LGBT Parents and Social Media: Advocacy, Privacy, and Disclosure during Shifting Social Movements

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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of American parents identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Shifting social movements are beginning to achieve greater recognition for LGBT parents and more rights for their families; however, LGBT parents still experience stigma and judgment in a variety of social contexts. We interviewed 28 LGBT parents to investigate how they navigate their online environments in light of these societal shifts. We find that 1) LGBT parents use social media sites to detect disapproval and identify allies within their social networks; 2) LGBT parents become what we call *incidental advocates*, when everyday social media posts are perceived as advocacy work even when not intended as such; and 3) for LGBT parents, privacy is a complex and collective responsibility, shared with children, partners, and families. We consider the complexities of LGBT parents' online disclosures in the context of shifting social movements and discuss the importance of supporting individual and collective privacy boundaries in these contexts.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

LGBT; parents; families; advocacy; privacy; social media.

ACM CLASSIFICATION KEYWORDS

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION

Growing numbers of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals are raising children in the United States today [18]. Currently, about 37% of those who identify as LGBT have had children (an estimated 3 million LGBT adults) [18]. Specifically, research shows that 38% of transgender adults, 59% of bisexual women, and 32% of bisexual men are parents [18]. The proportion of same-sex couples with adopted children more than doubled between 2000 and 2010, from 10% to 21% [42]. Popular support for

recognition of LGBT families, with or without children, is growing: in 2014, 55% of Americans polled were supportive of same-sex marriage, compared with only 35% in 2001 [61].

This change coincides with broader social movements characterized by significant and cumulative successes in LGBT peoples' fights for social and political inclusion in the U.S. and in many other countries. In 2015 alone, a number of key events highlighted these movements: on February 18, Kate Brown became the first openly bisexual U.S. governor [17]. On March 31, Tokyo's Shibuya ward became the first region in eastern Asia to recognize same-sex marriage [30]. On May 23, Ireland became the first nation to approve same-sex marriage by popular vote [73]. On June 1, Caitlyn Jenner became the first openly transgender woman to be featured on the cover of *Vanity Fair* [7]. Most significantly in the U.S., on June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled state-level bans on same-sex marriage to be unconstitutional [72].

Despite these high-profile events, discrimination toward LGBT individuals remains a serious problem in the U.S. [21,74–77]. ENDA, the Employee Non-Discrimination Act, was first introduced to Congress in 1994 but has yet to be passed [46]. Only 22 states have made discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation illegal [78]. Though the proportion of same-sex couples adopting children is rising [42], LGBT persons still face significant legal obstacles when fostering or adopting children: private adoption agencies can legally disqualify same-sex couples, and in three U.S. states, even state-licensed agencies can refuse to place children if doing so conflicts with their religious beliefs [79]. Only seven states prohibit adoption discrimination based on sexual orientation, and only two of those states also prohibit adoption discrimination based on gender identity [79].

For LGBT individuals, raising children requires overcoming considerable institutional hurdles. Engaging with public institutions (such as schools) poses additional challenges: many everyday parenting tasks, from childcare enrollment forms [16] to healthcare practices [11], are exclusionary of LGBT parents. The necessity to interface with such institutions upon becoming a parent, then, "in some ways jettisons [LGBT individuals] and their families from the relative safety of a marginalized world into the mainstream" [52]. In other words, having children

inherently makes the lives and identities of LGBT individuals more "public." This increased tension between LGBT parents' public and private lives—and the evolving privacy concerns of their families—requires the development of new disclosure strategies, as well as "finding the language to do so" [52].

LGBT parents employ a number of complex strategies to navigate their public and private lives, managing the privacy of their children, partners, former partners and families in addition to their own. A significant body of research has shown that LGBT individuals use social media sites to address challenges they may face in their daily lives, such as social isolation [26–28,56,60] and difficulty locating partners [8,20,58]. HCI research has investigated the experiences of parents, who must manage their children's online privacy [3,4,71] while also negotiating with partners about what is and is not shared about the family on social media sites [35]. Exploring the role social media plays in the lives of LGBT parents can help us better understand the complexities of navigating public and private identity work as it relates to disclosure and privacy online.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 parents who identified as LGBT. Our results are organized around three main themes: first, LGBT parents use social media sites to *detect disapproval and identify allies* within their social networks. Second, LGBT parents frequently become *incidental advocates*, wherein posting online about their daily lives is perceived to be advocacy work—even when they do not intend for it to be. Third, for LGBT parents, *networked privacy management* activities are complex and collective responsibilities shared with children, partners, and former partners. We discuss the challenges LGBT parents experience when making disclosure decisions that impact not only themselves, but also their families. Furthermore, we reflect on the dynamic nature of boundary management issues in the context of shifting social movements around LGBT rights and acceptance.

RELATED WORK

LGBT Parenting
The composition of LGBT families includes intentionally childless couples, children born into families with one or more LGBT parents, and individuals "who have children within a heterosexual relationship and who subsequently identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgendered" [59]. The range of parenting practices within the LGBT community leads to a diversity of experience beyond the "ethnic, religious, and economic distinctions that characterize other families" [36].

