frameworks of parent-parent and parent-child hierarchies like changing their name and pronouns. In doing so, trans parents relinquish some of their symbolic authority and power "over" their children as parents because of the need for their children to "see them as they are," and as Hil Malatino (2020) points out, "gender recognition is sustained by a web of forces that we don't control. Because we rely on others for recognition, we understand how selfhood is given through such forms of recognition" (39).

Therefore, trans parents transing of care in discursive and material ways exposes possibilities to destroy, or at least destabilize, systems that impact various sites of scale. "Trans collectives and communities are deeply interwoven and interdependent, enmeshed in a way that makes distinguishing between the roles of career and recipient difficult – they're rotating, interchangeable, and reciprocal," argues Malatino (2020, 24). Thus, trans care refutes individualism and encourages dynamics that make each other's lives more possible and worth living. It refutes the structures and the systems that do not sustain the life forms of those who are unwilling or unable to reproduce normalize bodies, identities, and practices.

Communities |

Mutual aid is the radical act of caring for each other while working to change the world. Mutual aid projects are ones that are made by people for people: they directly meet people's survival needs. Dean Spade (2020) points out "as people were forced into systems of wage labor and private property, and wealth became increasingly concentrated, our ways of caring for each other have become more and more tenuous" (8). And as many scholars interested in the reproduction of labor and social justice have pointed out, much of this caring labor falls upon the shoulders of Black, Brown and Indigenous women through the American family system. Abolishing the family then opens space for radical shifts in how we relate to ourselves and others by unlearning the presumption supported by capitalist and familial logics that some people are deserving of care and others are not. Therefore, communes – consisting of around two hundred people according to some models – no longer train people to be capitalist workers or inhabitants of a straight, binary-gendered and racially stratified system like our current configuration does (Lewis 2019). For instance, "sex and sexual pleasure," argues O'Brien, "could become collective concerns, both challenging sexual coercion and abuse, and supporting people to find paths towards sexual fulfillment" through providing people the knowledge, space, and resources to heal from intergenerational trauma and religious shame. This dual pronged approach towards sexuality helps undo the heteronormative misogyny built into the framework of family and reconfigures what a "normal" body is because the capacity of what a body can do no longer defines who that person is. This also results in a less ableist world because mental and physical disabilities will no longer be in need of a "cure" nor shape what a "normal" person is.

Institutions |

Abolition is not about creating absence or chaos. Rather, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2018) articulates abolition is "a fleshly and material presence of social life lived differently." It is about figuring out how to work with people to make something rather than figure out how to erase something. Therefore, if the family is abolished discourses of family can no longer be mobilized to develop xenophobic and anti-immigrant laws, policies, and imaginaries at the nation/state level. With this, comes the blossoming of difference and the dissolution of borders. Wars can no longer be fought to "protect our loved ones" back home. Legal documents that codify gender and obligatory family relations like birth certificates or donor and adoption documents can no longer be used to deny trans parents' relationships with their children or force birthers to be legally connected to their offspring. The state in the form of offices like "Child Protective Services" has no recourse to take custody of children because children will not "belong" to anyone and childcare becomes collectivized.

Conclusion |

Several years ago in 2014, N and I were walking through some back streets in Boston, Massachusetts near the historic shopping district of Faneuil Hall, a historically significant marketplace and meeting hall that opened in 1743.[54] On winter break from my

[54] For me, it is important to reference where I am when having these types of conversations, particularly because I find myself in places that are deeply enmeshed in legacies of settler colonialism, imperialism, racial capitalism, and patriarchy. And because how we think and feel is deeply intertwined with where and when we are and who we are with, I must provide the context in which these conversations happen. Moreover, with the help of data mining companies like Ancestry, the Plymouth Public Library system, and the Mayflower Society, N has "traced" our genealogy. To her excitement and my complicated shame, N

master's program, we decided to get lunch before driving home to Plymouth. N doesn't chit chat much, so we silently plodded along the cobblestones towards our destination. After crossing a random street, she nonchalantly pointed out, "this is where I could have gotten an abortion when I was pregnant with your mother," and kept walking. Quickly doing the math, I realized my mother was in utero pre-Roe v. Wade which meant N would have had to secure an illegal abortion. Unsure of how to proceed with information about my retro-active potential non-existence, and my mother's impact on N's, and my life, I squirreled it away for future intellectual fodder.

