

STRAIGHTENING OUT (THE POLITICS OF) SAME-SEX PARENTING:  
THE VERBAL AND VISUAL RHETORIC OF GAYS AND LESBIANS AS PARENTS  
IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. POPULAR PRESS

by

JAMIE LANDAU

(Under the Direction of Bonnie J. Dow)

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues for the hegemonic function of mass mediated portrayals of gay and lesbian parents and identifies verbal and visual rhetorical strategies of those portrayals. Specifically, I argue that a quantitative increase in visibility of same-sex parenting in U.S. popular press from 2004 to 2005 does not translate to unmitigated progress. Rather, homophobic, (hetero)sexist, and heteronormative constructions of gay familial life are repeated. Challenges to these dominant ideologies discursively emerge, but this resistance, I suggest, is tenuous at best. This study is important for illustrating the cultural constructedness of homo/heterosexuality as it arises in relation to parenting, for exposing the hegemonic power relations of how same-sex parenting is “put into discourse,” and for showing how these discourses are used *rhetorically* to support particular power relations and to persuade audiences. These findings have implications for the development of gay and lesbian identities and the progress of the gay and lesbian movement.

INDEX WORDS: Gays, Lesbians, Homosexuality, Parenting, Marriage, Hegemony, Heterosexism, Heteronormativity, Mass Media, Rhetoric, Foucault, Butler

STRAIGHTENING OUT (THE POLITICS OF) SAME-SEX PARENTING:  
THE VERBAL AND VISUAL RHETORIC OF GAYS AND LESBIANS AS PARENTS  
IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. POPULAR PRESS

by

JAMIE LANDAU

B.A., Vanderbilt University, 2002

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2006

© 2006

Jamie Landau

All Rights Reserved

STRAIGHTENING OUT (THE POLITICS OF) SAME-SEX PARENTING:  
THE VERBAL AND VISUAL RHETORIC OF GAYS AND LESBIANS AS PARENTS  
IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. POPULAR PRESS

by

JAMIE LANDAU

Major Professor: Bonnie J. Dow

Committee: Celeste M. Condit  
Roger Stahl

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2006

## DEDICATION

For those who seek to free themselves with their own voices.

As Virginia Woolf said to Leonard Woolf in David Hare's screenplay for the Academy Award-winning film, *The Hours*,

I have endured this custody. I have endured this imprisonment. I am attended by doctors. Everywhere I am attended by doctors who inform me of my own interests... They do not speak for my interests! How dare they presume?... It is me. It is my voice. It is mine and mine alone... This is my right. This is the right of every human being... Thereby she defines her humanity. (2002, pp. 91-95)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the endless support from my colleagues, friends, and family.

I am in debt to my advisor, Bonnie Dow, for not only being enthusiastic from day one about this thesis topic, but also for being one of the best (and most patient) editors I will ever have. She is *the* reason for my learning curve in academic writing. I am also considerably thankful to Celeste Condit, who has shown me all that I have to look forward to in being a scholar. As a member of my committee, she has especially challenged me to reveal the uniqueness of the rhetorical perspective in cultural criticism. Additional thanks to Kevin DeLuca for his encouragement to stretch *and* always speak my mind over the past two years, and to Roger Stahl for his work on my committee. My undergraduate mentor, John Sloop, deserves significant credit as well. He introduced me to the field of rhetoric, and particularly its intersections with the study of gender and sexuality. I owe him for why I professionally do what I do and why I will continue to do it. I cannot thank him enough for that, and much more.

I am further indebted to my fellow graduate students, some of whom have also become my good friends and, hopefully, friends forever. Specifically, I am blessed by the presence of people who are critical thinkers *and* critical shoulders to lean on. Many thanks to Melanie McNaughton for her help when I needed it the most. Also, I never could have dreamed of a more wonderful person than Lisa Slawter to be my counterpart on this road called graduate school. She inspires me to work hard, and harder, to make this world a better place.

Additionally, my closest friends outside of academia and far away from Georgia have been essential to making me believe in myself and my studies. It is because of them that I smile

every day. Those who deserve the biggest, ever-lasting hugs include Katie Scullin, Missy Chicre, Jenny Kovarovic, Lauren Zeranski, Beth Thomas, and A.J. Kohari.

Lastly but certainly not least, I am very grateful to my family. My father, Julian Landau, and my mother, Julie Landau, instilled in me from a young age that receiving an education, *plus* sharing it, would make me into the best person I could be. In particular, my mother, my grandmothers Mildred Landau and Louise Shadix, and my aunt Tina Roddenbery taught me that being a woman and being intelligent are never mutually exclusive, nor are they characteristics about which to stay silent. Also, I thank Jeff Landau for being the finest big brother any little sister could have.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
 CHAPTER	
1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF GAYS AND LESBIANS IN POPULAR MEDIA AND CRITICAL/CULTURAL DISCOURSE	
CRITICISM .....	1
Symbolic Annihilation to Assimilation: Literature Review of Representations of Homosexuality in Mass Media .....	3
Critical Perspectives .....	15
Outline of Subsequent Chapters .....	20
2 “LOOKING STRAIGHT AT GAY PARENTS”: A FOCUS ON (STRAIGHT) CHILDREN SETS US STRAIGHT ABOUT SAME-SEX PARENTING .....	22
“... Living, Breathing Result of a New Social Endeavor”: Children as Social Scientific Experiments .....	27
“Dad’s Out of the Closet; His Child Wants to Hide”: The Children’s (Gay) Secrets .....	35
“... I am Very Attracted to the Opposite Sex”: Children’s Compulsory (Hetero) Sexuality .....	40
“Sincerely Feminine”: (Proper) Gender Performances of the Children .....	43
“... Paradoxical With a Vengeance”: Conclusion .....	48



3	“...ALL-AMERICAN IDEALS OF THEIR STRAIGHT COUNTERPARTS”: THE (STRAIGHT) DYNAMICS OF GAY FAMILY LIFE .....	51
	“Love?... Start a Family”: Portrayals of Family Affection .....	52
	“I Will Be the Cup-Cake Bringing Mom”: Stereotypical Male/Female (Gay) Parenting Gender Roles .....	57
	“...the Picture of Suburban Serenity”: Same-Sex Parents as (Straight, White, Middle-Class) Suburbanites .....	63
	“Almost Married... With Children”: (Controversial) Politics of Same-Sex Marriage and Parenting .....	72
	“Odd Men and Women [Parents] Out in a Straight World”: Conclusion .....	78
4	THE RHETORIC AND POLITICS OF PRINT NEWS MEDIA	
	REPRESENTATIONS OF SAME-SEX PARENTING: A CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....	81
	Families Like Mine?: The (Straight) Rhetoric of Same-Sex Parenting .....	82
	Are We Everywhere?: The (Straight) Politics of Same-Sex Parenting .....	92
	Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research .....	100
	REFERENCES .....	102
	NOTES .....	113
	APPENDIX: COPIES OF FIGURES .....	114

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Johnson, D., Piore, A., & Dorfman, D. I. (2004, Oct. 18). At home in two worlds. <i>Newsweek</i> , p. 52. ....	114
Figure 2: Peterson, K. S. (2004, March 10). Looking straight at gay parents. <i>USA Today</i> , p. 1D. ....	114
Figure 3: Gilgoff, D. (2004, May 24). The rise of the gay family. <i>US News &amp; World Report</i> , p. 43. ....	115
Figure 4: Dominus, S. (2004, Oct. 24). Growing up with mom and mom. <i>New York Times</i> <i>Magazine</i> , p. cover .....	115
Figure 5: Dominus, S. (2004, Oct. 24). Growing up with mom and mom. <i>New York Times</i> <i>Magazine</i> , p. 73 .....	116
Figure 6: Dominus, S. (2004, Oct. 24). Growing up with mom and mom. <i>New York Times</i> <i>Magazine</i> , p. 74 .....	116
Figure 7: Dominus, S. (2004, Oct. 24). Growing up with mom and mom. <i>New York Times</i> <i>Magazine</i> , pp. 68-69.....	116
Figure 8: Gilgoff, D. (2004, May 24). The rise of the gay family. <i>US News &amp; World Report</i> , pp. 40-41. ....	117
Figure 9: Johnson, D., Piore, A., & Dorfman, D. I. (2004, Oct. 18). At home in two worlds. <i>Newsweek</i> , p. 54. ....	117
Figure 10: Teixeira, E. (2004, Oct. 10). Demographic study: New look at black gay families. <i>Newsday</i> , p. A32.....	118

Figure 11: Johnson, D., Piore, A., & Dorfman, D. I. (2004, Oct. 18). At home in two worlds. <i>Newsweek</i> , p. 53. ....	118
Figure 12: Armour, S. (2004, April 14). Gay marriage debate moves into workplace. <i>USA Today</i> , p. 2B. ....	118
Figure 13: Schneider, C. (2005, Sept. 18). Ban on gay parenting? <i>Atlanta Journal-Constitution</i> , p. C1 .....	119
Figure 14: Adams, B. (2004, Oct. 18). Family pride: ‘Gayby’ boom continues despite raging legal rights debate. <i>Salt Lake City Tribune</i> , p. C1 .....	119
Figure 15: Armour, S. (2005, Jan. 10). Gay parents cheer a benefit revolution. <i>USA Today</i> , p. 2B .....	119
Figure 16: Armour, S. (2004, April 14). Gay marriage debate moves into workplace. <i>USA Today</i> , p. 2B. ....	120
Figure 17: Burson, P. (2004, Aug. 6). Above the noise: Children of gay parents are trying to cope with the debate over legalizing same-sex marriage. <i>Newsday</i> , p. B44. ....	120
Figure 18: Figure 13: Schneider, C. (2005, Sept. 18). Ban on gay parenting? <i>Atlanta Journal- Constitution</i> , p. C8 .....	121
Figure 19: Burson, P. (2004, Aug. 6). Above the noise: Children of gay parents are trying to cope with the debate over legalizing same-sex marriage. <i>Newsday</i> , p. B46. ....	121
Figure 20: Egelko, B. (2005b, Aug. 23). Court grants equal rights to same-sex parents. <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> , p. A1.....	121

## CHAPTER ONE

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF GAYS AND LESBIANS

#### IN POPULAR MEDIA AND CRITICAL/CULTURAL DISCOURSE CRITICISM

The family, the keystone of alliance, was the germ of all the misfortunes of sex.  
— Michel Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 111

The family is both fault line and detonation device, both the place where a resistant culture throws down the gauntlet and the explosive moment of catalytic change.  
— Suzanna Walters, 2001, p. 211

In the past two years, discourses concerning the nature of gay and lesbian *familial* relationships have had an increasing presence in popular mass media. Specifically, major current events like updated U.S. Census information on gay-headed households, as well as new laws legalizing and *illegalizing* gay familial rights, make up a large part of this mediated and societal milieu. For instance, according to the *Gay & Lesbian Atlas* (Gates & Ost, 2004) which compiled the latest 2000 U.S. Census data involving gays and lesbians, there are now more than 160,000 families with two gay parents and roughly a quarter of a million children. In particular, one in three lesbian couples is raising children and one in five gay male couples is raising children. These numbers are substantially up from one in five lesbian couples and one in twenty gay male couples raising children at the time of the last U.S. Census in 1990. Also, these figures do not include the estimated million or so children being raised by single gay parents, closeted gay parents, or bisexual/transsexual/transgender parents. Moreover, there is reportedly a significant undercount since gays and lesbians are historically reluctant to identify themselves as couples on census questionnaires. Part of this population growth is even referred to as the “Gayby Boom” (Garner, 2005, p. 5).

As gay and lesbian parents populate the country, their liberties, with regard to marriage and adoption, are simultaneously in flux. A chronological list of recent key legislation on gay familial rights includes the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling on February 4, 2004 that a state ban on gay marriage was unconstitutional, the San Francisco city authorities' issuing of marriage licenses and performing of marriage ceremonies to nearly 4,000 gay and lesbian couples from February 12 until March 11 when the California Supreme Court ordered a halt to and later nullified the certificates, and U.S. President George W. Bush's call on February 24, 2004 for a U.S. Constitutional Amendment protecting marriage between a man and a woman. On November 4, 2005, citizens in 11 states voted to approve state constitutional amendments to ban gay marriage. In January of 2005, the U.S. and Florida Supreme Courts refused to hear a constitutional challenge to Florida's 1977 ban on adoption by gays and lesbians, and in August of 2005, the California Supreme Court's ruling on three separate cases established California as the first state in the country to grant full parenthood to same-sex partners despite the absence of legal adoption or a biological connection. By February of 2006, steps to pass laws or secure November ballot initiatives banning gays and lesbians from adopting children were underway in at least 16 states.

This study examines articles and photographs treating issues of same-sex parenting that appear in major U.S. newspapers and newsmagazines during the aforementioned period of intense public attention to the status of gay and lesbian familial relationships.<sup>1</sup> It is guided by a multi-critical perspective that asserts public discussion of gays and lesbians as parents functions as an arena for understanding the cultural negotiation and persuasion of dominant and subversive politics of homo/heterosexuality

in society. With this project, then, I argue for the hegemonic function of mass mediated portrayals of gay and lesbian parents and identify particular verbal and visual rhetorical strategies of those portrayals. But, ultimately, this is not just a case study of rhetorical criticism. In addition, this study is a queer version of what McKerrow (1989) calls “critical rhetoric.” That is, it illustrates the cultural constructedness of homo/heterosexuality as it arises in relation to parenting, consequently exposing new possibilities for communication about sexuality.

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I review scholarly work on representations of gays and lesbians in mass media, explicate the gender and discourse theories used in this project, and offer a brief description of subsequent chapters.

### Symbolic Annihilation to Assimilation:

#### Literature Review of Representations of Homosexuality in Mass Media

From feminist to gay and lesbian to queer scholars, research on images of sexuality has proliferated in the academy in the past decade and a half. As this section demonstrates, representations of sexuality (ranging from portrayals of gays and lesbians to the transgendered) in popular mass media are more and more the focus of critical analysis. However, academic attention to representations of same-sex parenting in any medium is very limited, while visual analyses of images of homo/heterosexuality at large are seriously lacking. Generally, past and current scholarship about mediated portrayals of homo/heterosexuality centers around the invisibility and visibility of gays and lesbians and the politics produced through representation.

Gross (1991) pioneers this work, using the term “symbolic annihilation” (which he and Gerbner coined in 1976) to refer to the extreme inequalities of mediated representations of social groups, specifically of sexual minorities like gays. For instance, Gross shows that gay characters are absent in early cinema, in turn arguing that because “representation in the mediated ‘reality’ of our mass culture is in itself power; certainly it is the case that non-representation maintains the powerless status of groups that do not possess significant material or political power bases” (p. 21). In other words, mediated invisibility of gays is the product of real-life discrimination against homosexuality, acting as a form of modern “border control” reminding society where membership begins and ends (1999, p. 4). Gross further claims that when gays do attain visibility, such representations still reflect the mainstream “biases and interests of those elites who define the public agenda, and these elites are (mostly) white, (mostly) middle-aged, (mostly) male, (mostly) middle and upper middle classes, and entirely heterosexual.” (1991, p. 21).

Kielwasser & Wolf (1992), Fejes & Petrich (1993), Doty (1993), and Alwood (1996) take up and extend this concept of homo/heterosexual (in)visibility in the media and its relation to power structures. For example, Kielwasser & Wolf (1992) focus in on the “symbolic annihilation” of adolescent gays and lesbians on mainstream network television programming, pointing out that this representation deprives homosexual youth of key social allegiances and they consequently become powerless and stuck in a “spiral of silence” both in the press and in real life (pp. 355-357). Specifically, Kielwasser & Wolf find that even though homosexual youth, and adolescents as a whole, make up a large part of the television audience, shows rarely acknowledge the existence of gay and

lesbian youth. If they do, homosexuality is often framed as only a sexual activity, as a “phantasm” or sort of an anti-reality for understanding heterosexuality, as a phase devoid of larger cultural context, and as a problem of the American family, thus restricting character types to the “confused teen,” the “situational homosexual” and the “assimilated gay” (pp. 259-262).

Similar scenarios of gay marginalization and acculturation come to light when Fejes & Petrich (1993) comprehensively review how both the U.S. entertainment and news media deal with homosexual characters and issues up to the early 1990s. They reveal that explicit portrayals of homosexuality are not uncommon during the early years of silent films and talkies, where homoerotic behaviors are used as “comic devices” or to depict “deviance, perversion, and decadence” (p. 397). However, from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s, films made during the Production Code rarely refer to gays and lesbians, although “negative” subtext sometimes implies homosexuality to emphasize the “evilness” and “alienness” of villains (p. 397). At the time, mainstream print publications also only indirectly reference homosexuality, and these reports almost always involve violence or crime, or frame gays as the “alien other” (p. 402). By the 1960s, explicit portrayals appear in media, but these overt images of homosexuality in film, television, and in print are rarely presented in a positive or even neutral light (p. 398). Instead, frequently being gay is depicted “at best as unhappiness, sickness, or marginality, and at worse perversion and evil to be destroyed” (pp. 398-402). The issues of gay and lesbian culture, community, and oppression are obscured or minimized, stereotypes like the promiscuous and child molesting homosexual are common, and homosexuality is a treatable disease or a morality tale to reaffirm society’s sense of heterosexual normalcy.



Fejes & Petrich (1993) claim that, by the 1970s, media outlets for the most part ended their blatant negative portrayals of gays and lesbians and showcased sympathetic stories about homosexuality and gay rights. These presentations, however, did not appear regularly, were usually dramatic, often only featured male gays and not lesbians, commonly defined homosexuality as a “lifestyle” that lacks politics, and implied that sexual orientation is a choice (pp. 400-402). Yet, after AIDS was discovered in the early 1990s and linked to its prevalence in gay males, mass media reverted back to explicit homophobia by stigmatizing gays as “guilty,” “threatening,” “abnormal,” and “outcasts” (pp. 401-404). As of 1993, some positive coverage of homosexuality appeared in the press, such as when the issue of gays in the military shifted in frame from a conflict between opposing interest groups to one of civil rights, and when gays and lesbians were associated with larger communities (p. 405). Still, these attempts to positively represent gay and lesbian communities regularly “heterosexualized” them, thus discriminating against gays by putting homosexuality outside “normal” mainstream society (pp. 405, 412). Finally, overt displays of physical behavior between gay characters still remain off limits on television (p. 404).

Media scholars have turned the bulk of their research toward analysis of the newly visible public discourses on sexuality, discovering that additional visibility does not necessarily mean (hetero)sexism disappears. In doing a “queer reading” of contemporary popular culture homo/heterosexual examples like the *Laverne and Shirley* television sitcom and the movie *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*, Doty (1993) argues that complex notions of gender and sexuality, known as queerness, have been in texts and their audiences all along (p. 16). For example, Doty asserts that there is a strong lesbian

narrative in *Laverne and Shirley*, even as it is couched by a story of straight male hysteria that breeds misogyny and homophobia (p. 39), as well as that Jack Benny is America's favorite fag, which in the present patriarchal culture is coded as a feminine straight man (p. 63). As a result of these "in-between" case studies, Doty says that "queerness was alive and kicking," but he acknowledges that most queering remains "discursively, politically, and economically beneficial only to straights and straight culture, framed and understood as it still is largely through the languages, codes, and systems of capitalism, patriarchy, connotation, and heterocentrism" (pp. 103-104).

Heterosexism is a pattern found by Alwood (1996), who focuses on how both media production and sociopolitical forces influence "prejudiced" depictions of gays in the mainstream and alternative print and broadcast news throughout history. Specifically, Alwood outlines the structural bias in routine journalistic practices, which he says results in "(favoring) the established power base and defend(ing) the status quo while shunning the perspectives of those who are politically powerless — as were gays and lesbians for so long in this country" (p. 7). Such operations include 1) "the heterosexual assumption" because the newsroom is almost always exclusively controlled by white, middle-class, heterosexual men, 2) the need for "objectivity" and "balance" which makes even positive stories controversial since they include opposing views, 3) the pressures from outside newsrooms or superiors that influence an individual reporter's content, and 4) hiding in — and often eventually coming out of — the "newsroom closet" which made knowledge of gay life a secret that must be revealed (pp. 8-15).

Alwood's textual analysis particularly reveals that portrayals of gays and lesbians are few and sporadic until after World War II, and if there was coverage, homosexuals

were talked about as “menace[s] to society” and “enigmas” (pp. 21-27). Then in 1963, the *New York Times* ran its first front-page story about gays, focusing on it as a subculture and “the problem” this community caused the city. Alwood claims that this major article became a guidepost for other media (p. 50), causing other negative stereotypical representations like the network television documentary that aired on *CBS Reports* which made sweeping claims about the unhappiness and “psychosis” of gays and lesbians (p. 69). But also around this time, gays in the U.S. began producing their own local homophile publications in which content centered on resistance and political change (p. 79). The police raids and riots at the Stonewall Inn gay bar in New York City in 1969 kicked off another plethora of stories about homosexuality and the gay (and now lesbian) liberation movements and subsequent civil rights legislation, reflecting a new and deeper understanding of gay-related issues; but, the articles still relied on old clichés like the “ill” and “confused” homosexual (pp. 95-96, 104). Improvement in coverage occurred later, when homosexual journalists began emerging from the media closet in the early 1970s, and scientific reports also questioned the “abnormality” of homosexuality (pp. 103-132). Thus, by the late 1970s, when “the media and the public were more willing than ever to discuss homosexuality openly,” positive gay characters actually appeared in prominent roles in network films even while gay stereotypes proliferated in news media (pp. 153-176). When AIDS emerged in the 1980s, homophobic backlash and stigmatizing in the press returned, though by the latter part of the century it was replaced with more affirmative exposure of gay fundraising and educational efforts about AIDS (pp. 211-264). Alwood recognizes that gays and lesbians appeared routinely in the news and newsrooms by the end of the century, but says the news continues to reflect

prejudices against homosexuality, resulting in what he terms “straight news” (pp. 315-328).

Critical/cultural studies in the past 10 years continue to critique mediations of homo/heterosexuality by analyzing the increasing public depictions of gays and lesbians or research about them (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Dow, 2001; Gamson, 1998; Gross, 2001; Shugart, 2003; Tropiano, 2002; Wilcox, 2003), which now sometimes show same-sex people as parents (Walters, 2001; Shugart, 2005). Gross’s (2001) recent book about the historical role of varied media (including, for instance, print and broadcast news, television talk shows, soap operas, movies, music records, comics, and cyberspace) argues that gay people were portrayed to the majority and to themselves, “in ways that perpetuated harmful stereotypes and, eventually, also in ways that beg[a]n to reverse some of that harm” (xiii). Gross extensively tracks cultural, political, and media events surrounding these hegemonic images. As a result, he concludes that gays ascend from the status of villain, victim, “criminal, sinner, and pervert to... (more diverse) categories of voting bloc and market niche,” all the while assimilating their group’s distinctions in order to blend into the mainstream (p. xvi). He specifically singles out sexual minorities as even less conventional and therefore even more controversial than other minorities, such as women, because gays and lesbians are a self-identified minority whose identity is not apparent at birth; what’s more, “their very existence is a presumed threat to the ‘natural’ (sexual and/or political) order of things” (p. 13). For instance, Gross reports homosexuals are still never shown as “just plain gay folks,” that they are hardly used in roles that do not center on their difference as an anomaly, disappointment, or threat to the moral order that then is countered by ridicule or violence, and that positive or

“unexceptional” portrayals often are suppressed (p. 16). In sum, they remain “odd men and women out in a straight world,” keeping them “partially closeted” (pp. 257-258).