LGBT parents have "a variety of both constructed and biological kinship ties and relationships," including past and present partners and potentially estranged biological families, subsequently creating unique and sometimes limited access to family support in the raising of their own

children [49]. One of the most powerful manifestations of homophobia and transphobia is the belief that LGBT individuals pose dangers to children; accordingly, a significant focus of scholarly research about LGBT parents has been motivated by efforts to characterize the social and psychological health and well-being of their children [2,51,57]. This research, often cited in court cases around marriage and adoption rights, has largely shown that children raised by LGBT parents are no different in social development or in educational achievement than children raised in heterosexual households [57,59]. However, the predominate focus of this prior research compares LGBT families to heterosexual-parented households, which limits our understanding of the unique experiences of these families [36].

In addition to disparate policies and legal obstacles, persistent social stigma continues to challenge LGBT parents and families. Many LGBT parents exercise selective disclosure strategies, particularly when dealing with their children's schools [33,34,52]. Such disclosure strategies "demonstrate the fine balance families must strike between being publicly authentic and creating safety by protecting themselves from negative attitudes" [52]. Other perceived challenges for LGBT parents include having to "constantly explain" their family background, a lack of family or community support, the denial or difficulty of obtaining services (such as healthcare or customer service), and the fear of harassment or violence toward oneself or one's children [44].

Lannutti [39] draws on Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory to describe privacy management challenges among married gay and lesbian couples, for whom disclosure of their marriage also means disclosure of sexual orientation. CPM theory suggests that communication partners maintain and coordinate privacy boundaries [54]. Family relationships are one instance of a complex relationship in which individuals may have knowledge of others' private information [53]; when information co-owners do not comply with individuals' privacy rules, privacy boundaries may be violated, creating boundary turbulence. As Petronio [54] notes, privacy boundaries are mutable, and "novel or new contexts" may trigger changes to privacy rules [39]. For LGBT parents, successfully managing their families' privacy—including disclosures about their own identities—requires constant negotiation between their public and private lives.

Parents Online
As technology and social media use rises among children and adults, all parents must navigate the challenges and anxieties of raising children in an increasingly digital world while also managing what is and is not disclosed about the family online [71]. Recent work explores what parents themselves share about the family online [3,19,47]; this work shows that parents face unique challenges in balancing their authority as parents with the privacy and autonomy they wish to afford their children [71]. Despite

increasing concerns about what and with whom their children are sharing online, "parents themselves post extensively about their children online, often sharing personal content about children's behavior, development, and appearance" [3].

Parents express concerns about "controlling information, oversharing, and digital footprints," especially with regards to photos they share of their children online [35]. To mitigate their concerns, parents engage in "privacy stewardship" [35], which involves negotiating with partners and with others to determine what is and is not shared about their children. New mothers specifically must balance the "benefits of sharing baby photos with risks of creating digital footprints for their child" [35]. Although a growing body of literature has investigated the challenges families experience as they adopt and use new technologies [3,15,35,69,71], fewer studies have focused on social media use among non-traditional families, an agenda called for in a CHI 2013 workshop [32]. This is important for creating more inclusive and supportive online spaces and in promoting social equality through technology design [4,31,32].

Disclosure, Privacy, and Outness

The disclosure of one's sexual orientation or gender identity ("coming out") has been shown to benefit mental health and increase access to social support [5,12,40]. Individuals who are more "out" might "be better able to identify which of their peers are supportive versus stigmatizing, and to build their friendship networks accordingly" [12]. However, as a stigmatized minority group, LGBT individuals may lack social contact with others like them; in such situations, online spaces hold particular value. For rural teens, representations of LGBT lives on Internet forums and social media sites may provoke personal understanding and confirmation of identity [23,55]. Furthermore, online tools create additional opportunities for LGBT individuals to disclose sexual or gender identities, to mobilize political ideologies, and to construct "safe spaces" [55].

Expectations of outness are predicated on the common belief that increased visibility for the LGBT community will motivate social equality [38]. LGBT visibility as a political strategy [38] is based in part on Allport's [1] Intergroup Contact Theory, which argues that positive interactions with outgroup members reduces ingroup prejudice toward that outgroup. Descriptions of interactions between LGBT individuals and members of their extended social networks often reflect the underlying principles of Allport's theory [25,38,39]. In particular, friendships between LGBT individuals and heterosexuals have been shown to reduce prejudicial attitudes and, under certain conditions, to be associated with LGBT-affirming behavior [45]. Thus, disclosures of sexual orientation or gender identity—or "coming out"—are not only important to the individual process of accepting and sharing one's identity, but also in political advancement toward greater LGBT acceptance.

Although outness has demonstrated importance both for LGBT individuals and for the community at large, online spaces can be risky for disclosing sensitive identity information, due to the persistence of digital traces [65] and the collapse of multiple audiences [10]. Notably, social media sites vary in the extent to which participants must disclose personally identifiable information in order to participate (e.g., the use of real names versus pseudonyms). According to one survey, 43% of LGBT adults have disclosed their sexual orientation on social network sites (SNSs) [63]. In the context of SNSs, identity disclosures can create additional privacy concerns and stress for LGBT individuals. For example, though transgender Facebook users valued the social support they received from their Facebook networks during their gender transitions, a significant percentage of participants engaged in disclosure management strategies (such as unfriending, creating lists, or maintaining multiple accounts) that were associated with a significant increase in stress [24].