My investment in mapping out the American family system more clearly comes at a time when Roe v. Wade was overturned; trans children, and especially trans girls, are being banned from playing sports at various ages in twenty states; the New York Times Opinion (2022) pages published a piece that uses "biological women;" corporations like Disney are leveraging queer and trans respect and dollars against alt-right and republican legislation; the prison industrial complex offered incarcerated peoples lesser sentences in exchange for sterilization (Tamburin 2019); COVID-19 continues to disable and kill people globally; Russia and various state powers continue to fuel environmental and community destruction; and misinformation alongside disinformation circulates faster than the capacity to institute nuanced critical thinking skills in the public education (that is also being dismantled).

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has found that our family's American roots start very close to the beginning of the colonies in the 1630s. My immediate and extended family continue to occupy Wampanoag land and have little interest in affecting any real material change for the Wampanoag community or Indigenous populations writ large. When I asked N if she really wanted to be affiliated with a group (the Mayflower Society) that historically bases its legitimacy on the demonization of non-Christians through murder and co-optation, she simply shrugged and stated it was "a long time ago," a common reaction for many white Americans. In offering all of this up, I simply add to the complex intellectual eco-system shaping my perceptions.

For some, these disruptions shatter people's liberal perceptions of progress, prompting an outcry of relatively organized, one-off protest. For others, myself included, see these disruptions as just another roadblock created in the hopes of completely stamping out the people and communities doing the work to undo the status quo. The passing of Roe v. Wade did not solve issues related to reproductive justice for most people wanting more bodily autonomy. Fighting for trans children to access systems that breed inequities does not solve how gender is used as a state and community policing tool. Letting people die and/or accelerating their deaths via illness and war over shifting understandings of community, belonging, and mutual aid. Therefore, as much as it pains me to be alerted to more news of hardship and death I am also encouraged and rejuvenated by the older and newer individuals and communities working together by sharing resources and knowledge like that of the Combahee River Collective, the "Birthing and Breast or Chestfeeding Trans People and Allies" on Facebook, SINS INVALID, Gays and lesbians Living in a Transgender Society (GLITZ), and La Resistencia. As my trans parents in this study along with many of these groups show, the traditional family structure is limited: decision making powers are hierarchical, financial and material resources are horded, and emotional sustenance and connection is divvied among those who "belong" and those who do not according to middle-class, white, cis heteronormative parameters. Therefore, moving beyond the family as the primary relational unit offers expansive opportunities to reimagine interrelationality among and across the human, part-human, non-human, relationships that are fundamental to developing a capacious politics of care.

Appendices

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name*	Age	Gender	Race &/or Ethnicity	Class	Sexuality	Gestational Parent (Y/N)
Ted	34	Male	White	Middle class	Queer	N
Chance	36	Male	Mixed (African American and white)	Working class	Sexually attracted to females	Y
Elise	mid-30s	Female	White	Lower-Middle Class	TBD	N
Grace	23	Trans Feminine	White	Lower-Middle Class	Queer/ Lesbian	N
McKenna	late 20s	Woman	White	Middle-Upper Class	Lesbian	N
Kory	25	Trans man	White	Lower-Middle Class	Queer	Y
Brianne	mid-40s	Trans Woman	White	Lower-Middle Class	"kind of straight"	N
Darren	27	Transgender Man	African American and Native American	Working class	Pansexual	Y
Medusa	32	Non-binary with masculine tendencies	White	Working class	Pansexual	Y
Rick	37	Trans man	White	Middle-Upper Class	Straight	N
Reed	36	Trans masculine / non-binary	White	Middle Class	Queer	Y
Daxton	48	Genderqueer	White	Middle-Upper Class	Queer	Y
Lisa	45	Woman	White	Middle-Upper Class	Lesbian	N
Tad	27	Gender non-conforming; trans man	White	Middle Class	Pansexual	Y

Table 2, continued

Miriam	mid-50s	Woman	White	Middle Class	Straight	**N**
Jeremy	36	Trans man	White	Lower-Middle Class	Queer/ Pansexual	Y
Ryder	28	Gender non-conforming; masc leaning	White	Lower-Middle Class	Queer/Gay	Y
Evan	33	Man	White	Middle Class	Straight	N
JP	early-50s	Genderqueer	Latino	Middle Class	"Likes Women"	Y
Sam	35	Non-binary; trans masc	White	Middle Class		Y
Beck	40	Gender non-conforming	White	Middle Class	Bisexual/ Queer	Y
Adam	42	Non-binary, trans masculine	White	Middle-Upper Class	Queer	Y
Jay	Mid-30s	Masc; Non-binary	White	Middle Class	Fluid	Y
Travis	mid-30s	Trans man	White	Middle Class	Queer	Y
Dominic	33	Gender non-binary	White	Lower-Middle Class	Pansexual	N
Kendrick	27	Trans man/man	Black	Middle Class	Queer/ Pansexual	Y
Emerson	early-30s	Trans man	White	Middle-Upper Class	Gay	Y
Xavier	36	Male	Black	Middle Class	Straight	Y
Peter	28	Genderqueer /Trans masculine	Thai American	Middle Class	Queer	Y
Damien	30	Male	Black	Middle Class	Straight	Y
Nathan	35	Non-binary	White	Middle-Upper Class	Pansexual	Y
Tom	35	Man	White	Middle-Upper Class	Pansexual	Y
Luke	mid-30s	Non-binary; trans masculine leaning	White	Middle-Upper Class	pansexual/ queer	Y