Similarly, Suzanna Walters (2001) studies modern gay visibility in American media by critiquing primarily popular entertainment television like *Ellen*, movies such as *My Best Friend's Wedding*, and advertisements. She acknowledges that “increased visibility of marginalized groups (like gays and lesbians) often creates new restrictions and recycles old stereotypes” (pp. 10, 222) even while it is necessary for equality (p. 13). In particular, she identifies homosexual alienation as the “other” and assimilation into heterosexuality as two of the most oppressive representations disempowering gays and lesbians. She suggests, though, that the latter strategy is more troubling today: “In earlier times, gays were simply depicted as deviants, as aliens from sexual outer space set to wreak havoc on straight (‘normal’) society. But in these more open times, lesbians and gays are more often represented as ‘normal’ (just like us)” (p. 16). By focusing on gay similarity to straights, Walters fears such representations marginalize or even erase the diversity of those who desire something more than inclusion in straight society (p. 19).

Walters (2001) devotes an entire chapter to contemporary media representations of gays and families, specifically within subtexts of gay marriage, gay children, and same-sex parenting. Walters dates this discourse to when the U.S. Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996 and Vermont created and legalized civil unions in 2000, saying that since then the sound bites “gay marriage debate” and “family values” have played out in mainstream media (pp. 179-180). She reasons that if one believes the press, all gays want marriage, often resulting in three major dramatic narratives: 1) conservatives say gays should be allowed to marry because it tames them and brings

them into mainstream culture, 2) lesbian liberals say gays should be allowed to marry because it frees marriage from patriarchal history, and 3) heterosexuals say denying gays access to marriage is discriminatory (pp. 181-182). Walters argues that, here again, popular culture is not explicitly homophobic but still frames homophobia as the “*legitimate*” (emphasis in original) disgust of good moral people (p. 182). Likewise, fictional television more often than not situates a heroic heterosexual character as a humorous gay marriage advocate (pp. 184-196). Current coming out stories of gay youth also frequently reinforce the “essential” and unchangeable nature of the binary of homo/heterosexuality (pp. 200-201).

Walters further finds that gay-headed families, and consequently same-sex parents, while becoming more and more visible *as open gay families* (emphasis in original) and no longer outwardly bashed, are problematically portrayed as either heterosexual clones or encroaching, exotic threats (p. 212). For example, dominant discourses in today’s press by both gay and straight sources are “odes to family *diversity* while muting family *difference* [emphasis in original]” and are concerned with how children of gay and lesbian parents will deal with their own sexuality (p. 215). Walters also shows that same-sex parenting narratives historically parallel those of gays in general. Thus, even by the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are few cultural examples of gays becoming and being parents in the context of their gayness rather than in a “one-time only” sort of scenario, aside from select exceptions like a 2001 made for television movie *What Makes a Family* (pp. 221-224). As Walters summarizes, “truly alternative models of parenting and familial arrangements are still largely invisible” in media (p. 229).

Scholarship on the “closeted” history of gays and lesbians on primetime television (from medical dramas to miniseries to situation comedies) continues with Tropiano (2002) and is narrowed by Dow (2001) and Battles & Hilton-Morrow (2002). In looking at mainstream national print and broadcast news about, and the primary texts of, the 1997 public announcement of Ellen DeGeneres’s homosexuality, Dow (2001) reasons that Ellen’s “liberatory” coming out is in fact regulated, in Foucault’s sense, through traditional television norms of representing homosexuality (i.e. gay sexuality is the “problem” to be solved in terms of its effect on heterosexuals, homosexual characters are rarely shown in their own communities), through the narrative of psychological autonomy, and through the strategy of personalization (pp. 123, 129). For instance, Ellen’s homosexuality is relevant almost exclusively for its impact on personal relationships and those relationships are with heterosexuals. In short, Dow says Ellen’s “political oppression was her personal problem, and the solution to that problem is largely in the hands of heterosexuals” (p. 131). Dow acknowledges, however, that *Ellen* is not the traditional “one-time” appearance. Ellen then becomes a case study of what Dow terms “poster child politics,” where an issue is directly related to an individual who gives it visibility but cannot guarantee its success (p. 137).

After critically approaching *Will & Grace*, Battles & Hilton-Morrow (2002), argue that, contrary to the acclaim of the sitcom as a progressive program, the representations of homosexuality in the show are situated within safe and familiar popular culture conventions, thus reinforcing heterosexism (p. 89). In particular, the show puts gayness in opposition to masculinity, leaving no room for a different model of homosexuality, it pairs characters in traditional opposite-sex dyads so that homosocial

behavior is represented as male bonding rather than as same-sex desire, it stunts characters' threats to heteronormativity by making a gender-challenging character too over the top, and it stresses interpersonal relationships over gay politics (pp. 89-98). The authors suggest, then, that visibility cannot serve as a framework to evaluate a show, especially because "visibility comes with the price of having to conform to or be made sense of within dominant cultural discourses," which in contemporary U.S. society translates to heteronormativity (p. 101).

Likewise, Shugart (2003) studies the new mainstream media visibility for gay men in the gay man/heterosexual woman couple concept of major movies like *My Best Friend's Wedding* and in prime-time shows such as *Will & Grace*. She argues that in these texts, homosexuality is recoded and normalized as consistent with privileged male heterosexuality and extends heterosexual male privilege, thus legitimating blatant sexism and heteronormativity (p. 68). For example, she maintains that the relationship between the gay man and straight woman is situated like a traditional heterosexual romantic one with heterosexual domesticity (pp. 73-75), and that the gay male lead is heterosexualized by being juxtaposed with more stereotypically flamboyant gay males (pp. 76-80). Moreover, she notes that the gay males have unlimited sexual access and entitlement to, as well as paternal patriarchal jurisdiction over, a stereotypical heterosexual female (pp. 83-88). All of this, Shugart claims, is a formula for heteronormative masculinity that has serious implications for women, and for gay men, whose male privilege makes them allies of patriarchy (p. 89).

Turning to the sexual politics of reporting on scientific research about homosexuality, Wilcox (2003) asserts content and professional norms of science



journalism influence the dramatic and contradictory coverage in mainstream news and the gay press (p. 226). In particular, Wilcox finds the dominant theme of the discourse is being born gay or choosing to be gay, creating a dichotomy of biological determinism (p. 231). Additionally, specific scientific studies garnering the most media attention fit into a biologically deterministic framework for thinking about sexuality (p. 236). Findings also show that social commentary on these studies gives a strong impression that biological means biological determinism (p. 241). At the same time, the religious right, which Wilcox says is a prominent actor in this idea that sexual orientation is a choice, rarely receives coverage (p. 242). In sum, Wilcox argues “the possibility of choice is taken for granted as the default position on homosexuality. The coverage moves the debate over sexuality to the terrain of science from the realm of politics, and represents science as having the power to determine the outcome of political debates” (p. 243).

Shugart (2005) analyzes the 2002 coming out of celebrity talk show host Rosie O'Donnell as a lesbian, a gay parent, and a political advocate of gay adoption. As a result, Shugart asserts O'Donnell is rhetorically mitigated and rationalized by prior constructions of her as both a desexualized mother and child, strategies which ultimately converge and reconfigure her (homo)sexuality to deem her, and consequently any other adopting gay parent, a misfit (pp. 54, 63-65). For instance, once O'Donnell came out, coverage characterizes her as “opportunistic, greedy, and deceptive,” qualities that are very different from and that compromise her other maternal and childish personas. Moreover, there is a great deal of attention paid to the “difficultness” of O'Donnell being “an abused child and subsequent wounded adult,” all of which are framed in the context of her homosexuality (pp. 66-67). In short, Shugart says same-sex parents are depicted as

misfits suited to nurture other misfits, putting them and their adopted children outside heteronormative parenthood (pp. 69-72). This “poster child politics” case study, Shugart further proposes, “may suggest that queerness is tolerated and even embraced in the mainstream for its entertainment value, which at least minimizes if not neutralizes its political threat” (pp. 72-73).

Overall, a large body of research tracing the history of gays and lesbians in media reveals that not only is homosexuality often overlooked, but when it is portrayed, it takes narrow homophobic, heterosexist, and heteronormative forms. Considering current sociopolitical events affecting gay-headed households as well as their escalating coverage in mainstream public discourse, this contemporary study of same-sex parenting in major print news articles *and* photographs is significant for adding to previous literature.

### Critical Perspectives

Studying notions of homo/heterosexuality in mass mediated popular discourse is an expansive interdisciplinary endeavor. Thus, for this project I poach from various critical perspectives, namely contemporary gender/queer, cultural, media, and rhetorical theories. In particular, I pay close attention to ideological and hegemonic relations and their intersections with issues of visibility, heteronormativity, and regulation, since these latter three concepts are fundamental to the politics and rhetoric of representations of homosexuality in mainstream mass media.

Although definitions of ideology and hegemony vary throughout the academic community, critical cultural studies explain ideology as “a [power] structure of beliefs, principles, and practices that define, organize, and interpret reality,” and when

systematically represented, ideology is regarded by members of a society as “the normal or natural way things are” (Vande Berg et al., 1998, pp. 237-238, 292). Hegemony is when dominant groups exercise control over lower ones by maintaining the existing social order through polyvocal negotiation with and consent to the worldview of the present hierarchy’s “normalcy” and “naturalness” (e.g., Condit, 1994; Vande Berg et al., 1998, pp. 292-293).

Pioneering the gender/queer work is Foucault’s (1978/1990) genealogical analysis of how educational, medical, and legal discourses during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in the West treat sexuality. In general, Foucault accounts that sexuality is a discursive construct that takes culturally and historically specific forms. Foucault reveals, then, that heterosexuality is no more normal or natural than other sexualities. As he says, “The history of sexuality — that is, the history of what functioned in the nineteenth century as a specific field of truth — must first be written from the viewpoint of a history of discourses” (p. 69). Specifically, discourse creates a regime of knowledge and power about sexuality, a society of normalization that is not really a mechanism of exclusion but more so an operation of a network of specific knowledges and powers. For example, Foucault concludes the child’s “vice” of having sex is a support, rather than an enemy, to set limits for the visible and the invisible (p. 42). Also, homosexuality is consequently constituted as different solely in terms of degrees of difference from the discursive norm of heterosexuality. Thus for Foucault, and myself, discourse is both an instrument of power and an effect, a “hindrance, a stumbling block,” but also “a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (p. 101). Put simply, modern public discourse is a power-laden medium of social control, producing and policing certain sexualities.

Butler (e.g., 1990/1999, 1993, 1997, 2004) takes up Foucault to posit the gendered body as performative, repeating gendered norms over time to produce the appearance or idea of a *gender* (emphasis in original): “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1990/1999, p. 33). In other words, gender is a kind of stylized doing, not a being. In turn, Butler suggests these acts of gender are sustained through reiterated corporeal signs and, most important for this project, *discursive* means, which reaffirm and renaturalize regulatory fictions that serve particular disciplinary ends, most notably compulsory heterosexuality (p. 172). For Butler, gender trouble like drag parodies can have possibilities of transformation since it reveals the imitative structure of gender itself (p. 175). But Butler (1993) reflects later on such subversive moments and re-emphasizes their constitutive constraints, arguing that gender construction is always a process of materialization that *stabilizes* (my emphasis) over time to “produce boundaries of bodily life where abjected or delegitimated bodies fail to count as ‘bodies’ .....[while] bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter” (pp. 15-16). For example, Butler (2004) points to state regulations on gay and lesbian adoption as well as single-parent adoptions that restrict what a sexuality will and will not be, suggesting they “refer to and reinforce an ideal of what parents should be, for example, that they should be partnered, and what counts as a legitimate partner” (p. 56). In sum, gender and discourse about gender can be subversive, but at the same time they are regularized and constrained repetitions of dominant norms of heterosexual hegemony in contemporary times.

Also underpinning this study are other gender/queer scholars (e.g., Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Fuss, 1991; Halberstam, 1998; Haraway, 1995; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993; Wittig, 1992) who theorize about today's institution of heteronormativity, its ideology of heterosexism, and how both are reconstructed and renormalized through reproduced gestures *and* public discourses. For instance, Wittig describes, "...to live in society is to live in heterosexuality... it has sneaked into dialectical thought (or thought of differences) as its main category" (1992, pp. 40-43). One of the main premises of Sedgwick's (1990) book is that understandings of the hetero/homo binary are heterosexist. Furthermore, in looking at a range of "biological" body parts and behaviors of gender and sexuality, Fausto-Sterling (2000) concludes they, and the public and scientific discussions about them, are constructions of a society of (hetero)normalization. Haraway (1995), similarly, refers to the reconstitution of heterosexuality as the "natural" universal, calling it "the Sacred Image of the Same" (p. 365).

When looking to contemporary media texts, many critical cultural and media scholars further suggest mass media is the principal source for understanding the workings of hegemony in the modern world (e.g., Cawelti, 1985; Gitlin, 1980; Gross, 2001; Schudson, 1987). Specifically, some argue news discourse plays a crucial role in shaping ideologies today (Alwood, 1996; Fiske, 1987). Likewise, many of these theorists posit that visual images, such as photographs in newspapers, reflect the sociopolitics of today's public culture (e.g., Barthes, 1964; Finnegan, 2003; Lucaites & Hariman, 2001; Mitchell, 1994). Consequently, this project also assumes that the popular printed press, in verbal and visual form, functions hegemonically to reveal and construct dynamic power relationships and their sexual politics in current America society.

Additionally, this study is heavily guided by a rhetorical perspective. That is, I assume that hegemony is forwarded through persuasive processes. Specifically, popular discourse is hegemonic rhetoric because the negotiation of particular ideas and attitudes in it are situated communication that serves to influence particular audiences. Wander (1983), in extending earlier rhetorical theorists who introduced the concepts of power and politics to public address study, advocates an ideological turn in modern criticism. For instance, he argues for elucidating what messages do rather than what they are, since “The question has to do with the appeal of groups struggling for power at a particular time and place, the rhetorical strategies employed, and the connections between them and a given work or author” (p. 118). The critic, then, should take an activist role to describe and assess the functions, and successes, of the range of appeals to the sociopolitical interests of an audience.

McKerrow (1989) later narrows Wander’s ideological criticism to articulate what he terms “critical rhetoric,” a Foucaultian examination of discourses of power ideologies that views them as being mobilized to construct and sustain certain cultural practices. In other words, McKerrow reasons that all public argument is knowledge and power, instead of an essence or truth, that has material functions “to keep people ‘in their place’ as that status is defined and determined by the interest of the dominant/dominated in maintaining its social role” (p. 129). According to McKerrow, criticism thus reveals how rhetoric restricts *and* resists, and, also important to this project, constructs ideologies. Since I am concerned with how news persuades mainstream audiences about alternative sociopolitical change caused by gay and lesbian parenting, I take serious both

McKerrow's views on discursive powers and his recommendation to deconstruct them through analysis.

### Outline of Subsequent Chapters

The following study of verbal and visual representations of same-sex parenting in U.S. newspapers and U.S. newsmagazines answers the contemporary critical/cultural call for close rhetorical criticism of recent mass media constructions of homo/heterosexuality. That this analysis looks at an unprecedented site of slippage, i.e. gays and lesbians raising children, is especially important to, as Butler (2004) writes,

understand how the terms of gender [and sexuality] are instituted, naturalized, and established as presuppositional... [and] trace the moments where the binary system of gender [and sexuality] is disputed and challenged, where the coherence of the categories are put into question, and where the very social life of gender [and sexuality] turns out to be malleable and transformable. (p. 261).

Consequently, in Chapter Two I delineate the ways in which the texts and photographic images portray children of gay and lesbian parents. I look at the children here because the press reports are in fact dominated by depictions of them rather than of their same-sex parents. In particular, I find that this concentration on the children highlights them in four main fashions: they are social scientific experiments, they confess about their "secret" of having same-sex parents, they are compulsively heterosexual, and, lastly, they perform stereotypical male and female gender. I point out the resistive and regulatory components to these portrayals of sexuality, arguing that they are often

disciplined to be homophobic, heterosexist, and heternormative. Yet, moments of subversion can be seen.

Chapter Three analyzes how the news narratives and pictures represent gay and lesbian parents *themselves* as well as the contexts of their family life. While media coverage dwells on concerns of the children, a substantial amount of discourse surrounding same-sex parents and their households also articulates ideologies of sexuality. In particular, I conclude that the representations narrowly draw same-sex parents as showing affection directed only toward their children and not each other, as performing stereotypical gendered parenting roles, and as appearing and living like predominantly white, generally middle-to-upper-class, and mostly suburban straight Americans. In addition, reporting on and photographing of current sociopolitical events about gay-headed families, such as recent U.S. Census data and marriage and child custody laws, appear, but they are rife with conflict, relegated to the sidelines, and/or repoliticized. I track the specifics of these constructions, in the end suggesting that they are often homophobic, heterosexist, and heternormative, plus frequently sexist, classist, and racist. At the same time, however, I illustrate that there are discursive challenges to these logics.

My conclusion, Chapter Four, begins with a brief summary of my findings and ends with an in-depth discussion of the rhetoric and politics of my analyses as they pertain to specific strategies of mass media and the progress of the gay and lesbian movement. I also offer implications for this project on the study of sexuality in popular discourses, and, relatedly, posit future research foci.



## CHAPTER TWO

### “LOOKING STRAIGHT AT GAY PARENTS”:

#### A FOCUS ON (STRAIGHT) CHILDREN SETS US STRAIGHT

#### ABOUT SAME-SEX PARENTING

Visibility in mass media has been an important goal of the gay and lesbian movement because, as countless critics claim, some recognizable representational form of homosexuality is necessary for political power and equality (e.g., Butler, 1991, pp. 20-21; Fejes & Petrich, 1993, p. 397; Gross, 2001, p. 21; Morris & Sloop, 2006, p. 3). As Walters (2001) puts it, “We come to know ourselves and to be known by others through the images and stories of popular culture” (p. 13). *Invisibility*, then, can be oppressive, both on screen and off. But, Walters also cautions against considering mere visibility as progress, because visibility is in fact also a “smokescreen,” and “to be *seen*, therefore, is not necessarily to be *known* [emphasis in original]” (pp. 26, 12). Consequently, visibility in the press alone does not equal legitimacy and social acceptance, particularly for minority populations like gays and lesbians who, “to become visible... enter into a dominant discourse that marks the boundaries of normalcy — which in contemporary U.S. society means hetero-normalcy” (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002, p. 101). In other words, the result of rendering homosexuals visible in discourse has actually often been a *regulated* visibility that chiefly reflects the “common sense” ideology of mass culture (Butler, 1990/1999; Foucault, 1978/1990). In today’s world, this translates to sensibilities of those who are “(mostly) white, (mostly) middle-ages, (mostly) male, (mostly) middle and upper middle classes, and entirely heterosexual (at least in the public)” (Gross, 1991, p. 21). Yet even as these mainstream interests continue to be repeated and renormalized

in popular culture, public representations of gays and lesbians are still always power struggles where resistive moments can sometimes be *seen*, and now and then even *known*. In the case of representations of gays and lesbians as parents, visibility primarily takes the form of images of the children of gays and lesbians. Consequently, we see and come to know same-sex parenting through the mediated regulations on what it means to be a child raised in a gay-headed household.

An overwhelming majority of the print news media coverage on same-sex parenting looked at for this study is in fact dominated by a focus on the children of gays and lesbians. Ranging from reporting commentary, social scientific research, and political legislation pertaining to children to a plethora of personal, parent, and expert interviews about and with them, the verbal text of the articles center heavily on children from gay-headed households rather than on their parents. A visual focus on the children also dominates the photographs that are printed with about half of the newspaper and newsmagazine stories.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the children are almost always pictured when any images accompany an article. Furthermore, the children are always the focal point of the cameras since they are typically in the exact center of the rectangular or square frames of the photographs. Also, they have the most complex movement in the entire shot, and/or they are the center of attention of anyone else pictured with them (e.g., Adams, 2004; Figures 3, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15). Exemplifying this is the lead full-page shot to an October 19, 2004 *Newsweek* story in which 12-year-old Doreen Stermer is pictured face forward and standing up with the wind blowing in her hair. Meanwhile, Doreen's lesbian parents sit still on the sand beneath and beside her, staring up at their daughter (Figure 1). Likewise, a March 10, 2004 *USA Today* photo that takes up half of the cover of the Life Section

above an article titled, “Looking straight at gay parents,” features, from left to right, lesbian mother Kim Musheno, co-parent Joseph Price, lesbian mother Catherine Alston, Musheno and Alston’s 3-year-old son Alec, and co-parent Victor Zaborsky. All four adults have their bodies and eyes turned toward the boy in the middle, while he looks downward to play with a train set (Figure 2). This growing mediated visibility of the children *as children of gays and lesbians* is new and progressive for acknowledging their presence, and by association the status of their same-sex parents, in contemporary culture. These verbal and visual public representations are particularly ground-breaking when considering mass media historically has rarely shown the familial community of gay people, and that media not too long ago regularly stereotyped homosexual males as child molesters (Fejes & Petrich, 1993). However, while this strong focus on children challenges traditional notions of homosexuality, it simultaneously works to rearticulate homophobic, heterosexist, and heteronormative identities of children of gays and lesbians and their same-sex parents.

In general, by centering the stories on the children, gay parenting is framed as if it is exclusively relevant for its impact on relationships with children. Children, then, become the yardstick by which gays, as parents, are evaluated. Although children make up a large part of what it means to be a gay parent, they are by no means the only components to parenting and gayness, a multifaceted identity that involves a range of interactions among parents and with the gay community in general. This focus on children also marginalizes homosexuality. For instance, gay parents themselves are frequently overlooked in the articles, explicitly and implicitly, as primary sources in lieu of narratives about, and from, their children (the overwhelming majority of whom are

specifically noted to be heterosexual). And even when testimonies from gay and lesbian parents are included, their quotations are more often than not still outnumbered by, and placed later in the stories than, those of their children. Moreover, photographs of just the parents are published less often than photos of the children alone since only a few of all the visuals feature gay and lesbian parents without their children (e.g., Figure 18; Ruiz, 2004). Also, the ways the group photographs of the children and their parents are cropped and captioned visibly cut out or at the very least sideline the adults, such as one May 24, 2004 *U.S. News & World Report* picture where the head of one lesbian parent is missing while the lower half of her body, as well as the full body of her daughter on the floor is included (Figure 3). Emphasizing the placing of parents in the background, a June 21, 2004 *Seattle Times* shot is captioned, “Chelsea, 13, left, and Sara, 17, have been raised by gay parents Howard and Darry Leonard, background....” (Turnbull, 2004).

