THE SELFISH-ENOUGH FATHER

Gay Adoption and the Late-Capitalist Family

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The appearance in 1999 of two memoirs by gay men about their experiences of adopting children marked a new moment in the discourse about gay families. Jesse Green, in *The Velveteen Father: An Unexpected Journey to Parenthood*, and Dan Savage, in *The Kid: What Happened after My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant*, both perceived a social victory in their ability to navigate the adoption process with their partners; for them, coming home with a child made a major statement about gay couples' being taken seriously as prospective parents and, perhaps most significant, about men being taken seriously as primary caretakers of children.[1] Examining the psychic journey to fatherhood as experienced by men for whom birth is not a biological project, these narratives reflect on the issue of what adopting a child — indeed, just *having* a child — symbolizes for people who have experienced coming out as tantamount to cutting family ties and to rejecting traditional family structures. In this context, the possibility of formal legal adoption represents for gay parents — in some ways even more than the prospect of marriage or civil unions — a major new public integration into and a more complicated social affiliation with "traditional" family structures.

In this essay I explore a complex affective transformation that becomes visible as the men in these memoirs negotiate what it means to be a "real" father in the context of a family intentionally constructed without a mother. I explore a psychological moment of selfishness, as I call it, that emerges in both accounts. It is perhaps only logical that highly self-conscious examinations of paternity would find form in memoir — the genre of self-centeredness, as it were — given memoir's powerful claim on the authority of personal experience. Yet it is suggestive that a genre that seems to privilege experiential knowledge — and thereby to legitimize and enable the politics of difference — is here used to contrary ends, to reclaim

GLQ 14:4
DOI 10.1215/10642684-2008-004

and reinhabit the very forms of entitlement that these memoirs explicitly associate with normative heterosexuality. In effect, these texts become commentaries on how the experience of gay fatherhood is inevitably shaped by the same expectations, desires, preconceived notions, and psychic compensations of all fatherhood. (Indeed, both texts speak as much to straight audiences as to gay ones.) My purpose in analyzing these narratives is neither to denounce the authors' self-positionings as insufficiently queer nor to fault their "selfish" investments in paternity. Instead, it is to examine how they represent the family as an increasingly dense and rich site of self-actualization within the structures of late-capitalist identity.

The use of memoir to normalize and legitimize gay fatherhood is a noteworthy development in itself. These texts do not fit easily into commonly recognized genres and subgenres of gay autobiography, such as coming-out narratives, sexual confessionals, and AIDS memoirs, or into the many visual and new-media avenues through which gay-identified artists have foregrounded the self as an act of performance. Unlike "queer autobiography," for instance, with its proclaimed project of disrupting normative subjectivity, the texts under consideration here can be read as insisting on a stable speaking subject and coherent sense of identity. Instead of enabling a separation or individualization of the self against a world of heteronormativity, and therefore possibly questioning and denaturalizing our understanding of subjectivity in general, these memoirs offer a willful self-insertion into the collective social body, a sometimes uneasy but nonetheless insistent identification with the mainstream. If "queer" refers to those who, as Gloria Anzaldúa writes, know oppression and yet "don't belong anywhere," then the performance of selfishness in these accounts serves a counter political function: namely, to organize the writer's sense of shared social entitlement.[2]

The affect of selfishness works similarly in both texts, I argue, as a way to actively negotiate and compensate for being at a double remove from the "natural" model of the biological family. As gay men who adopt, these authors describe a different experience of becoming a family than that of most other gay or straight people. Unlike lesbian couples, many of whom have birth children through assisted reproduction, and unlike those gay men who have biological children from previous heterosexual relationships, and even unlike the smaller number of men who have pursued complex and expensive surrogacy arrangements that allow one partner to become a birth father, men who adopt are more likely than other gay parents to have no biological relationship to their children. Their situation might seem comparable to the nonbiological kinship of gay men who become foster parents, for example. Indeed, for many gay men, fosterhood has been a more viable and politically attractive approach to adoption, despite the notoriously limited and

uneven access that the foster-care system offers to gay would-be parents. But it is precisely by insisting on the privilege of adopting a newborn baby and, as I discuss below, by working through private adoption agencies rather than the public social-services system that the writers of these accounts view themselves as stepping into newly "outed" terrain.

The experiences described here also differ from those of straight couples who adopt, since two men together do not "replace" the heteronormative birth parents — or even uphold the idea of heteronormative birth parents — and thereby maintain the social fiction of biological kinship in which adoption in the twentieth-century United States has been conventionally invested. In the ideal of the "invisible" adoption, the model dating from the post–World War II decades, nonbiological kinship is meant to be assimilated so completely under the cover of social kinship that a child might not even know that he or she has been adopted. The presumed desirability of being able to erase a child's birth origins has been challenged in recent decades, both indirectly by the rise of transnational and transracial adoptions, and directly by the opening of the adoption process in some U.S. states to allow birth parents and adopted children to maintain contact.[3] In the case of open adoptions, the ongoing presence and reminder of a birth mother or birth father disrupts the seamless replacement of one family by another, allowing for the possibility of more than one mother and father figure. In addition, parents who adopt interracially also experience visibility in ways similar to nonstraight parents, to the extent that a family's physical "remove" from biological kinship may be marked by apparent racial differences.[4] However, although racial nonresemblance between parent and child in some cases clearly marks a nonbiological relationship, it certainly does not always or reliably do so. And more significant here, cross-racial adoption does not undermine the normativity of maternal and paternal roles — precisely the roles that the gay men writing these accounts confront and navigate through the various racial, social, and economic privileges they have at their disposal.

These memoirs therefore offer a rare insight into fatherhood as a social performance. Judith Stacey writes that the "social character of paternity has always been more visible than its biological status."[5] But in the case of gay fathers, it is a performance not "covered" by biology at any level, implied or otherwise, and it is thus, more than in the other family configurations I have noted, constructed more completely in social terms. The experience described by these writers is not necessarily unique to men, nor even one shared by all gay fathers, of course. But in a culture in which the maternal is still as thoroughly "naturalized" as the biological — Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh identify this as the deeply felt belief

that "those who are motherless will obviously not be looked after properly"—the paternal does not enjoy a similar presumption of sufficiency.[6] In short, lesbian couples (even those with no biological relationship to their children), straight couples, or even gay men who become birth fathers through heterosexual marriages or through surrogacy arrangements do not confront precisely this same overdetermined structure of performance anxiety around parenthood.[7]

To compensate for the presumed biological privilege of mothers, therefore, the gay men in these cases represent the pressure to demonstrate, paradoxically, their private investment in parenthood in the most broadly recognizable social terms. As a result, what is uniquely foregrounded is a sense of entitlement that—although it may be a common denominator in all psychic processes of family formation—becomes a good deal more visible here. As these narratives implicitly make a case for the acceptability—indeed, legibility—of a family constructed without a mother, they reveal some of our deepest and most intractable associations between family nurturance and motherhood. Through these accounts, the "selfish" father emerges as a way to resist the empty space of the mother but is ultimately presented as a *positive* new construction of fatherhood, a way to reclaim paternity on new emotional and social terms. At the same time, this transformation does not mean jettisoning the older, traditional terms on which paternity has rested, such as social status and material stability. In fact, it is precisely the simultaneous development of the new and the reinhabitation of the old that constitutes the complex politics of this new gay family within the larger production of the American family in market terms.

Selfishness and Shame

In *The Velveteen Father*, Jesse Green reflects on a process that is both chosen and yet—in an important sense for him as a gay man—unanticipated. Green recounts becoming involved with his partner, Andy, after Andy had already adopted a son as a single man. Green develops a paternal relationship to Erez, and later to a second child, Lucas, whom the couple decides to adopt together (even though it is only Andy who becomes the official legal parent). Green's view on becoming a "real" father is therefore that of half of a gay couple with two privately adopted children, despite—and because of—having no actual legal status as a father himself. The effect of this arrangement is to heighten Green's awareness that his "sufficiency" as a father can be measured only in performative terms: that is, through his emotional and material attachment to his sons rather than through biological or legal rights.

