

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Gay fathers, gay citizenship: on the power of reproductive futurism and assimilation

Journal Item

How to cite:

Langdrige, Darren (2013). Gay fathers, gay citizenship: on the power of reproductive futurism and assimilation. *Citizenship Studies*, 17(6-7) pp. 728-741.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2013 Taylor Francis

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's [data policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

**Gay fathers, gay citizenship:
On the power of reproductive futurism and assimilation**

Abstract

Edelman's (2004) new ethics of queer theory is focussed on the all-pervasive image of the child, which he argues provides the foundation for the hegemonic politics of 'reproductive futurism'. His searing criticism raises important questions for sexual citizenship and particularly the gay parent as citizen. Edelman's argument that queers should abandon accommodation and instead embrace their position as the figure of negativity offers a challenge to all those gay men that seek to be fathers. In this paper I critically engage with Edelman's arguments and explore the implications of a queer rejection of reproductive futurism and parental privilege through an empirical investigation of young gay men's stories about the possibility of becoming fathers. I argue that whilst Edelman's uncompromising stance serves to open a space for gay men embracing the jouissance that is increasingly being abandoned through an assimilationist desire for citizenship it also, more problematically, closes down possibilities for gay men and thus further reinforces present inequalities in citizenship. Is negativity the only option in the face of the onslaught of reproductive futurism or might there be a dialectical solution that is at once radically queer but also reflective of the variety of claims for sexual citizenship?

Background and introduction

Late modernity has been characterised by tremendous social, cultural and technological developments that have impacted upon and challenged 'traditional' notions of the family (Weeks, Donovan and Heaphy, 1999). Whereas parenthood has always been the 'default position' for heterosexuals, it is only relatively recently that it is becoming a realistic option for 'out' gay and bisexual men, albeit mostly restricted to the West¹. And although there is increasing awareness of the possibilities of parenthood for lesbians (see, for instance, Dunne, 1996, 1998, 2000; Hicks, 2011; Ryan-Flood, 2009) there is still relatively little research on the issue of parenthood for gay and bisexual men, though this is changing (see Hicks, 2011; Lewin, 2009, and Weston, 1991, for some notable examples). There has been a considerable expansion of academic interest over the last twenty years in the analysis, problematising and de-centering of masculinities. While no clear equivalence can be drawn between academic analyses and substantive social change, masculinities are no longer so fixed and taken-for-granted in the contemporary social world. These processes of problematisation extend to questioning the assumed separation of gay and bisexual males from

fatherhood and raise the broader issue of the relationship between gay fatherhood and claims for citizenship.

Only a short time ago possibilities for gay and bisexual men having children were strictly limited. Gay and bisexual men who wanted children either engaged in heterosexual relationships, struggled to foster/adopt, occasionally co-parented or invested time working with children or with the children of their friends and relatives. Many other gay and bisexual men (and indeed their friends and family) just assumed that becoming a parent was not even an option (Hargaden and Llewellyn, 1996; Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). Tied in with this is the common belief that men are not 'natural carers' and furthermore that gay and bisexual men pose a particular 'sexual risk' to children (Hicks & McDermott, 1999). At the moment, the means by which gay and bisexual men (in same-sex relationships) can become parents include co-parenting, adoption/fostering and surrogacy. Whilst formal adoption and fostering have existed (for heterosexuals) for many years it is unusual – though becoming less so - to find openly gay and bisexual men (in same-sex relationships) who have been approved to adopt children in Europe, the USA and also in many other places throughout the world. Hicks and McDermott (1999) argue that this is due to (1) institutional opposition to gay and bisexual men becoming parents in this way and (2) few gay and bisexual men putting themselves forward to foster or adopt, though this is clearly changing. One significant development, in the US particularly, has been the increasing use of transnational adoption by lesbian, gay and bisexual men and women (Eng, 2010) that in itself raises troubling questions about liberalism and the 'racialization of intimacy' (ibid), which I explore further at the end of this article. Finally, whilst there have been a number of high profile cases of gay men engaging in surrogacy arrangements these are still relatively uncommon and invariably limited to the very wealthy.

There have been many changes in the gender, sexual, generational and age relations of family life in recent decades. The contemporary challenge to the form of the traditional family is part of the elaboration of what Giddens (1991) terms 'life politics'. In post-traditional societies, life politics addresses questions of how we should live and what sort of moral order we should create in a society disembedded from the ties of tradition. Plummer (1995: 147) describes life politics as 'a radical, pluralistic, democratic, contingent, participatory politics of human life-choices and differences'. He sees one axis of this new politics in issues of gender and sexuality and, in particular, the creation of 'intimate citizenship'. Giddens (1992) argues that we now have the possibility of 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991), based on negotiation, equality and confluent love, and he cites lesbian and gay relationships as examples that demonstrate some of the qualities of the pure relationship. Families occupy a crucial role in the distribution of citizenship entitlements

(Turner, 2008) and it is here where we see battles unfolding about the right to have lesbian, gay and bisexual families treated equally with those of heterosexuals. As Puar (2007: xii) notes:

... a transition is under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e. the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e. gay marriage and families). The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain – but certainly not most – homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the ‘measures of benevolence’ that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity.