Here, then, gay parents are generally positioned at the margins by this focus of the narratives and camera on their (straight) children. As Gross (2001) points out, gays, of all social groups, have been “among the least permitted to speak for [them]selves in public life, including in the mass media” (p. 14). As a result, the representations here are covertly homophobic by continuing to push gayness to the sidelines in silence. By situating children front and center to the meaning of what makes a (gay) family, this discursive concentration also reiterates conventional heterosexual norms of parenting for the primary sake of child-rearing. That is, other reasons for and experiences of gay parenting, such as starting a different kind of relationship with a current partner or joining a new community of gay adults, are overlooked.

This narrow news frame further codes heterosexism since only one of the articles features a self-identified homosexual child of gay parents (Dominus, 2004) while more than half of the children interviewed in all the articles analyzed for this study declare their heterosexuality, sometimes quite aggressively. Any explicit visual distinctions of a child's homosexuality, such as, for instance, being pictured with a same-sex partner or photographed in a distinctively gay youth context, are also strikingly absent from every photographic image. Consequently, the focus of the press on the children can even be read as a focus on straights, another repressive heterosexist representational form. For example, Dow (2001) and Walters (2001) criticize popular media, like the television show *Ellen*, for frequently using gays as catalysts for the growth of straights. Walters fears that this depiction constrains gay politics to heterosexuality, setting gays "aside as *vehicles* for straight enlightenment, much in the way that people of color serve as *avenues* for white understandings of race [emphasis in original]" (pp. 104-105). In short, as an addendum to what Walters says (2001, p. 219), here it takes straight children to set us straight about gay parenting.

In addition to the child-centered narrative and camera work of the stories, the specific verbal and visual rhetoric deployed in the newspapers and newsmagazines to describe these children and their lives at times displaces "proper" sexuality and gender norms but simultaneously severely disciplines understandings of same-sex parenting. As I argue below, four of the most reappearing and regulating narratives concerning the children in these texts and images function in the following ways: they depict the children as abnormal scientific experiments, they emphasize children's feelings about the "secret"

of having same-sex parents, they make the children's (hetero)sexuality a central issue, and, relatedly, they focus on the children's (proper) performance of gender.

“...Living, Breathing Result of a New Social Endeavor”:

### Children as Social Scientific Experiments

Scientific discourse about hetero/homosexuality is not a new trend, nor is its power to regulate (Brookey, 2001; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Foucault, 1978/1990; Haraway, 1996; Wilcox, 2002). Likewise, the contemporary print news reports in this study utilize conventional rhetorics of biology and medicine to discipline children of gay and lesbian parents, even as their lives literally trouble common sense logics of sexuality that emphasize male with female procreation. In particular, the articles *always* explain the existence of these children by including the medical history of and terminology for their conception. For instance, they explicate private reproductive processes and family-related events, ranging from in vitro fertilization to surrogacy to adoption to divorce. Often, these details appear early in the text of the stories and take up entire paragraphs. Although how these children come into being is exceptional, the extra and frequently mythical emphasis put on their origins situates them outside the realm of “regularly (heterosexually, biologically) created” children.

Manifesting this pattern is a March 7, 2004 story in the *Boston Globe* that goes at length to explain all the biological, medical, and situational ways these children originate:

Many of the old ones have divorced parents, one of whom now has a partner of the same sex. There are a large number of children born to lesbian couples, ever more so as donor insemination becomes more commonplace. And more and more

gay male couples are building families through surrogacy and adoption. (Jacobs, 2004)

A March, 24, 2004 story in the *New York Times* similarly begins with a detailed description of their medical procreation, albeit a fable-like one:

The case might be called Uterus V. Ovum. E and K were a lesbian couple in Marion County, Calif., who wanted children. K provided the eggs, E the womb, and a fertility clinic supplied the sperm and the technical help. (Belluck & Liptak, 2004)

Likewise, the lead paragraph to a gay parenting cover story in the October 24, 2004 *New York Times Magazine* says: "... the conception of Ry... a feat that involved the sperm of a gay man, the egg of a lesbian in love and one very clean glass syringe" (Dominus, 2004). Even quotations by liberal and conservative experts repeat these mythical themes, such as when a psychologist in a November 14, 2004 article in the New Orleans' *Times-Picayune* calls these children and their parents a "new social phenomenon" (Bronston, 2004) and the president of the Massachusetts Family Institute says in a July 16, 2004 *Boston Herald* piece, "From the moment [a child of gay parents] comes into the world he is marked as being part of some kind of new social order" (Ross, 2004). A June 21, 2004 *Seattle Times* article further highlights the normality of biological, and abnormality of non-biological, parent to child relations when reporting, "Each man is the biological father of one of the girls, and the adoptive parent of the other" (Turnbull, 2004). Anecdotes that involve divorces also depict the children as foreigners in (heterosexual, heterosexist) society. For instance, a July 19, 2004 feature story in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* features Abigail Garner, the author of a book called *Families Like Mine*:

*Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is*, giving an account of her parent's divorce, and the story notes that the divorce put Garner in "a situation that thousands of children find themselves in every year" yet it was still "unusual" because "her dad was gay" (Miranda, 2004).

Additionally, this portrayal of alienation emanates from the few photographs of just the children, when they are *always* pictured absent any unrelated youth or discernable social context. For instance, Ry, a daughter of two lesbians, is literally shown under the scope of the camera lens since she appears alone on the oversized front cover of an October 24, 2004 issue of the *New York Times Magazine* looking like a forlorn model standing in strong light against a blank background (Figure 4). One full-page shot and a smaller family-submitted photo of Ry and her sister Cade that are printed later in the magazine are similar in situating them as social scientific specimens since they again are photographed alone and in seemingly desolate and non discrete locations, given that the cropping of the pictures makes it appear that they are by themselves in bleak environments (Figures 5, 6).

In these examples, as in a majority of the articles, children of gays and lesbians are discussed and depicted as if they are bio-products of mysterious, new social scientific experiments. They are portrayed as the result of abnormal reproductions because they are emphasized as being born via untraditional heterosexual acts of procreation. Historically, mass media depicted homosexuality as the "alien other" (Alwood, 1996; Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Gross, 2001), ranging from overt homophobic representations of gayness as a perversion and a sickness to more subtle heterosexist coding when gay character roles center on sexual difference as an anomaly instead of in an affirmative manner. In this



specific contemporary case, children of gays, and by association their gay and lesbian parents, are again alienated not only by the homophobic discourse of medicinal marveling and othering, but also by the preference placed on direct heterosexual biological relations. As Haraway observes, “biology discursively establishes and performs what will count as human in powerful domains of knowledge and technique” (1996, p. 323). She suggests this is evident in the common trope of heterosexual reproduction (p. 324). Put simply, that trope and its heterosexist and heteronormative ideologies that assume and privilege inception by intercourse between a male and female are also reiterated in these texts. Walters (2001) points out the risks of this restricted reasoning, saying justifications for discrimination of gays and lesbians has often been based exactly on “the assumption that gay ‘lifestyles’ threaten the sanctity of the nuclear family by proposing and practicing a sexuality not centered on reproduction” (p. 211). In sum, the articles favor mainstream, heterosexist, heteronormative, body-based, biological explanations of human sexuality and reproduction. These constructions, deployed through textual and photographic images, visibly “other” the range of origins of children of same-sex parents, thus relegating them to an outer scientific space.

Repressive representations of children of gays and lesbians as objectified, even bizarre, specimens for medical study are so strong in the texts that the children and sometimes their parents often reflect on this metaphor when describing their lives. Evidence of this is in the October 24, 2004 *New York Times Magazine* article when Ry, a daughter of two lesbians, is discussed as,

Acknowledge[ing] that she is a living, breathing result of a new social endeavor...[she] has spent so much time under a magnifying glass that it’s almost

if her feelings about her family —and her own response to those feelings— have been permanently magnified. (Dominus, 2004)

Later in the story, one of Ry's moms repeats this idea when saying, "It's like our whole lives have been this one big, messy, incredible experiment." Additionally, an excerpt from Garner's book that is included in the July 19, 2004 *Star Tribune* story quotes Tina Fakhrid-Deen, a 29-year-old child of gay parents, who says, "[children of gays feel like] we are some kind of zoo people — something to be studied, not loved or embraced or thought of as humans" (Miranda, 2004). Here children of gays express a type of dysfunctional isolation from society because their lifestyles do not match the heterosexual status quo. This resembles Kielwasser and Wolf's (1992) findings that show homosexual youth get stuck in a "spiral of silence" because mass media "symbolically annihilate" them. Thus, the children's personal science-linked narratives in the stories about same-sex parenting continue to perpetuate heteronormativity and homophobia, even as the children recurrently smile for the camera. This scientific alien narrative is problematic for legitimating varied types of gay-headed families since, as Kielwasser and Wolf argue, this "favor[ing of] homogeneity over difference" consequently "rejects all forms of sexuality (homosexual or otherwise) that communicate any deviation from a 'straight' heterosexual orientation" (pp. 351-352).

Scientific discourse regarding recent research studies done on children raised by gays and lesbians also constrains notions of same-sex parenting and reiterates conventional logics of hetero/homosexuality. This occurs even as most of the findings progressively tout that there is no difference between children of gays and children of straights. Overall, more than half of the articles include information about the social

scientific studies. Usually, the studies compose an entire section of the stories since scientists as well as pro-gay and conservative sources frequently respond to them (e.g., Adams, 2004; Gilgoff, 2004; Johnson, Piore, & Dorfman, 2004; Peterson, 2004; Salamon, 2005; Turnbull, 2004). A few of the news reports even take up the research as their primary focus (Bronston, 2004b; Kranish, 2005).

First, it is noteworthy that research done about and only on children in gay-headed households is highlighted. That is, the inclusion of this particular research again portrays children as the primary concern of gay-headed households and sets them up as evaluative measurements of their same-sex parents. In other words, not once is a study mentioned that focuses on the parents, thus continuing mass culture's (adult) campaign on (the sex of) children (Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 42). Furthermore, underlying this concentration is a conventional reliance on science to explain (the sexuality of) these children and their gay parents. Historically, discourses about sexuality have privileged scientific studies, particularly treating them as "fact" no matter their soundness (Alwood, 1996; Brookey, 2001; Foucault, 1978/1990; Wilcox, 2003). Likewise, almost every article notes the inconclusiveness of the research in this area yet still treats the studies as credible evidence of what makes a *gay* family. For example, a March 10, 2004 story in *USA Today* devotes six paragraphs to "research on the children of gay families," starting the section with the statement that "there is precious little research... The studies are often small, conflicting and controversial," then printing the findings, and ending with quotes from scientists saying things like, "we need more data" (Peterson, 2004). Overall, then, this rhetoric makes science into an authoritative argument about gay parenting and homosexuality no matter the type or accuracy of findings. This contentious scientific data

also *legitimizes* children of gays and same-sex parenting as “controversial” subject matter that requires social scientific examination. All of these representations are repressive in the sense that they depict gay-headed households as inherently in need of social scientific explanation as well as they are contrasted to the “normalcy” of their straight counterparts.

Because mainstream mass media have been found to disproportionately portray certain sets of scientific studies (Wilcox, 2003), it is also telling that among all the research done, results drawn in 2001 by sociologists Judith Stacey and Tim Biblarz from the University of Southern California are overwhelmingly cited in these texts that are published three to four years later. Sometimes this study by Stacey and Biblarz is the only one that receives any coverage whatsoever. Underlying the heavy interest in this specific study and the language used to talk about it are heterosexist and homophobic assumptions. Namely, Stacey and Biblarz make “appropriate” conclusions that empower pro-gay parenting rights while at the same time they are rhetorically amenable to supporting conventional stereotypical beliefs about homosexuality. Similar to Wilcox’s (2003) and Broome’s (2001) arguments that scientific studies receiving the most media coverage were in the news because they fit most easily into biologically deterministic frameworks of sexuality, research reappearing here has a lot of rhetorical force because it is useful for pro *and* anti-gay advocates. In turn, as this study gets a lot of media play, it gives a crucial voice to positive views of same-sex parenting yet simultaneously lessens the supposed socio-political threat of that parenting, and homosexuality in general, because those views are still always illustrated as debatable due to a (reigning) opposing opinion.

For example, Stacey and Biblarz are cited in a May 24, 2004 *U.S. News & World Report* story as suggesting that children of lesbians were less likely to exhibit gender-stereotyped behavior. The article then frames this as a positive and a negative finding by further interviewing Stacey as saying there are no “harmful” differences between children of gay and straight parents but then moving to a response from Focus on the Family’s psychologist in residence and author, Bill Maier, who said “[Children of gays] don’t have rigid gender stereotypes? That’s gender identity confusion” (Gilgoff, 2004). The newspapers and newsmagazines consistently introduce or summarize the study in ways that articulate heteronormativity as well, such as when they report that the research looks at whether kids being raised by gays and lesbians are “as well adjusted as their peers,” at whether they do or do not “fare any worse than those raised in more traditional households,” and at whether a gay parent’s “sexuality bore an influence on his or her child” (e.g., Egelko, 2005a; Kranish, 2005; Peterson, 2004; Salamon, 2005). Put simply, children being raised by gays and lesbians are repeatedly represented as a scenario inherently fraught with possible problems. Here and in all the texts, same-sex parenting is also continuously narrowly depicted as mostly about homosexuality, even though a host of other factors were tested by the researchers. Walters (2001) suggests it is very dangerous for legitimating homosexuality when gay difference is reduced to sexual choice (p. 18). What’s more, this specific rhetoric of science yet again disciplines these children and their families to the realm of the abnormal in relation to the norm of straight familial life.

“Dad’s Out of the Closet; His Child Wants to Hide”:

### The Children’s (Gay) Secrets

Another initially liberating but ultimately regulating storyline that reappears in the newspapers and newsmagazines centers on the children’s “big secret” of and sometimes “coming out” about having gay parents. From staying silent to lying to speaking out, children of lesbians and gays are repeatedly written about and interviewed as to whether or not and how they explain, or literally “come out” about, “their secret” (e.g., Brown, 2004; Gilgoff, 2004; Jacobs, 2004; Johnson, Piore, & Dorfman, 2004; Kim, 2004; Miranda, 2004; Turnbull, 2004). Like the discussions of the children’s reproductive histories, these sections are often lengthy and central to the articles, thus weighting their thematic importance in signifying what it means to be a child in a gay-headed household. The photographs featuring the children alone and with their parents, coupled with nearby bold headlines and adjoining captions that always in some way report that they have “gay” or “same-sex” parents, further resignify their identities in relation to this process of coming out. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, a “secret” is defined as “Something kept hidden from others or known only to oneself or a few” and “Something that remains beyond understanding or explanation; a mystery” (Secret..., 2000). Traditionally, having a secret and “coming out” about it also have been associated with coming to terms with one’s own homosexual identity (e.g., Kurdek, 2004). Furthermore, Gross (2001) theorizes “coming out” as an important progressive public and political act for gays, an “open avowal of one’s sexuality... [which] symbolize[s] shedding the self-hatred that gay men and women ha[ve] internalized” (p. xv).

In these narratives, both the secret and the coming out discourse work separately and together to negotiate meanings of these children, their gay parents, and homosexuality in general. For example, when children are depicted as keeping secret the homosexuality of their parents, either through explicit editorial comments or indirectly through their refusal to publish their names or those of their parents, such as teenage siblings who agree to be interviewed for a March 7, 2004 *Boston Globe* article about their lesbian mother only if their names are not printed (Jacobs, 2004), having same-sex parents and being gay in general are positioned as *legitimately* things to be ashamed of and shunned. An anecdote at the beginning of an October 18, 2004 article in *Newsweek* also exemplifies this narrative of keeping the gay parent secret:

The other kids in grade school talked about family life... Kyle Michaels kept quiet. Nobody would understand.... If you didn't hew traditional values, it seemed to her, you kept quiet. Cedar Park was certainly not a place, she felt certain, where you talked about your mom's being a lesbian. (Johnson, Piore, & Dorfman, 2004)

The title of a made-for-television movie review published on June 18, 2004 in the *New York Times* further explicates the shame a child has about having even an openly gay father: "Dad's out of the closet; His child wants to hide" (Heffernan, 2004). Likewise, a subhead, "Different treatment" and the section beneath it in a June 21, 2004 article in the *Seattle Times* show a prejudice against gay parents and preference for straight ones. As the story goes, first Kate Fortmueller makes up lies to explain her lesbian moms. Then she says she does not tell because "I think I just considered my family different in the sense that some people have two sets of parents, or single parents, and some kids are

raised by their grandparents or other family members” (Turnbull, 2004). Here, Fortmueller first denies the existence of her family and later devalues her family by equating it with “some” of those “different” familial situations which include people involved in divorce. As a result, gay parenting is alienated and stigmatized almost like a failed marriage, while heteronormative parenting is reinforced.

On the other hand, most of the articles follow these implicitly homophobic scenarios with explicit text about empowering stories of children “coming out” about their families. In addition, the mass publishing of the photographs of these children in such large and even national mainstream print news media, like the *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* newspapers and *Newsweek* magazine, is an extremely open and public avowal of same-sex parenting and, by association, homosexuality. Such an emancipating confessional ritual, however, has historically been mitigated and depoliticized in past mediated representations of gays (e.g., Dow, 2001; Foucault, 1978/1990) and specifically surrounding public outings of gay parents like Rosie O’Donnell (Shugart, 2005). A similar seemingly legitimating but eventually regulating pattern occurs in the print news reports and their adjoining pictures looked at for this study.

For instance, the potential and actual liberation of sharing the secret of having same-sex parents is often mentioned via reporting commentary and personal testimonies. Examples include a April 7, 2004 story in the *St. Lewis Post-Dispatch* that indicated that it was “a big relief” once 16-year-old Evan Brieg told friends about her gay father (Kim, 2004) and a March 7, 2004 *Boston Globe* article that interviews a lesbian mother as saying “It was very affirming for [her 11-year-old daughter, Deanna]” to host a sleepover where Deanna’s friends found out about her parents for the first time (Jacobs, 2004).



Furthermore, when the children are photographed by themselves or with their same-sex parents, the nearby headlines of the articles and the captions below the pictures almost always identify them by their full names and/or relations to their “gay” parents and/or parent’s “partner,” thus declaring their gay-headed home life to America (e.g., Adams, 2004; Armour, 2005; Dominus, 2004; Peterson, 2004; Schneider, 2005). As briefly noted earlier, the children are also generally smiling or showing other emotions of happiness and contentment in every picture. These affirmative verbal and visual portrayals paint very positive pictures of “coming out” about being a child raised by gays and lesbians. Nevertheless, these representations of outing are ambivalent, at best. Specifically, the liberatory force of coming out narratives and photographs are mitigated by several homophobic rhetorical patterns: the coming outs are arguably positive according to the inclusion of sources from opposing opinions, they regularly happen in “safe” and temporary therapeutic-type spaces, and the headlines and captions for a lot of the photos link these happy gay families to controversy. All of this underlies the affirmations and their pro-gay politics, keeping children of gays and lesbians, and their parents, still at least partially closeted.

First, for example, the verbal text on the prior silence and outing is almost always organized in an argument then counter-argument structure, which lessens the potency of the liberation since it gives credibility to two sides of the story. Second, the stories regularly write about the outings as something that is difficult to do, and, done only periodically and in private therapy-like environments, like at gay-related events such as at Children Of Lesbian And Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) meetings. This language can be seen in a May 24, 2004 article in *U.S. News & World Report* that profiled a college

freshman, A. J. Costa, who kept his mother's relationship with a live-in partner secret while he was in grade school, though just before leaving for college he "came out" about them when attending "Family Week" in Provincetown, Mass. (Gilgoff, 2004). Likewise, Kyle Michaels in the earlier *Newsweek* anecdote also "no longer keeps secrets" after a "turning point" when she went to a summer camp for children of lesbians and gays (Johnson, Piore, & Dorfman, 2004). As a result, this instance and countless others depict the children's outings as one-time occasions in the private company of gay-related communities; plus, crucially, they depict their personal problem instead of as an effect of a larger societal issue. Although these acts somewhat, as Gross (2001) argues about the progressive politics of coming out about homosexuality, "shed the self-hatred," as well as doing so in a positive gay context, it is still telling that none of these outings are framed as longer, recurring events, nor are they positioned in everyday public settings beyond their personal, "safe" (gay) lives.

Even the empowering mass published photographs of "outed" children of gays and lesbians get repressed when read in contrast with these argumentative, episodic, and therapeutic verbal narratives about their "secret" and "coming out" which surround and mitigate them. Big bold headlines and captions often also express overt negativity about gay-headed households, further regulating the visuals. Evidence of this is a September 18, 2005 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* "Ban on gay parenting" large Metro Section headline and subhead, "Some Georgia lawmakers may push a plan next year to shield children from what they call an 'unnatural lifestyle'" (Schneider, 2004), as well as an October 7, 2004 *Houston Chronicle* sub-headline that reports, "Black same-sex couples could be doubly harmed" (Ruiz, 2004). Additionally, the captions to photos printed on

March 10, 2004 in *USA Today* and on May 8, 2004 in the *Boston Globe* narrow the positive pictures of the children happily blowing bubbles and playing with trains, respectively, to oppressive socio-politics of gay parenting, by editorializing, “The Natick couple may have to choose between marrying and adopting a second child from overseas,” (Ordonez, 2004) and “Kim Musheno will give birth to another boy next month as gay parenting becomes another battle in the culture wars” (Peterson, 2004). In short, the secret that is being repressed by these outings is no longer homosexuality, but rather homophobia and heterosexism, since the logic needed to make sense of these is a fear of gays and lesbians. Dow (2001) earlier concludes and criticizes this individualized “token” illustration of coming out when she studied the mass media’s handling of DeGeneres’ outing: “it is not sexuality that is being repressed in television, but rather the *politics* [emphasis in original] of sexuality” (p. 135).

#### “...I Am Very Attracted to the Opposite Sex”: Children’s Compulsory (Hetero)Sexuality

The ways print news media talk about and picture the physical behaviors of the children of gays and lesbians further articulates their subjectivities and those of their parents into traditional understandings of sexuality. Specifically, the children’s behavior that is always and most frequently discussed verbally in the texts is linked to whether or not they are or will “grow up to be” homosexual. In general, this topic gets approached explicitly via frank personal testimony from children and their gay parents or reporting on social science studies that seek answers to the parental influence of homosexuality on children. This discursive concern with how children of gay parents will reckon with their own sexuality, and in particular whether they will be *gay*, weights the negative

implications of homosexuality and gay parenting, repeating heterosexism. It also reasserts heterosexuality as the ideal. As Walters (2001) argues about this kind of discourse, “it implies a ‘natural’ desire to raise children as heterosexual” (p. 219). Overall, such an emphasis on the sexuality of the children also involves a major essentialist assumption that they are “sexed” as *either* homo-*or*-heterosexual and that these subsequent two sexualities are influenced by their parents, two conventional arguments that sources here also continually seek to restabilize.