In addition to online disclosure concerns, social and economic disparities further complicate who can and cannot safely "come out." Gray [22] argues that these "politics of visibility" are propagated by media representations of LGBT life, which are often urban-centric. In urban contexts, LGBT visibility is often "taken for granted" [23]; in rural areas, LGBT individuals often lack the social and economic resources required to safely identify themselves. As Bernstein and Reimann [6] argue, visibility is not simply an individual act, "but the result of complex interactions and exercises of power between [LGBT persons] and their interlocutors." As a result of these disparities, individual preferences for (and restrictions on) outness may conflict with coalescence and group identity [55]. LGBT individuals' identity disclosures in online spaces are likely to be similarly affected by their social location, despite community expectations of outness—raising questions about the potential role of social media sites in enhancing visibility for LGBT persons.

In offline contexts, many LGBT parents engage in selective disclosure strategies [33,34] to manage their public and private lives. McLaughlin and Vitak [43] argue that online norms of self-disclosure correspond with norms users have formed in their offline interactions; however, more strategic disclosures are not always possible online without significant effort on the part of individual users. Additionally, LGBT parents have privacy concerns that extend beyond their own networks; for example, an LGBT parent who is not "out" to parents of their children's friends may be particularly cautious when disclosing information related to sexual orientation or gender identity online [63].

METHODS

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 parents about their use of social media, related both to their LGBT identities and their identities as parents. Some results are applicable to LGBT individuals more broadly; however, stigma surrounding LGBT identities is often particularly

acute in the context of parenting. Thus, we would characterize LGBT parenting as an important intersection of identities, which we cannot broadly disambiguate.

We posted recruitment messages to LGBT parenting groups on Facebook (e.g., Lesbian Mommies, Transgender Law Center) and shared recruitment information with relevant user accounts on Twitter (e.g., Gay Parent Magazine). We directly contacted individual Facebook users who were administrators of regional LGBT parenting groups around

the U.S. (e.g., LGBTQ Parents and Families of Santa Cruz, Philadelphia Queer Parents) to request permission to share recruitment messages with their groups. We also posted recruitment messages to Craigslist in several major U.S. cities, including New York City, San Francisco, Boston, Atlanta, and Seattle. Two participants were recruited through one author's personal network.

As suggested by our recruitment methods, we sought geographic diversity in terms of regions across the U.S. (see Table 1). Eight participants lived in the West, four in the Pacific Northwest, seven in the Midwest, five in the Northeast, and four in the South. As work by Mary L. Gray [22] and others have demonstrated, the distinction between urban and rural communities is particularly relevant to understanding LGBT experiences; however, to protect the privacy of our participants, we did not collect information beyond each participant's state of residence. All participants had at least one child under the age of 18. Of the participants interviewed, 21 participants had one child; seven participants had two children. 26 participants had a child age 12 or younger, and five participants had children 13 or older. The age of participants' children skews young, likely because it is increasingly easier for LGBT individuals to become parents than in decades prior; in addition, the decision to participate in a study about LGBT parenting may be more salient to newer parents. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 64; the mean participant age was 40. Of our participants, five identified as transgender (3 men and 2 women), and 23 participants (5 men and 18 women) were cisgender (wherein one's gender experiences agree with the sex assigned at birth). Ten participants identified as lesbian (10 women), 5 participants identified as gay (2 women and 3 men), 6 participants identified as bisexual (3 women and 3 men), and 3 participants identified as queer (2 women and 1 man). One participant identified as being in a same-sex relationship (as opposed to identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual). Three participants did not disclose their sexual orientations.

Two members of the research team conducted interviews between February and July 2015. Interviews lasted a median of 45 minutes; the longest interview lasted 81 minutes and the shortest 26 minutes. All 28 interviews were conducted over Skype or phone and were recorded using voice recording software. Each participant gave verbal consent before the call recording began. Participants were told that they could stop the interview at any time. Each participant was compensated for their time with a $25 Amazon gift card (one participant chose to forego her compensation). We did not view or access any participants' social media accounts during or outside of the interviews. This study was approved by the research team's Institutional Review Board.

Participants were asked to tell us about themselves, their families and their technology use. To begin, we asked participants to describe their sexual orientation and gender

	Age	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Child age(s)	Region
P1	53	Trans man	Gay	10 yrs	CA
P2	28	Cis woman	Lesbian	6 yrs	NJ
P3	35	Cis woman	Lesbian	1 yr; 5 yrs	CO
P4	34	Cis woman	Bisexual	11 mos; 3 yrs	OH
P5	33	Cis woman	Gay	4 yrs	WA
P6	40	Cis woman	Bisexual	7 yrs	TX
P7	39	Cis woman	Same-sex relationship	9 wks	OR
P8	34	Cis woman	Lesbian	3 yrs	NC
P9	26	Cis woman	Lesbian	7 mos	CA
P10	33	Trans man	-	4 yrs	CA
P11	40	Trans woman	-	5 yrs	NH
P12	28	Cis woman	Queer	5 yrs	MI
P13	39	Cis woman	Bisexual	8 yrs; 15 yrs	TX
P14	37	Cis woman	Lesbian	4 wks; 2 yrs	CO
P15	40	Cis woman	Queer	7 yrs	CA
P16	47	Cis woman	Lesbian	12 yrs	NY
P17	28	Cis woman	Lesbian	9 mos	MI
P18	32	Trans woman	-	4 yrs	CA
P19	51	Trans man	Queer	10 yrs	WA
P20	59	Cis man	Gay	16 mos; 26 yrs	CA
P21	64	Cis woman	Lesbian	4 yrs	IL
P22	43	Cis man	Bisexual	11 yrs; 15 yrs	NY
P23	43	Cis man	Bisexual	13 yrs	NY
P24	44	Cis man	Bisexual	17 yrs; 18 yrs	IL
P25	41	Cis woman	Lesbian	16 yrs	WA
P26	58	Cis woman	Lesbian	11 yrs	MI
P27	37	Cis man	Gay	5 yrs	TX
P28	33	Cis woman	Gay	8 mos; 3 yrs	MN