By contrast, Dan Savage, author of *The Kid*, and his boyfriend, Terry, legally adopt a child together as an openly gay couple. Savage chronicles the various options for parenthood he has considered before making the decision to adopt—including acting as a sperm donor for lesbian friends and coparenting with them, acting as a donor for and coparenting with a straight single female neighbor, or becoming a foster parent. That Savage and his boyfriend decide on adoption as the most expeditious and desirable route, that they enter the adoption process as a couple, and that they pursue an open adoption (hoping to find a birth mother willing to select gay men to raise her child) are important differences in Savage's and Green's adoption histories. Yet some of the starker differences between these narratives—sincerity of tone, for instance—also immediately suggest a deeper similarity: a shared problem of self-positioning. Green is meditatively self-conscious about the prejudices that make people uncomfortable with the idea of gay men being around children, let alone having children. His fears about how his relationship with his son might be misinterpreted demonstrate how deeply internalized such homophobia can be. Savage is flippant and conversational, with discussions of sex that could earn an NC-17 rating. As the writer of a long-running, syndicated sex-advice column in city newsweeklies, Savage has made a career out of publicly performing gayness without shame. His memoir essentially takes the voice of shamelessness from his column and transposes it—for calculated effect—into a story about family values, where to talk about gay desire and gay parenthood in the same paragraph seems to be, for Savage, a necessary first level of social provocation. (When he announces his intention to adopt, he reports, even his own friends are wary that he will set back the image of gay adoption.)

Yet in working through the question of what makes a good-enough parent, both Green and Savage find a strikingly similar answer in a relation of affect to parenthood that can only be called selfish desire. I suggest there is a performance of a sense of entitlement here that is linked to—although not merely a simplistic response to—the sexual shame that defines so much of modern gay experience in general and to the stigma of pedophilia that is still widely if inaccurately projected onto gay men in particular. Savage says, "When I came out in 1980, it didn't occur to me that one day I would be able to adopt a child. I assumed, incorrectly, that it was illegal for gay men to adopt children. After all, gay men didn't have families—we were a threat to families" (22). Savage declares that to recognize the cultural contradictions between homosexuality and baby making is a normal part of the coming-out process. If one grows up with the idea that "gay family" is an oxymoron, then having a child demands an ironic reexamination of what that act symbolizes in one's life—unlike straight parents, who will not be routinely,

even daily, called on to account for the paradoxical meaning of "family" within a social order that rejects their claim to membership in those very terms. Still, sometimes those gay and straight roles of self-examination are reversed, as Savage observes. Attending an introductory seminar on adoption, he and his boyfriend are handed literature that describes "grieving your infertility" and coming to terms with the "failure" of not being able to have one's own children. In contrast to the other couples around the table, Savage shares none of the painful sense of loss of giving up on the idea of a biological family. For him and Terry, the "losses inherent in adoption" are, in his view, limited to the same things that most soon-to-be parents voluntarily accept, namely, fewer opportunities for sexual adventurousness and getting high. As a gay couple, he writes, he and Terry personally did not view adoption as a defeat but as a triumph: "a great, big, honkin' victory" (24). If adoption seems to subject Dan and Terry to the presumptions of heterosexuality (beginning with the "funereal tone" of the seminar's first day), he points out that it also subjects the straight couples to the experience of having their sexual identities questioned since the privilege of bioreproduction is no longer theirs to assume. In this context, he observes, he and Terry were the only couple in the room who were well past this stage of "coming out" about their nonprocreative sexuality.

In both of these narrative journeys toward fatherhood, private adoption is presented as a historical departure from familiar and even traditional ways that gay men and lesbians have created parent-child relationships, such as through fostering, unofficially taking in children of other family members, or, for many lesbians, creating biological children through time-honored, low-tech methods of at-home insemination. For unmarried men — whether single or more euphemistically "unmarried" — the domestic foster-care system has long been a main avenue to parenthood, usually as long as these single parents are willing to accept children who are older or have a range of disabilities or emotional or behavioral problems that make them difficult for social service agencies to place with "ideal" families. A full definition of "ideal" presumably does not need to be spelled out here, but certainly marital status (and thus always, at least implicitly, sexual orientation) has been no less significant than race and class in the social equations by which parents have been historically "matched" to children, just as children's race, class, age, and health have historically determined how they have been socially "distributed" to potential adoptive families.[8] Many gay men wanting to become fathers have also chosen fosterhood with additional motives of community responsibility. By taking up the cases of HIV-positive children or children abandoned by straight parents, they ironically rebuke the prevailing legal presumption that straight parents are inherently more fit.[9] Moreover, although foster care in many cases can

lead to adoption, the change in legal status from foster parent to adoptive parent, while hardly a formality for gay parents, given the well-documented discrimination against them in U.S. courts, often comes many years after the family has been living together and functioning as a family. It is thus an after-the-fact recognition of a chosen arrangement that is already in existence, where emotional bonds between parent(s) and child are understood to have taken root.

To choose adoption from the start instead of foster parenting, therefore, represents a shift of the psychological terrain. It is to reject what many have considered the more socially responsible route of "rescuing" children at higher risk.[10] It also represents a refusal of the second-class (or lower) nurturing status that has been allotted to gay men, and from the unwritten arrangement in some social-services systems that will accept a match between less-desirable parents and less-in-demand children. Of course, in reality, turning to private-agency adoption instead of the public foster-care system does not erase these social hierarchies, as these writers discovered. Both describe being offered newborn babies that other prospective parents have already passed over, and both writers chronicle similarly agonizing moments of decision about whether to accept a "nonoptimal" placement — industry-speak for a child exposed to alcohol or drugs during gestation — or to hold out for another baby. Hierarchies of race and economic privilege, therefore, inevitably emerge from these narratives too. To maximize his chances of receiving an offer of a baby, Green's partner, Andy, chooses an agency in the Southwest that deals primarily with Hispanic and mixed-race children and, unlike other agencies, does not have a policy against placing these children with white families. Through the scraps of information gleaned from the agency, he knows that the birth mother of his first son, who is of multiracial origin, has made a kind of "Sophie's choice" to give up her second baby in order to better care for her older daughter and that the mother of his other son, who immediately returned to Mexico after giving birth, was presumably an illegal immigrant. These fragments of information are reminders of the liminal figures in Green's story, women living at the raw edges of poverty, survival, and displacement.

Savage's account similarly highlights the transfer of human capital inherent in adoption. The birth mother in his story is Melissa, a homeless, young white woman living on the streets of Portland, Oregon, who is pregnant by accident, let down by her own dysfunctional family, and reluctant to give up her baby but aware that she is unable to take care of him. In witnessing the harrowing scene of Melissa sobbing in the hospital bed as she parts from her baby, Savage recognizes that it is this young woman, by far the most socially and economically marginal figure in the book, who pays the highest "price" of all for Dan and Terry's new

acquisition. Whether the narrative, as in Green's case, seems to downplay the global structures of poverty and privilege that make the adoption possible or, as in Savage's case, lays them out in grief-filled detail, it is undeniable that adoption is predicated on the same social inequities, political failures, and indigence as the foster-care system. Putting aside the question of whether birth parents in straitened circumstances can ever be said to freely "choose" adoption, the effects of the system are certainly the same: to siphon off the children of the poor and disadvantaged for adoption and incorporation into the middle class.[11]

Therefore it is precisely in this context that the turn toward adoption in these accounts must be recognized as personal and psychological rather than as a social reorganization of how adoptable children are actually "distributed." Whereas foster placement is (supposedly) organized around the specific needs of specific children, the adoption process begins in the realm of parents' personal wants and desires. It is a shift from the idea that a child needs a parent to the idea that the parent needs a child, for reasons that do not originate out of a sense of community responsibility or social justice. Wanting to adopt a healthy newborn instead of a suffering and potentially hard-to-love kid means basing a claim to parenthood on the deeply self-interested desire to start with the same blank slate that biological parents take for granted. Savage calls this rejecting the Damaged Goods option. He writes: "We didn't want to adopt a kid someone else had messed up. No, we wanted to mess up a kid all by ourselves. So what if we weren't going to be the Good Gay Couple? We were going to be the Selfish Gay Couple and go for that healthy infant, and if that made us assholes, well, we had a lot of company—most of it straight" (59).