An example typical of the majority of news reports featuring the gay question is a March 7, 2004 story in the *Boston Globe* that includes an interview with two siblings who have lesbian mothers:

As for the question many ask about children of same-sex parents — Will they be gay? — both smile. ‘People think you will be gay, but I think it is just the opposite,’ said the girl. ‘For myself, I am very attracted to the opposite sex.’  
(Jacobs, 2004)

In addition to reestablishing the importance of a polar notion of hetero/homosexuality, here the reporter and the child with a gay parent emit compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexism: when homosexuality is implied it is then assertively denied by noting the child’s reportedly “very” version of straightness. Likewise, 19-year-old Taylor Heald makes the same argument when she is interviewed about her sexual orientation on March 24, 2004 in the *Chicago Sun-Times*: “Taylor Heald, who has a boyfriend.... [said] the fact that her mother is gay ‘didn’t influence me at all. If anything, it made me more open to everything.... As a result, I’m even more sure of my answer” (O’Hara, 2004). Thus, as the heterosexist reasoning goes, homosexuality is not preferred and gay parenting is only

good for its role in repeating *extreme* heterosexuality in children. Sloop, in looking at rhetoric about the famous John/Joan case (2000a) and news reports surrounding U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno (2004, pp. 104-122), similarly found that heterosexual desire is drawn up in “aggressive terms” when the discourse confronts situations of gender trouble. As a result, he suggests that what the body did sexually was “utilized rhetorically as evidence for the success or failure” of, in one case, sex reassignment (2000a, p. 137). In the texts analyzed for this study, then, I likewise argue aggressive (hetero)sexuality is used rhetorically as evidence for the success of same-sex parenting in producing straights.

Also of note here is that only one of the articles looked at for this study includes a self-identified or referenced gay child of same-sex parents. This relative invisibility of an adolescent homosexual raised by same-sex parents symbolically annihilates that specific sexual identity, dangerously reiterating the mediated repression of gay youth pinpointed more than a decade ago by Kielwasser & Wolf (1992). This kind of representation (or lack of it) also calms what Walters (2001) identifies as a common anti-gay hysteria that fears “gay ‘recruitment;’” “a mistaken belief that gay and lesbian parents are more likely to produce gay children or foist their gay identity upon their progeny” (p. 211). Furthermore, even when gayness of the child is briefly highlighted in the one article, the homosexual youth falls victim to historically mediated stereotypes of homosexuality and heteronormativity that suppress her presence.

For instance, Cade, the solitary self-identified 16-year-old lesbian raised by lesbians who is mentioned in an October 24, 2004 *New York Times Magazine* story, is put in the shadows of her older heterosexual sister, Ry, since Ry overwhelmingly fills the

pages of the feature story. Quotations from the parents about the sexualities of their daughters further relegate Cade to the outskirts and Ry to the center stage, such as when the mothers say they “found themselves avoiding the topic of Cade’s sexuality” but told Ry at age 16 to “just go have sex with [her boyfriend].” Also, when Ry herself talks about a homosexual experience, it is framed in homophobic and heterosexist terms as merely a phase, and again, as justification for her straightness: “As for her own sexuality, she’s straight, which she said she knows with increasing certainty with each passing year. ‘Yeah, you know, I made out with a girl in high school,’ she said. ‘I get an A for effort’” (Dominus, 2004). In short, according to the texts of the news reports looked at for this study, gay children of same-sex parents practically do not exist. Or if they do, they are unjustly treated as “sort of an anti-reality used to navigate the ‘real’ concerns of heterosexual youth” (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992, p. 360).

#### “...Sincerely Feminine”: (Proper) Gender Performances of the Children

Although the newspapers and newsmagazines primarily deal with issues of sexuality, the discursive and visual field is also fraught with repeating proper notions of the children’s femininity and masculinity. Earlier critics note the intersections of sexuality and gender in popular discourses and how they simultaneously work together and separately to reify traditional norms of sexuality and gender (Brookey, 2001; Butler, 1990/1999; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Halberstam, 1998; Shugart, 2003, 2005; Sloop, 2000b, 2004, 2005). Likewise, in these news reports, the transgression of gay parenting and homosexuality is also disciplined by constraints on the portrayals of the children’s (hyper)gender performances that reiterate what it means to be a stereotypical “girl” or

“boy.” Specifically, textual narratives about the children’s looks and their possession of material goods, including how they describe themselves, predominantly illustrate this tendency toward stability of traditional gender binaries. The photographs accompanying these narratives largely repeat this pattern.

The October, 24, 2004 story in the *New York Times Magazine* manifests this model even as there is explicit gender trouble. The reporter offers up the following descriptions for Ry, the 22-year-old daughter of two lesbians: a “tough-girl,” “dressed in vintage *femme fatale* [emphasis in original], a black checked dress with fish nets and heels,” her sense of style is a “constructed form of femininity... girl in quotation marks,” and Ry is suited for a store she works at that is “both campy and sincerely feminine...” (Dominus, 2004). Likewise, in the interview Ry says as a child she always “loved to dress up,” a time when she was also “obsessed with pink.” Yet now, Ry mentions, she is inclined to “stacked heels and deep red lipstick,” identifying, appearance-wise, with drag queens. Here and elsewhere Ry is subjected by, and subjects herself to, discursive disciplining of her iconic performed, almost drag-like, femininity. As the gendered reasoning goes, and as both Ry and the reporter even reference, Ry is like the character Rizzo in the movie, “Grease”— the stereotypical “pink-clad bad girl” (Dominus, 2004).

The pictures of Ry visually uphold this stereotypical gender play as well. The magazine’s cover shot shows her with long hair, dressed in a low-cut button-down dress shirt and short skirt, and noticeably wearing makeup as well as earrings, a necklace, a bracelet, and a ring (Figure 4), a conventionally feminine appearance that does not in the least trouble idealized gender. The power of this reiteration of “femininity” is so strong that it challenges the soft-toned, big-lettered, controversial-themed headline, “Got a

Problem With My Mothers?” and its much smaller subversive verbal tease, “Coming of age with same-sex parents,” which is posited half-way down the page next to Ry’s right arm.

Thus, even as portrayals of Ry in some ways seriously undermine traditional conceptions of gender, narratives about and from Ry still fit common sense bipolar conceptions of femininity, as well as *extremely* resignify them by emphasizing classically “feminine” attributes, like Ry’s love for pink and heels as well as her iconic “womanly” look. Evans (1998) argues that gender performances like male drag in contemporary popular film, though somewhat transgressive, often revive gender stereotypes such as a return to the cult of true womanhood (p. 210). For the most part the verbal and visual rhetoric of Ry’s stereotypically feminine performance in this *New York Times Magazine* article echoes this. Also crucial to this reiteration of proper performance of gender is Ry’s self-identification as a heterosexual in contrast to the physical descriptions of her lesbian sister, Cade. Put simply, heterosexual and lesbian identities get portrayed as closely approximating heteronormative conventions of femininity and masculinity, a negotiation Shugart (2003, 2005) also found in the gay male lead characters of popular sitcoms and in discourse surrounding Rosie O’Donnell’s coming out.

For example, Cade is described as “wearing men’s suits and cutting her hair so short that even her mothers protested” (Dominus, 2004). The photographs featuring both Cade and Ry further emphasize these tropes of traditional “femininity” and “masculinity.” Specifically, in multiple shots taken over their life spans, Cade is pictured having short wild hair and wearing plain T-shirts and pants while Ry’s long hair is always either down or held stylishly up in a clip as she wears lace or bikini tops, skirts,



dressess (Dominus, 2004; Figures 6, 7). In sum, the (hetero)sexist logic suggests, as Halberstam (1998) also identifies, that lesbians usually look what is considered “masculine” and straight women usually look what is thought to be “feminine.” This essentialist gender and sexuality rhetoric supports Fausto-Sterling’s (2000) argument that “definitions of homo- and heterosexuality were built on a two-sex model of masculinity and femininity” (p. 14). Consequently, the children’s (proper) gender and sexuality, as they come under question due to their untraditional family situations, their constructed gender, or their self-identified homosexuality, are stereotypically and severely restabilized by the verbal and visual discourse.

Additional textual examples of this include a September 6, 2004 piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle* that describes three-year-old Lucy, a daughter of two lesbians, as also loving pink (Marech, 2004) and a June 21, 2004 story in the *Seattle Times* that leads with the following iconic anecdote about two teen daughters being raised by (gay) dads: “Whether it concerns matters of the heart or what dress to wear to the senior prom... From diapers to dating, the men have taught the girls about rites of passage into womanhood” (Turnbull, 2004). Likewise, a *Newsweek* story on October 18, 2004 talks about 14-year-old (female) Kyle, who has two lesbian moms, as “run[ing] the video camera for the cheerleading squad..... She did find time to attend her first homecoming with her boyfriend Anthony” (Johnson, Piore & Dorfman, 2004). Again, being a girl or a woman is literally equated with loving pink, shopping, cheerleading, wearing dresses, and dating males, all stereotypical “feminine” behaviors and looks that uphold mainstream understandings of gender and sexuality. Also of note here is that daughters are featured more often than sons in the news media coverage. This further limits the

threat same-sex parenting, and in particular homosexuality, specifically has for “masculinity.”

Like the disciplinary pictures of Ry, the majority of the (straight) kids of gays and lesbians appear in photographs in ways that also align them with customary logics of how females and males should look and act. For instance, the pictures of the youngest girls mostly show them wearing frilly, lacy dresses, such as the leading two-page-spread shot printed on May 24, 2004 in *U.S. News & World Report*, where two gay fathers have their backs to the camera as they hold the hands of their daughter, who is in a ballet-type dress and carrying a purse while she walks down a neighborhood sidewalk (Figure 8). Grade school and pre-teenage girls are not as often depicted as hyper-feminine, but it is still telling that none of their material characteristics, ranging from the long lengths of their hair to the “girly” styles and tighter fits of their clothes, regularly trouble what is commonly associated with and appropriate for the female gender (e.g. Armour, 2005; Figures 1, 3, 14, 19; Salamon, 2005). The few boys who are in the visuals are also frequently depicted donning typical “male” attire, like wearing professional collared shirts and sports paraphernalia (e.g., Figures 2, 12, 16, 20). Exemplifying these images are an October 18, 2004 photo printed in *Newsweek* that features gay fathers Brad Punty and Tony Russo with their two young sons, one of whom wears a formal plaid button-down dress shirt and slacks and the other of whom wears pants with a long jersey T-shirt that has an athletic team logo on its front (Figure 9) and an October 10, 2004 picture in *Newsday* that shows 17-year-old Malki with a sports jersey and ball cap slanted sideways (Figure 10). As the result of these illustrations and the verbal rhetoric discussing the physical attributes of the children, truly alternative types of children from same-sex

parents, ranging from different kinds of femininities to a greater visibility of boys in these households, are strikingly absent from the newspapers and newsmagazines. In turn, gay parents are identified by the news as primarily raising conventionally straight females and sometimes “boys” who apparently will be “true women” and normal “men” when they grow up. These logics about gender and sexuality do little to revise what is commonly known as femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality. They also position same-sex parenting as good because, and only if, it produces traditional girls and boys.

#### “...Paradoxical With a Vengeance”: Conclusion

Walters (2001) suggests that the explosion of gay visibility in contemporary mass media is a political paradox. She writes,

These times *are* [emphasis in original] earth-shattering and exciting but also deeply confusing, often ambiguous, and paradoxical with a vengeance... because the increased visibility of marginalized groups often creates new restrictions and recycles old stereotypes. (p. 10)

The mainstream newspapers and newsmagazines looked at for this study represent children raised by gays and lesbians, and by association same-sex parenting and homosexuality at large, in paradoxical ways as well. By foremost focusing on this specific subjectivity of children, the verbal and visual rhetoric publicly announces the familial portrait of gayness. Homosexuality, then, no longer appears outside the realm of making an American “family” as it has historically been positioned by popular culture. Affirmative “coming out” narratives and pictures of happy children from gay-headed households, plus the citing of social scientific research that concludes these children are

well-adjusted, produce this positive portrayal of what it means to be a child with gay fathers or lesbian mothers.

Although these images are progressive and not explicitly homophobic like the past deeming of gays and lesbians as “anti-family” or other hostile diatribes claiming that gay males disproportionately molest children, they still reiterate subtle forms of homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. As a close analysis of the discourse shows, centering on the children in fact pushes homosexuality to the sidelines in silence since an overwhelming majority of the children interviewed are (aggressively) heterosexual, as coupled with the fact that *gay* parents receive far less media coverage. Likewise, the recurring liberatory narratives about the children’s “coming out” frequently get rearticulated and reappropriated by language and visuals that frame their avowal as, for example, less empowering acts done only in private and in places distant from everyday U.S. culture. An emphasis on explaining the children’s (non)biological origins and select scientific studies about them further permeates the news reports here and problematically sets the children up as an objectified phenomenon in need of social scientific examination by opposing and often homophobic views. These depictions, like the confessional ones, continue to work to alienate the children and simultaneously to reconstitute a straight, biology-based, procreating society. Lastly, the descriptions and pictorials of the physical behaviors and characteristics of the children closely align with proper notions of sexuality and gender to restabilize any sex or gender trouble. Namely, for the most part, the children appear compulsively straight and extremely “feminine” if they are females or “masculine” if they are males, while the solitary featured lesbian

daughter of two lesbians falls victim to mediated conventions that suppress her gay presence and equate lesbianism with masculinity.

In sum, the political paradox presented here is this: on the one hand, children of gays and lesbians are different than other children in straight “normal” America because, for instance, they are controversial social scientific experiments and either keep or shed the (shameful) secret of having same-sex parents; while on the other hand, they are the same as the children of straight “normal” America because they, for instance, are heterosexual and fit into proper gender binaries. What unites this paradox is a commitment to heterosexist norms of what constitutes “normal” children. And it is not just our logic about children of gays and lesbians that is disciplined by these representations. Because these children are presented as the barometers for their lesbian mothers and gay fathers, same-sex parenting is ultimately regulated by the same discriminatory regulations placed on the children. In other words, what it means to be a gay and lesbian parent is not only mitigated by what it means to be *a child of gays and lesbians*, but gay and lesbian parents also are evaluated by their ability to reiterate heterosexist norms in their children. All of this is inherently problematic for *knowing* and accepting homosexuality even as some of it is *seen*.

## CHAPTER THREE

“...ALL-AMERICAN IDEALS OF THEIR STRAIGHT COUNTERPARTS”:

### THE (STRAIGHT) DYNAMICS OF GAY FAMILY LIFE

Print news media's illustrations of children raised by gays and lesbians dominate the texts and photographic images looked at for this study and consequently heavily signify meanings of same-sex parenting. As I argue in the previous chapter, these representations promote visible homophobic, heterosexist, and heteronormative understandings of how children of same-sex parents are and are not just like children of straights. Moreover, same-sex parents are subsequently judged by these disciplined depictions of their children. However, the newspapers and newsmagazines here also reconstitute gay parenting through photographs involving gay and lesbian parents and the contexts of their familial life, as well as through a number of substantial reporter narratives and personal and expert testimonies about and from same-sex parents *themselves*. In what follows, then, I analyze how and in what terms the news discourse also makes the relative invisibility of gay and lesbian parents visible outside of just the aforementioned association with their children. In particular, I show how resistive and regulatory representations are offered through visual and verbal rhetoric about the physical characteristics and behaviors of same-sex parents, their places of residence, and U.S. Census information and legislation concerning gay and lesbian marriage and adoption.

Generally, gay and lesbian parents appear in the news as a happy, nationally growing community rife with political potential. This proliferating positive political depiction of same-sex parents is necessary to authenticating the existence of gay *families*,

adding a new and progressive familial category to Gross' earlier statement that, due in a large part to the omnipresence of gays in the contemporary mass media, "Today, few can remain unaware of the existence of lesbian and gay people" (2001, p. xiv).

Nonetheless, closer analysis reveals that the same mediations are explicitly and implicitly coded in homophobic, heterosexist, and heteronormative ways that continue to seriously constrain understandings of homosexuality. Resembling the images of the children, gay-headed households are primarily portrayed as living up to the "...all-American ideals of their straight counterparts," (Johnson, Piore, & Dorfman, 2004) as reporters for an October 18, 2004 *Newsweek* article write, or being outside the (heterosexual) norm, a perspective offered by the headline for this same *Newsweek* story that reads, "... gay parents in a straight society." Specifically, I suggest below that there are several rhetorical patterns that repeat time and again to mitigate gay parenting in these ways: same-sex parents are shown absent physical affection for each other, any semblance of gay parental romance is framed as tied to the purpose of having children, gays and lesbians are represented as performing stereotypical male/female parenting roles, and same-sex parents are portrayed as living just like straight, white, suburbanites. Finally, media discussions of current political legislation about same-sex adoptions, custody, and marriage heighten the controversy of gay parenting and conflate it with the heterosexist institution of marriage.

#### "Love?... Start a Family": Portrayals of Family Affection

Explicit displays or discussion of physical and sexual behavior between homosexuals have been off limits in mass media representations. Moreover, if and when

any semblance of gay romance appeared, it more often than not was desexualized or heterosexualized (Alwood, 1996; Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Gross, 2001; Walters, 2001). Likewise, overt affection between gay parents is always lacking in any form from these print news stories. Yet, there are minor references to degrees of liking or sometimes the extent of “love” between gay parents, such as the second sentence in an October 18, 2004 *Salt Lake Tribune* article that reports about lesbian mothers Sienna Williams and Kim Carey, “Love? Still strong after nearly 10 years together” (Adams, 2004). Also noteworthy is that the main behaviors adults generally display in the photographs are staring, simple touching, and happy facial expressions of affection like smiling. However, these verbal and visual romantic scenarios mostly occur in discussions about the parents’ decisions to have children and/or desire to get married, as well as in pictured scenes where their affection is directed at their children. An October 18, 2004 *Newsweek* photograph visually portrays this pattern, as gay father Darrell Martin leans in from the left as he kisses his 16-month-old daughter Maya. Simultaneously, Craig Peterson, Darrell Martin’s partner and Maya’s other father, holds her from the right (Figure 11). Put simply, it is telling that Darrell and Craig are not shown kissing and touching each other, but rather only their daughter. Acts of explicit (homo)sexuality, then, are for the most part rendered invisible in these texts, with no overt or covert notions of bisexuality ever surfacing. Additionally, at those moments when (homo)sexuality is somewhat represented, it is coded as relevant almost exclusively for, and as, happiness for children or the family unit rather than the benefit of the relationship between same-sex parents.

More examples of this heterosexualized representation of (homo)sexual romance appear in the *Salt Lake Tribune* story mentioned above. Its lead sentence talks about the



women “decid[ing] to start their family” and the paragraph after the “love” question mentions that Carey wants to be a mom and is looking forward to welcoming Sullivan Williams-Carey into the world. An October 24, 2004 article in the *New York Times Magazine* likewise exemplifies this scenario of minimizing same-sex affection between parents and targeting it toward procreation when the language of the news report literally aligns the beginning of the child’s life with the love lives of her parents: “Her story, she knows, starts with theirs. In 1979, within months of falling in love, [Sandy] Russo, then 38, and [Robin] Young, then 23, decided to have a family together.....” (Dominus, 2004). Similarly, a March 7, 2004 *Boston Globe* article ends with the following fairytale romance description of two gay men and their sons as they read their family album: “Many years ago when Timmy’s Dad and Daddy met each other...They always knew they wanted to be parents. They met a little boy named Timmy. They knew right away that adopting Timmy would be a great way to begin their forever family.” (Jacobs, 2004).

In these cases and many others resembling them, the hallmarks of the heterosexual family tableau (i.e. two people who fall in love and subsequently raise children) are repeated and renormalized. No other romantic storylines, depicting, for instance, two or more than two same-sex parents in love for years and happily living together before or never having children, receive as much media coverage. This rhetoric privileges straight romantic notions of parenting as the norm as well as sets up gay parenting itself as an unusual situation, a representation that comes across even more strongly when one of the lesbian mothers in the *New York Times Magazine* article later reflects that having kids “wasn’t part of gay culture” (Dominus, 2004). Accordingly, *gay*

parenting is not gay parenting after all. Instead, proper same-sex parenting is verbally portrayed just like traditional straight parenting.

These codes are reiterated through the majority of photographs as well.

Overwhelmingly, two same-sex parents are pictured smiling *at* their children and physically touching them while standing and sitting beside them, which often involves even holding and embracing the youngest children (e.g., Adams, 2004; Armour, 2005; Burson, 2004; Figures 1, 8, 11, 16; Ford, 2004; Gilgoff, 2004; Peterson, 2004; Salamon, 2005). A photograph that explicates this scene of parental affection geared heavily toward the children is printed in an April 14, 2004 issue of *USA Today* in which two gay dads are portrayed smiling and walking with their son, who takes steps between them with one hand clasped by his father, Tim Surratt, and the leash of his dog in the other (Figure 12). Likewise, a large photograph that is published on the cover of the Metro Section of the September 18, 2005 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* shows lesbian Tara Gibson smiling broadly as she reads a *Thomas the Tank Engine* book to her 5-year-old son Zachary, who sits and laughs in her lap (Figure 13). Even intimacy in the March 10, 2004 group shot in *USA Today* that has a gay parent touching the arm of another gay parent is constrained since both of them still stare and smile at the boy in the picture rather than at each other (Figure 2). Almost this same scenario is depicted in one of the lead photographs accompanying an October 18, 2004 *Salt Lake Tribune* story in which lesbian Chris Johnson's arms are clasped over the shoulder of her lesbian partner, Lorie Hutchinson, while wedged between their embrace is their smiling daughter, Olivia. Further noteworthy here is that the two lesbian women do not look at each other either but instead look straight at the camera (Figure 14).

All of these representations offer up progressive portrayals of gay and lesbian parents as physically and psychologically supportive of their children. The children's repeatedly apparent appreciation of this endearment, ranging from them smiling back to laughing with their fathers and mothers (e.g., Adams, 2004; Figures, 2, 3, 12, 13, 14), further authenticates this successful and intimate vision of same-sex parenting. These are far cries from earlier mass mediated homophobic depictions of gays and lesbians with youth where they were rarely even shown with each other, let alone in affirmative ways. In addition, it is still novel that some sort of positive same-sex affection appears in the news at all.