Resistance to new definitions of the family must not be underestimated however. For instance, legislation concerning assisted conception services (and social policy concerning the family more widely) rely on very specific definitions of what a family is, should be and/or how it might be ideally constructed (Langdrige & Blyth, 2001; Turner, 2008). There is also currently considerable debate about the ‘model’ nuclear biological family and opposition to ‘alternative’ or non-traditional families. Despite extensive research of child-rearing in families headed by both single women and lesbian couples, and a smaller body of work on gay/bisexual men and couples, failing to identify any more problems for children in these ‘alternative’ families than in ‘traditional’ families (e.g. Golombok, Spencer & Rutter, 1983; Patterson, 1995), prejudice against their access to assisted conception treatment and fostering/adoption remains pervasive. And so, in spite of apparently liberal assisted conception legislation in the UK, disapproval concerning the families of lesbians and gay/bisexual men is still apparent, with attempts to legislate and control ‘the family’ and more specifically to restrict access to those deemed ‘undesirable’ (Langdrige & Blyth, 2001).

Turner (2008) highlights how, in spite of the decline of the nuclear family, the moral force of marriage and family is so strong within most cultures that rather than simply refuse citizenship (rights and wider acknowledgement) instead we see queer relationships (and also therefore parenthood) being brought into the fold alongside heterosexual marriage and traditional notions of family. The UK introduced legislation for same sex civil unions in 2004 and the present conservative/liberal democratic coalition government is currently consulting about legislation to allow same sex marriage. David Cameron’s assertion that his support for this move is because ‘I am a conservative’, rather than ‘in spite of being a conservative’, highlights the desire to allow/subject queers to the same entitlements/treatment as heterosexuals. For many, this is a tremendously positive development, the result of continuing campaigning efforts and a general sense of the

success of an appeal to liberal sensibilities around equality. For others, this is yet another example of the gradual and effective assimilation of lesbians and gay/bisexual men into a privileged heterosexual matrix of (white, middle class) coupledness, monogamy and the strictures of particular given family forms.

The factioning, fractioning, and fractilizing of identity is a prime activity of societies of control, whereby subjects (the ethnic, the homonormative) orient themselves as subjects through their disassociation or disidentification from others disenfranchised in similar ways in favor of consolidation with axes of privilege. Puar (2007: 28).

Also significant - and troubling - is how this new benevolence towards queer families and relationships is 'contingent upon ever narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity' (Puar, 2007: xii). That is, the opening up of marriage and family to queers is far from a simple benign gesture of tolerance, with it instead implicated in the re-production of an elite consumerist queer subject and also what Puar (2007) describes as 'homonationalism'. Racial privilege and a seemingly unlimited consumption capability are best exemplified by the growth of transnational adoption amongst queers in the US (Eng, 2010). And it is through discourses of (sexual) progress contrasted to the (sexually) backwards culture of the terrorist Other, that the queer is increasingly acting as the poster boy/girl of a racially and religiously divisive post 9/11 Imperialist homonationalist politics.

The tension between a view of sexual politics concerning LGB relationships and family as progressive (through growing equality) or regressive (through the loss of the Otherness of being queer and the embracing of privilege) forms the central thread of this article. This work therefore speaks to the many broader contemporary debates about political strategy, action and engagement amongst those who are currently excluded from full citizenship and seeking recognition and rights.

A theoretical challenge

Whilst Edelman's (2004) searing polemic *No Future* has been summarily dismissed for being incoherent and nihilistic (see, for instance, Lewin, 2009, Weatherill, n.d.), I believe it offers the most persuasive and powerful account of the power/danger of 'reproductive futurism' for people interested in challenging the hegemonic position of the image-of-the-child-as-collective-future within contemporary citizenship discourse. That is, Edelman's work represents the most extreme position in a new tradition of queer theory, including writers such as Bell and Binnie (2000), Berlant

(1997), Bersani (1995) and Halberstam (2007), where it is argued that the queer represents the antithesis of the figural image of the child as a representation of future possibilities. As Berlant (1997: 1) states: 'In the process of collapsing the political and the personal into a world of public intimacy, a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by one imagined for fetuses and children.' Much of this work has emerged in the context of the 'anti-social' thesis, perhaps best exemplified by Bersani (1995: 5), who notes the danger of 'queering' the family from within thus:

Suspicious of our own enforced identity, we are reduced to playing subversively with normative identities – attempting, for example, to “resignify” the family for communities that defy the usual assumptions about what constitutes a family. These efforts whilst valuable, can have assimilative rather than subversive consequences; having de-gayed themselves, gays melt into the culture that they like to think of themselves as undermining. ... De-gaying gayness can only fortify homophobic oppression; it accomplishes in its own way the principal aim of homophobia: the elimination of gays.