Table 1: Participant demographics.

identity, including questions of outness and disclosure. Careful attention was paid to the identity language used by each individual participant, which the interviewer then adopted in subsequent questions. We then asked participants to describe a typical day in the life of their family. Participants were asked general questions about Internet and social media use. We asked which sites each participant used and the audiences of each, as well as whether or not their use had changed since becoming a parent. We sought to elicit specific experiential narratives from our participants through the use of general questions centered on specific emotions (e.g., "Is there anything that has happened online in relation to your LGBT identity that you [liked, didn't like], or that made you [happy, mad]?"). Last, participants were asked about their experiences surrounding LGBT-related policies and advocacy.

We transcribed interviews and used an inductive approach to develop codes [64]. Two members of the research team individually read through interview transcripts and noted codes by hand. After discussing the codes as a research team, we created a more comprehensive list of codes (51 codes in total). Three researchers each coded four interview transcripts in a pilot coding process to test and refine the codebook. We coded interviews using Atlas.TI, frequently discussing codes to maintain agreement. Each interview transcript was coded by two members of the research team. Quotations have been lightly edited for readability.

A note on language: Sexual orientation and gender identity cannot easily be captured in categorical terms; the broad label of "LGBT" risks eclipsing individual identity expression. When referring to individual participants and their stories, we describe participants' identities when possible. For purposes of readability, we sometimes refer to LGBT individuals collectively. For the sexual orientation and gender identity expressions preferred by individual participants, see Table 1.

RESULTS
Results are organized around three primary themes. 1) *Detecting disapproval and identifying allies*: LGBT parents use social media sites to obtain social cues that allow them to evaluate their safety in relation to others. 2) *Incidental advocacy:* LGBT parents become incidental advocates when posting online about their daily lives is perceived to be advocacy work. 3) *Networked privacy management*: for LGBT parents, online privacy is a complex and collective responsibility shared with children, partners, former partners and families.

Detecting Disapproval and Identifying Allies
LGBT parents used social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter to assess social cues from within their personal networks, which helped participants determine how much and with whom they could share. When P18 began her gender transition, she "tested the waters" with Facebook posts related to transgender rights:

> "I was gauging my family, to see how they would react. I had some people who responded very negatively—so I knew they weren't safe."

Following these posts, P18 created lists of "safe" connections with whom she would later share posts related to her gender transition, restricting access from any Facebook friends who had previously expressed negative reactions to transgender-related content. In addition to leveraging privacy filters and lists, several participants blocked or unfriended users they perceived to be a threat to their privacy or well-being. Some participants also unfriended users who shared offensive content, which participants later encountered in their News Feeds. P5, who frequently engaged with public communities on Twitter, felt Twitter should offer better filtering tools so she could have more control over who and what appeared in her feed. P5 could detect disapproval using Twitter, but was unable to filter it out when she so desired:

> "There should be better ways of moderating. Hate-speech of any kind, no matter who it's directed to, should be removed. Social media has such a powerful ability to connect people and foster conversations—but as soon as you allow people to make hateful remarks, other voices don't get heard."

Many participants used social media sites to seek out or to create spaces where they felt they could safely engage. Following the Supreme Court's 2013 strike-down of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), many Facebook users changed their profile pictures to a red equals sign, an initiative started by the Human Rights Campaign in support of marriage equality. Four of our participants (P3, P12, P17, P26) specifically mentioned these profile pictures as a meaningful signal of support and recognition. Said P3:

> "There was a trend on Facebook to change your profile picture to an equal sign, and that was pretty amazing. To watch my friends on Facebook who did that, and to see how many there were… it was really heartwarming. I felt very supported."

For P3 and others, the equality sign was an effortless way to identify allies among her Facebook friends.

Finding "fellow travelers"
Participants also used social media to seek out parents who had parenting experiences that were closely aligned with their own. P6 used Facebook to identify other bisexual women, particularly other bisexual parents:

> "What has really delighted me online is when I discover that somebody I kind of know is a fellow traveler. I started paying more attention to [a coworker's] social presence… it turned out she was bi, and she's got kids about my son's age. We have a lot more in common than I thought."