However, the forms homosexuality continues to take in the news are narrowly drawn. In particular, the traditional heteronormative belief that people primarily enter romantic partnerships for the purpose of rearing children is reinforced when gay parenting in pairs is solely equated, both verbally and visually, with raising children. Similar to Haraway's (1996) observation about dioramas of primitives at natural history museums, "The germ of human sociality was the *couple* and their *offspring* [my emphasis]" (p. 347). Or, as Shugart (2003) notes about the portrayals of gay men and straight women sitcom characters exploring having a child together, "[it] frames them as a conventionally heterosexual couple in tandem... as parents-to-be, and their relationship takes on the very traditional heterosexual hallmarks associated with that scenario: they pick out baby clothes together...." (pp. 73-75). Walters argues these are problematic representations for homosexuality since they merely "clone[d] heterosexuality, thus muting real gay family *difference* even as odes to family *diversity* abounded [emphasis in original]" (2001, p. 215). As a result, the news texts here are empowering for same-sex

parenting and homosexuality by rendering visible romance between gays. Yet on the contrary, the gay affection that receives the most coverage still does not contest understandings of love outside of reestablishing the limited traditional heterosexist and heteronormative reasoning of coupling to have children. As Foucault (1978/1990) points out about the discursive history of sexuality, “The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm” (p. 3).

“I Will Be the Cupcake-Bringing Mom”:

#### Stereotypical Male/Female (Gay) Parenting Gender Roles

The printed press consistently discusses and shows a few other physical behaviors and traits of gay and lesbian parents that both subvert and restabilize popular notions of same-sex parenting. Like the portrayals of their children, this information is revealed in the reported and photographed looks, behaviors, and testimony featured in the discourse. Specifically, material descriptions and depictions of parenting duties regulate the gender and sexuality of same-sex parents. Namely, even as the heterosexual parenting model is criticized and the same-sexes of the parents inherently trouble the male-female binary, the majority of the verbal and visual representations of gay and lesbian parents compulsively reiterate the stereotypical two-parent “child-rearing, stay-at-home mother” and “hard working father” (heterosexual) nuclear family ideal.

For example, a March 7, 2004 article in the *Boston Globe* says the following about the appearance and actions of two gay fathers:

Cullinane, 39, who teaches third grade, does more of the daily caretaking of the boys such as carpooling and cooking. Brown, 40, a lawyer who wears square

black glasses, does the big school projects....” (Jacobs, 2004)

Along the same storyline of a “masculine” and a “feminine” couple, a January 10, 2005 article in *USA Today* writes about two lesbian mothers that,

Ann Weber, 40, is a senior tax accountant for Eastman Kodak... She and her partner Marci Weber have two children... Through her employer, she is able to get health care coverage for Marci and the children — enabling Marci to stay home full time... [Ann says about Marci] ‘It’s invaluable having her home.’ (Armour, 2005)

Likewise, a March 10, 2004 *USA Today* story includes this stereotypic description by a lesbian mother about her future involvement in her son’s schooling: “I will be the *cupcake-bringing mom* [my emphasis]” (Peterson, 2004). Furthermore, a March 24, 2004 piece in the *Chicago Sun-Times* includes this report about a lesbian’s “fatherly” parenting behavior, as relayed through her daughter: “There was a time when [the daughter] was young and that she felt sad that she didn’t have a father. ‘Then I realized that my mom had the tool bench in the basement, and she took me fishing every summer’” (O’Hara, 2004).

All of these samples profess versions of the same story — proper families, even gay ones, consist of a coupling of two parents where one person performs stereotypically “masculine,” and the other “feminine,” duties. Specifically, the “male” is depicted as some version of tough and professional and the “female” as care-taking and homebound. One gay dad even explicitly references filling this traditional male-gendered professional role when talking about his decision to cut back on his work week: “As a male, you feel the pressure to work and work all the time. Initially, I felt guilty about cutting back and

guilty to my children if I didn't" (Armour, 2005). Furthermore, news reports continue to verbally profess these gender binaries when referencing other "male/female figures" in the children's lives. For example, a June 21, 2004 quote in the *Seattle Times* says two daughters of gay dads also have access to "aunts, grandmothers, people up the street" (Turnbull, 2004); moreover, a September 6, 2004 story in the *San Francisco Chronicle* quotes Julie Ginsburg, who agreed to "co-parent" with a gay man in addition to her lesbian partner, because she "wanted [her] children to have a *male* [my emphasis] figure in their lives" (Marech, 2004). A gay dad, Todd Brown, similarly mentions the need for his children to interact with a female/feminine person in a March 7, 2004 *Boston Globe* story when he is interviewed as saying "My children are not being brought up on Mars... They have aunts and grandmothers they are very close to" (Jacobs, 2004).

Visually, the stereotypical male/female gendered parenting roles are for the most part much less rigid than those laid by the verbal discourse. Strikingly subversive gay parenting models, however, are still missing considering the traditional parenting performances and looks of the adults pictured, as well as the invisibility of any distinctively gay adult actions in the photos. In general, same-sex parents are shown spending "family time" with their children, ranging from reading books and playing games to taking leisurely walks together in their neighborhoods (e.g., Armour, 2005; Figures 2, 8, 12, 13, 16, 20; Ordonez, 2004). Exemplifying this is a photograph printed on January 10, 2005 on the jump page to a *USA Today* article that shows lesbian mothers Jackie Doval and Mina Garcia apparently watching TV and eating popcorn in bed with their 4-year-old son, Mario (Figure 15). Another every day family scene is pictured in a March 7, 2004 photograph in the *Boston Globe*, explicated by its long caption that says,

Home Front: Deanna Makinen, 11, practices on her saxophone at the home she shared with her 9-year-old brother, Troy; her mother, Debra Masteson; and her mother's domestic partner, Barbara Richards. At left, Troy and Richards laugh during a family board game. (Jacobs, 2004)

The visible physical characteristics of the parents, like their hairstyles and the clothing they wear, further either align “appropriately” with their sexes or are fairly conservative and non-descript, thus not upsetting traditional binaries of gender performances (e.g., Figures 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18, 20; Ford, 2004). Unlike the photographs of the children, however, same-sex parents are not usually portrayed as hyper “masculine” or “feminine.” Typical of the majority of the photographs reiterating illustrations of true “masculinity” and “femininity” is a gay male father donning a Polo-shirt and a baseball cap in an April 14, 2004 *USA Today* shot (Figure 16) and two lesbian mothers in an August 16, 2004 *Newsday* picture who have long hair and are dressed in a sleeveless shirt with short shorts and a dress, respectively (Figure 17).

Images which are more conservative in their portrayals of what men and women should look like still fit safely within traditionally gendered appearances. For instance, lesbian mothers featured in an October 24, 2004 *New York Times Magazine* story are both shown with short (but not too short) hair and are dressed in solid colored long-sleeve sweaters and button-down shirts that do not cling closely to (but are not baggy on) their bodies (Figure 7). Two other lesbians in one of the photos accompanying an October 18, 2004 *Salt Lake Tribune* article also have a moderate look due to their short (but styled) hair and their collared white sweater and white Polo T-shirt, respectively (Figure 14). Also of note is that all of the pictures of the gay fathers, while only a majority of the

photos of the lesbian mothers, depict these gendered ideals. In other words, it is telling that, the few times the boundaries of doing gender get blurred a bit by the photographic news images, those images only feature lesbians, such as the lead shot to the October 18, 2004 issue of *Newsweek* in which lesbian mothers Tara and Dawn O’Keefe are both dressed in athletic wear and one of them has almost a military buzzed “male” hair cut (Figure 1). Much like masculinity is protected by the fact that daughters of gays and lesbians are covered by news media more than sons, this pattern of always portraying gay males as “males” further reestablishes common sense notions of what it means to be a “man.” That the few instances of gender troubling also generally equate lesbians with traditionally “masculine” looks additionally reinstates mainstream logics of (lesbian) homosexuality with (masculine) gender.

Contrary to the textual representations of same-sex parents, however, there are no visible links made between these gender performances and the portrayed parenting roles of the gay and lesbian adults. That is, these pictorial illustrations do not seriously relegate one adult as the “masculine” parent and the other as a “feminine” one. But, like the verbal depictions, there are generally only two parents portrayed, plus their “everyday” actions and looks make them appear to parent together just like any other (straight) male/female couple. Put simply, nowhere do gay parenting duties include anything concerning being raised in a gay-headed household, such as, for instance, scenes of their family spending time with other gay families or even reading gay-related books. Even when gay and lesbian parents are photographed alone, they are nonetheless pictured being “normal” parents and never necessarily visible gay ones, as in the September 18, 2004 shot in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that shows lesbian foster mother Michele Suprenant simply



sitting in a what appears to be an average baby nursery filled with, for instance, a Winnie the Pooh child-sized chair and a plastic yellow toy school bus (Figure 18).

That lesbians and gay men are interchangeably shown in print news media doing successful everyday parenting duties is important. Common sense bipolar logics of gender and sexuality normally exclude homosexuals, and especially gay males, from parenting, or historically feature only “effeminate” gay males or “feminine” lesbians as good parents. It is significant progress, then, that the newspapers and newsmagazines here reproduce not just positive narratives and pictures of same-sex parenting, but also that gay males are featured as often as lesbians. However, the representations only go so far in challenging conventions since the male-female dichotomy remains verbally, and in some ways also visually, indisputable, at it has often been reestablished in past gender and sexuality discourse (Brookey, 2001; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Halberstam, 1998; Kessler, 1998; Ramet, 1996). Consequently, this illustration leaves in place a binding script that Haraway (1996) calls, “the durable essentials of the sexual division of labor, male-headed heterosexual families, and child-laden females” (p. 347).

Put another way, many of the print news representations of same-sex parents in this study are still dangerously patriarchal, heterosexist visions of parenthood because stereotypical notions of “masculine” versus “feminine” parents are severely upheld. Vavrus (2002) saw similar mediated regulations when analyzing seemingly subversive news media accounts of “Mr. Moms,” otherwise known as stay-at-home (straight) dads. She concludes that these stories simply switch the sexes of the parents who, through their public and private practices, ultimately uphold the idealized nuclear family... and the paternal dominance within it,” what she consequently terms the “domestication of

patriarchy” (p. 353). In these stories about same-sex parenting, then, I suggest the domestication of patriarchy occurs and further domesticates heterosexism so that gay male and lesbian parents do not gravely threaten gender norms. Walters (2001) also observes this swap in portrayals of same-sex parenting and its relative powerlessness in straight society, noting that, “the parents might be June and June (instead of June and Ward Cleaver) but — not to worry America — it’s all the same anyway” (p. 216). Although the visuals do not work strongly on their own to reestablish this traditional gendered notion of the division of labor between parents, their reiterations of proper performances for “masculinity” and “femininity,” and, in particular, their extra policing of what gay fathers look like, simultaneously continue to protect the male-female binary. That the photographs generally show only two people parenting, who resemble any other (straight) parenting couple, further puts a straight face on same-sex parenting, especially when coupled with the constraining texts.

#### “...The Picture of Suburban Serenity”:

##### Same-Sex Parents as (Straight, White, Middle-Class) Suburbanites

From the alignment of men with culture and women with nature to the micro-politics of homebound post-feminism to the assumed urbanness of homosexuality, critics make connections between different regional spaces, sites, and spheres with specific ideologies of gender and sexuality (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Cassidy, 2001; Dow, 1996; Halberstam, 2005; Ortner, 1974/1996; Phillips, Watt, & Shuttleton, 2000; Plumwood, 1998; Rubin, 1984; Vavrus, 2002). Correspondingly, scenes that are highlighted in the gay parenting newspaper and newsmagazine stories resignify homosexuality and what it

means to be a gay parent. The suburban home, the gay community event, and the courtroom are the three geographies most frequently made present in this discourse, sometimes all at once in one article but to different degrees. Overwhelmingly, however, the site of a middle-to-upper class suburban home or neighborhood in any-town America is the environment verbally and visually emphasized over all the others.

Major textual identifiers of this overarching context include town bylines at the beginning of each article, narratives and photos about child-filled neighborhoods and “modest” homes both in and surrounding the interviews with children and their parents, and citations from 2000 U.S. Census data on the growing pervasiveness of gays, and especially gays raising children, residing in counties throughout the country. In general, visual suburban codes come across most frequently through the background of the photographs that reveal a room in a house or a neighborhood, settings which are often additionally confirmed by explicit location-themed text in accompanying photo captions. An anecdote early on in a May 24, 2004 article in *U.S. News & World Report* exemplifies this textually reiterated suburban location:

A trio of neighborhood boys pedal their bikes up the driveway, say hello to the moms, and ask Madison [the child of the lesbians] if they can use her bike ramp.

The boys cruise up and down the ramp’s shallow slopes while Madison continues bouncing [on a pogo stick], the picture of suburban serenity. (Gilgoff, 2004)

Simple background-related narratives also typify this “Middle America” setting, like the following that was published on August 16, 2004 in New York’s *Newsday*: “Cameryn and Jelley go to work every day, shuttle [their children] back and forth from home to sports practices and friends’ houses, and sit down with them most nights for dinner”

(Burson, 2004). A sentence about stay-at-home gay dad Mike McCarns in a January 10, 2005 *USA Today* story also constructs this suburban scenario when explaining, “Instead of managing accounts, [McCarns] now spends his time organizing play groups and taking his children to the supermarket” (Armour, 2005). Similarly, a March 7, 2004 story in the *Boston Globe* describes one gay-headed family from Exeter, N.H. as living in “a modest brown-shingle bungalow” with “three cats, two hamsters, and 10 sea monkeys” and another family with same-sex parents as residing in a “long gray bungalow in a suburb outside of Boston with a pool...” (Jacobs, 2004). This geographic account is practically replicated three days later in a different national paper, *USA Today*, that describes the house of two lesbian moms in Silver Springs, Md.: “a modest, three-bedroom home complete with dog, cat and enough toys stacked around to stock a small store” (Peterson, 2004).

Typical suburban locations dominate the setting of almost all of the photographic images of gay and lesbian parents and their children as well. Specifically, pictures are most often of the gay-headed families inside their private houses, generally in family-centered communal spaces like living rooms and kitchens, as well as often in bedrooms (e.g., Armour, 2005; Figures 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; O’Hara, 2004; Peterson, 2004; Salamon, 2005). These particular scenes are identifiable by visible artifacts in the pictures that are usually associated with those home front areas. For instance, a big couch and coffee table is in the foreground of a March 10, 2004 *USA Today* shot that also includes, in the background, a television and a framed picture on the wall (Figure 2). Here, then, is the classic contemporary family hearth, the living/TV room. Even the caption says the family gathers in their “home in suburban Washington, D.C” (Peterson, 2004). Another “family

room” photograph is on the jump page of an August 16, 2004 article in *Newsday* where lesbian mothers Corinne Lesko and Denise Jelley are shown sitting on a couch in the background while their children, Hunter, Ashley, and Cameryn, sit on the floor in front of them. Situated in the back right hand corner of the shot is a wooden bookshelf holding books and picture frames. (Figure 19). Similarly, a May 24, 2004 shot in *U.S. News & World Report* has in its back right-hand corner a candle-holder on the ledge of a bar that overlooks a room with what looks to be the top of household appliances like a refrigerator (Figure 3). Accordingly, this photo features the kitchen or hall entrance area of, as the adjoining caption states, “their suburban home” (Gilgoff, 2004).

The few times that gay families are not depicted in their homes, they are often instead visually situated in their neighborhoods, though frequently not even physically far from their houses. Environmental and man-made building construction objects signify these outside scenes. Manifesting this is the lead shot to the May 24, 2004 *U.S. News & World Report* story which portrays two gay fathers and their daughter on their front walkway heading toward the road in their neighborhood. Explicating this specific situation are small bushes and a tricycle in the foreground, and, in the background, cars parked on the side of the road and in front of other houses and trees (Figure 8). Likewise, a January 10, 2005 photo in *USA Today* shows two gay fathers taking a walk with their son and dog on what appears to be a remote, tree-lined brick path (Figure 12). Although there are no other visual codes here to tell how close in proximity this family is to their own house and neighborhood, the family is still depicted pretty much alone in the privacy of the woods, minus a vague, blurry, potentially human body distant in the background.

As a result of these repetitive illustrations, same-sex parenting is mostly confined to the suburban home front.

All of these verbal and visual suburban portrayals of gay parenting are promising since they depict gays and lesbians literally living successfully in smaller non-metropolitan, and often conservative, communities nationwide. Langford (2000) argues similarly about the subversive possibilities of the (homo)sexual politics of suburbia due to the opposite general belief that the suburbs are topographies of conformity and bourgeois essentialism. Additionally, there has always been the reigning homophobic logic of small-town terror of contact with (homosexual) otherness (Halberstam, 2005, pp. 13, 32) and the representation of sites beyond the metropolis as desexualized (Phillips, Watt & Shuttleton, 2000). For example, Sloop (2000b) identifies the regularity of rural disciplining of (homo)sexuality when identifying metaphors of “corruption in the heartland” that circulated around the life and murder of a transgendered person in Nebraska named Brandon Teena. Put another way, throughout time and in mass media, urban zones and cities have been the model environment, when there is one, for homosexuals (Halberstam, 2004; Phillips, Watts & Shuttleton, 2000; Rubin, 1984). As a result, I suggest that the portrayals of gays in suburbia in this study of contemporary news texts, just by their mediated visibility in such a mainstream heterosexist or traditionally non-sexual demographic, have resistive potential to defy traditional understandings of homosexuality and space.

However, the powerful potential of these depictions of gay and lesbian parents to trouble the conventions of such normative territory are reconfigured by the print news texts in ways that accommodate same-sex parents while reestablishing heteronormative

sensibilities. Specifically, same-sex parents are mitigated by their apparent sameness in middle-class status, whiteness, and (almost) invisible gayness. As evident in the verbal and visual examples above, the majority of the illustrations explicitly highlight typical middle-class finances and lifestyles of gay-headed families, ranging from the material goods they buy to the neighborhoods in which they spend the majority of their time. Accordingly, this version of gay parenting repeats already established formulas for *any* middle-to-upper-middle class American family. To say it differently, not once are gay and lesbian parents and their children portrayed as, for instance, poor or often owning any distinctively gay items. Nor are they regularly found living outside of the domestic and private suburban sphere.

Also of note is that racial or ethnic textual references are extremely rare in the print stories, in which the only explicit references to race involve African Americans (Fernandez, 2004; Ruiz, 2004; Texeira, 2004). The few stories that feature black gays in their narratives all center on a recently released demographic study about black gay families that showed the largest concentrations lived in major metropolitan cities. In other words, if African-American same-sex parents are called forth by the discourse at all, they are only represented as urban residents. For example, city bylines and regional descriptions about various black gay couples and parents signal metropolitan scenes, such as in an October 10, 2004 piece in *Newsday* that leads with “J.E. Miles, an HIV counselor who lives in *Harlem* [my emphasis]” and an October 7, 2004 story in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* also starts with an anecdote about Mike Slaughter, who “lives a comfortable life in southwest Atlanta” (Fenandez, 2004). But at the same time, race is explicitly depicted through all of the images in the news reports. White same-sex parents

(including those possibly of Hispanic or other light-skinned origins) significantly receive the most photographic media coverage, followed by a few pictures featuring African-Americans (e.g., Burson, 2004; Figures 2, 10, 13; Ruiz, 2004). The racial makeup of the people photographed is visible primarily by their skin tones since uniquely multicultural and racial context is missing from *all* of the shots and almost all of their captions. Unlike the metropolitan-based verbal discourse surrounding black gay-headed households, however, African-Americans are not visibly positioned in one specific scene.

Nevertheless, their settings are just either urban, such as the picture of a black gay male sitting on a “city stoop” in Harlem with his teenage nephew (Figure 10), or suburban, such as the aforementioned representations of domesticated (white) gay parenting life that sometimes feature an African-American gay or lesbian parent. Thus the logic goes that to be black and a gay parent, one is for the most part contained inside the cities and thus outside the normalcy of suburbia. Overall, then, the ubiquity of white (gay) suburban households is naturalized by the verbals and visuals in the newspapers and newsmagazines analyzed in this study. White (gay) parenting, in turn, is assimilated into, and as, the nuclear familial norm.

Contextual references to scenes of or statistics about the gay community that appear somewhere in the text of the majority of news stories further regulate the progressiveness of portraying same-sex parenting in suburbia. This disciplining occurs even as the inclusion of distinctively gay context represents a fairly progressive move for contemporary news media in illustrating gayness. In particular, articles often feature informative paragraphs about gay-themed events and organizations like COLAGE, quotations from leaders of regional and national gay advocacy groups, and supporting



materials such as the 2000 U.S. Census data which publicly acknowledged the increasing numbers of homosexuals and gay families in the country. A section about a third of the way into an October 18, 2004 article in *Newsweek* depicts the commonly cited gay community event:

The Internet has enabled [kids of gays] to connect, sparking a ‘coming out’ of an identity group that calls itself Queer Spawn. An advocacy group, COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), says its membership has climbed 19 percent this year. The success of Family Week in Provincetown — 3,000 members of gay-headed homes gathered there this summer — has spurred a similar convocation of kids of gays.... (Johnson, Piore, & Dorfman, 2004)

Likewise, the growing presence of homosexuality in all corners of the country is frequently explicated by 2000 U.S. Census data on the nationwide rise in same-sex households, including extra reporting commentary about how the Census figures were probably even higher due to the historical reluctance of minority populations like gays and lesbians to identify themselves as such on Census questionnaires (e.g., Adams, 2004; Armour, 2005; Bronson, 2004b; Gilgoff, 2004; Johnson, Piore, & Dorfman, 2004; Kim, 2004; Miranda, 2004; Peterson, 2004).

Here and in narratives from other news reports like them, large gay communities and their subsequent gatherings are recognized, thus positing an empowering picture of gays and lesbians and their kids as more and more an official citizenry of the country, especially in non-metropolitan parts of the country. This is a far cry from gays who were traditionally presented in mass media devoid of any gay social context, a homophobic restriction in the mediated history of homosexuality (Alwood, 1996; Dow, 2001; Fejes &

Petrich, 1993; Gross, 2001; Walters, 2001). But, on the other hand, specific spatial and situational rhetoric, as well as the broader dramatic news frame of these gay contextual statements, lessen their ability to destabilize stereotypically straight suburbia.

For instance, in the *Newsweek* article mentioned earlier, the growing gay-centered organizations are primarily situated in far off, private, and “safe” locations like the Internet rather than commonly *in* the everyday public or suburban spheres. Many other stories handle the inclusion of gay communities like this, thus relegating gayness to the episodic sidelines. Likewise, if and when a photograph includes any “gay community” items or people, those signifiers are also marginalized, such as, for instance, the subtlety of a rainbow flag as it hangs from the side of a house in the very far right corner of the lead shot accompanying a May 24, 2004 U.S. News & World Report article (Figure 8). In a similar fashion, the seemingly authorizing U.S. Census data is restricted by a surrounding debate-like narrative structure in the stories. Specifically, the U.S. Census information is usually positioned right before, following, or between other contentious paragraphs on the controversial social scientific studies and politics of gay familial life. An October 18, 2004 article in the *Salt Lake Tribune* demonstrates this reappearing pattern by countering a divisive statement about Utah’s “wrangling over” its proposed marriage amendment on the November ballot with a citation of Census facts that “Between 168,000 and 180,000 gay and lesbian couples are raising children nationwide... Utah boasts some of the highest percentages of children being raised in same-sex couple households in the country” (Adams, 2004). Shortly, the story turns to Drs. Stacey and Biblarz’s study on children of gays that found no difference from those of straights. This is then followed by a quotation from the director at the conservative

policy think tank, The Heritage Foundation, who did not support Dr. Stacey's work. As a result, the print news media's argument then counter-argument structure treats the politically powerful 2000 U.S. Census information in ways that discipline gays and lesbians and their children back into a less visible and conventionally minority status.