Selfishness exists right on the surface of these accounts. As framed here by Savage, it constitutes the rhetoric of inviolable individual desire. That is, Savage does not simply use the word *selfish* as a more provocative version of *self-interested* or something equally value-neutral; in using *selfishness* with all the pejorative connotations that go along with it, he asserts it as an active good, a signal of adult autonomy. Selfishness constitutes someone who not only resists social invisibility but who functions competitively in a world of market equality. "Admitting we were just as selfish as every other straight couple trying to adopt wasn't easy" (56), Savage says, but he does not allow his guilt about refusing to settle for Damaged Goods (or DG) to overcome his ordinary sense of entitlement: "I felt tremendously guilty about all of this, naturally, and reminded myself that even the healthiest of infants can become a DG kid in a moment. One fall from a swing, one moment alone in a bathtub, and we could find ourselves raising a child with severe disabilities. Should this happen, we would, like good parents, rise to the challenge.

But we wanted to start even, though we knew there was no guarantee we would stay even" (59). Savage essentially responds to the question of why people have kids with an argument about cultivating the liberal self: "The reason people in general (by which I mean straight people, since people in general are straight) have kids today is to give themselves something real and meaningful and important to do. Having children is no longer about propagating the species or having someone to leave your lands to, but about self-fulfillment. Kids are a self-actualization project for the parents involved" (34). If the ideology of the family, according to Savage, has become entirely about self-actualization, and contemporary parenting about the production of the self, then selfishness must be understood as a constructive way to make the self more equal within the competitive terms of liberal individualism.

Green describes his journey as learning to be greedy—that is, learning to act more competitively on his desires and even to accept the idea of male desires as rightfully equivalent to women's biological needs. Green's partner, Andy, had at one point discussed an arrangement to become a sperm donor to a lesbian couple and to help raise the child together, just as Savage did. Andy's relationship with the two "Karens" ended acrimoniously when the women decided to seek another donor. "The issue of selfishness was troubling Andy," Green writes. "The expense of spirit wasted on the Karens had naturally left him feeling bankrupt, and yet, since he had trouble thinking ill of anyone, especially two women seeking a child, he could not conclusively face their betrayal. Was selfishness somehow inherent in the biology of reproduction? Did you *need* to be greedy to create a child?" (19). Green struggles with doubt about whether he or his partner, as men, deserve to have any say in active reproductive decisions. He resents the "Karens" for acting with professional efficiency in their own interests and reflects on women's abilities to identify their "core goals" for family and meet them in a "timely manner" (37). In Green's view, a culturally sanctioned form of selfishness represents a trait that women apparently naturally possess and that he and his partner need to acquire. To overcome their sense of inferiority in all matters of parenting, it appears, men must learn to be greedy, both *for* themselves and *against* the privileged position of mothers.

What might therefore seem like a countersexist project of "raising" fatherhood to the same cultural status as motherhood apparently rests on and, indeed, depends on an essentialist conception of the maternal. Indeed, to reconceive fatherhood in terms powerful enough to rival the naturalization of motherhood actually requires a psychic investment in a kind of biological neosexism. Similarly, to model an appropriate "passion" for fatherhood depends on repudiating the inappropriate passions that historically have been used to identify the homosexual.

Green fears that when men desire to have children too "passionately," selfishness crosses over into a more dangerous terrain:

> As a source of passion—the kind of passion mothers are admired for possessing and vilified for lacking—fatherhood, even biological fatherhood, was suspicious. Women needed to have children to be seen as normal and fulfilled, but too much child-lust in a man made him a freak: a possible pedophile, or at least homosexual. . . . A man who wants to adopt a child is often seen in a similar role: stealing from a woman the one thing society allows (indeed forces) her to keep for herself. Was it finally unnatural—that is, unhealthy—for a man to raise a child without a woman? Was it *selfish*? (22)

In his self-distancing from "freakish" father love, Green not only disavows any identification with the mother but also with a gay identity understood to be immature, erotically underdeveloped, and selfish in the most pathologizing sense. For men to desire children too much is to become, first, aberrant and, second, feminized. It no longer represents a desire for fatherhood but for the wrongful—freakish—desire to become a mother. The following lines contain some of Green's most vehement language: "What are we to make of those fathers who, desperately wanting to nurse their own babies, convince quack doctors to inject them with hormones? We think them ridiculous, perhaps disgusting, especially since the halfhearted lactation thus stimulated could not nourish a guinea pig. The pleasure, if any, derived by the man—ah, pleasure, that American criminal—seals the sin, though the pleasures of female breast-feeding are tolerated as an unavoidable side effect of biology" (22). The oddly transgendered figure in this description—who is even more deeply abjected by Green than the pedophile—is "disgusting," "ridiculous," and "criminal" in his attempt to take over a woman's function, his pleasure sterile, his ability to nourish "halfhearted." The generalizing "we" indicates that Green does not necessarily mean the above description to be taken as his personal view, but it remains unclear to whom "we" applies. (Are hormone injections less disgusting when given to women during fertility treatments, for example?) Even though Green seems aware of his own tangled reactions here, the language of recoil marks the text regardless. His performance of shame affirms and upholds the distinction between normative physical pleasures of fatherhood and nonnormative ones (those that might cross over into sexual gratification). Articulating shame becomes part of the gay father's accomplishment: the demonstration of a fully internalized ability to discriminate between the "natural" and "unnatural" pleasures of fatherhood.

To articulate "good" paternity as selfish, therefore, also requires rearticulating selfishness as an intimate good, rather than as a socially destructive or damaging impulse. In the context of gay fatherhood, selfishness becomes a counteractive agent to gay shame.[12] I will not attempt to rehearse here the psychoanalytic narrative of shame in relation to sexual identity, except to observe that asserting maturity through parenthood specifically counteracts the standard narrative of homosexuality as a failure to develop a fully adult sexual identity.[13] Parenthood becomes a way to render oneself culturally intelligible as an autonomous adult. Savage describes having a child as a way to remain "relevant" in the fullest social sense. Of course straight people, too, can discover that pushing a stroller confers a new kind of social visibility. But for a gay man or woman, it more fully alters the calculus of identity within which one is read—by gay and straight people alike. Both writers, when out in public with their sons, immediately noticed a shift in the attitudes of strangers toward a presumption of straightness and inclusion. Even in contexts where the parents' status as a gay couple is obvious, or should be, Green found extraordinary the difference the presence of a child could make—a new affirmation of belonging in some spheres, such as at the playground or in local shops, and a new sense of separation in others, such as in social gatherings of gay men. Either way, Green discovers that "fatherhood trumped gayness" in terms of visibility. "If we were no longer gay to straight people, we were no longer gay to most gay people either" (159).

Embracing paternity thus becomes a new way to signify the self as a full participant in the social sphere—not to mention a whole new way to inhabit the total structure of family relations that gay identities are still typically defined against.[14] Having a child, for Green, resolves two levels of social extraneousness at once. The first is a level felt by anyone living in a baby-centric culture without a baby. The second is a feeling of "superfluity" that is identified as particular to the experience of being gay: "Without a child you were always a child: a hanger-on, an exile, a zero. But for a gay man, even a gay man living in Greenwich Village, this sensation of superfluity was by no means novel. How often I'd felt it at the bank, at the laundry, where I'd impersonate maturity but feel weightless, invisible. . . . Everything conspires against the single, childless man" (97). Having a child thus becomes, for the gay man, a way to become more completely himself. Green describes his not-yet-partner, Andy, as wanting to adopt in order "to tend to something untended in himself" and as wanting "not to receive unconditional love, but give it" (38). To tend to the self becomes the counteragent to shame: not because gay men need kids in order to get unconditional love but because they have the same need as everyone else to perform it. For Andy, parenthood brings a "sense of

liberation" that is "more profound than the joy a pretty baby offered" (129). Green writes of the fantasy of a perfect new alignment between identity and identification, without any troubling sense of excess or lack: "With Erez to take care of, his life all at once made sense, as at that moment when stereoscopic images, formerly out of focus, suddenly merge and snap into place. The wasted energy of doubleness, of misalignment, is now available for better uses; the color is brighter and the world is dimensional" (129).