Edelman (ibid) argues that the political relies on what he terms 'reproductive futurism' in which there is an inherent heterosexual logic at play. Through his Lacanian reading of a number of literary sources, notably Dicken's Tiny Tim, the face of the child – employed strategically by conservatives through a discourse of the protection of children – leads to the subordination of present desires (jouissance) to the always deferred claim to meet the needs of innocent children. Traditional arguments against gay marriage exemplify the conservative desire to preserve the status quo in which the queer is an abject citizen in the name of the protection of children, or more specifically childhood itself. Edelman's polemic is not primarily levelled as a criticism of this well-worn argument, however, but rather against those queers who speak to such Othering by mobilising a similar claim to the value of marriage, family and the future of society through rights based claims to be allowed equal access to these societal structures, whether through the desire to marry or raise children. With such claims – when realised – comes the abandonment of jouissance and the subversive force of queer sexuality. Instead, it is argued that queers should refuse such claims and instead embrace their positioning as Other, as 'parasites upon the social order and embody the death drive for which they have come to stand' (Bateman, 2006). To this end, Edelman - not unproblematically - deploys the rather arcane psychoanalysis of Lacan to develop his arguments and it is here where we see the death drive centrally figured through what he calls the 'sinthomosexual', the figure who refuses compassion and futurity.

For politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child. That Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention ... queerness names the side of those not 'fighting for the children', the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. Edelman (2004: 3).

This radical queer negativity is not without its problems however, and that is even when putting aside the serious concerns that can be raised about the Lacanian framework on which his argument is developed (Brenkman, 2002; Weatherill, n.d.). Most notable is the separation of theory/critique from practical politics. Edelman elides any serious consideration of what is expected of the queer him- or her-self, with him revelling in his own jouissance at this refusal to engage in the messy world of practical politics. Unlike Warner (2000), who makes a similar case for queer refusal of sexual norms and the defence of all that heterosexuals find detestable in queer culture, there is no future imagined here. Of course, this is knowing and intentional but for those of us in the social sciences wanting to effect social and political change it leaves us seriously wanting. Bateman (2006) contrasts this with Butler's (2002) position in *Antigone's Claim*, which Edelman dismisses as liberal-humanist inclusiveness, with Butler advocating working within the social to improve queer lives and Edelman insisting that the queer must always and forever remain disruptively Other. And Puar (2007) questions the focus on reproduction for the way it may inadvertently re-centre the very child focused and future oriented politics that Edelman seeks to resist, with her arguing for a Deleuzian focus on events and assemblage: a critical turn to regeneration rather than reproduction. Edelman's position cannot be taken seriously – in political terms – but it, at least, opens up a space to think the unthinkable and also challenge us in the social sciences to articulate a practical politics of sexual/intimate citizenship that does not simply reproduce the status quo.

Growth of gay parenthood arguably stands as an example of assimilationism in sexual citizenship, a rejection of the antisocial queer that Edelman so passionately advocates and also the embracing of privilege associated with the racialization of intimacy (Eng, 2010). Key here is the next generation of gay men and whether the direction of generational travel is towards the acceptance or rejection of reproductive futurism, towards assimilation and privilege or critical challenge and that is the focus of this paper, an empirical examination of the procreative consciousness of young gay men in the UK. In a sense, the work presented here might be thought of as located in the life course theory

perspective, whereby individual development is understood within particular interpersonal and historical contexts (Bengston & Allen, 1993; Cohler, 2005, Rabun & Oswald, 2009). The study of particular birth cohorts is one way of operationalising this theory, as particular birth cohorts occupy a shared historical macro-context and thereby provide valuable information for understanding LGBT lives against normative heterosexual expectations. Given the relatively recent historical change concerning citizenship and lesbians and gay/bisexual men, particularly concerning gay/bisexual parenthood, this seems a most apposite methodological strategy. The views of the next generation of gay men concerning their desire to become a father provide crucial information to inform the debates outlined above, an empirical ground to think through otherwise contested 'bunker positions' for and against gay parenthood. Below, I present key findings from a study of young gay and bisexual men's views about parenthood that speak to the debates outlined above and provide valuable information about the next generation and their desire (or not) to become fathers.

The views of young gay men

Participants were recruited through advertisements throughout the West Yorkshire region of England. Gay youth groups and local universities were specifically targeted and then snowball sampling from initial informants. The only restrictions to recruitment were that participants should be between the ages of 18 and 30 and be gay or bisexual without any children. Twenty participants were recruited aged from 18 to 28 with a mean age of 23.1 years. Nineteen of the participants described themselves as gay, with one bisexual. Eleven were single and nine in relationships ranging from one month to three years in length (mean of approximately one year). Seventeen were White British, two described themselves as mixed race and one Chinese. Eleven stated that their religion was Church of England, five having no religious affiliation, two Catholic, one Methodist and one Spiritualist. However, only six participants described themselves as being 'personally religious'. Five were educated to UK school leaving age (GSCE), ten with two further years of school education ('A' level) and five educated to degree level. Five were undergraduate students, five unemployed, four employed in manual occupations, three employed in the service industry and three employed in a professional occupation. The sample was roughly in proportion to the regional population across all demographics, according to the Office of National Statistics.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions designed to facilitate rich responses on the expectations of young gay men for parenthood. Questions were designed to address the background, knowledge and expectations of the participants with sections on their own experience of being parented, understandings of gay parenthood and hopes and wishes with regard