In sum, the repeated representations of middle-class, white, and suburban gay families limit notions of same-sex parenting by upholding the regulatory (hetero)sexist, classist, and racist politics of the suburbs. In other words, gay and lesbian parents are depicted as living just like straight suburbanites because they are, as Shugart (2003) notices about contemporary gay sitcom settings, "appropriately" grafted onto established and conventional heterosexual communities and context. Gross (2001) warns against this reduction of gay difference to heterosexual sameness, otherwise known as assimilation, because it "requires muting of a group's distinctive coloring in order that they might blend into the fabric of the mainstream" (p. xvi). In this case, then, the complexity and diversity of gay and lesbian communities, ranging from lower class gay-headed families to black same-sex parents in small towns to distinctively gay familial cultural context in the suburbs, are silenced. Instead, what reigns through these news reports is a middle-class, white, heterosexual, domesticated model of gay parenting.

"Almost Married... With Children":

(Controversial) Politics of Same-Sex Marriage and Parenting

The reporting on legal current events concerning gay familial rights, ranging from progressive and oppressive laws on custody to adoption to marriage, is a potentially progressive yet simultaneously constraining verbal component of the newspaper and

newsmagazine articles analyzed for this study. Such information is mentioned or frequently even a focal point of the majority of articles, in part evident by the large spaces these narrative sections take up on the pages and the multiple experts interviewed to react to them (e.g., Burson, 2004; Eliasberg, 2004; Healy & McIntire, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Lawrence, 2004; Marech 2004; Ordonez, 2004; Rich, 2004; Turnbull, 2004). Due to the visibility of electoral and judicial politics in these texts, children of same-sex parents, gay parenting, and homosexuality in general are figured in very public settings like the courtroom; moreover, they are politically charged portrayals that naturalize the politicization of homosexuality. In many of these texts, pro-gay rights are regularly provided a platform, another powerful instance of mediated visibility for gays and lesbians. For example, a September 6, 2004 *San Francisco Chronicle* story about co-parenting interviews the executive director of the legal organization National Center for Lesbian Rights, who claims that today fewer gays and lesbians are modeling the traditional family structure and are still having successful families (Marech, 2004). Thus here and in other examples, alternative forms of (gay) parenting are explicitly avowed. It is also noteworthy that a few photographic images accompanying the news reports also portray the public sphere politics of gay familial life by picturing, for instance, a lesbian mother with her two children sitting in the hall of a courtroom after she was granted full parenting rights (Figure 20).

Nonetheless, I argue that the recurring dramatic layouts and heated language of these political representations mitigate the progressive potential of these texts. In a similar fashion, editorial commentary in captions beneath the few explicitly political pictures and adjoining a handful of other everyday images of same-sex parents in their

homes and neighborhoods antagonizes the politics of homosexuality. Importantly, the pictures of these politicized gay rights activities are also heavily outnumbered by the photographic images analyzed earlier in this study, thus limiting their resistance. As Gross (2001) says about the prejudice underlying past potentially liberating political appearances of gays in mass media, they are almost always “invariably in the context of some *controversy* [my emphasis] centering on [gay] right[s] to pursue [their] lives in ways that heterosexuals take for granted” (p. 252). Similarly, the contentious news discourses and captions here frame children of gays and lesbians, and same-sex parenting, as *legitimately* “controversial” subject matter that requires political debate.

Some textual examples of this are in the reappearing explicit military metaphors used by reporters and their sources in the stories to discuss the politics of gay-headed households, including words like “bipolar,” “divided,” “union and division,” “cultural divide,” “debate,” “revolution,” “under attack,” “policies blasted,” “clashing ideologies,” “culture war,” and “battlegrounds” (e.g., Burson, 2004; Eliasberg, 2004; Lawrence, 2004; Peterson, 2004; Piccalo, 2004; Ruiz, 2004; Turnbull, 2004). Photo captions, when they mention politics, often replicate this negative depiction, as in an August 16, 2004 *Newsday* caption explaining that two gay fathers “try to shelter their son, Stefan, from the political debate over marriage for same-sex couples” (Burson, 2004). Gay familial rights, then, are disciplined by dramatic, combative rhetoric and logic that heightens their violence and opposition no matter if they earn legislative authority or not. An additional instance of this expression of the strongly opposed socio-politics of gay familial life appears in several early sentences in a March 10, 2004 story in *USA Today*:

But there is certainly controversy. As President Bush calls for a constitutional

amendment to ban gay marriages, a pivotal issue in the culture wars is getting renewed attention: gay parenting. Buried beneath the debate on gay marriage is the question of just what being raised in a gay family means for children.

(Peterson, 2004)

Alwood (1996) notices similar heterosexist contextual regulation in the history of gays in mainstream news media, pointing out that reporters wrote “about the rights and dignities of gays as controversial topics that require ‘balance,’” which in turn literally “provide[d] a platform for those who want[ed] to castigate gays and lesbians” (pp. 323-324).

One such legitimated contemporary forum of prejudice against gays and lesbians occurs in an October 17, 2004 story in the *Chicago Sun-Times* that cites U.S. Senate Candidate Alan Keyes as saying, at a rally for an Illinois constitutional amendment denying recognition and benefits to gay civil unions, that “incest was inevitable for children raised by gay couples” (Jackson, 2004). Many other articles include these homophobic articulations, though generally less explicitly, such as in reporting that shifts back and forth between episodic hard news about empowering same-sex marriage ceremonies to the discriminatory trials of gay parenting. For example, a March 19, 2004 article in the *New York Times* counters and recounts the acceptance of gay politics. It includes an enfranchising story of two moms, Feidda Damast and Birch Early, getting married on the city streets of San Francisco, followed by a less heartening tale of another child with lesbian mothers who would not talk about her family in school because she was embarrassed and scared (Brown, 2004). In conclusion, controversial news frames and captions textually regulate same-sex parents and their children by never allowing them to be political without problems or by dwelling on their (homosexual) home lives as

a force to be reckoned with. At the same time, the politics of gay-headed families are rarely even evident in visual form. Thus, as an addendum to what Gross (2001, p. 16) claims, gay parents are still never shown as just plain (gay) families even as judges, politicians, and social activists publicly promote gay rights.

The political events that receive the most media coverage further regulate gay parenting and reproduce heteronormativity. Although a varied sample of corporate, state, and federal familial legislative acts is featured in the discourse for this study, the topics that receive the majority of verbal press are state and federal marriage amendments defining marriage between a man and a woman and unprecedented state court cases granting, and banning, gay adoptions and custody rights. These two broad political issues are indeed important equal rights concerns for the gay and lesbian movement that need mainstream recognition. But, they are certainly not the only policies that affect same-sex parents and their children in contemporary U.S. society. Similar to the rhetorical force of the specific scientific research study that dominates the news texts, these particular gay politics of marriage and child-rearing fill these news reports because they fit easily into traditional straight logics of the familial institution, even as their very mediated presence and sometimes legislative successes challenge them. Namely, the trope of (heterosexual) unification for procreation is reconstituted by the politics in these narratives. This common sense equation of marriage with having children, and vice versa, comes across in the narrow selection of legislation receiving publicity, as well as in the language used by reporters and sources that directly links these legislations.

For instance, this marriage-for-parenting theme appears in the lead of a July 2, 2004 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* when it says,

Having been together for nine years, San Jose couple Rich and Michael Butler married on Feb. 13 at San Francisco's City Hall... and are the proud papas of a 4-month-old adopted girl named Emily. Parenthood, Rich Butler said... is 'just awesome.' (Ford, 2004)

Similarly, reporter commentary and a gay father's quotation in an August 16, 2004 article in *Newsday* suggests just being parents practically makes a couple married: "Whether they're ever able to get married, LePlante and Frost said their mission is to nurture and care for their children. 'We live our lives like we are married,' Frost said" (Burson, 2004). A teenage daughter of a lesbian equally assumes being a child with same-sex parents relates to gay couples wanting to marry when she says in a March 7, 2004 article in the *Boston Globe* that she is "all for gay marriage...But the fact is that one-half the world is for it, and the other half is not. And that half is going to make it really hard for the children" (Jacobs, 2004). Additionally, a May 8, 2004 *Boston Globe* piece starts with the following anecdote about two lesbian women adopting children and hoping to get married: "Lynnette Sinclair and Michelle Cote started to build a family last November when they adopted a baby girl, Alana, from Eastern Europe. The next steps, they hoped, would be to marry in a small ceremony when same-sex marriage is legalized in Massachusetts and then to adopt a sibling for their daughter" (Ordonez, 2004). Similarly, a November 14, 2004 article in the New Orleans' *Times-Picayune* describes a baby boy's Jewish naming ceremony followed next by a narrative about a Rabbi performing a commitment ceremony for the boy's two gay fathers (Bronston, 2004a). Reporter commentary in an October 10, 2004 *Newsday* article even more explicitly aligns gay families with the legalization of gay marriage when it says, "The data on black gay



families with children shed new light on the nation's ongoing debate over legalizing gay marriage" (Texeira, 2004).

In short, this political discourse portrays same-sex marriage as solely necessarily for the sake of raising children. Consequently, gay parenting becomes rhetorical evidence of the need for gay marriage, and vice versa. Although these depictions often advocate the sociopolitical advancement of gays and lesbians, they narrowly rely upon conventional heterosexist reasonings of kinship. Such logic excludes the affirmation of alternative models of parenting and familial arrangements that involve, for instance, same-sex (and straight) parents who do not desire to get married or gays and lesbians (and straights) who want to marry but not to have children.

#### "...Odd Men and Women [Parents] Out in a Straight World": Conclusion

The newspapers and newsmagazines analyzed here, as Gross (2001) acknowledges about modern mainstream media in general, are "shifting the terms of our public conversation toward a greater acknowledgement of [sexual] diversity" (pp. xvi-xvii). For some of the first times in the history of popular culture, gays and lesbians are represented *as same-sex parents* and their children represented *as children of same-sex parents*. Specifically, the dynamics of gay family life portrayed in these stories and photographs often include same-sex parents and their children living happily and successfully in suburban regions around the country. This is a novel and positive illustration of homosexuality that subverts common sense beliefs that gayness and parenting, as well as gayness and suburbia, mutually exclude one another. Gay fathers and lesbian mothers who are physically affectionate with their children are even regularly

rendered visible by the verbal and visual discourse looked at for this study. Moreover, pro-gay politics, such as unprecedented court rulings legalizing gay adoption and custody rights, are frequently given a forum in the news media.

However, these new visions of the (gay) family often still recycle old negative stereotypes of homosexuality. Furthermore, they repeat heteronormative, heterosexist, sexist, classist, and racist understandings of gender and sexuality, translating again to sensibilities of those who are (mostly) white, entirely middle and upper middle classes, and publicly heterosexual. In particular, gay and lesbian romance is recoded by narratives and photographs as solely for the sake of raising children, thus constraining same-sex parenting to the heterosexist ideal of coupling for procreation. Relatedly, gays and lesbians are consistently depicted as performing traditional male/female parenting roles in twos, often to the extent of reestablishing rigid patriarchal relations. Additionally, same-sex parents are shown over and over again as middle-class, overwhelmingly white, and almost always dwellers of typical suburban homes and neighborhoods. Strikingly absent from these representations, then, are people from a different class and racial background, and crucially, any same-sex parents who are distinctively gay everyday or *in* the suburban sphere. Finally, discussions surrounding current legal events that affect gay-headed households talk about gay politics in a counter argumentative manner, which lessens any potential threat of same-sex parenting. The texts also repetitively foreground and explicitly conflate the politics of gay parenting with gay marriage. This further reconstructs gay and lesbian parents under conventionally heteronormative terms.

According to these news reports, then, gay parenting is just like straight (white, middle-class) parenting after all. Fejes & Petrich (1993) argue that these “more subtle

images of heterosexually-defined homosexuality are equally damaging to affirmative gay and lesbian identity and politics” (p. 412). Put another way, at the same time that same-sex parenting becomes more and more an official part of America’s mediated and familial tableaux, gay and lesbian parents are still being represented as “odd men and women [parents] out in a straight world” (Gross, 2001, p. 257).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE RHETORIC AND POLITICS OF PRINT NEWS MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

#### OF SAME-SEX PARENTING: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

CHILDREN OF LESBIANS AND GAYS EVERYWHERE  
— Banner at 2000 Gay Pride Parade in Minneapolis, MN

Homosexuality and parenting are no longer mutually exclusive in popular discourse. In addition to the texts looked at for this study, representations of gay and lesbian familial life appear in current broadcast news reports around the country. Meanwhile, fictional portrayals of gay and lesbian parents and their children periodically pop up in today's major Hollywood movies and prime-time television shows as well. For instance, from early 2004 to late 2005, at least 30 television news segments airing nationally on America's main cable networks feature, in some fashion, same-sex parenting.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, a minor plot in *The Family Stone*, a film that hit theatres during the Christmas season of 2005, includes a gay son who adopts a child with his partner. Also, a February 26, 2006 episode of *Grey's Anatomy*, a top rated hour-long medical comedy/drama on ABC, features two gay fathers whose son is admitted to the emergency room. Clearly, there is a new and proliferating public presence of depictions in U.S. mainstream mass media that recognize gays and lesbians as parents.

My analysis of major U.S. newspapers and newsmagazines from early 2004 to late 2005 reveals, however, that a quantitative increase in the visibility of gays and lesbians as parents does not necessarily translate to unmitigated progress. Rather, what appear are rhetorically disciplined distinctions regarding what will and will not count as recognizable same-sex parents and children from gay-headed households. Consequently I argue that, for the most part, homophobic, (hetero)sexist, and heteronormative

constructions of gay familial life are repeated time and again in the print news reports. At the same time, challenges to these dominant ideologies discursively emerge, but these resistances, I suggest, are tenuous at best. In what follows, I briefly summarize the analysis of the previous chapters and then extensively discuss why, and in what specific ways, these ideological strategies also are rhetorical. My findings, then, not only reveal the hegemonic power relations of how same-sex parenting is “put into discourse,” but they also show how these discourses are used *rhetorically* to support those particular power relations. I conclude with the implications of this study for the politics of the contemporary gay and lesbian movement and future studies of sexuality.

#### ‘Families Like Mine?’: The (Straight) Rhetoric of Same-Sex Parenting

In Chapter Two, I argue that the print news reports are verbally and visually dominated by a focus on *the children* of gays and lesbians instead of on the parents themselves. Same-sex parenting, then, is reduced to concerns of the children, which overlooks the complexity of gay and lesbian parental experiences and positions the children as the yardstick for evaluating their parents. That an overwhelming majority of the children featured also aggressively claim their heterosexuality additionally marginalizes homosexuality. Put differently, what mostly matters about same-sex parenting appears to be the straight children, who function as the means to judge the successes and/or failures of their (gay) parents. When children of gays and lesbians are in the press spotlight, my study also finds that they are primarily depicted within four frames: they are social scientific experiments, they grapple with their “secret” of having

same-sex parents, they are compulsively heterosexual, and, relatedly, they perform proper gender.

Although the articles and photographs in this study are, as I mention, dominated by images of the children in gay-headed families, how the news discourse renders same-sex parenting visible on its own plane is also important to the ideological meanings in and the forces of these texts. Accordingly, Chapter Three documents the patterns of the printed press as it represents gay and lesbian parents *themselves* and the contexts of their familial life. A close analysis here also reveals homophobic, (hetero)sexist, and heteronormative depictions, as well as the presence of sexism, classism, and racism. The main narratives that thread through the news portrayals of same-sex parents and their societal milieus are the following: they do not show physical affection for each other but instead direct their care toward (raising) children, they enact traditional male/female genders and gendered parenting roles, and they overwhelmingly look like and live the lives of white, middle-to-upper-class, suburbanites. Lastly, current legislation concerning gay familial rights is reported on but always described as controversial, and the political issues of gay parenting and gay marriage are continuously conflated.

In addition, the analyses in Chapters Two and Three analyze how the aforementioned disciplined ideologies of hetero/homosexuality (and sometimes sexism, classism, and racism) come across through verbals and visuals, both separately and as mixed media. Put simply, the images of same-sex parenting in the texts and in the photographs continuously complement but also contradict each other, adding to the hegemonic function of this mass mediated discourse.

As Wander (1983) advocates about modern criticism, “[it] reflects the existence of crisis, acknowledges the influence of established interests and the reality of alternative world-views, and commands rhetorical analyses not only of the actions implied but also of the interests represented” (p. 120). Concurrently, this study foremost brings to light the contesting grid of intelligibility of gays and lesbians, particularly as parents, as they are for some of the first times in history rendered visible as such in today’s popular printed press. In short, this representational field is fraught with homophobic, heterosexist, and heteronormative interests about same-sex parenting. Sexism, classism, and racism also underpin this new regime of gay familial visibility. At the same time, however, there are breaking points to these dominant ideologies, where notions of homosexuality appear to transform, only to be disciplined again.

Although this case study emphasizes the ideological functions of the representations of same-sex parenting, that function is, of course, inseparable from the rhetorical appeals that make these representations persuasive to their presumed audiences. Distinctively, my findings show the specific verbal, and, simultaneously, visual strategies mass media deploy to influence mainstream contemporary America’s cultural perceptions of gay and lesbian parents. In other words, with my analysis I reveal, and will explicate in-depth below, the particulars of the persuasive effect of this situated communication for its audiences.

In general it appears that these texts strive to explain gay-headed households to a presumed straight adult American audience that is also understood to be, primarily, men and women engaged in parenting who are middle-to-upper class, white, and married. As a result, my analyses mostly reveal that the discourse tries to answer, through verbal and

visual forms, if and how gay and lesbian parents and their children resemble and/or differ from the families of the readers of the discourse. In other words, the main questions answered are, “How are these families like mine?” and “How are these families not like mine?” Additionally, my rhetorical study illustrates that, as the discourse goes to lengths to deal with those questions and their answers, it simultaneously negotiates them with economic and production conventions of news media.

For example, the focus on the (straight) children works by resonating with the knowledges of hetero/homosexuality and family life shared by readers and viewers of these publications. It is estimated that only 10 percent of the total U.S. population is gay or lesbian, making a majority of Americans heterosexual. Most of the people coming into contact with the national mainstream newspapers and newsmagazines looked at for this study, then, are probably heterosexual and are presumed to be so by media producers. Demographic profiles of buyers of these particular publications additionally report that at least a third of their adult readers have children (e.g., “Newsweek...,” 2006; “Profile of Daily Boston...,” 2006; “AJC Readership...,” 2006). As a result, heterosexual and child-based rhetoric potentially appeases and consequently draws in the specific readership of straight parents. As Gross (2001) points out, coverage in modern media often boils down to the bottom line of advertising to (heterosexual) audiences: “[the] audience wants to see its own face reflected on the screen....and the audience that matters most is overwhelmingly... heterosexual” (p. 256). Furthermore, this concentration on the child, and in particular a concern for the child’s well-being, is a classic pathos appeal for all audiences, parenting or not, identified centuries ago by Aristotle.



Moreover, such a focus introduces the topic of gay and lesbian parenting, which inherently might challenge the heterosexist ideologies of readers, in a manner that maintains the needed newsworthiness of the news stories but simultaneously does not unsettle audience beliefs. Commercial conventions demand that media cover the cutting edge of society to retain a market as well as to increase it. Because gay and lesbian parenting is presumed to be an unfamiliar familial situation to the average heterosexual reader, then such a “new” family story receives a lot of play in the press. But the edginess of mass media is a fine line. In order to be profitable, media cannot “be too far out in front of most people (especially those in [the] target audience), but not too far behind, either” (Gross, 2001, p. 258). Thus, because this notable topic of same-sex parenting might disturb sensibilities of the audience, the narratives and photographic images face a rhetorical problem of having to present the troubling information in “safe” ways. I argue it is the site, and the literal sight, of a heterosexual child as a synecdoche for gay familial life that partially attempt to solve this. In other words, emphasizing the (straight) children (of gays) is not only an age-old accepted assertion, but simultaneously a moderate and (straight) audience-appropriate support to explaining the more extreme and newsworthy argument of same-sex parenting.

Additionally, such simple verbal and visual lenses are easy, eye-catching, and powerful formats to portray and interpret personhoods that are multifaceted and involve multiple people. News is dominated by individualistic reporting and photojournalistic conventions that view complex issues through simple, single perspectives. For example, scholars suggest the photograph is an effective means to package pieces of the world (e.g., Deluca & Demo, 2000; Sontag, 1973). Consequently, I argue that the personalized

stories about children and the pictures of them being raised by gays and lesbians seek to capture readers and viewers through these straightforward snapshots. As Jamieson (1988) suggests about the persuasiveness of memorable phrases and memorable pictures in modern media, “synoptisiz[ing] an issue in clear, concise, dramatic statements [and photos] are more likely to be seen and heard... creat[ing] potent enthymemes” (pp. 91-97).

Depicting the children as social scientific experiments, I suggest, is also a productive rhetorical pattern, not only because it appeals to the assumed dominant ideologies of hetero/homosexuality and procreation held by readers, but also because it utilizes bio-rhetoric and science to explain the existence of progeny from gay-headed households. Put differently, this representation answers the straight question of how “these children” come into being as well as does so in a way that incorporates the historical authority of science, specifically in discursive understandings of (homo)sexuality (Brookey, 2001; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Foucault, 1978/1990; Haraway, 1996). Reporting on the latest scientific findings, no matter their accuracy, also successfully satisfies market needs and journalistic standards for staying abreast of current events and producing “news.” As Gross (2001) says, “...for a story to be newsworthy, it must contain a break in the usual order of things” (p. 9). Scientific studies are additionally helpful tools for verbally quantifying data on (gay) familial life, a difficult-to-quantify human situation.

Other compelling rhetorical tactics in these texts are the children’s confessions of their (gay parent) secret. Predominantly, they constitute the dominance of the straight audience and its heterosexist interests. But, they are also appropriate for earning

commercial newsworthiness and engaging contemporary American civil rights issues. Moreover, they maximize the persuasive powers of journalism and photojournalism. It is by means of this confessional ritual, then, that I reason reporters handle another rhetorical problem of balancing the presumed heterosexism (and subtle homophobia) of the readers with the economic goals and sociopolitical sensitivities of the press. Specifically, the confessions help explain to straight parents what it is like for (straight) children to experience the “challenges” of a (gay) “coming out.” They also always give agency to the reader *and* onlooker of these admittances, a persuasive technique for privileging audiences with positions of interpretive power. As Foucault (1978/1990) says about confessional discourse, “for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish...” (pp. 61-62). Similarly, Sontag (1973) suggests the camera is a predatory weapon, so to capture people in a photograph turns them into “cooperating” *objects* that can be “symbolically possessed by viewers” (p. 14). She continues, “[the photograph] seduces subjects into disclosing their secrets” (p. 41).