Articulating why one wants a child—which, these memoirs repeatedly note, heterosexuals are not routinely required to perform—becomes part of a larger narrative of assimilation. In his "reasons" for wanting to adopt, Savage puts forward a series of selfish, semi-objectionable, and mercenary claims that rhetorically undermine any high-flown notions of self-sacrifice, community duty, or the greater social good that readers might accidentally attribute to him, and forces us to acknowledge his motives as utterly self-interested and mundane. He wants kids, he argues in turn, to have a meaningful activity as he gets old ("Gay men need hobbies, too"), to be able to get enormously fat ("When the pounds come my way, I don't want people . . . to look at me and say, 'Wow, Dan really let himself go. Can't he get himself to a gym?' I want them to say, 'Dan's priorities have changed. He has children. He doesn't have time for the gym.'" [38–39]), to make a political statement ("Public displays of affection for gays and lesbians are political acts, and what could be a larger public display of affection than the two of us adopting a kid together?" [36]), and, finally, to fulfill the terms of a book contract for which he has already spent the advance.

Nonetheless, Savage's path through the adoption process, like Green's, also traces a trajectory from shame to a more or less assimilated view of the self within the family. To file their application with the adoption agency, Savage and his boyfriend must submit a "Dear Birthparent" letter for prospective birth mothers to review. The task of writing this letter brings Savage up against the book's biggest psychological stumbling block: he is unable to imagine a young woman who will turn past the pictures of straight couples offering identical loving, Christian homes and decide, "Yes, of course! Fags! I want to give my baby to fags!" (88). Savage tackles his writer's block by writing a fake letter that parodies every gay stereotype he can think of:

> Dear Birthparent:
>
> We are Terry and Dan. Yes, we are both men, and we would like to adopt your baby! If you have a problem with homosexuality, please know that we have a problem with teenagers who go out, get themselves knocked

> up, and then think they can sit in judgment over others. We have been with each other for three months. We hope to adopt a baby soon, as gay relationships don't usually last longer than six or seven months.

And so on. After writing this aggressively homophobic version, Savage is able to produce the real letter that represents his genuine investment in the adoption process. To his surprise, the letter turns out as blandly sentimental as all the straight couples' letters. ("We are excited about adopting a child, and we look forward to building a healthy, respectful relationship with you" [91].) From the first letter to the second, Savage's identification shifts from outsider to insider. His description of his and Terry's house and neighborhood, their extended families and hobbies — a snapshot of gay normalization — enables him to present himself and his partner seriously as "good" parents. Evidently, the path to full assimilation ultimately demands acquiescence to the conventional affective sentiment of good parenthood.

The issue of assimilation is central to any discussion of the significance of gay families in contemporary U.S. contexts. As a middle-class, home-owning, and financially stable white couple, in which one partner acts as a breadwinner and the other quits work to stay at home with the baby, Dan and Terry are about as traditional a model of the family as a gay couple could be. In fact, Savage, who enjoys claiming to be politically conservative where "family values" are concerned (he advocates stable, two-parent households and "ritual and familiarity" for children), has more than once described himself as a gay Dan Quayle.[15] Sociologists and historians of the family would be quick to point out that the values associated with traditional heteronormative domestic arrangements have always been predicated on a broad basis of material and social stability; certainly the embrace of "family values" in public discourse typically reflects a suspicious nostalgia for economic conditions that belong to another era entirely.[16] And indeed, it seems at times as if upwardly mobile gay families are in the midst of re-creating domestic hierarchies, complete with old-fashioned divisions of labor, that cannot be seen as postfeminist or progressive.[17]

But whether we respond to these models of assimilation as progressive — simply because they are not straight — or as regressive to the extent that they re-create the very same patriarchal structures that feminists have called on men and women alike to dismantle, I propose that we attend to the particular material ways the authors inhabit these new identities. Certainly, the performance of maturity and social acceptability is important in affective terms. But Green and Savage also perform assimilation in material terms. In fact, it could be convincingly

argued that they are most fully inscribed within the broader context of American familial ideology through their identities as consumers. Thus, if adoptive fatherhood can be seen as demanding an assimilation of the gay self into a normalized affect of familialism, we must also recognize an equally significant corollary development in which the modern family serves as a larger new unit of "selfhood" within the terms of liberal individualism. In this sense, the development of the gay family cannot be separated from the development of the family in general as a way to organize consumption. And understanding the larger organization of the family as a *consumer* unit helps us understand the ongoing movement of gay politics into the private sphere.

The Material Father

It is suggestive that the rhetoric of economic security and stability is so strongly foregrounded in memoirs that are each in their own way trying to locate an affective base for the family that does not rest on motherhood or the maternal. To the extent that material conditions underwrite the terms of social belonging and citizenship in the United States—terms that have been so historically strained for the gay community—both Savage and Green reclaim "family" for themselves on the very private grounds of being able to afford it. Having a child comes to symbolize gay men's and lesbians' attachment to the social by way of a material-consumerist display of family ties: the ability to shop at BabyGap.

How does "acquiring" a child reinscribe the parent into the social? I have shown how these couples' middle-class position allows them to trump the social "disadvantage" of homosexuality through adoption. In so doing, I suggest that they also inscribe themselves into an even more expansive logic of social entitlement. Ann Anagnost has argued that "the position of parent, for white, middle-class subjects, has become increasingly marked as a measure of value, self-worth, and citizenship."[18] Similarly, David Eng has suggested that "the possession of a child, whether biological or adopted, has today become the sign of guarantee not only for family but also for full and robust citizenship—for being a fully realized political, economic, and social subject in American life."[19] In Anagnost's and Eng's analyses, it is the cross-cultural alignments of race—through the movement of Asian adoptees to the West—that help produce the (white) adoptive parent as a more fully realized American subject. Whereas transnational adoption reveals one angle—through the experience and consumption of the "differences" of race—into the forms of psychic and social entitlement by which contemporary Western parenthood must be understood, gay adoption reveals another, comple-

mentary angle. Even when not marked by the difference of race (e.g., Savage, his partner, and their child all are white), gay families are, again, often just as fully marked as *social* rather than natural. Whereas transnational and cross-racial adoption allow us to recognize how a fuller social subject is produced through aestheticizing racial difference, gay adoption throws into equally distinct relief the social production of the modern family through its material identities and material formations. In other words, both angles make visible the dynamics of assimilation and consumption that, I argue, are at work in large degree in all forms of advanced capitalist parenthood.

In a 2001 opinion piece published in the *New York Times* when court battles over gay adoption in Florida were in the national spotlight, Savage argues that the staggering number of children in need of homes ought to dwarf all other issues of parental and adoptive rights, such as the sometimes invoked "right" of a child to have a mother and a father. ("The real choice for children waiting to be adopted in Florida and elsewhere isn't between gay and straight parents, but between parents and no parents.")[20] In *The Kid*, however, Savage takes a different tack, as I have shown, by starting with the perspective of parents' private desires as opposed to the "rights" of children languishing in foster care. One advantage of this "selfish" approach is, simply, to desensationalize men's desire to have children. Savage argues, cheekily, that gay men who want to parent tend to be just as good—and bad—at it as anyone else by citing his own "fitness" to parent on the grounds of his and Terry's maturity (not much), length of commitment (not long), and reasons for wanting to have children (not selfless or heroic).

But an equally important advantage of organizing the narrative around the parent rather than the child is to build another, more implicit argument for normalization, one rooted in the material life of the family rather than in biological or legal rights. Certainly kinship theorists have analyzed the "post-structuralist" family as one constructed through a broad network of affiliations—friends, lovers, ex-lovers, extended family—that are not necessarily blood or legal relations. Kath Weston has demonstrated that by redefining family through affiliation rather than biology, gay men and women reclaim "kinship" and "family" as actively functioning categories for use by and within the gay community, reappropriating family as a new category of choice (even while recapitulating and reinscribing the original prototype on which even nonbiological families must be seen as based).[21] But although Savage and his partner, and Green and his partner, challenge both the heteronormative and blood-tie definitions of family at once, they hardly "queer" the family in the way that the politics of antinormalization has sought. In his analysis of gay marriage, for instance, Michael Warner has pointed out the dan-

gers to queer politics of this type of structural assimilation: "Any politics that makes full social membership conditional on the proprieties of the marital form is ultimately a way to pave over the collective world that lesbians and gays have made."[22] (The "collective" world as an alternative to mainstream social relations parallels Weston's description of self-selected "affiliations" as inverting traditional kinship.) Warner emphasizes that the full weight of shame and stigma is thus placed on those gay men and women from the queerer sides of gay culture who do not "behave themselves," so to speak.[23]

If gay adoption is about reinhabiting the categories of kinship, as Weston might argue, then gay parenthood is also about the reinhabitation of material capital in a way that even more tightly binds gay men and women into the web of family relations. Savage and Green both grapple with the idea that family is not just whom you "choose"; it is also whom you spend money on. Instead of spending tourist dollars, buying designer products, and otherwise fulfilling the stereotype of the footloose, double-income-no-kids market demographic that is popularly (and erroneously, as shown by M. V. Lee Badgett) identified with the gay "lifestyle," the fathers in these examples show material consumption *within the family* to be what makes the gay family intelligible as an affective unit.[24] Spending money becomes a way to construct the category of family in recognizably social terms. Not for a moment should this tie between the social and the material be considered uniquely gay. (Dan's excited mother wants to begin shopping for her future grandchild before Dan and Terry have even been picked by a prospective birth mother.) In fact, it is precisely because money is such a significant marker of social parenthood in general that consumption becomes one of the fullest ways to realize such a variety of family bonds.