to becoming parents themselves. Interviews lasted from an hour to several hours. Interview data was transcribed verbatim and subjected to a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis (van Manen, 1990; see also Langdrige, 2007). That is, an attempt was first made to understand the experience of each participant as a whole analysed through a systematic thematic analysis before moving on to look for overarching themes across participants. The findings were then analysed in the light of extant understandings of the issues and theoretical knowledge of sexual identities, parenthood and citizenship outlined above. This involves discussion of both the primary data garnered in the study presented here and also the findings (including quotes from participants) from extant research on this topic conducted, most of which is from US studies. Similarities and differences with previous research are highlighted but the primary focus here is on how the data might inform theoretical debate about the politics of family and reproductive futurism.

Reproducing the past and projecting a future

In the seventies we expressed ourselves sexually, in the eighties we were coupling up, and in the nineties we are having families (Gay father cited in Mallon, 2004, p. 29)

There was an even distribution among the young men in this study with regard to their desire to have a child. Seven of the participants were clear about their desire to become a parent, seven were equally clear that they do not want a child now and probably not in the future. The remaining six men did not rule out the idea in principle but are unsure about becoming parents at present, with a couple of the men warming to the idea through the process of being interviewed on the topic. It is clear that this level of depth of conversation about having children was new to a number of the participants and several men expressed gratitude for a space in which to air their thoughts, and learn more about how they see the issue in conversation. This distribution of the wish to be a parent is in itself interesting as it is doubtful that there would have been such an even split with earlier generations of young gay men, suggesting a change in young gay men's identities and expectations about their life course, as has been noted in previous work in the US (Mallon, 2004; Lewin, 2006; Stacey, 2006; Berkowitz, 2007; Rabun & Oswald, 2009; Goldberg et al., 2012). Previous generations of gay men have grown up with an expectation that their sexual identity precluded a parental identity, reinforced within and outside gay communities through public understandings of gay and bisexual lifestyles. One of the participants in Mallon's (2004) study describes the situation thus: 'The coming out process was not so much about people knowing I was gay as it was more about losing the idea of having children'. The apparent shift in stories of parenthood for gay men with many more embracing the notion of fatherhood may indeed reflect a 'transformation of

intimacy' with the rise of a new sexual story (Plummer, 1995) for parenthood emerging in late modernity, in the West at least.

In Berger and Luckmann's (1966) terms, we see gay and bisexual men internalizing the *objectivation* we now all see in the social world through, for instance, social and legal changes (such as civil partnerships and the Human Fertilization and Embryology Act (1990)). These *typifications* – representations - are increasingly becoming socially *habitualized* with new and ever more potent stories circulating and offering new choices for young gay and bisexual men: for instance, television programmes like ABC's incredibly popular and critically acclaimed *Modern Family* featuring representations of gay men as parents. This is not entirely unproblematic, however, for whilst this show ticks all the boxes of a progressive queer liberalism (Eng, 2010) all the characters are exceptionally wealthy and the particular model of queer parenthood on show is the result of transnational adoption. With time queer parenthood as social practice may become institutionalised as it becomes further historicised and collectively acknowledged and supported. Once familiar narratives of the end of the family line for gay and bisexual men when coming-out, whilst still present, are more background than foreground amongst this generation of men who really do appear to be beginning to tell a new story and in the process breaking one of the last taboos for not only gay and bisexual men but also the broader social world into which they are thrown.

A number of core themes were apparent within the data concerning the reasons for becoming a father, or the development of procreative consciousness in the terms of Marsiglio & Hutchinson (2002): see also Berkowitz (2009). These included: family background; a natural urge; loving children; the dream of a perfect life. These themes were further nuanced by the desire amongst several men to become parents at some point in the future but not now. This was often in the context of feeling that it was important to establish a career and home before seriously contemplating parenthood, reflecting a normative developmental trajectory in which one needs to first establish one's own place in the world before bringing another into it, perhaps at least in part due to a sense of needing to warrant their right to do this on account of their own marginalized status as gay men (Goldberg et al., 2012).

The most significant finding was how influential one's own experience of being parented was for these young men. Men who were products of a happy childhood seemed to be the most likely to want to re-produce their own upbringing and become fathers. They were also the most likely to report being happy in their lives now. Just under half of the sample (nine men) spoke of their happy

childhoods and of these six were very definite about their desire for a child, which is remarkable given the ages of the participants. The ‘naturalness’ of the desire to father children is invoked, acting to power this motivation and firmly place it within the realm of the ‘normal’, the ‘everyday’, in contrast to the notion of the gay father as pioneer (see Clarke, 2002).

We’ve grown up in such a loving caring environment that its just a natural feeling for us to want have children. (Rick 1:28, Pro).