P14 participated in a private Facebook group for parents who had the same sperm donor: "We all post lots of pictures of our kids in there, just because they're all related in some way." Finding "fellow travelers" was of particular importance when participants had parenting questions that were not adequately addressed in popular online parenting communities. P4, for example, felt that BabyCenter forums did not resonate with her experiences, and instead used Facebook to find groups specifically for LGBT parents:

> "I might click on a link to a BabyCenter page, and I'll just be like, 'Oh, god. Get me out of here. These are not my people.' Facebook makes it so easy for me to narrow down 'my people.' I found those people on Facebook."

P15 expressed similar frustration with popular parenting forums: "Those spaces tend to be very heteronormative, and after a while, it became not a place I wanted to be." P6 appreciated the opportunity to connect with other bisexual parents online: "It's been really nice to just have somebody else around… who has a similar kind of family, similar identities, similar things that we're dealing with. We never would've known each other without blogs or social media."

When P10 and his partner decided to have children, he lacked access to social or informational resources for parents like him: although P10 had transitioned, he was still biologically able to carry a child. Although he "looked and looked" for online resources for transgender parents, "nothing like that existed" at the time. Now, P10 participates in Facebook groups and other online communities to connect with other men experiencing pregnancy:

> "There wasn't anything that I could relate to. I just had to find general resources and tailor them for myself as best I could. These kind of groups—like Breastfeeding Transmen—I love being a part of them now."

Incidental Advocacy
LGBT parents felt they became what we call *incidental advocates* when forced to advocate for their families while navigating social and institutional barriers and, more notably, when online posts about their day-to-day lives were interpreted by others to be advocacy work.

Always Advocating
Some parents noted that they spent a great deal of their time, both offline and online, advocating for their families. Parents who felt they were often educating others in their offline lives—such as healthcare providers, teachers, and other parents—expressed exhaustion with having to "always" advocate for themselves and their families. P5, for example, said:

> "In accessing resources outside of your family or your immediate community, everyone assumes you're straight. Whether that's going with my wife to the midwife for the first time, or going to

the hospital—there are lots of times when we're encountering 'firsts' for other people."

Most participants felt they could not escape the expectation to constantly advocate: for many, it was simply not possible to disambiguate their sexual orientation or gender identity from other aspects of their identity, such as their identity as a parent. As a result, even actions as simple as sharing photos from everyday contexts (e.g., a family photo) to Facebook became unanticipated "advocacy work." When asked whether or not she participated in LGBT advocacy online, P28 said: "I would say just my presence and the life I'm living is that by default. I'm not necessarily trying to wave this flag and advocate. I'm just being myself." P19, too, felt he could not express his identity as a parent online (e.g., posting a photo with his son) without also expressing his identity as a queer man:

> "Both are intrinsic parts of who I am. I'm always a parent and I'm always queer. The way I experience the world is based on and influenced by being queer, and by being a parent. I can't separate those things."

Although P19 was not actively trying to advocate for LGBT issues, he felt his Facebook friends sometimes interpreted his quotidian posts about parenting as advocacy work. Other parents, like P27, felt this everyday visibility was the best way to advocate for LGBT families and were careful to post photos and stories from their daily lives to Facebook:

> "I think it's helpful for people who are against families like ours to be able to see us—to see how boring and normal we are. We're getting our kids dressed and fed, their hair brushed. We're getting them ready for school. We're taking them to dance classes."

Accordingly, most participants did not post everyday content with the specific intention of advocating for LGBT families, but many participants recognized the significance of normalizing LGBT family experiences through their posts online, particularly if their social networks were otherwise largely homophilous.

Outness as Advocacy
Though some participants expressed exhaustion with the perceived inability to avoid advocacy, others welcomed opportunities to purposively advocate for LGBT people through intentional disclosures of their own gender identities and sexual orientations—potentially in the face of unaccepting attitudes. P4 said:

> "I'm Facebook friends with people who aren't embedded in the [LGBT] community. My friends are really diverse—that means I'm exposed to a diverse cross-section of America, and it's not always pretty."

P4 welcomed the opportunity to discuss her personal experiences with friends who often had differing viewpoints on policy issues affecting the LGBT

community. Other participants, who would not otherwise disclose their identity so openly or frequently online, felt they had an obligation to others in the LGBT community. P24 said:

> "I try to be private about my life, or at least my personal life. But I try to be open at the same time, for other people that are going through my situation."

Some participants leveraged site affordances, such as the profile picture, to create persistent identity signals. This allowed them to bypass the need for continued disclosures to new or evolving audiences. P25, for example, intentionally chose a Facebook profile picture of her and her wife to explicitly signal her sexual orientation. This way, anyone visiting her page—whether an old friend or an acquaintance visiting for the first time—would "know it's a two-mother household." P25 said this had been particularly useful when interacting in Facebook groups. Before changing her profile picture, P25 would sometimes have to "out" herself to Facebook users with whom she might not otherwise connect:

> "We have a neighborhood Facebook page—I've definitely had to 'out' myself, to let it be known that you're living in a neighborhood with more than just straight, white, heterosexual couples."

P8 also advocated through strategic disclosures to people outside of her immediate network: when P8 saw a Facebook friend post about LGBT-related issues, she commented "about our daily life, just to make [other commenters] aware." P17 engaged in similar efforts to "out" herself to other users:

> "I'm proud of my family… how we look and our structure. If that means I can show somebody else who wants to have a family or wants to be in an LGBT relationship—it could be seen, so we don't really hold back."