The truth about why gay men want to be dads, Savage provocatively suggests, is far more disturbing than anything the homophobic Right can think up. "When I fantasized about becoming a dad, I didn't picture myself having sex with children. No, in my dad fantasies, I saw myself going to work, making money, and coming home to Terry and the kid" (183). In his view the ability to support this comfortable setup *is* the definition of social stability, not just of economic stability. In an anecdote about himself as a child, Savage offers a powerful capsule analysis of the root of the social in the material:

> One of my most painful childhood memories is of my father explaining to my mother why Anita Bryant was right about "the gays." I was in the backseat of our green Chevy Nova, wedged among my three oblivious siblings. "The gays are a threat to society economically because they don't

> fall in love, get married, settle down, and have kids. They don't buy cars or washing machines or lawn mowers. So gay rights will mean fewer jobs for people who make cars, washing machines, and lawn mowers. Gays should be tolerated, but they couldn't be trusted with kids." (168)

Savage's father's explanation of why "the gays" fail to participate as full members of the economy turns into a familiar figure of speech—as if "trust" had become a euphemism for household appliances. Those who cannot "be trusted with kids"—the very words that invoke the pedophile—are no longer aligned with deviant sexuality but instead with a deviant materialism. Nonconsumers do not fulfill their social responsibilities. Trustworthiness calls up the image of a good employee who understands the company's paternal interests to cover his own. Savage reports, "The irony is that of my father's four children, only the homo has fallen in love and settled down. I'm the only one who can afford to buy a washing machine right now" (168). Although the incident is presented with irony, Savage responds to his father's words in the same materialist terms, reclaiming his stake in society by way of the washing machine that he can afford and his straight siblings cannot. In being able to settle down and adopt, he models the gay family as a fully functional site of consumption.

Green, too, displays an acute consciousness that the traditional role of fathers is to pay the bills—and a dissatisfaction with the expectation that the exchange of money is the primary social signifier of a father's love. "If I was someday to be a real father I was going to have to pay for it. Is that not what fathers did? And all they did?" (162). He suggests that the bill-paying signifiers of fatherhood make it impossible for anyone to call himself a "real" father unless he feels emotionally and financially trapped. Green explicitly considers the status of the child as a possession. "Who really owned an adopted child?" he wonders. "It was never asked who really owned the other kind" (22). Through adoption, the market logic of the family is revealed to be as powerful as the biological model of parenthood: "Blend them, merge them, fold them into the corporation—a subtext that spoke to the underlying scariness of an unclaimed child. Adoption seemed to challenge the ownership fixations (and the consumer anxieties beneath those fixations) of a postwar American consumer society whose icon of successful adulthood was a paid-off mortgage" (22). If a healthy bank account does not guarantee acceptability, a child supplies a different way for gay parents to navigate their relation to the social. Green suggests that adopting a child might succeed in marking full adulthood in a way that a paid-off mortgage, at least for gay men, doesn't quite manage to do. The insight of Green's account here is to show that the absence of

a naturalized maternal affect, together with the absence of naturalizing biological ties, doubly exacerbates the existing tension over child-as-possession, making it that much more difficult for the adoptive gay father to disavow the (never really disavowable) status of the American child as a commodity.

Both writers thus come to terms — more uncomfortably in Green's case — with the status of children as private property. Seen in this light, the possessive aspects of capitalist family structures help to legitimize gay adoption rather than subvert it. As noted earlier, at least one man in each narrative briefly considers coparenting with a lesbian couple, an approach to family making that would more visibly rupture the two-parent, self-sufficient family unit. Indeed, there are obvious precedents for such alternative parenting arrangements to be found in other historical and cultural models of the family: for instance, "othermothering," community-based child care, or informal adoption, all traditionally recognized within African American kinship relations, are structures that give adults other than the biological parents — sometimes an entire network of adults — a collectively acknowledged interest in the welfare of a child.[25] That these lesbian and gay coparenting arrangements fall through in Savage's and Green's cases is not evidence that such alternative structures cannot work, nor a presumption about how "transgressive" (for better or worse) they might prove in actual practice, but instead powerfully reveals how an economy of possession and ownership encourages and rewards the psychology of "private" parenting. Even in an open adoption like Savage's, where the birth mother is not erased from view, formal adoption makes the act of acquiring a child — whether by adoptive or nonadoptive means — legible as an assertion of capitalist self-interest.[26]

Perhaps most useful about selfishness as a category of analysis is how it connects affective and material contexts. I have employed it in terms of shame and entitlement, but it can be taken beyond the analysis of affect by recalling the conventional economic definition of who counts as a full member of society. Indeed, selfishness is the classic economic paradigm of rational selfhood. An individual who behaves according to purely self-interested motives is someone who can compete in the marketplace. Feminist economists have long observed that the separative identity posited by mainstream economic theory is modeled not only by the selfish actor in the marketplace but also by the patriarchal head of household who makes decisions for the good of all members. The opposite model of selfhood is someone whose identity is completely soluble in others' needs — the classic example is the mother.[27] Barrett and McIntosh remind us that economic theory ignores members of society who do not enter the market by subsuming them as family members into the "individuality" of the head of household. This head of the family

can then be "assumed to be an economic agent, complete with income, expenditure, consumer preferences, indifference curves and marginal propensities to all sorts of economic activity." This "conflation of the individual and the family," they note, "is absolutely necessary to sustain the conservative economic fantasy" that market liberalism is a moral and rational system.[28]

Indeed, to examine gendered divisions of *selfhood* in the gay family would be a valuable way to expand the reach of conventional analyses of divisions of family labor to a new, psychic realm. But my argument here is limited to the proposition that the consumer family claims this "separative" social identity for itself. If the reason to have a family is, in contemporary market society, understood in terms of fulfilling individual desires rather than, for example, producing family laborers—the very shift that functions as the basis of John D'Emilio's famous explanation of the development of modern gay identity in capitalist terms—then the modern family is all the more inscribed into this market fantasy of separative autonomy.[29] Therefore, in discussing the particular significance of economic choices made in a "family of choice," I am not simply referring to the ability to satisfy highly individualistic tastes and desires that we associate, for instance, with consuming goods or selecting sexual partners. In the broader material context of the family, the power of choice demonstrates that if the family enters into social relations *self-interestedly*, and if this self-interest follows market logic in being *predictable*, then the family must be recognized as a fully functioning unit. It is not a collection of individuals with different jobs, different last names, and, possibly, different priorities; instead it operates more like a small business. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the more the household in an advanced capitalist society resembles a traditionally interdependent economic unit—complete with familiar divisions of labor between wage earning and nurturance—the more effectively it can be understood as a cohesive social unit. And the more the family behaves as a single unit, along the very same lines laid out by economists to explain individual market behavior, the more its "selfish" economic identity helps explain its social power.