Of the remaining men who report happy upbringings, two see fatherhood as a possibility, with only one (Simon) definite about not wanting a child. However, Simon is disabled with cerebral palsy, unemployed and living at home, and unable to come out to his parents at the age of 27 and perhaps there are more significant issues in his life at present than having children. Only one of the men who strongly wishes to become a father describes an unhappy childhood (Dave). Dave is unlike all the other young men who profess the wish for a child in this respect. He had an unhappy childhood, sounds unhappy in his life now, is uncomfortable about his sexuality, and has not come out but still expresses a desire to become a parent. The other men who would like a child appear to be more accepting of their sexuality and all are out in some contexts, although two are have not come out to their parents.

Several of the men related their views on having a child to their own family experiences, and in particular with regard to their experience of their own parents. For some there was a feeling of wanting to recreate the happy family they had grown up in and to engage in an inter-generational transmission of values from father to child. It is worth noting, however, that several of the men who present a happy upbringing have absent fathers, either because they do not live with them or because they work long hours and are unavailable to a great extent. So even among this sample a ‘happy childhood’ is relative. Only three of the men talk positively about their relationships with their fathers.

I do see myself as pretty much following in the footsteps of my father. You know getting a steady job and then being a father or having children. (Nathan 15:28, Pro).

My family have and always will be very close to me and I think it ... I think it has lead to me wishing to impossibly embark on fatherhood. I’ve not had certain things from them that I would love to give my child if I were to have one.... they are largely homophobic. (Tom 16:28, Pro).

For Dave, mentioned above, who had experienced an unhappy childhood, it was the idea of making good the problems of the last generation that drove his desire to become a parent. There was a strong sense of generational reparation feeding his desire to become a father.

I'd like to look after the kid. Do all the things that my dad didn't do with me. I know this sounds selfish...but I'd like to do all the things...like take them park, take care of them...just enjoy myself with...running around with them. ... If I know what's wrong about what my dad did to me or whatever type of thing like...I know what's the right thing to treat a kid...and bring a kid up. (Dave 8:41 Pro)

Practical difficulties are acknowledged by these gay men, but are secondary to the elucidation of pro-fatherhood narratives. It is the process of becoming a father as a gay man that tempers desire rather than any doubt about the value of this as an option. Options for gay men are indeed restricted, particularly when there is limited access to information or resources, as there is for many of these young men who do not come from particularly privileged or cosmopolitan backgrounds. Ways of becoming a father like surrogacy are likely felt to be the preserve of the rich and powerful, even if acknowledged at all as an option.

Several men reveal how they have had a dream growing up – a kind of fantasy of a future life with a family of their own. There is a degree of wistfulness for Stuart as a youth worker who loves children and equates intimate relationships with parenthood but feels it is almost impossible to achieve as a gay man. This dream is thought 'unattainable', due to his status as a gay man, though certainly not unwanted. Instead, a 'perfect life' is conjured up here through the presence of a child, the presence of future possibilities founded upon a particular image of the family.

It's that unattainable dream of that perfect life. Well everyone craves for it don't they? Everyone wants to be happy, settle down in a loving relationship. And have that child as well, that...to a lot of people that can make...it a perfect life. (Stuart 5:39 Maybe)

This notion of a perfect future represents a move to (white) heterosexual norms concerning a person's life span development, similar to that seen in other studies. As a participant in the work of Berkowitz (2009: 184) states: 'I actually think once I found out I was gay, I definitely wanted kids ... I almost wanted to normalize it as much as I could ... or maybe to prove them wrong.' What is notable in other studies, is the way in which gay family life (specifically, coupledness with children)

is privileged over other ways of living. In the more recent extant literature (e.g. Berkowitz, 2009; Lewin, 2006; Mallon, 2004) there is an increasing lack of validation of ‘families of choice’ (Weston, 1991), where friendships constitute the gay family, with a hierarchy of values expressed with children being the means by which a ‘real’ rather than ‘pretended’ family is constituted. Many participants spoke of ‘wanting a normal or conventional life’ (read as: white, middle-class, heterosexual) and leaving behind their ‘selfish’ past, marking out those gay men who refuse this life course trajectory as deficient (see for instance Mallon, 2004). Goldberg et al., (2012) similarly note the way in which two types of gay men are constructed in contemporary (US) narratives of parenthood with those not embracing parenthood positioned as self-centred. By contrast, many of the UK participants spoke of wanting children itself being ‘selfish’, perhaps reflecting key differences in the conception of the acceptability of gay families for UK working class gay men against US middle-class sensibilities, and the potential concern for the lives of children brought up in non-conventional family situations. This is tempered, however, by a strong sense of the ‘natural’, alongside the notion of continuing one’s existence by leaving the most powerful trace of all upon the human world, another human being (cf. Ricoeur, 1988):

With any genuine person ... male there is a desire to be a father, that’s what we are put on this earth for. To have children, to reproduce and to get, keep the human race going basically. ... You want to be to become a father, you want your name to carry on. You want to put something else into this world than just a rotting body and decaying dust at the end of the day ... and your child is there 20 years after you’ve died as this person of what you’ve created in some ways. And when people look at your child they will see what you’ve brought up a good person, what kind of person you are through them and then they will go on and have children and it so on and so on. It does sound selfish, it isn’t selfish way ... how else are you remembered? As a gay man you can’t pass your name on, your legacy ends there; that’s your life done and dusted. (Stuart 5:40 Maybe).