P5 agreed: "The more you see people as like you, and less as 'them,' the harder it is to be disrespectful. That sort of little step—people doing that for years and years—is what shifts public opinion."

Advocacy through Affirmations of Identity

Online affirmations of identity were especially important to participants who experienced less identity recognition in their offline lives. Bisexual participants in relationships with opposite-sex partners expressed specific frustrations with the lack of visibility for bisexuals in the LGBT community. P4, a bisexual woman, said:

> "In some ways, I'm involved in the LGBT community because I've made myself involved. I am a part of that group. And yet, I'm living this very straight-appearing life: I'm married to a man. I have two kids. On the outside, there is nothing different."

In contrast to participants in same-sex relationships, who were exhausted with having to constantly educate others around them, bisexual participants in opposite-sex relationships felt they were not easily identifiable as members of the LGBT community. This exclusion motivated more intentional advocacy efforts. P6, another bisexual woman, said that her "straight-appearing" life made her more likely to engage in advocacy online. P6 frequently attended LGBT conferences and events, where she worried she would be mistaken for a heterosexual ally. Bisexual participants like P6 used social media sites to assert their identities and affirm their ingroup membership:

> "I definitely don't feel like I fit in as much as I did back when I was dating women. I feel like I have to work harder to establish that now. So I do that on Twitter."

At one event, an organizer retweeted P6's tweets. Knowing that other event attendees saw P6's online assertion of her bisexuality made her feel more comfortable at the physical event: "It was a way for me to put a little nametag on myself—to stake out a little bit of identity space."

Networked Privacy Management

Like many parents, our participants considered social media sites an important tool for sharing pictures of their children with friends and family. LGBT parents, however, are especially mindful of their children's right to privacy, both at the present moment and in the future. In particular, parents in our study worried their personal social media posts might unintentionally reveal sexual orientation or gender identity information that could later affect the privacy, safety, or comfort of their children and families.

Many LGBT parents must also consider the privacy needs of their current and former partners. P18, a transgender woman, was particularly concerned with the privacy of her former partner—her ex-wife did not wish to disclose to friends and family members why their marriage had ended. Because P18 and her wife shared many mutual Facebook friends, P18 felt she could not disclose any information related to her gender transition on Facebook, at the risk of compromising her ex-wife's privacy:

> "She didn't want me to post. We had a lot of common friends, and she was trying to deal with my transition… what it meant for her, for her life."

Accidental Identity Disclosures

LGBT parents' accidental disclosures are higher-risk in a social media environment due to the persistence of online content. An unintended audience could—whether in the present or the future—gain access to a persistent digital trace. Thus, participants' privacy concerns often extended beyond the online networks they had purposefully established and into broader, unknown audiences.

Even participants who were otherwise "out" to their friends, families and coworkers worried about accidental identity

disclosures online. When P20 came out as gay, before he started using social media, "it was on a one-by-one basis. I didn't broadcast it." On social network sites, information is typically shared from one to many; individuals cannot easily control when a disclosure is broadcast to a larger audience, or when information they have intentionally shared with a limited audience is subsequently circulated to external audiences without their knowledge. P12, a queer woman, said of posting family photos to Facebook: "It feels sort of like coming out every time."

Some participants were accidentally "outed" to family members as a result of their social media use. P4, a bisexual woman who is married to a man, posted to Facebook for National Coming Out Day:

"It was not something that stuck out as really divisive. But my husband texted me later in the day, 'Oh my god, what did you post to Facebook? My mother just called me to ask if our marriage was in crisis.' I've never discussed being bisexual with my mother-in-law."

P4 initially reacted by blocking her mother-in-law and grandmother-in-law from several posts. Later, she reconsidered: "I just have to be who I am all the time, in whatever space that is."

P8's mother did not have a Facebook account. However, whenever P8 mentioned her wife on Facebook, extended family members would tell her mother about the post:

"People run to my mother, and then Mom will come to me and say, 'You need to quit posting on Facebook. If you're happy, that's great, but you don't need to post it.'"

Due to her extended family's disapproval, P8's mother felt that P8 should limit disclosures related to her female partner: "I know if I were with a guy and posting, it wouldn't be a problem." Though P8 had not intended for her mother to see these posts, other family members were able to communicate information P8's mother should not have been able to access.

Managing Audiences

As online networks expand and additional social contexts are represented (and collapsed), privacy controls become increasingly critical—but also increasingly daunting—for LGBT parents to successfully manage. Some participants reconciled this tension by using separate social media sites in strategic ways. P13, for example, said that she openly disclosed her bisexual identity to her limited network on Twitter. On Facebook, however, P13 was mindful of her husband's role as a local business owner and feared she might accidentally disclose her sexual orientation to employees: "I tend to be aware that my account is linked to my husband's, so I don't just scream it from the rooftops. There are things that our employees don't need to know." P19 maintained two separate Facebook accounts—a public account, where he shared pictures of his daughter with friends and family, and one specifically for close friends: "It's just easier just to have a separate page, rather than having to make sure I have the right filter on whatever I'm posting." P19, who participates in the Leather community (a sexual subculture most often associated with fetishism and sadomasochism), said he would not post about Leather events to either of his Facebook accounts:

"My daughter is at an age now where her classmates—or parents of her classmate—might be looking things up on Facebook. It's the first place people go to look. So rather than having that as an initial impression, I have other more private outlets to access those communities."