Table 2, continued

Damon	28	Man	Black	Middle Class	Straight	N
Juan	24	Trans man	Latino	Working Class	Queer	Y
Adrian	60	Man	Black	Unknown	Straight	Y

* Pseudonyms have been given to participants to protect their anonymity. Participant demographics were gathered in the interview. See Appendix X for the list of demographic and interview questions. Therefore, all participant demographics are written and labeled according to each participant. If for some reason a participant didn't want to answer or I forgot to ask then I combed the interviews for answers. If I could not find the answer, I left that section blank.

Table 2: Interview Questions

A. Demographic Information
1. Gender:
2. Sexuality:
3. Age:
4. Social class:
5. Race/Ethnicity:
6. City/ Town (Grew up and live currently):
7. Religion if any:
8. Relationship status:
9. Number of children and ages:
10. Who makes up your household:
11. Occupation/s:
a. Number of years in present occupation/s:
12. Other organizational memberships (community, sports, hobbies):
B. Qualitative/Narrative Information
1. When did you become a parent?
2. Did you always know you wanted to be a parent?
3. What does parenthood mean to you?
4. How do you think someone would describe your parenting style?
5. Can you describe to me what it feels like to be a parent?
6. What are the things you do to be a good parent?
7. Tell me about a happy parenting moment.
8. Was there a shift in how people treat you since you became a parent?
9. How is child care divided in your household?
10. How would you say your parenting differs from that of your parents?
11. How involved are other members of family, or friends, with your child(ren)?
12. What are some activities you like to do as a family?
13. What are some things you like to do when you're not in parent mode?
14. Do you see yourself reflected in any popular media? If so, why? If not, why?
15. How do you refer to yourself when you're talking about being a parent? Like I'm so-and-so's mom, dad, mother, parent, pops? How did you decide to go with that?

Table 2, continued

16. How do you view your role as a mother/father/(other parenting identification) etc.?
17. Can you describe to me a moment that you finally felt seen/understood in regards to your trans identity and your parenting?
18. Can you give me an example of a time you felt like a father/(other parenting identification)?
19. I am interested in learning more about how you, as a mother/father, decide what is best for you child(ren).
20. It seems like gender roles in respect to parenting are more relaxed in general. Meaning there is an increase of stay-at-home dads and career moms. Do you feel this is reflected in your family?
21. Sometimes LGBTQ people express it can be difficult to move about the world as a queer person. Have you ever faced any challenges? What about in relation to parenting?
22. Are there places that you (don’t) feel comfortable going? How come? What is it about that space?

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VITA

Miles Lynn Feroli

Education

2016 – 2022, expected	PhD in Gender and Women's Studies University of Kentucky Lexington, KY
2014 - 2015	MSc in Gender London School of Economics London, England
2010 - 2014	BA in American Studies Roger Williams University Bristol, Rhode Island

Professional Experience

2022 - Present	Associate Director Center for Inclusive Excellence and Global Engagement Eastern Kentucky University
2021 - 2022	Instructor of Record Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Media University of Kentucky
2021	Adjunct Instructor Department of History and Cultural Studies Roger Williams University
2016 – 2019	Instructor of Record Department of Gender and Women's Studies University of Kentucky

Scholastic and Professional Honors

2021	Cooperative for the Humanities and Social Sciences University of Kentucky
2019 – 2020	

2018	Center for Equality and Social Justice Fellow University of Kentucky
	LGBTQ* Graduate and Professional Research Grant University of Kentucky
	College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award University of Kentucky
	Bonnie Jean Cox Graduate Research Award, University of Kentucky
2017	Capacious Conference Grant Millersville University
	Bonnie Jean Cox Graduate Research Award University of Kentucky

<u>Professional Publications</u>

2014	Feroli, M. 2014. "A Deeper Cut: Enlightened Sexism and Grey's Anatomy." In *Smart Chicks on Screen: Representing Women's Intellect in Film and Television*, edited by Laura D'Amore, 109-128. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.