A participant in Rabun and Oswald (2009: 280) perhaps best exemplifies the very real practical tensions being expressed between ‘mainstreaming conservatism’ and the claim for rights:

[Gay men] have moved from a culture centred on sex to things like marriage and fatherhood, etc. I’m not sure necessarily if I like that change sort of mainstreaming or the conservatism coming into the gay community but I do appreciate that we increasingly have the opportunity to get married ... well in one state in the U.S. ... but nevertheless I like that the option is there. But I definitely think in the context of the gay

movement or gay culture right now I think [parenting] is encouraged.

There were others who talked of their unhappy childhoods and would not consider having children, for fear of repeating patterns of poor parenting and familial unhappiness, perhaps reflecting public discourses around cyclical patterns of abuse in families. But even here, there is no sense of resisting reproductive futurism through an anti-social desire to embrace sexual jouissance amongst any of the men who did not want children or political stance against the perceived privilege of parenthood, but rather a personal expression of the challenge of parenthood more akin to the arguments of Duff (2011) than Edelman (*ibid*). That is, whilst Duff similarly argues that democratic citizenship relies on a discourse of parenthood, parenthood leads to insecurity rather than confidence in political virtue.

As I've said I don't really want to end up like my parents... if I was going to be in a family of my own I don't think I'd want it to end up like my family... Don't really want to be a parent if the person that I love most in the world really resents me. (Paul 3:24, *Anti*).

What is significant here is that this data comes from a population of young gay men hitherto ignored in the extant literature. These men were not from large cosmopolitan cities or from privileged backgrounds (unlike most US literature on this subject), as many of these men were working class and relatively poor. Furthermore, UK data concerning the desire of young gay men to become fathers is rare with no previous studies specifically focussed on procreative consciousness conducted with UK gay and bisexual men. What are absent here, however, were stories in which race/ethnicity intersected with the stories for gay parenthood. The majority of the participants, as is unfortunately common in much similar work, were white British men and even amongst those three participants from other racial backgrounds issues of race and ethnicity were not highlighted. The fact that these men were not from particularly cosmopolitan environments may well be significant here. Much of their knowledge of queer parenthood stemmed from television where class and race rarely figure in the representation of queer lives. The stories of parenthood from these young gay men, alongside the extant US literature, demonstrate the very real presence of a new homonormative narrative that is being embraced by large numbers of the next generation of gay men, regardless of class background, and so evidence the power of reproductive futurism. What is absent is resistance - whether personal or political - and instead we see the apparent need to engage with what appears to be becoming a hegemonic narrative of gay parenthood with all the privilege that this entails.

The individual narrative histories of these men clearly patterned their desire concerning fatherhood, alongside their beliefs about the nature of family itself. In common with other similar US studies, these men were split evenly on their desire to become a father, with a sense of reproducing the past through their own desires for particular familial futures. The power of reproductive futurism is clear, with many of these men speaking of their desire for a family in ways that are more traditionally associated with heterosexual men. Indeed, even amongst those who do not wish to be parents this is rarely a result of adopting an identity as 'refusenik' (in Stacey's, 2006, terms) – of revelling in the jouissance of homosexuality or refusal of privilege - but rather through a more personal desire not to reproduce their own negative childhood experiences. There is little here to satisfy Edelman's calls for a queer refusal of reproductive futurism, no outsider perspective but rather an internal and very individual engagement with (accommodation to?) the power of family and parental citizenship. What is the possibility of 'no future' here and what are the possibilities of a radical queer alternative to such child centred futurism?

No future or a critical future?

Most queers would, I think, want a place in a political future and find it difficult to envisage a world where they all stand together against reproductive futurism and, therefore, against full citizenship. This is certainly true of the young gay men in this study and, given the evidence presented in other studies, likely the case for many other gay men. The nature of this future is in doubt, however, and it is here that Edelman offers a useful corrective to the dangers of reproductive futurism and the wholesale assimilation of queers within extant models of family and parenthood. But how might we work with both tradition and critique in formulating a politics of sexual citizenship? In Langdridge (2006) I outline one possible resolution to the tensions between ideology and critique, within the context of sadomasochism and sexual citizenship. In that article I draw on the work of Ricoeur to advance a theoretical position in which there is space for ideology (in the form of citizenship) and utopian critique (in the form of transgression). With this, there is space for both a political engagement with the core (in terms of rights based claims to citizenship) and also space for those standing on the margins to queer citizenship itself through their active refusal to participate. In common with the calls from Gamson (1995), and also Grosz (1995) with her equivalent discussion of feminist politics, I argue that there is a need – through dialectic - for both traditional political engagement and more radically transgressive queer politics in order to effect progressive political change.