Other participants, whose network structures had recently changed, struggled to adapt to new and sometimes sensitive contexts. P6, a bisexual woman, had recently started a new job with clients who were vocal about their conservative views. Although she felt professional pressure to connect with her clients on Facebook, P6 said this new audience kept her from posting as openly as she would have previously. P6 was also Facebook friends with her "very conservative, religious parents," and felt that because of these family and work obligations, she "had to decide: do I want to continue to be myself there, or do I make a more 'tame' face?" P6 acknowledged that although she could use Facebook's privacy settings to limit the visibility of her individual posts, she felt burdened by the amount of work required to do so.

Supporting Privacy

For LGBT parents, privacy management involves a complex network of privacy boundaries, in which individuals must manage not only their own privacy, but also the privacy of their children, partners, former partners, and extended families. Participants felt that some of their privacy needs could be better supported through site design.

Participants desired more control over the information they disclose online. P2 wanted more control over who can see the events she attends or the pages she likes on Facebook; actions such as attending a Pride event or "liking" an LGBT organization could unintentionally disclose her sexual orientation to acquaintances, colleagues, or family members. P11 also emphasized the need for more nuanced privacy controls, particularly on sites like Twitter, where users can only control the visibility of their accounts, not of individual tweets: "Twitter is either all private or not, so it's harder. If I'm using any site, I'm using privacy settings to some degree, to try to filter who sees what." P12 felt similarly:

"On Twitter, people might discover your profile through a search or something, and it's completely public. On Facebook, I have more control over who sees, so I feel like I can post more freely."

LGBT parents also desired improved privacy controls with regards to their children and their parenting practices. P27

had previously fostered his children; before adopting them, he was legally prohibited from sharing photos of or information about his children online. During and following the adoption process, P27 worried about friends and family members sharing photos of his children online. However, P27 said he "would be okay with it so long it was somebody that had similar settings to my own—that only people on their friends list could access them."

Many participants expressed concerns over the push toward "a real-name Internet," which, as P15 noted, "is hideously damaging to families like mine—really anybody who is in a more vulnerable position in our society." LGBT parents felt especially vulnerable to "real-name" initiatives, as many LGBT individuals have chosen names which may differ from their legal names. P19 said:

> "Facebook needs to look at its name policy, which is not just an issue for LGBT people. [Many] people don't want their real name online because they don't want somebody stalking them, for example, or domestic violence issues."

P15 specifically chose not to use her legal name in forums and other online communities, as she had experienced harassing behavior in the past. LGBT persons, being members of a sexual minority, are particularly susceptible to stalking and harassment. P15 had repeated online encounters with a man who fetishized her for being a lesbian mother; thankfully, these encounters occurred in a community which did not enforce a "real-name" policy. As P15 said, "The more vulnerable you are, the more reasons there are not to use your real name online."

DISCUSSION
Our results suggest that, for LGBT parents, online disclosures require complex negotiation between public and private life. These negotiations are further complicated by the inability to disambiguate sexual orientation or gender identity from one's identity as a parent, and the ways in which that intersection is publicly perceived. LGBT parents must evaluate their privacy not only in the present day, but also in the context of unknown future audiences—particularly as political climates continue to shift. Here we discuss how LGBT parents manage online disclosures with respect to temporality and shifting social movements.

Online Disclosures in Temporal Contexts
Familiar metaphors for managing privacy, such as closing a door to prevent access to a physical room, fall short in the digital world. A digital audience is "large, unknown and distant," and thus the mechanisms for managing online disclosures are increasingly complex [50]. Palen and Dourish [50] describe privacy as "a dynamic, dialectic process" in which interpersonal privacy management is under continuous negotiation, governed both by individuals' expectations and experiences and by those of others. Within a single social media site, such as Facebook, users experience context collapse [10], wherein multiple,

intersecting social contexts [50] each require different disclosure practices. Social media site users have little control over what others may disclose about them; as a result, users engage in both personal and collective disclosure management strategies [37]. Thus, personal privacy management is constantly in flux, evolving as networks and social contexts continue to shift.

The persistence of content shared online means that audiences "can exist not only in the present, but in the future as well" [50]. Managing unintended audiences are a known challenge for social media site users [14,68]; what is unknown is how future unintended audiences will interpret disclosures related to LGBT identity made in the present day. As public opinion surrounding LGBT rights and issues continues to shift, LGBT parents will need to consider the implications of their digital traces not only in the present, but for the future as well.

For LGBT parents, posting a family photo—for instance, a picture of two moms with their young daughter—might be perceived differently by their current online networks than it will be when their daughter is grown. The past decade has seen dramatic shifts in national attitudes regarding same-sex marriage and LGBT-parented families [61]; this same photo would almost certainly be perceived differently today than it would have been a decade prior. This makes managing online disclosures particularly challenging for parents, who must now consider not only how their children will feel about a posted picture in 5, 10, or 20 years (a practice described as "privacy stewardship" [35]), but also how society may come to view that same picture over time. Our results suggest that, in the context of shifting social movements wherein public opinion is constantly evolving, an individual's privacy is heavily dependent on both the temporal context in which it is instantiated as well as the societal context in which it is viewed.