At the same time, this revealing is just an effective formula for making news, since without the public recognition of these children there would not be a “new” familial story to tell the straight market. That these texts simultaneously provide a psychotherapeutic forum for pro-gay (but not too pro-gay) viewpoints puts them even more on the cutting edge of culture and aligns them with ethics of human diversity via, as Cloud (1998) identifies in other case studies of modern sociopolitical discourse, a constructive rhetoric of healing. Furthermore, I suggest individualized packaging of

children's personal problems is also amenable to media conventions in capturing audience attention with, again, one (straight) window into a larger (gay) world.

Emphasizing the children's compulsory heterosexuality and proper gender practices, as well as the traditional gender roles of their parents, are tactful linguistic and photojournalistic approaches. That is, as I state earlier, the majority of readers and viewers of these stories and photographs are presumed to be heterosexual, so they can associate with expressions of straightness and, crucially, its contrast to gayness. What's more, the demographic profiles of buyers of the print publications report that they are either "men" or "women" and that these two populations generally read the press in equal proportions (e.g., "Advertiser Services....," 2006; "Consumer Profile....," 2006; "Newsweek U.S....," 2006). In turn, I argue that when the (photo)texts emphasize stereotypical looks and behaviors of the male/female gender binary, they are in effect tapping into and reinforcing what are presumed to be the most common characteristics and ideologies of their mainstream male and female audience. Photographic images are especially the "ideal medium for naturalizing a repressive structure of signs," specifically to "reproduce normative conceptions of gender....," according to Hariman & Lucaites in their analysis of the iconic "Accidental Napalm" shot (2003, p. 37). For instance, Demo (2000) argues that the classic visual "feminine" characteristics of the Guerrilla Girls help foster audience identification (p. 154).

The date of publication of the news reports influences these stereotypic, and even hyperbolic, representations of sexuality and gender as well. At the time, traditional logics of hetero/homosexuality and gender are under fire by, for instance, pro and anti-gay familial legislation proposed and even passing at the state and national levels of U.S.

government. Additionally, in 2004, advertising to the gay market increased more than the overall percentage growth of ad spending to the full market (Spain, 2005), attesting to the temporal upsurge in new “gay” images of gender and sexuality. I suggest these recent, major, and often contradictory social changes to the political and commercial arenas subsequently affect the forms hetero/homosexuality and gender take here. As Gross (2001) identifies, “shifts [in images of (homo)sexuality] happen in tandem with advertisers’ perceptions of changing values of the ‘prime demographic’” (p. 5). Thus, I reason that reporting on children in gay-headed households rhetorically balances these novel cultural and economic events. Specifically, it reiterates and sometimes aggressively reconfirms conventional tropes of (hetero)sexuality and gender even while presenting challenges to them so as to stay current with American civil rights and trends. I also assert that sex and gender stereotypes are highly legible in, for instance, the visual form. On the contrary, multifaceted or ambiguous sexualities and genders are more difficult to code and decode by average (heterosexual) media producers and consumers.

Gay familial affection, both when it is absent and when it is present, is another rhetorical component of these U.S. newspapers and newsmagazines. These narratives primarily seek to attract a straight parenting audience to same-sex parenting by exposing their similarities in caring for children while at the same time brushing over their sexual behavior differences. To do so, reporters dwell on the hallmarks of the heterosexual family in gay-headed forms, such as having affection for children. Put differently, the fact that intimacy is omitted between gay and lesbian adults but permitted (in PG-rated levels, of course) from them for their children is, I suggest, a strategy for solving the rhetorical problem of how to simultaneously appeal to conservative (homophobic) sentiments of

sexuality *and* report on the apparently happy, loving home lives of gays and lesbians and their children.

As rhetorical texts, the demographic-themed images here further work to represent and sell a certain home and family life to certain media consumers at a certain moment in U.S. history. At the very least, the traditional professional and parenting roles pitched here draw in conservative, capitalist, procreating Americans who possess or aspire to the material status and conventional child-rearing practices of the families represented. Otherwise, however, distinctive semblances of gayness are either missing from or sidelined in these scenes probably to prevent alienation of the assumed majority of straight suburban readers. Presenting white gay and lesbian parents more often than other races is an additional indication of the presumed dominance of Whites in this media audience. When African-Americans are featured, however, I argue this is evidence of how the newspapers and newsmagazines deal with the rhetorical problem of simultaneously providing a newsworthy and culturally sensitive public forum for racial minority interests. Finally, I suggest these “safe” and middle-to-upper class suburban scenes are amenable to basic production and economic conventions in the newsroom, ranging from photojournalistic preferences for taking pictures inside private homes in order to control the environment of a shot to featuring material goods in order to increase advertising.

Textual discussion and pictorial depiction of major current events concerning legalizing and illegalizing gay rights, such as marriage and adoption, are final strategies by which the press seeks to explain same-sex parenting. In general, using legal discourse, like relying on science, is a convincing form of argumentation in a modern deliberative

democratic society like America. It also works well with media market needs to report the latest sociopolitical happenings, however alternative they may be, from various viewpoints. But, in order to prevent upsetting members of the heterosexual audience, the press covers policies that repeat the audience's mainstream straight couple interests, like support of the institution of marriage and its equation with the practice of rearing children. Even U.S. newsroom patterns of historically reporting on and picturing the state and its public sphere add to the reason for these political articulations of gays and lesbians as parents and marital partners.

#### Are We Everywhere?: The (Straight) Politics of Same-Sex Parenting

According to Alwood (1996),

The news media have long been one of the public's few sources of information about homosexuals, given the closeted existence that most have been forced to live to escape social stigma. For much of American society, what people see and hear in the news is what they accept as reality. (p. 6)

Lucaites & Hariman (2001, 2003) equally argue that (photo)journalism plays a special role in conceptualizing contemporary civic life. When considering this study, then, the verbal and visual images of gays and lesbians in the (straight) news are important for articulating, *for heterosexuals*, what it "really" means to be a homosexual who parents in early 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. Yet at the same token, mass mediated portrayals of homosexuality, whether aimed at straight *or* gay audiences, historically are also significant to the development of gay and lesbian identities and to the goals of the gay and lesbian movement at large (e.g., Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Gross, 2001; Kielwasser &

Wolf, 1992; Seidman, 1993; Walters, 2001; Wolf & Kielwasser, 1991). As Walters (2001) points out, “for gays, visibility is wrapped up with identity in more complicated ways than other minorities” (p. 291). For instance, visibility is a key component to being (openly) gay; moreover, the gay and lesbian liberation movement began, and still continues today, as a plight for visibility, as evident by the famous rallying cry, “We Are Everywhere.” Consequently, how gays and lesbians and their children are made (in)visible in these mainstream printed press reports has serious implications for the personal and public politics of same-sex parenting.

First, such major publicity of gay familial life confirms that national print news outlets today are willing to discuss gays and lesbians as parents, a political and commercial territory that has rarely been charted by mainstream (straight) media, at least not in any regularity. Gay familial rights advocates should revel in this growing visibility that might influence comparable coverage by a range of other U.S. news and fictional mass media geared toward persuading a range of audiences. In general, then, there is progress here, both in mass media’s apparent welcoming of new visions as it searches for audiences and in the actual alternative visions of homosexuality that get play. These representations of same-sex parenting, both when they directly refer to real life gay politics or just by their existence in public discourse, are particularly important for adding to the country’s current cultural conversation on legal recognition of gay-headed families.

Specifically, I applaud that these texts often promote gay-headed households via discourse about authoritative scientific studies on the well-adjustment of their children. This is an affirmative visibility for individual gays and lesbians and the gay and lesbian familial movement at large to begin gaining legitimate recognition from the institution of



science as it is translated by popular press. Put simply, straights can see and maybe come to know same-sex parenting as a healthy situation, while gays can also see and hopefully come to know their own sexuality as healthy for parenting. The gay and lesbian familial movement further receives validation from an influential institution. Walters (2001) similarly celebrates when "...[gay and lesbian] families are touted as functional and happy," because at these moments she says "the ground of heterosexual terra firma begins to rock and quake, not knocking foundations but perhaps shifting things about a bit, insisting on a sort of remapping... [an] opening up [of the heterosexual] sense of family" (pp. 296-299).

Likewise, the repeated "coming out" stories and pictures in many ways affirm homosexuality by their very public and often positive, first-hand declaration of gay-headed households. I argue that such a new avowal of gay familial life to and in straight society has the potential to revolutionize and revise (straight) notions of homosexuality *and* heterosexuality. Gross (2001) similarly identifies the progressive politics posed by outing and its related "visible presence of healthy, unapologetic lesbians and gay men:" "it undermines the unquestioned normalcy of the status quo, and it opens up the possibility of making choices that people might never have otherwise considered could be made" (p. 16). Likewise, in looking at social activism by Queer Nation such as when gays dress up as AIDS patients, DeLuca (1999) suggests the "very [visual] presence of the homosexual body is rhetoric of resistance, a refusal to be quarantined" (p. 17).

That gays and lesbians are repeatedly shown here, no matter their sexes, as loving, care-taking, financially successful parents literally living in the suburbs also is resistive. Meaning, these representations of gay familial life in suburbia attempt, for some of the

first times, to challenge the norms traditionally associated with that homophobic and (hetero)sexist domestic sphere. I assert this is a deconstructive queer image that potentially recreates the suburban zone to embrace same-sex parenting. DeLuca (1999) also acknowledges the possibility of such subversive geographic politics in the reterritorialization of ACT UP's kiss-ins, saying they displace heterosexism and normalize homosexuality by making spaces "that are safe for visible, multiple sexualities" (p. 19). The proliferation of these gay familial suburban portrayals in mass media might also add to Berlant & Warner's (1998) queer world-making project and the gay and lesbian movement's mantra that "We Are Everywhere." For example, I reason that gay rights advocates seeking to debunk and redraft debilitating stereotypes of, for instance, gay male pedophiles and metro gay males, could use these tactics to transform (straight and gay) definitions of homosexuality.

However, I also argue that, even though the texts in this analysis at times seriously challenge traditional logics of homosexuality, they in fact regularly re-stabilize them. In turn, these seemingly revolutionary representations of same-sex parenting all too often constrain gay rights rather than empower gays and lesbians. In particular, the focus on (straight) children forefronts only heterosexual children at the expense of sidelining, or even failing to represent, gay youth and parents. Heterosexual children are posited, then, as barometers of their gay and lesbian parents, a representation that is heterosexist because it evaluates same-sex parenting primarily by straights and only for its benefits to straights. This narrow vision of same-sex parenting is extremely problematic for the acceptance of homosexuality at large because it does little to recognize gays and lesbians from their own point of view or for their gayness. Because of the dominance and

repetition of this particular frame across the printed press, I also suggest this *version* comes to signify same-sex parenting *in toto*. Dow (1996) cautions against this same occurrence in the handling of feminism by contemporary prime-time television shows (p. xxiii). In sum, news today seems to swallow the progressive sight of gay-headed households for the main sake of *knowing* heterosexual children in a heterosexual society. I caution, then, that a verbal and visual focus on the children of same-sex parents in mass media might be rhetorically productive for protecting already instituted conservative sexual politics, and even passing new anti-gay legislation, instead of fueling the gay and lesbian familial movement.

Similarly, I suggest the scientific discourse acknowledging the children and their same-sex parents is temporary at best, and at worst, supportive of anti-gay sentiment. In other words, these children and homosexuality at large remain imprisoned, rather than liberated, by the scientific microscope. In particular, being raised by gays and lesbians is still portrayed as biologically and medically *abnormal* in relation to the norm of heterosexually created children and their straight procreating parents. I argue this representation is very problematic for homosexuality ever abandoning its discriminatory outsider status. It also dangerously stabilizes heterosexual lifestyles. Butler (2004) also notices this double-edged politics of traditional modes of legitimization, stating "... the demand to be recognized, which is a very powerful political demand, can lead to new and invidious forms of social hierarchy, to a precipitous foreclosure of the sexual field, and to new ways of supporting and extending state power" (p. 115). Thus, I conclude that rhetorics of science in mainstream news reports are potentially more effective for

reclaiming conventional notions of sexuality and family instead of welcoming new models like same-sex parenting.

The history of mass media's coverage of gay and lesbian "coming outs" and the children's confessions here also reveal serious political dangers of this public but personal therapeutic discourse. What can apparently be emancipating for gays and lesbians, then, can also be the cause of their re-containment as depoliticized, or worse, as re-politicizing heterosexist ideologies. As a result, I question whether representations of children raised by gays and lesbians who share their feelings about the homosexuality of their parents will ever be empowering for gaining or even maintaining gay (familial) rights. As Cloud (1998) and Dow (2001) also caution about such individual, confessional politics practiced in popular culture, it can mask social and political reform. I argue, then, that real life homophobic policies like the banning of adoptions by gays and lesbians may perhaps benefit from this confessional rhetoric.

The symbolic annihilation of gay youth in this news coverage, I suggest, is detrimental to identities of gay adolescents, especially gay children of gays. In other words, since visibility in mass media sets some of the parameters for personhood in today's society, then this specific homosexual subjectivity apparently does not make the cut in (straight or gay) America. What's more, I fear this omission also adds to the re-construction of the following heterosexist version of same-sex parenting: proper gay and lesbian parenting produces straights. Although there is statistical truth to this equation, I argue that gay and lesbian advocates should not celebrate this gay familial situation over other ones that include gay progeny, or they risk reinforcing homophobia themselves. At

its worst, this oppression could cause gay youth to get stuck, again, in a “spiral of silence” (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992).

Likewise, recurring references to idealistically gendered children and their same-sex parents regularly re-inscribe dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality which, as Butler notes about such traditional performances of masculinity or femininity, “foreclose[s] the thinkability of its disruption” (2004, p. 43). Again, I am concerned that gay-headed households are only being *seen* and *known* through very gender-conservative and straight lenses. This representation has limited rhetorical force in the future for appreciating the differences of alternative familial forms and of a diversity of genders and sexualities.

I see similar problems with the intimacy appearing in these texts. Subtle homophobia still reigns as the reports restrict gays and lesbians from being physically affectionate with one another in public while emphasizing affection directed towards their children. Morris & Sloop (2006) recently call for a visual critical mass of man-on-man kissing to re-politicize this exact disciplining of same-sex desire on and off media screens, and I suggest the news reports here seriously stunt this project. In fact, the proliferation of these child-targeted and familial versions of gay and lesbian desire might even reverse the powers of queer juggernauts, not to mention that they already reinstate heteronormative reasons for partnering and procreating.

Furthermore, I caution against entirely celebrating the portraits of these successful “father” and “mother” same-sex parents. All too often they are, in fact, domesticated by patriarchy, (hetero)sexism, and classism, which are disconcerting for the prospects of accepting a diversity of familial forms, and, of course, genders and sexualities. These

representations could not only prohibit the gay and lesbian familial movement from moving forward, but they potentially push the perilous ideologies of anti-gay family, sexism, and classism to the forefront as well. Gross (2001) also notices the destructive sexual and gender politics in frequently stereotypical depictions of homosexuality, saying that they "... encourage the majority to stay on their gender-defined reservation, and try to keep the minority quickly hidden out of sight" (p. 16).

In a similar fashion, I reason that the specific representations of suburbia are dangerous to understandings of gays and lesbians as parents. Same-sex parents are basically shown they can be (middle-to-upper class) suburbanites only if they are not distinctively gay or an ethnicity other than white. This image reeks of assimilation, what Gross (2001) argues is one of the worst fates for minorities like gays entering mainstream America, both on and off screen:

The greatest American bargain offered to successive minorities continues to be: assimilate, but on our terms. By all means, add your flavoring to the national stew, but keep it subtle enough not to threaten the dominance of white middle-class... hetero- normativity.... and we reserve the right to demonize and marginalize those who refuse to play by our rules. (p. 262)

For social progress in the political arena of gay familial life, I assert it is destructive to exclude racial and class minority communities of homosexuality. Doing so just reasserts powers of the majority, which in this case is composed of straight, privileged, whites.

Lastly, the politics receiving the most printed press actually privilege gay rights that are not solely pro-gay because they are grounded in heterosexist and heteronormative notions of family and procreation. In particular, (gay) marriage

emerges as *the only* and *the right* means for legitimating same-sex parenting, and vice versa. Reporting on this legislation is also constantly infused with controversy, debilitating its acceptance. I question, then, whether gay-headed households can be publicized without a combative context that constrains their political empowerment. Additionally, the promotion and conflation of marriage and parenting threatens to render illegitimate gay and lesbian (*and* straight) relationships that do not comply with marriage and having children. As Butler (2003) warns about the effects of recent efforts to win gay marriage legislation, "...sexual practices and relationships that fall outside the purview of [that] sanctifying law become illegible, or worse, untenable and new hierarchies emerge in public discourse" (p. 106).

### Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

In conclusion, I argue that the increasing and new visibilities of gays and lesbians as parents in print news media are indeed proliferating and represent progress of a sort, but they are not so new and improved after all. Instead, these depictions of gay familial life are like many of modern mass media's paradoxical representations of homosexuality, in that they "... overturn traditions and shore them up twenty-two minutes later," as Walters ( 2001, p. 298) notes about some of today's television situation comedies. Therefore, scholars and gay and lesbian advocates should continue to interrogate images of homosexuality in popular discourse, particularly if those images at first appear to do subversive work in revising the mediated and real life history of gays and lesbians. In particular, future research should be done, from a diversity of perspectives, on verbal *and* visual representations of gay and lesbian families in other media, including, for instance,

in broadcast news, in the gay press, in mainstream television and film, and, in bodily forms by pro- (and even anti-) gay social activists. These analyses, on their own and in comparison to each other and previous literature, will help us continue to understand different ways of being and knowing sexuality in contemporary society. As queer critical rhetoric, they will also literally illuminate the various discursive means, or strategies, of those constructed knowledges about sexuality. At the very least, such projects assert the potential queer nature of the world. And specifically in the case of this study, of a life possibly unscripted by conventional sexualities, genders, and families.



## REFERENCES

- Adams, B. (2004, Oct. 18). Family pride: 'Gayby' boom continues despite raging legal rights debate. *Salt Lake Tribune*, p. C1.
- "AJC readership update demographic profile." Retrieved March 17, 2006 from:  
<http://www.ajc.com/services/content/advertising/mediakit.html>
- Alwood, E. (1996). *Straight news: Gays, lesbians, and the news media*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Armour, S. (2004, April 14). Gay marriage debate moves into workplace. *USA Today*, p. 1B.
- Armour, S. (2005, Jan. 10). Gay parents cheer a benefit revolution. *USA Today*, p. 1B-2B.
- Barthes, R. (1964). Rhetoric of the image. In *Image-music-text*. (Stephen Heath Trans.) (pp. 32-52). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Battles, K. & Hilton-Morrow, W. (2002). Gay characters in conventional spaces: *Will & Grace* and the situational comedy genre. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19(1), 87-105.
- Belluck, P. & Liptak, A. Split gay couples face custody hurdles. *New York Times*, p. 18.
- Berlant, L. & Warner, M. (1998). Sex in public. In During, S. (Ed.). (2001). *The cultural studies reader: Second edition*. (pp. 354-367). London: Routledge.
- Brookey, R. A. (2001). Bio-rhetoric, background beliefs, and the biology of homosexuality. *Argumentation & Advocacy*, 37, 171-183.
- Bronston, B. (2004a, Nov. 14). Everyday dads. *Times Picayune*, p. 1.

- Bronston, B. (2004b, Nov. 14). Children of same-sex parents fare well in research. *Times Picayune*, p. 6.
- Brown, P. L. (2004, March 19). For children of gays, marriage brings joy. *New York Times*, p. A1.
- Burson, P. (2004, Aug. 16). Above the noise: Children of gay parents are trying to cope with the debate over legalizing same-sex marriage. *Newsday*, p. B44.
- Butler, J. (1990/1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. (10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1991). Imitation and gender insubordination. In Fuss, D. (Ed.). (1991). *inside/out: Lesbian theories/gay theories*. (pp. 13-31). New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex.'* New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). *A politics of the performative*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Cassidy, M. F. (2001). Cyberspace meets domestic space: Personal computers, women's work, and the gendered territories of the family home. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 18(1), 44-65.
- Cawelti, J. (1985). With the benefit of hindsight: Popular culture criticism. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2, 363-379.
- Cloud, D. (1998). *Control and conciliation in American culture and politics: Rhetoric of therapy*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Condit, C. M. (1994). Hegemony in a mass-mediated society: Concordance about reproductive technologies. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 11, 205-230.

- DeLuca, K. M. (1999). Unruly arguments: The body rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation, *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 36, 9-21.
- DeLuca, K M. & Demo, A. (2000). Imagining nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the birth of environmentalism. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 17(3), 241-260.
- Demo, A. T. (2000). The Guerrilla Girls' comic politics of subversion. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 23(2), 133-156.
- Dominus, S. (2004, Oct. 24). Growing up with mom and mom. *New York Times Magazine*, pp. 69-75, 84, 143-144.
- Doty, A. (1993). *Making things perfectly queer: Interpreting mass culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dow, B. J. (1996). *Prime-Time feminism: Television, media culture, and the women's movement since 1970*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Dow, B. J. (2001). *Ellen*, television, and the politics of gay and lesbian visibility. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 18(2), 123-140.
- Eliasberg, K. (2004, May 16). Legal scholars ask if marriage is the only way to make a family. *Boston Globe*, p. E1.
- Egelko, B. (2005a, Jan. 1). Same-sex couples; Arkansas judge OKs foster care. *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. B1.
- Egelko, B. (2005b, Aug. 23). Court grants equal rights to same-sex parents. *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. A.1.
- Evans, N. (1998). Games of hide and seek: Race, gender and drag in *The Crying Game* and *The Birdcage*. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 18, 199-216.
- Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of*

- sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fejes, F. & Petrich, K. (1993). Invisibility, homophobia and heterosexism: Lesbians, gays and the media. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 10, 396-421.
- Fernandez, D. (2004, Oct. 7). Black same-sex pairs. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. 3F.
- Finnegan, C. A. (2003). *Picturing poverty: Print culture and FSA photographs*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books.
- Fiske, J. (1987). *Television culture*. London: Routledge.
- Ford, D. (2004, July 2). Shooting for love in photo exhibits of gay family life. *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. F11.
- Foucault, M. (1978/1990). *History of sexuality: An introduction: Volume 1*. (Vintage Books ed.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Fuss, D. (Ed.). (1991). Introduction. In *inside/out: Lesbian theories, gay theories*. (pp. 1-10) New York: Routledge.
- Gamson, J. (1998). Talking freaks: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families on daytime talk TV. In Bernstein, M. & R. Reimann (Eds.). (2001) *Queer families, queer politics: Challenging culture and the state*. (pp. 68-86) New York: Columbia University Press.
- Garner, A. (2005). *Families like mine: Children of gay parents tell it like it is*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Gates, G. J. & Ost, J. (2004). *The gay and lesbian atlas*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press.
- Gilgoff, D. (2004, May 24). The rise of the gay family. *U.S. News & World Report*, p. 40.

- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and the unmaking of the new left*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Gross, L. (1991). Out of the mainstream: Sexual minorities and the mass media. In Wolf, M. A. & Kielwasser, A. P. (Eds.). (1991). *Gay people, sex, and the media*. (pp. 19-46) New York: Harrington Press.
- Gross, L. (2001). *Up from invisibility: Lesbians, gay men, and the media in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Halberstram, J. (1998). *Female masculinity*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a queer time & place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Haraway, D. J. (1995). Universal donors in a vampire culture: It's all in the family: Biological kinship categories in the Twentieth-Century United States. In W. Cronon (1995). (Ed). In *Uncommon ground: Rethinking the human place in nature*. (pp. 321-366). New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Healy, P. & McIntire, M. (2004, June 28). Hoisting rainbow flags, wearing campaign buttons. *New York Times*, p. B3.
- Heffernan, V. (2004, June 18). Dad's out of the closet; His child wants to hide. *New York Times*, p. E24.
- Jackson, C. V. (2004, Oct. 17). Keyes says incest awaits kids of gays. *Chicago Sun Times*, p. 8.
- Jacobs, S. (2004, March 7). Children of same-sex couples tell their stories. *The Boston Globe*, p. A1.
- Johnson, D., Piore, A., & Dorfman, D. I. (2004, Oct. 18). At home in two worlds.

*Newsweek*, p. 52.

Jamieson, K. H. (1988). *Eloquence in an electronic age: The transformation of political speechmaking*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hare, D. (2002). *The hours*. New York: Miramax Books.

Hariman, R. & Lucaites, J. L. (2003). Public identity and collective memory in U.S. iconic photography: The image of 'Accidental Napalm.' *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 20(1), 35-66.

Kessler, S. J. (1998). *Lessons from the intersexed*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Kielwasser, A. P. & Wolf, M. A. (1992). Mainstream television, adolescent homosexuality, and significant silence. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 9, 350-373.

Kim, E-K. (2004, April 7). Gay marriage would make their families official, kids say. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, p. A1.

Kranish, M. (2005, July 31). Beliefs drive research agenda on new think tanks. *Boston Globe*, p. A1.

Kurdek, L. A. (2004). In Coleman, M. & Ganong, L. H. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of contemporary families: Considering the past, contemplating the future*. (pp. 96-115). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Langford, B. (2000). Margins of the city: Towards a dialectic of suburban desire. In Phillips, R., Watt, D. & Shuttleton, D. (Eds.). (2000). *De-Centering sexualities: Politics and representations beyond the metropolis*. (pp. 64-80). London: Routledge.

- Lawrence, J. M. (2004, Aug. 26). Lesbian off hook for child support. *Boston Herald*, p. 5.
- Lucaites, J. L. & Hariman, R. (2001). Visual rhetoric, photojournalism, and democratic public culture. *Rhetoric Review*, 20(1/2), 37-42.
- Marech, R. (2004, Sept. 6). Gays forging creative paths to parenthood. *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. A1.
- McKerrow, R. E. (1989). Critical rhetoric: Theory and praxis. In Burgchardt, C. R. (Ed.). (1995). *Readings in rhetorical criticism*. (pp. 124-146). State College, PA: Strata Publishing Company.
- Miranda, R. (2004, July 19). Child advocate. *Star Tribune*, p. 1E.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Morris, C. E. III & Sloop, J. M. (2006). 'What lips these lips have kissed': Refiguring the politics of queer public kissing. *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies*, 3(1), 1-26.
- "Newsweek U.S. demographic profile." Retrieved March 17, 2006 from:  
<http://www.newsweekmediakit.com/newsite/us/research/audienceprof.shtml>
- O'Hara, D. (2004, March 24). Almost married... with children. *Chicago Sun-Times*, p. 58.
- Ordonez, F. (2004, May 8). For gays, adoption irony. *Boston Globe*, p. B1. *Figure 17.1*
- Ortner, S. (1974/1996). *Making gender: The politics and erotics of culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Peterson, K. S. (2004, March 10). Looking straight at gay parents. *USA Today*, p. 1D.
- Phillips, R., Watt, D. & Shuttleton, D. (Eds.). (2000). Introduction in *De-Centring*

*sexualities: Politics and representations beyond the metropolis.* (pp. 1-17).

London: Routledge.

Piccalo, G. (2004, Nov. 6). Union and division. *Los Angeles Times*, p. E1.

Plumwood, V. (1998). Wilderness skepticism and wilderness dualism. In Callicott, J. B.

& Nelson, M. P. (Eds.). (1998). *The great new wilderness debate.* (pp. 652-690). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

“Profile of daily Boston globe readers.” Retrieved March 17, 2006 from:

<https://bostonglobe.com/advertiser/mrktdata/bostonglobemrkt/readership/readership.stm>

Ramet, S. P. (1998). *Gender reversals & gender cultures: Anthropological and historical perspectives.* New York: Routledge.

Rich, E. (2005, June 17). Gay father gets hearing on custody conditions. *Washington Post*, p. B4.

Ross, C. (2004, July 16). Moms the word: Lesbian couple first on birth certificate. *Boston Herald*, p. 2.

Rubin, G. S. (1984). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality.

In Kaufman, L. S. (Ed.). (1993). *American feminist thought at century's end: A reader.* (pp. 3-64). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Ruiz, R. (2004, Oct. 7). Anti-gay policies blasted. *Houston Chronicle*, p. B1.

“San Francisco Chronicle: Advertiser Services.” Retrieved March 17, 2006 from:

<http://sfgate.com/c/advertise/marketinfo/>

Salamon, J. (2004, Feb. 5). A child learns a harsh lesson in politics. *New York Times*, p. B7.



- Schneider, C. (2005, Sept. 18). Ban on gay parenting? *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, pp. C1, C8.
- Schudson, M. (1987). The new validation of popular culture: Sense and sentimentality in academia. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 4, 51-68.
- Segwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Seidman, S. (1993). Identity and politics in a 'postmodern' gay culture: Some historical and conceptual notes. In Warner, M. (Ed.). (1993). *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory*. (pp. 105-141). Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.
- Shugart, H. (2003). Reinventing privilege: The (new) gay man in contemporary popular media. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, (20)1, 67-91.
- Shugart, H. (2005). On misfits and margins: Narrative, resistance, and the poster child politics of Rosie O'Donnell. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 2(1), 52-76.
- Sloop, J. M. (2000a). 'A van with a bar and a bed:' Ritualized gender norms in the John/Joan case. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, 20(2), 130-149.
- Sloop, J. M. (2000b). Disciplining the transgendered: Brandon Teena, public representation, and normativity. *Western Journal of Communication*, 64(2), 165-189.
- Sloop, J. M. (2004). *Disciplining gender: Rhetorics of sex identity in contemporary U.S. culture*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Sloop, J. M. (2005). Riding in cars between men. *Communication and Critical/Cultural*

- Studies*, 2(3), 191-213.
- Sontag, S. (1973). *On photography*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Spain, W. (2005, March 22). Report: Ad spending in gay media soared in 2004. *MarketWatch*. Retrieved March 23, 2005 from:  
<http://cbs.marketwatch.com/news/story.asp?guid={F5FEDDAA-1EDF-4DF7-9BE5-07DD36F59554}&siteid=google&dist=google>
- Texeira, E. (2004, Oct. 10). Demographic study: New look at black gay families. *Newsday*, p. A32.
- “The New York Times: Consumer profile: Adult readers.” Retrieved March 17, 2006 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/marketing/adinfo/audience/audienceprofile.html>
- Tropiano, S. (2002). *A prime-time closet: A history of gays and lesbians on TV*. New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books.
- Turnbull, L. (2004, June 21). Teenage sisters find love, trust with gay dads. *Seattle Times*, p. A1.
- Vande Berg, L., L. Wenner & B. E. Gronbeck (Eds.). (1998). *Critical approaches to television*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Vavrus, M. D. (2002). Domesticating patriarchy: Hegemonic masculinity and television’s ‘Mr. Mom.’ *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19(3), 352-375.
- Warner, M. (1993). Introduction. In *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory*. (pp. vii-xxxi). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wander, P. (1983). The ideological turn in modern criticism. In Burgchardt, C. R. (Ed.). (1995). *Readings in rhetorical criticism*. (pp. 106-124). State College, PA: Strata Publishing Company.

- Walters, S. D. (2001). *All the rage: The story of gay visibility in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilcox, S. A. (2003). Cultural context and the conventions of science journalism: Drama and contradiction in media coverage about biological ideas about sexuality. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 20(3), 225-247.
- Wittig, M. (1992). *The straight mind and other essays*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Wolf, M &. Kielwasser, A. P. (Eds.). (1991). Introduction in *Gay people, sex, and the media*. New York: Harrington Press.
- (2000). Secret. *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Houghton Mifflin Company. Retrieved Jan 11, 2006 from: <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=secret>

## NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> As my case study, I analyze news articles published from early 2004 to late 2005, examining them for verbal and visual rhetoric on same-sex parenting. Specifically, my analysis includes 50 or so news articles and their accompanying photographs that appear in America's major newspapers and newsmagazines nationwide like, for instance, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, the *L.A. Times*, the *Boston Globe*, *Newsday*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Seattle Times*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, as well as the *New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. I retrieved these articles from the LexisNexis online research engine after typing in the following search words (which could or could not appear as a phrase): "gay parenting," "gay parents," "gay parent," "gay mom," "gay mother," "gay dad," "gay father," "gay families," "gay family," "homosexual parenting," "homosexual parents," "homosexual parent," "homosexual mom," "homosexual mother," "homosexual dad," "homosexual father," "homosexual family," "homosexual families," "same-sex parenting," "same-sex parents," "same-sex mom," "same-sex mother," "same-sex dad," "same-sex father," "same-sex family," and "same-sex families," and then narrowed my selection to the appropriate temporal, geographical, and circulation specifications. At least half of the stories include one to upwards of eight photographs.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 50 or so newspapers and newsmagazines analyzed for this study, at least half of the stories include visuals. Specifically, about 10 articles include at least one photograph (e.g., Egelko, 2005b; Ford, 2004; Piccalo, 2004; Ruiz, 2004; Texeira, 2004; Turnbull, 2004), while about 15 include between two and eight photographs (e.g., Adams, 2004; Armour, 2004; Armour, 2005; Burson, 2004; Dominus, 2004; Gilgoff, 2004; Jacobs, 2004; Healy, 2004; Johnson, Piore & Dorfman, 2004; O'Hara, 2004; Ordonez, 2004; Peterson, 2004; Schneider, 2005). Copies of 20 photographic figures that I describe in-depth are included in an appendix at the end of this document, as well as their references appear in the list of figures before the table of contents. For additional photographic figures that I cite but do not describe in-depth, I use the article references.

<sup>3</sup> I collected, but did not analyze, about 30 television news segments that aired nationally on America's main cable networks like CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX NEWS. I retrieved summaries of these broadcasts from the Vanderbilt University Television News Archive online research engine after typing in the following search words (which could or could not appear as a phrase): "gay parenting," "gay parents," "gay parent," "gay mom," "gay mother," "gay dad," "gay father," "gay families," "gay family," "homosexual parenting," "homosexual parents," "homosexual parent," "homosexual mom," "homosexual mother," "homosexual dad," "homosexual father," "homosexual family," "homosexual families," "same-sex parenting," "same-sex parents," "same-sex mom," "same-sex mother," "same-sex dad," "same-sex father," "same-sex family," and "same-sex families," narrowed my selection to broadcasts aired from early 2004 to late 2005, and then purchased video cassette copies of each segment.

## APPENDIX: COPIES OF FIGURES

---

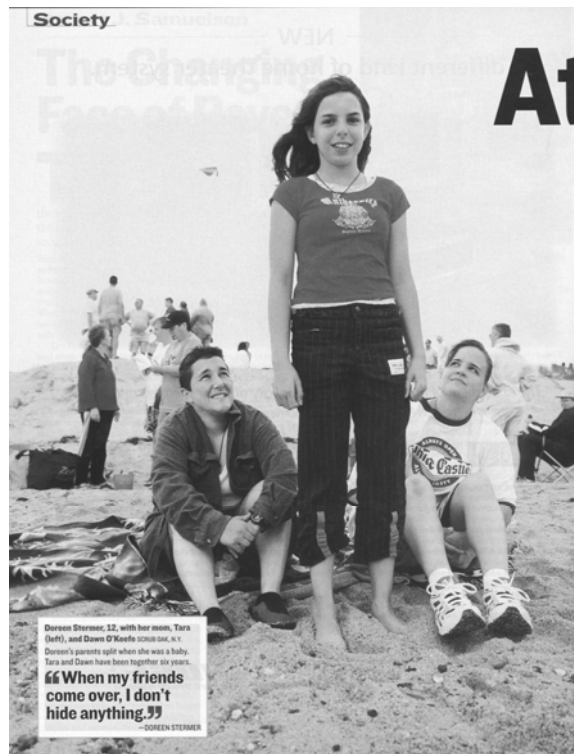


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



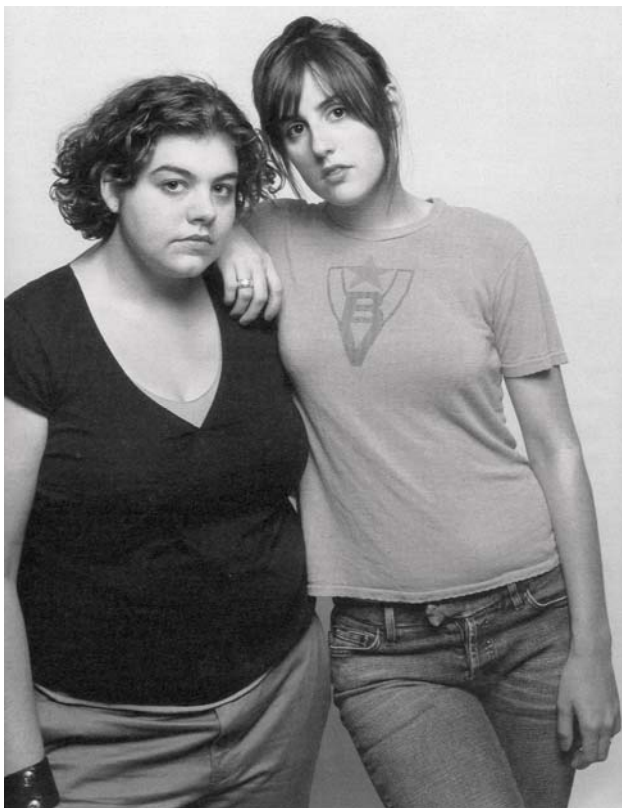


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

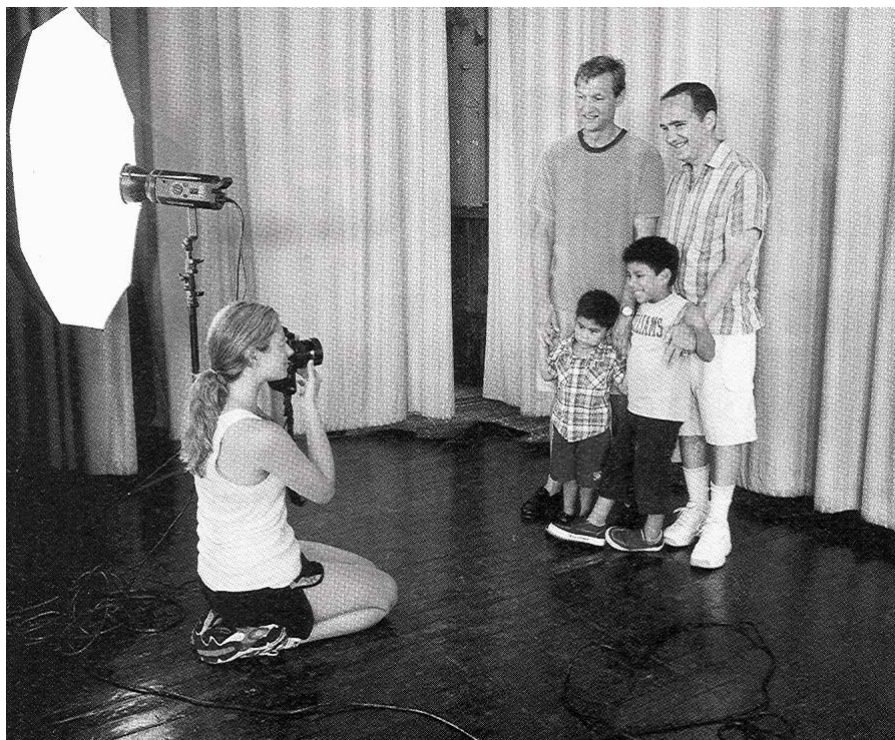


Figure 9





Figure 10

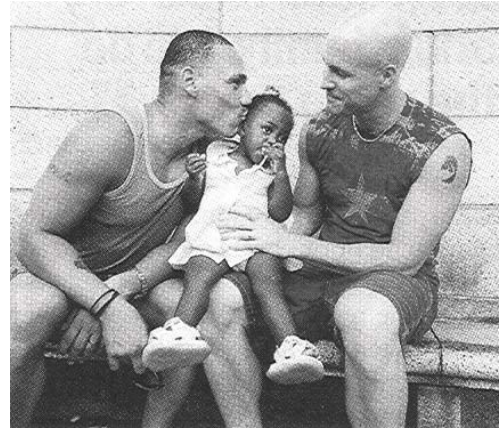


Figure 11



Figure 12

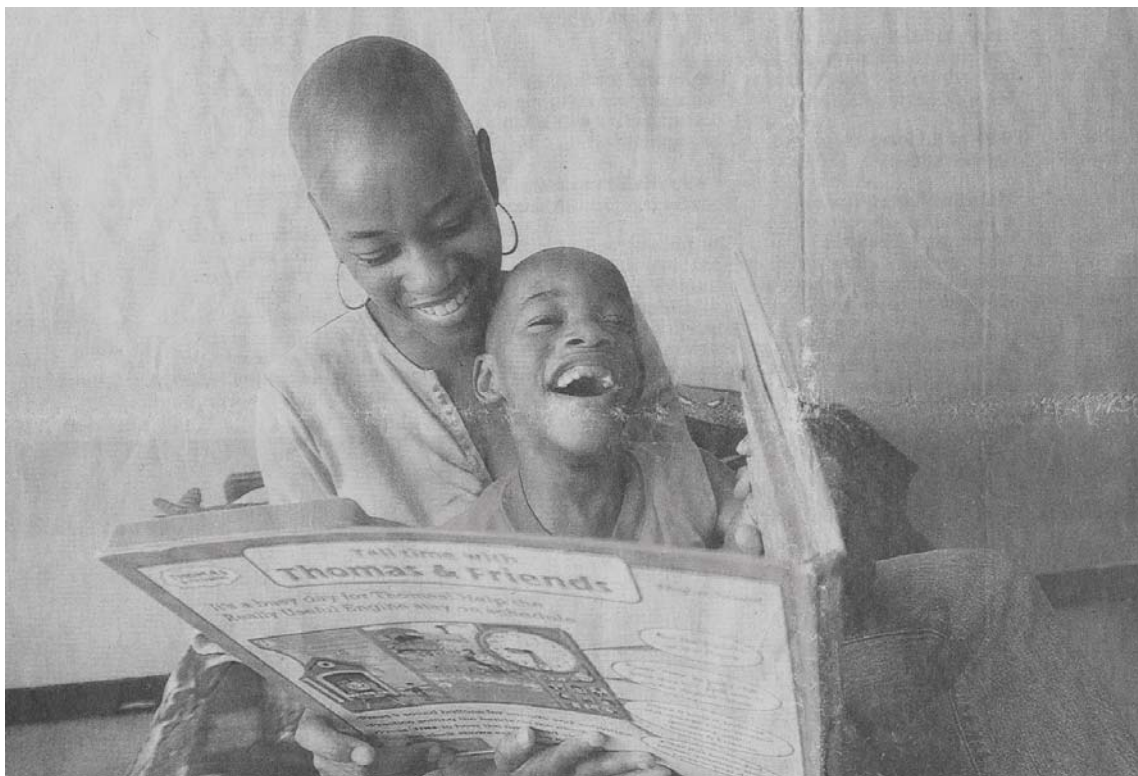


Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15





Figure 16

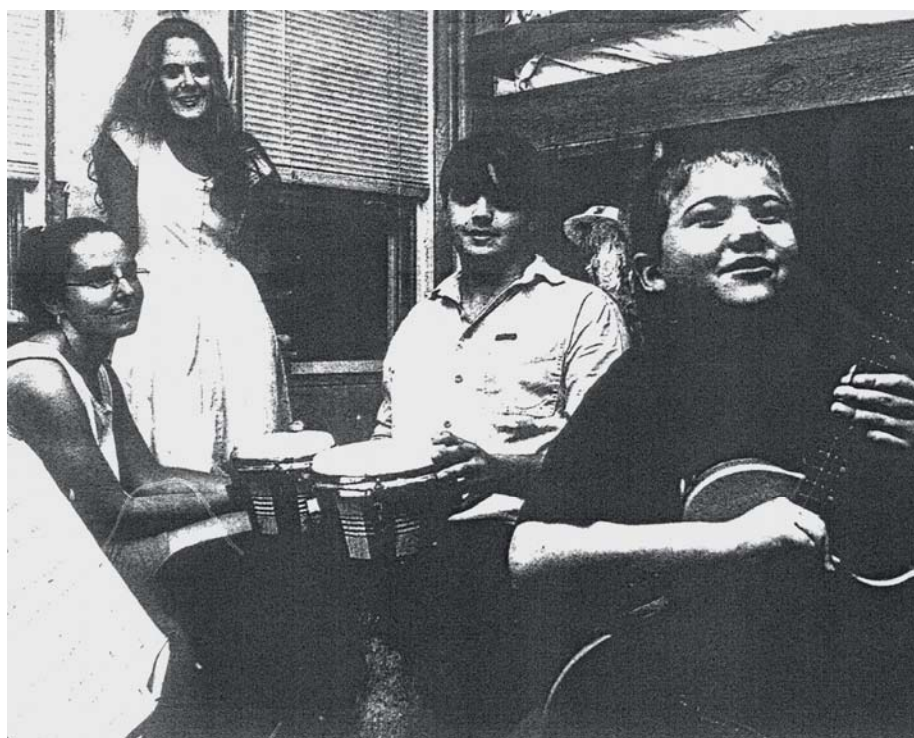


Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20