But is this enough? Certainly not for Edelman but then he fails to offer up any constructive solution to the critique he offers, and stands by this position proudly. Is it enough for some queers to stand outside reproductive futurism and revel in *jouissance*, whilst others embrace the call and offer up the potential of critique from within, or do we need more? And what of those queers who do occupy the antisocial, quite literally, when attempts are being made to continually undermine their freedom and capacity to do so? Does the mere presence of the queer within parenthood offer a critical perspective that will gradually erode the power of reproductive futurism and privilege: on the basis of the stories of these young gay men, I think not. Future studies will need to focus in more closely on the claims for citizenship being made by all sexual minorities to further examine the trajectory of stories of sexual citizenship. The dialectical approach offered up above provides one possible resolution but only if there are enough queers to stand up against the (potentially) pernicious power of reproductive futurism.

The allure of parenthood is strong, imbued as it is with power and entitlement, and this is where the dialectic between ideology and utopia may collapse in on itself. The strength of the desire for parenthood expressed by the gay men in the study presented here, alongside the failure of those choosing against parenthood to locate this within any explicitly political stance, demonstrates the power of parenthood. Furthermore, reports of gay fathers rejecting previous queer lives and asserting the superiority of their new lives as fathers represents a worrying but understandable trend (see, for instance, Lewin, 2009). Such narratives are infused with the power of reproductive futurism, racial and economic privilege and a perverse version of the canonical narrative concerning the perceived incompatibility of queerness and ‘family’. A dialectical method here, unlike that concerning sadomasochistic desire to engage with citizenship and transgression, is much less balanced with the ideology of (heterosexual) family dominant in all cultures and white, middle-class ideologies dominant amongst queer families in the UK and US. Whilst gay men may be creating new family forms, that choice carries responsibilities as much as entitlements, responsibilities to the Other queers who – for whatever reason – are not able or willing to claim citizenship by becoming a father (or indeed, mother). And whilst Lewin (*ibid*) bemoans the queer critique, offered by writers such as Edelman, for the way in which they seek to enforce a dichotomy between queerness and family (much as we have seen with the religious right), her own position offers little space for critical commentary on the pervasive influence of very particular notions of family itself. I think she is right that simple for and against arguments about the right to gay fatherhood are unproductive but considerable care is needed to walk a path here in which there is acknowledgement of the rights of gay and bisexual men to claim fatherhood for themselves and space for the refusal and criticism of the institutions of family and parenthood by other queers (whether lesbian, gay, bi or trans). The

dialectical method mentioned above will not offer anything unless there is a continuing queer critique of modes of relating, such as that provided by Edelman (2004), Eng (2010) and Puar (2007). Such modes of critique raise troubling questions about the individual, state and wider society, and most importantly space for expressions of queer subjectivity in which the *jouissance* and affectivity that many people - queer or otherwise - may wish to embrace. Whilst the ideas of Edelman and other queer theorists may not offer up practical political solutions, they occupy a crucial role in challenging an unreflective and arguably conservative drift in queer politics and provide the necessary power to sustain a dialectical engagement in which reproductive futurism and the power of particular notions of family meets its counterpoint.

It is also important to spend some time reflecting upon (and troubling) the queer subject that is at the heart of many (most?) stories of queer parenthood, a subject who is invariably white and privileged. The 'racialization of intimacy' is particularly pertinent here, defined by David Eng (2010: 10) as 'the collective ways by which race becomes occluded within the private domain of private family and kinship today.' The racialization of intimacy draws attention to the way occlusion occurs, for instance, in transnational adoption, the apotheosis of the white middle class, to which we might now also add 'queer' (in the United States at least), and the way in which this serves to reinscribe idealised notions of family in the global North through the procurement of babies from the global South. It also draws attention to the way in which queer families in Europe, the US and Australasia invariably involve axes of privilege that so often go unacknowledged: class and race. This is the challenge of 'intersectionality', perhaps supplemented by the notion of 'assemblage' - if we wish to avoid the 'primacy and singularity of the disciplinary subject and its identitarian interpellation' (Puar, 2011: 31). Without critical awareness of intersectionality/assemblage when thinking through sexual citizenship we risk the further occlusion of race and class from the intimate sphere and our own complicity in the growth of a dangerous new neoliberal 'homonormativity', driven by the consumptive power of white middle-class gay and bisexual men (Duggan, 2002; Nast, 2002).

Beyond the particularities of gay and bisexual fatherhood and the boundaries of citizenship, this article raises broader questions that speak to contemporary debates in sexual politics concerned with the pervasive dualisms of ideology versus utopia, transgression versus citizenship, and inside versus outside. What is shown here is that whilst a dialectical method in the spirit of Ricoeur (1986), a progressive spiral of engagement rather than vacillating endlessly between two opposed positions, may provide a way forward for those of us in the social sciences interested in moving beyond entrenched bunker positions this needs to be within the context of recognising the potential

power of one position to dominate the other. Should one position in any dialectic be so powerful, as we see here with the notion of reproductive futurism and family, there is a danger that the dialectic will collapse in on itself, or even worse spiral regressively backwards. What we need to be alert to, therefore, is the power invested in the respective positions and the possibility of both critique and tradition to sustain themselves in the face of each Other, such that any dialectic is indeed progressive and offers up space for all of those affected to realise their own personal desires whilst also effecting broader socio-political change.