Viewed in this way, perhaps it shouldn't surprise us that this model of the gay family tends to inhabit a fairly conservative cultural politics. Indeed, it becomes one of the most striking new sites of the "ideology of familialism" in which the symbolics of family life are expanded beyond the walls of the home.[30] The embrace of this familialism has become a highly visible aspect of the social performance of parenthood. Several gay stay-at-home fathers interviewed in a 2004 *New York Times* article endorsed the idea that to be a "real" father means completely giving oneself over to parenthood and that anything short of staying home full-time would defeat the purpose of having a family. One man, who left

his position as a professor at the University of Southern California medical school to raise three adopted children, is quoted as saying, "I can truly empathize with the women's movement now. I know that I've committed career suicide."[31] Perhaps it is revealing enough for any parent to admit never before having understood the relevance of feminist arguments about the price of choosing between family and career (assuming that this is what the interviewee means by the "women's movement"), thereby underscoring to what extent child raising is typically not seen as a collective social responsibility but as a personal and private decision. But also underscored here is a controversial but not at all uncommon view that having kids, if one is going to do it right, really is the end of any life outside the family. To give oneself over to hyperfamilialism emerges as a kind of necessary psychic shift for the stay-at-home father.

Certainly, upper-middle-class women in similar stay-at-home circumstances have become familiar targets for critics of hypermaternalism. Most recently, for example, Judith Warner has controversially portrayed U.S. mothers as pressured to subsume their adult identities to the task of child rearing.[32] In Warner's view, what Betty Friedan identified as the "feminine mystique" has been updated into the perfectionism of the new "mommy mystique." Warner's study of maternal superachievement has been roundly criticized for its almost exclusive focus on a highly educated cross-section of upper-middle-class and white women. But focusing on visible professional women makes an important point—although it is not the central thrust of Warner's argument—of the connection between the anxiety of being a good-enough parent and the anxiety of being able to transmit upper-middle-class status to the next generation. In a society that offers the family little or no structural support, the burden of guaranteeing children's success in a competitive society actually does become the parents' (and, more usually, one parent's) personal responsibility. Vocalizing the anxieties of this middle class, Warner says that without the right private schools, the right extracurriculars, the right colleges, we worry (note the "we") that our children "won't be able to buy a house or have the middle-class existence our parents seemed to find easy but that we can barely sustain. Ergo: soccer and violin and public service and weekends of baseball practice become *vitally important*."[33]

For gay fathers belonging to the same class demographic as the mothers Warner interviews, the stakes in performing social parenthood are certainly no less and in some ways a great deal more. "We never thought we'd even be able to have a child," says one father in the above-mentioned *New York Times* article. "When we had the opportunity to do it, we wanted to give her the best attention and love."[34] Savage needles antigay critics by suggesting that social conservatives

ought to be pleased that his son has never seen the inside of a day care center.[35] Judith Stacey writes that the topic of the appropriateness of leaving children with a nanny (along with the topic of exposing them to sexualized imagery at gay pride marches) appeared so regularly on a Los Angeles listserv of gay fathers that she dubbed these subjects the "Mr. Mommy Wars."[36] Whether trying to compensate single-handedly for the insecurities and inequalities of American social structures, or proving that they can care affectively for a child, gay fathers inhabit the most privatized model of domestic life to show that they have a real family, not a pale gay imitation of it. Being able to afford a stay-at-home parent makes it possible to claim to offer the most "nurturing" organization of the modern family—at a historical moment when the intense privatization of all social responsibilities makes this burden of achievement on the family generally strained at best and unsupportable at worst.

The fact that the couples in these examples are in comfortable economic circumstances is thus a crucial part of the story of material citizenship. Certainly it is those who can afford to feel a sense of middle-class entitlement who are able to inscribe themselves into the most protected areas of heteronormative family ideology (and who thereby come to the attention of major media outlets and are offered book contracts by large commercial publishers). If the "selfish" act of adoption allows gay men and women to bypass some of the most entrenched levels of discrimination in the system, such bypassing at the same time upholds and reaffirms the linked ideologies of privacy and self-sufficiency that make such a sense of entitlement possible. To voluntarily subordinate one's hard-won "liberated" political gay identity to the strictures of family nurturance is seen as a new kind of social maturity. Even if this maturity is not naively presented in these memoirs as a retreat from politics, it appears, at least on the surface, to borrow from a reactionary conception of the family as prepolitical. As the gay father takes the position of the prefeminist mother, the family life that Warner describes as stifling mothers' selfhood becomes an opportunity, in the context of the gay family, to reappropriate all the traditional social and affective "entitlements" of domestic privacy—for what they are worth.

Homonormative?

Savage's and Green's texts must appear to share—or at least to self-consciously exploit the rhetoric of—a newly "mainstream" vision of gay liberation that Lisa Duggan calls a new "homonormativity."[37] Although Duggan focuses on the rise of a neoliberal discourse of sexual politics in the mid-1990s, and specifically

identifies a relatively small but media-attractive movement with a group of center-right and libertarian writers who position themselves against the progressive and "queer" Left, she describes the politics of this homonormativity in broader terms, as a "politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."[38] To claim that material consumption has come to substitute for the fabric of community and identity formation is, of course, not a new historical critique. But the concept of homonormativity as described by Duggan offers a way to expand our analyses of the politics of consumption beyond an often limiting focus on the individual, or even on an individual positioned within a larger demographic group (such as gay consumers), and to examine how these materialisms are consolidated by the organization of capitalist relations within the family. As Rosemary Hennessy writes, "Avant-garde queer critiques of the arbitrariness of heterosexuality tend to keep invisible how the gendered division of labor has historically secured sexual identities to the family and consumer culture."[39] The objective here is not simply to modify an older feminist critique of bourgeois patriarchy and apply it to gay families but to assess how the family unit in general—gay or straight—has been pressed into the service of a larger neoliberal politics. Although much recent analysis of neoliberalism as a set of political economic practices acknowledges and insists on its reach into the structure of intimate social relations, we have only begun to examine its pressures in this domain and to analyze the shaping of family relations in response to contemporary ideologies of market individualism and market autonomy.[40]

The mainstream, depoliticized strain of gay politics that Duggan calls homonormative draws on the same terms and precepts that dominate social and political discourse in most contemporary market-organized societies. The rhetoric of privatization, individual freedom, and personal responsibility signals an all-too-familiar subordination of democratic and collective principles to a bottom line of "equality within capitalism."[41] Duggan points out that the same key terms of neoliberal individualism have become, over and over again, the justification for such socially conservative projects as welfare reform, the diminishment of public services, the competitive "outsourcing" of certain public institutions such as schools and prisons, the promoting of conservative social values, and, I might add, the George W. Bush administration's endorsement of marriage as an official policy solution to poverty and family instability.[42] The withering of state support systems is but one symptom of the privatization of social and economic relations on every level. And as the processes of the past three decades have opened domains of

social life to the market as never before, they have produced the very conditions that demand that the family maximize its efficiency.

This homonormative family structure—complete with patriarchal hierarchies and inequitable divisions of labor—is, from this point of view, a late-capitalist realization of private coverture. Under this concept, which originated in eighteenth-century English law, married women (*femmes couvertes*) were folded under the legal status and authority of their husbands. Women's labor was thus legally absorbed and incorporated into the overall interests of the head of the household. A modern-day version of coverture is encouraged by a wide range of structures that make full social autonomy conditional on homonormative family cooperation: a system of health insurance that requires at least one full-time earner of employment benefits and at least one adult with a legal visa; a lack of subsidized day care options; and the need for someone to take charge of maintaining the family's access to the institutions and privileges of the upwardly mobile. It is through the cooperative efficiency of the modern family, and the labor of the modern *femme couverte*—as many stay-at-home fathers have discovered—that the greatest number of social and collective needs is likely to be met. By this logic, the more efficiently the family allocates its social, legal, and economic resources, the more fully it can "cover" and protect each family member within the total organization of capitalist relations.

For instance, no matter how ironically it is presented, Savage's portrait of domestic life appears based on precisely the model of subsumed private labor that defines "traditional" marriage. In *The Commitment: Love, Sex, Marriage, and My Family*, a book exploring his and his boyfriend's ambivalence about gay marriage (Savage always chooses the word "boyfriend" over the respectabilities of "partner"), he reports, "My boyfriend . . . says he doesn't want to get married because—and I quote—'I don't want to act like straight people.' I believe the first time he made this comment he was folding my laundry, balancing our baby on his hip, and stirring a pot of grits on the stove."[43] In planning a possible wedding celebration or a possible ten-year anniversary party with their extended families—Savage insists that he and Terry remain undecided up until the very weekend of the event about whether to go to Canada and get married—both men ultimately appear to accommodate a series of psychic shifts of assimilation toward marriage just as they have earlier accepted those of assimilation toward adoption.