Incidental Advocacy and Social Progress
Our findings reveal that LGBT parents become *incidental advocates* simply by sharing photos and posts from their everyday lives. LGBT parents leverage social media sites to detect disapproval and identify allies from within their social networks; in many instances, it is their networks' responses to these everyday posts which provide the social information needed to determine who (and where) is safe. Rapid increase in national support for same-sex marriage between 2001 and 2015 [61]—coupled with the national attention LGBT-related movements have garnered in recent history—affects how those outside the LGBT community perceive the everyday social media posts of our participants. Moreover, vociferous national debate has created more media representations for social media users to share, populating feeds with potentially divisive content. Societal progress requires "diversity, discourse, and debate" [70]; while constant advocacy can be exhausting, sharing quotidian details—such as a family photo—could expose LGBT parents' online networks to heterogeneous

experiences they are not otherwise likely to see, promoting increased ingroup acceptance [1] and social advancement.

Social media users are increasingly leveraging system design to advocate for social change. In recent years, advocates have created several online projects to support the LGBT movement: in March 2013, the Human Rights Campaign encouraged Facebook users to change their profile pictures to a red equals sign to demonstrate support for marriage equality in advance of the United States Supreme Court's hearing on the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which was subsequently struck down [80]. In June 2015, in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in favor of same-sex marriage, 26 million Facebook users added rainbow overlays to their existing profile pictures using the platform-provided "Celebrate Pride" application [81]. Also in June, a Twitter user created an automated bot (@she_not_he) to identify and correct users who misgendered Caitlyn Jenner in their tweets [66]. Though these online advocacy efforts are sometimes derided—often categorized as "slacktivism," and their participants as "armchair allies" [48]—even small gestures of support were considered deeply meaningful to our participants. Indeed, recent literature suggests that digital activism efforts may serve to combat microaggressions, draw attention to social causes, and create supportive online environments for marginalized users [67]. The perception of support expressed by our participants—who used social media sites to actively identify allies—is an important finding given prevalent critiques around online "slacktivism."

Also important to conversations surrounding activist efforts is the notion of technological appropriation [13]. In order to use technologies "strategically, politically, or creatively" in the pursuit of social change, users must be able to mold these tools to suit their needs—often appropriating technologies in ways that were not intended by the original designers [62]. Similarly, even seemingly minor changes to interface design—for example, the enforcement of a real-name policy [9,29]—can have catastrophic effects on a person's privacy, relationships, and well-being, particularly for users who identify with marginalized groups. As our results demonstrate, considering the impact of design choices is of critical importance as social and political climates continue to shift.

Individual Privacy Boundaries and Collective Social Movements

Due to the fluid nature of network size and structure—in parallel with changing social attitudes regarding LGBT families—LGBT parents are required to conduct additional, ongoing work to disclose comfortably online. The work required to detect disapproval within one's social network, for example, will never cease: what does or does not constitute a "safe space" online is a moving target, one which LGBT parents must continually reassess.

Prior research describes how parents engage in a "third

shift" when managing their family's identity online [3] and deciding what is or is not appropriate to share [35]. LGBT parents, however, experience an additional layer of disclosure expectations and challenges related to their sexual orientations or gender identities. LGBT parents must consider the impact of their online disclosures not only for their chosen audiences, but also for unintended audiences beyond their personal networks (such as children's friends or a partner's coworkers).

People believe they have the right to own and control their private information. However, for LGBT parents, certain self-disclosures are considered to be other-owned: what participants viewed as a personal boundary was perceived by some to be collective. These conflicting perceptions of personal privacy may be explained in part by of the phenomenon of "stigma-by-association," whereby people who are close to a stigmatized person may themselves be stigmatized by others [41]. These conflicts in information ownership prevent the successful negotiation of privacy boundaries [50], placing LGBT parents in a perpetual state of turbulence [53]. The simplified ways in which social media sites often treat relationships and their boundaries do not reflect the complexities of our participants' privacy experiences. Our findings reveal a need for further research regarding stigma management and privacy design.

LGBT persons are also expected to make public identity disclosures in ways other individuals are not, to benefit a collective social movement [38]. Expectations of outness often stand in contradiction to the lived experiences of our participants, who must frequently navigate overlapping networks wherein outness is not always a possibility. Our results suggest that, despite increased LGBT acceptance in the United States today, LGBT parents experience an evolving set of "visibility politics" [22] online, which affect what participants are willing or able to safely disclose. LGBT parents—and others—will benefit from increased control over personal and collective privacy boundaries, particularly while social contexts continue to evolve.

CONCLUSION

LGBT parents use social media sites to evaluate their safety in relation to others and employ a number of complex strategies to manage the privacy of their children, partners, former partners and families. We present the concept of *incidental advocacy* to explain the ways in which LGBT parents' everyday social media use is perceived by others to be advocacy work, a concept that might extend to other forms of unintended advocacy among marginalized groups. We consider the complexities of LGBT parents' online disclosures in relation to the temporal context in which disclosures are instantiated, as well as the broader social context in which disclosures are viewed. We discuss the importance of site design in motivating and enabling social progress, and finally, we argue for the importance of supporting individual and collective privacy boundaries during times of social change.

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