References

- Bateman, R.B. (2006). The future of queer theory. *The Minnesota Review*, Spring, No. 65-66, pp. 171-175, doi:10.1215/00265667-2006-65-66-171.
- Bell, D. & Binnie, J. (2000). *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bengston, A.L. & Allan, K.R. (1993). The life course perspective applied to families over time. In P.G. Boss, W.J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W.R. Shumm & S.K. Steinmetz (eds.) *Sourcebook of family theories and methods: a contextual approach* (pp. 469-499). New York: Plenum Press.
- Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York, NJ: Anchor Books.
- Berkowitz, D. (2007). A sociohistorical analysis of gay men's procreative consciousness. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 3 (2/3), pp. 157-190.
- Berlant, L. (1997). *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bersani, L. (1995). *Homos*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brenkman, J. (2002). Queer post-politics. *Narrative*, 10 (2), pp. 174-180.
- Cohler, B.J. (2005). Life course social sciences perspectives on the GLBT family. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 1(1), pp. 69-95.

Clarke, V. (2002). Resistance and normalization in the construction of lesbian and gay families: a discursive analysis. In A. Coyle & C. Kitzinger (eds.) *Lesbian and gay psychology: new perspectives* (pp. 98-116). Oxford: Blackwell.

Duff, B. (2011). *The Parent as Citizen: A Democratic Dilemma*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Duggan, L. (2002). The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo & D. Nelson (eds.) *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* (pp. 175-194). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Dunne, G.A. (1996). *Lesbian Lifestyles*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dunne, G.A. (1998). *Living 'Difference': Lesbian Perspectives on Work and Family Life*. New York: Haworth Press.

Dunne, G.A. (2000). Opting into motherhood: lesbians blurring the boundaries and transforming the meaning of parenthood and kinship. *Gender & Society*, 14 (1), 11-35.

Edelman, L. (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Eng, D. L. (2010). *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Gamson, J. (1995). Must identity movements self-destruct? A queer dilemma. *Social Problems*, 42(3), pp. 390-407.

Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goldberg, A.E., Downing, J.B. & Moyer, A.M. (2012). Why parenthood, and why now? Gay men's motivations for pursuing parenthood. *Family Relations*, 61, pp. 157-174.

- Golombok, S., Spencer, A. and Rutter, M. (1983). Children in lesbian and single-parent households: Psychosexual and psychiatric appraisal. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 24, 551-572.
- Grosz, E. (1995). *Space, Time and Perversion*. London: Routledge.
- Halberstam, J. (2007). Forgetting family: queer alternatives to Oedipal relations. In G.E. Haggerty & M. McGarry (eds.) *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Hargaden, H. and Llewelin, S. (1996). Lesbian and gay parenting issues. In D. Davies and C. Neal (Eds.) *Pink Therapy*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hicks, S. (2011). *Lesbian, Gay and Queer Parenting: Families, Intimacies, Genealogies*. Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hicks, S. and McDermott, J. (Eds.) (1999). *Lesbian and Gay Fostering and Adoption: Extraordinary Yet Ordinary*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Langdrige, D. (2006). Voices from the margins: sadomasochism and sexual citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, 10(4), 373-389.
- Langdrige, D. (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.
- Langdrige, D. and Blyth, E. (2001) Regulation of assisted conception services in Europe: Implications of the new reproductive technologies for 'the family'. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 23 (1), pp. 45-64.
- Lewin, E. (2009). *Gay Fatherhood: Narratives of Family and Citizenship in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mallon, G.P. (2004). *Gay Men Choosing Parenthood*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Nast, H.J. (2002). Queer Patriarchies, Queer Racisms, International. *Antipode*, 34(5), pp. 874-909.

- Patterson, C.J. (1995). Lesbian mothers, gay fathers, and their children. In A.R. D'Augelli and C.J. Patterson (Eds.) *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities Over the Lifespan: Psychological Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. London: Routledge.
- Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Rabun, C. & Oswald, R.F. (2009). Upholding and expanding the normal family: future fatherhood through the eyes of gay male emerging adults. *Fathering*, 7(3), pp. 269-285.
- Ricoeur, P. (1986). *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* [Ed. H. Taylor]. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1988). *Time and Narrative, Volume 3* [Trans K. Blamey & D. Pellauer]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stacey, J. (2006). Gay parenthood and the decline of paternity as we knew it. *Sexualities*, 9(1), pp. 27-55.
- Turner, B.S. (2008). Citizenship, reproduction and the state: international marriage and human rights. *Citizenship Studies*, 12(1), pp. 45-54.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Warner, M. (2000). *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weatherill, R. (n.d.). *Queer Theory. Queer Future*. Downloaded from www.criticalpsychoanalysis.com on 14/5/12.
- Weeks, J., Heaphy, B. and Donovan, C. (2001) *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*. London: Routledge.

Weston, K. (1991). *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.

ⁱ Here as elsewhere in this paper, I refer to gay and bisexual men so that bisexual men in same sex relationships are not removed from the present discussion and once again rendered invisible in research of this kind, recognising that bisexual men may engage in opposite sex relationships and/or sexual encounters and have children within these relationships or as a result of these sexual encounters.