But if the significance of their "commitment" appears to turn on the cultural symbolics of gay marriage, Savage makes it impossible for any reader to fail to notice that his life is already fully structured according to the realities of straight marriage. In this context it is clear how absolutely the neoliberal discourse

of privatization depends on the most traditional structure of heterosexual labor in the family. Queer theorists and marriage advocates routinely observe that the real social justification of marriage is for individual adults to be able to share the rights and entitlements of law. But the "market" logic of marriage demands something quite different than an ideal of social equality between consenting adults. As many theorists point out, marriage has historically served as a "coercive tool of the privatization of social costs."[44] The stay-at-home fathers in the previously cited *Times* article express surprise and discomfort at their sudden new experience of economic invisibility after having given up their careers and wage-earning identities. Yet they nonetheless self-consciously embrace their unremunerated labor as the absolutely necessary glue that holds together not only the family but an entire social fabric. Married women's — or, in this case, gay fathers' — unpaid labor is understood as "underpinning the *privatized* social safety net."[45] And as I have shown, this is exactly the extraordinary social responsibility that generates a larger contemporary anxiety of good-enough parenthood. In this way, the competition to perform parenthood *socially* can, by way of the particular example of gay "domestication," perhaps be more clearly recognized as a function limited neither to gay nor to adoptive families.

In discussing the political contradictions and complexities to be found in all of these accounts of the gay family, I wish to stress that I am not suggesting that men who adopt children are inherently politically conservative, any more than I am singling them out for inhabiting the family-oriented structures of material capitalism — as if these structures could ever be upheld by any single group of people. For instance, it is interesting to contrast the apparent family-values traditionalism of *The Kid* against the author's personal track record of political mischief-making. Savage, whose politics might be more aptly described as contrarian rather than as following any mainstream gay liberal line — he favors gay marriage while questioning the value of monogamy, for instance — has demonstrated a flair for staging media stunts against right-wing politicians and exposing the hypocrisy of public moralists.[46] Yet even as Savage's political pranksterism underscores his media savvy and commitment to provocation, it also challenges the notion that "real" politics has been entirely subsumed into consumerism — or at least expresses one iconoclastic activist's longing for another, older kind of political organizing in which voting in local caucuses or running for elected office (both of which Savage has done) represented a richer form of political citizenship. Thus, within the context of Savage's national-media theatrics, the publication of a book such as *The Kid* must be understood as yet another performance, emblematic of a contemporary political condition that he pragmatically exploits: namely, the impoverishment

or reduction of the public sphere into the personal, or of what Ann Anagnost calls the general "contraction of the political into the familial."[47]

To use the term *homonormative* in this context, therefore, is not to suggest that Savage and Green identify with, or can be straightforwardly identified with, the social conservatisms that have been, in the instances that Duggan analyzes, purposefully united under the auspices of a new gay "centrism." It is to suggest nonetheless that the concept of the homonormative can be used to develop a broader and more nuanced understanding of what the privatizations and normalizations of contemporary gay life look like in relation to the ongoing depoliticizations of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century capitalist culture. In this sense, homonormativity is not merely continuous with the longer history of gay assimilation. It is historically specific to the construction of contemporary life through those structures of market capitalism that, since the 1980s, have been "supportive of upward redistribution of a range of resources, and tolerant of widening inequality of many kinds."[48] At the same time, it is also not merely a gay-flavored version of conservative social politics in the 1990s and 2000s. Although the homonormative may seem, at times, entirely compatible with such politics, it is inscribed within a deeper—and in some ways more intractable—view of liberal entitlement. Savage demonstrates not only that this deeper sense of entitlement can drive agendas on the left and the right at the same time, but that in the larger neoliberal framework, the difference between these various progressive and conservative visions cannot always be distinguished.

Eng writes, "While it is clear that gays and lesbians have always come from varied class backgrounds, the historical development and public visibility of queer family and kinship demand a concerted analysis of the ways in which contemporary forms of capitalism, flexible accumulation, and exploitation might be the very conditions of possibility for this emergence."[49] Green and Savage both show that the social performance of parenthood is also a performance of maturity, social acceptability, and of their inscription into the broader context of American familial and consumer ideology. Orienting themselves away from narratives of mainstream gay identity based on sexual freedom and toward a narrative of social responsibility, these memoirs demonstrate that the performance of selfishness in adopting a child and in reclaiming the structure of family is a powerful way to present oneself to the mainstream as socially, culturally, and economically intelligible. This is not an expansion of the horizon of political possibility in the way progressive, feminist, or queer politics have imagined it. Perhaps the politics produced by the "normalization" of the gay family within the terms of advanced capitalism can only be described as eclectic. Yet for better or worse, its internal

contradictions, which are a marker of all assimilationist moments in history, are precisely what make it a force to be reckoned with.

Notes

I wish to thank Andrea K. Summers and Elizabeth Freeman for their incisive comments on this essay, as well as the anonymous reviewers at *GLQ*.

1. Jesse Green, *The Velveteen Father: An Unexpected Journey to Parenthood* (New York: Ballantine, 2000); Dan Savage, *The Kid: What Happened after My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant* (New York: Penguin/Plume, 2000).
2. Quoted in Lynda Hall, "Lorde, Anzaldúa, and Tropicana: Performatively Embodying the Written Self," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 15 (Summer 2000): 111.
3. On international adoption, see Ann Anagnost, "Scenes of Misrecognition: Maternal Citizenship in the Age of Transnational Adoption," *positions* 8, no. 2 (2000): 389–421; and Sara Dorow, "Racialized Choices: Chinese Adoption and the 'White Noise' of Blackness," *Critical Sociology* 32, nos. 2–3 (2006): 357–79. On transracial adoption in the United States, see Twila L. Perry, "Transracial Adoption: Mothers, Hierarchy, Race, and Feminist Legal Theory," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 10, no. 1 (1998): 101–64; and Patricia J. Williams, "Spare Parts, Family Values, Old Children, Cheap," in *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader*, ed. Adrien Katherine Wing, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 159–66. On the racialization of poverty in the United States and the turn of the white middle class toward international adoption, see Ana Teresa Ortiz and Laura Briggs, "The Culture of Poverty, Crack Babies, and Welfare Cheats: The Making of the 'Healthy White Baby Crisis,'" *Social Text*, no. 76 (Fall 2003): 39–57.
4. On the conflict between racial "biologism" in adoption placements and the judicial adherence to colorblindness, see Kevin Noble Maillard and Janis L. McDonald, "The Anatomy of Grey: A Theory of Interracial Convergence," *Law and Inequality*, Social Science Research Network, March 29, 2007, ssrn.com/abstract=977110.
5. Judith Stacey, "Gay Parenthood and the Decline of Paternity as We Knew It," *Sexualities* 9, no. 1 (2006): 30.
6. Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-Social Family*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 24.
7. Although surrogacy arrangements may in some cases structurally resemble adoptive arrangements, particularly in an open adoption like Savage's in which the prospective fathers and birth mother know each other, I separate them in this article because surrogacy allows at least one father the guarantee of paternal rights and protections that do not have to be negotiated through the public legal system. Because surrogacy also allows some of the presumptions of "natural" fatherhood that go along with biological kinship, I treat adoption as the context in which the performance of fatherhood is

most exclusively social. This is not to suggest surrogacy does not involve similar anxieties about fatherhood. The argument about selfishness as part of a new psychological moment of gay fatherhood could certainly be explored in both forms. See, e.g., the documentary film *Paternal Instinct* (dir. Murray Nossel, USA; 2004).

8. The increasing numbers of children crowding into social-service systems in the 1980s and 1990s put pressure on many agencies to accept a broader pool of prospective foster parents—and in some places effectively opened the door to a "don't ask, don't tell" policy on parents' sexual orientation. Yet the outcome of transferring children according to structures of social privilege remains in effect. Williams points out that any hierarchy of value for children in the United States will also inevitably be a hierarchy of value by race. I would extend this point by saying that since race, poverty, and health each operate as indexes for each other, adoption operates as a site for the transfer of "values" along an entire range of social hierarchies, including race. These hierarchies are inescapable in any form of adoption, whether it is private/public, open/closed, domestic/international, formal/informal, or transracial/same-race. See Williams's rebuttal to Elizabeth M. Landes and Richard A. Posner's famously controversial argument that the shortages and excesses of different kinds (read "colors") of adoptable children could be redressed through the more rigorous application of market logic. Williams, "Spare Parts"; Elizabeth M. Landes and Richard A. Posner, "The Economics of the Baby Shortage," *Journal of Legal Studies* 7 (1978): 3232–48.
9. A case at the center of the Florida adoption battles concerned a sick, HIV-positive child who had been abandoned by his heterosexual parents and nursed to health over many years by a gay couple acting as legal foster parents, who eventually sought formal adoption. In a ruling upholding the state ban on gay adoptions, federal justice James Lawrence King wrote, "The existence of strong emotional bonds between plaintiffs does not inherently grant them a fundamental right to family privacy, intimate association, and family integrity," and claimed to base his decision on the issue of rights: "there is no fundamental right to adopt or be adopted" (quoted in Tamar Lewin, "Court Backs Florida Ban on Adoption by Gays," *New York Times*, August 31, 2001). In arguing for children's interest in the most stable and least socially stigmatizing homes, Justice King does not address what makes gay parents less "stable" than single parents or abusive parents. See Dana Canedy, "Groups Fight Florida's Ban on Gay Adoptions," *New York Times*, March 15, 2002.
10. See Ortiz and Briggs, "The Culture of Poverty," on the discourse of "rescuing" through adoption. (See also a January 11, 2007, AP wire report titled "Madonna: Malawian Orphans Need Rescue," Usatoday.com/life/people/2007-01-11-Madonna-Rosie_x.htm.) Maillard has also discussed the racial implications of celebrities publicly "rescuing" children from Third World countries. Kevin Noble Maillard, "Regardless of Africa: International Adoption and Parental Preference" (paper presented at the Conference on Adoption and Culture, University of Tampa, October 2005).

11. Ortiz and Briggs specify how funding for child support is tilted to encourage middle-class families to adopt the children of the poor and, effectively, the nonwhite: "Even as welfare reform all but eliminated federal transfer payments to help working-class women raise their own children, the 1996 adoption reform provided a $6,000 tax break to (implicitly white) families who adopted a 'special needs' child—with *non-white* a subcategory of the definition of special needs. Combined with the 1980 federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act that provided subsidies to middle- and upper-class families adopting from foster care, the Adoption Promotion Act meant that the federal government would provide upward of a $13,000 bonus for middle-class white people to raise the same children" (51–52).
12. A stark sense of shame pervades an earlier set of adoption accounts by gay men and women in Stephen Hicks and Janet McDermott, eds., *Lesbian and Gay Fostering and Adoption: Extraordinary yet Ordinary* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1999). An independent social worker offers this apologia for his choice of profession: "I decided that even if I couldn't have my own children I would be able to work in the child-care field. (I am sure some readers will groan about this, but there are lesbians and gay men in social work for good reasons)" (54).
13. For a discussion of standard Freudian accounts of homosexuality as arrested development and, more specifically, for discussion of how shame delineates identity, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," *GLQ* 1 (1993): 1–16. Shame, "as opposed to guilt, is a bad feeling that does not attach to what one does, but to what one is" (12). A "narcissism/shame circuit" becomes a setting for a theatrical performativity of self. In its performance of guilt and repression, Green's account appears to recognize and incorporate, wistfully, the construct of shame that determines an adult gay identity. See especially Green's description of giving his toddler son a bath (*Velveteen Father*, 159).
14. Which is not to suggest such a construction of identity in opposition to the family is necessarily permanent and unchanging. See John Leland on the cultural novelty of adult gay men and women experiencing baby pressure from their parents, "O.K., You're Gay, So? Where's My Grandchild?" *New York Times*, December 21, 2000.
15. See Dan Savage, *The Commitment: Love, Sex, Marriage, and My Family* (New York: Dutton, 2005). "One of the most underrated virtues—one I'd like to see virtuecrats promote to parents everywhere, and a virtue many homos have a problem with—is constancy. Once you're a parent, you simply have to stop reinventing yourself while your children are young. Parents who burn through a series of religions or change partners every six months or switch genders are, in my opinion, terrorizing their small children" (129).
16. The most influential analysis of the disconnection between traditional, nuclear-family values and postindustrial family economics in the twentieth century is Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

17. For analysis of gendered divisions of domestic labor, see Barrett and McIntosh; see also Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
18. Anagnost, "Scenes of Misrecognition," 392.
19. David Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas." *Social Text*, no. 76 (Fall 2003): 7–8.
20. Dan Savage, "Is No Adoption Really Better Than a Gay Adoption?" *New York Times*, September 8, 2001.
21. Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
22. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999).
23. Warner, *Trouble with Normal*, 114.
24. M. V. Lee Badgett, *Money, Myths, and Change: The Economic Lives of Lesbians and Gay Men* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
25. On the historical and even "revolutionary" importance of alternative family networks (as demonstrated in the phrase "bloodmothers and othermothers") in African American communities, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 179–99.
26. There is an irony that Savage and his partner are chosen by a birth mother who sees it as "radical" to give her baby to social "outsiders" like herself. Melissa is a disturbing figure in the narrative: a mother who doesn't disrupt the formation of a new, nuclear gay family but also cannot be written out of it. In a later essay, Savage describes her life on the streets as a long, slow form of suicide ("Living with a Very Open Adoption," in *A Love Like No Other: Stories from Adoptive Parents*, ed. Pamela Kruger and Jill Smolowe [New York: Riverhead, 2005]).
27. For a critique of the gendered distinctions in mainstream economics between the "separative" self and the altruistic or "emotional" self, see Paula England, "The Separative Self: Androcentric Bias in Neoclassical Assumptions," in *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics*, ed. Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). See Barrett and McIntosh on the conception of maternal selflessness in the "science" of modern sociobiology: "The characteristics of motherhood are particularly heavily invested with connotations of maternal instinct, of self-sacrifice to the propagation of the species, of values superior to mundane self-interest" (*Anti-Social Family*, 27).
28. Barrett and McIntosh, *Anti-Social Family*, 48–49.
29. John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 467–76.
30. Barrett and McIntosh, *Anti-Social Family*, 21.

31. Gina Bellafante, "Two Fathers, with One Happy to Stay at Home," *New York Times*, January 12, 2004.
32. Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (New York: Riverhead, 2005). See also Cathi Hanauer, *The Bitch in the House* (New York: William Morrow, 2002).
33. Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 32–33.
34. Bellafante, "Two Fathers."
35. Savage, *Commitment*, 22.
36. Stacey, "Gay Parenthood," 48n28.
37. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2003).
38. Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?* 50. Duggan credits Michael Warner for the term heteronormativity, on which she bases hers, but disclaims any intention to equate the structures or institutions of gay life, such as they are, with the vast hegemony of heterosexuality (94n15).
39. Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 67.
40. David Harvey writes, "The process of neoliberalism has, however, entailed much 'creative destruction,' not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also of divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart" (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 3).
41. Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?* xi.
42. See President George W. Bush's 2003 proclamation of Marriage Protection Week, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/10/20031003-12.html (accessed May 8, 2008).
43. Savage, *Commitment*, 24.
44. Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?* 17.
45. Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?* 17.
46. Savage's targets have included William Bennett and then Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum. See also Savage's accounts of (1) infiltrating a Republican national convention by successfully running for office as a local Republican precinct captain; (2) trying to infect Republican Gary Bauer with the flu during the 2000 election season by licking doorknobs in Bauer's office; (3) being charged with a felony after publishing a news report about flaws in the Iowa caucus procedures that allowed him to show up and falsely vote as an Iowa resident; and (4), when he was reported to have been among the first in Seattle to try to seek a marriage license, inadvertently scaring more politically cautious gay-marriage activists into trying to beat him into court.
47. Anagnost, "Scenes of Misrecognition," 395.

48. Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?* xi. Duggan has scrutinized the impoverishment of social vision that results when identity politics are widely assumed to be separable from economic policies. She describes how neoliberal discourse is able to exploit hard distinctions between the cultural and the economic realms. Homonormative politics serve as a kind of targeted delivery device for the standard tenets of neoliberal economics to a particular identity group: "This new homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history or gay politics: 'equality' becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, 'freedom' becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the 'right to privacy' becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped" (*Twilight of Equality?* 65–66). This is a stark diagnosis of what happens when political equality is conceived in capitalist terms.
49. Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," 6.