'Paradoxes of Visibility': Lesbian and Gay Parents in the Australian Print Media

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As popular media increasingly include representations of lesbian and gay parents, so comes with this what Gamson terms ‘paradoxes of visibility’. On the one hand, increased representation means both that lesbian- and gay-headed families are able to see themselves reflected in the mirror of the social realm, and that such representation potentially signifies increasing acceptance of lesbian- and gay-headed families. On the other hand, media representations of lesbian and gay parents, like all media representations, are prone toward sensationalism, normativity and potential misrepresentation. This article takes up this paradox by exploring a sample of articles from Australian popular magazines featuring lesbian and gay parents. The analysis presented suggests that normativities predominate across all representations examined, with this occurring specifically through: 1) the evocation of ‘loving families’ to account for lesbian- and gay-headed families in highly normative ways, 2) an emphasis upon biological relatedness to the exclusion of all other family forms, 3) a failure to recognise the racial and class privilege of white middle-class lesbian and gay parents, and 4) a primary focus upon coupled parents. As such, this article suggests that while the appearance of the articles analysed is positive for what it potentially signifies about public acceptance and the intelligibility of lesbian and gay parents, the articles function to exclude as much as they include.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Australia, attitudes towards lesbian and gay parents appear to be undergoing positive change. While research has suggested negative attitudes towards such parents within community samples,¹ ongoing support for lesbian and gay parents as symbolised by legislative change would suggest otherwise. Such positive change is not limited to the legal system, however, and extends to the growing number of schools that provide actively inclusive environments for lesbian and gay families, along with increasingly positive representations of lesbian and gay

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parents within the media. It is the last form of potentially positive change upon which the present article is focused.

In his ground-breaking research on media representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, Gamson\(^2\) outlines how such representations produce 'paradoxes of visibility': at the same time as they provide a space for LGBT people within the media, they do so on particular terms that either normalise the experiences of LGBT people, or construct them as 'freaks'. In relation to the latter construction, Gamson suggests that heteronormativity is reasserted through the negative comparison of the lives of heterosexual people with those of LGBT people, with the latter frequently depicted in the media as abnormal or otherwise deviant.\(^3\) Conversely, and in relation to the normalisation of LGBT people in the media, Gamson suggests that positive representations rely upon the assumption that LGBT people are 'just like' heterosexual/gender normative people.\(^4\) In so doing, Gamson suggests, norms of 'whiteness' and middle-classness are reinforced through the promotion of a normalised account of LGBT people that places them in comparison to white, middle class heterosexual people.\(^5\)

Importantly, Gamson also suggests that media representations of LGBT people such as those that appear in talk shows have much to tell us about the social contexts in which the shows are produced.\(^6\) For example, we can discern much about public attitudes toward LGBT people by surveying what is deemed palatable to a mainstream audience by the media. As Gamson suggests, the producer/viewer dynamic is constantly under negotiation with producers of media arguably placing their own spin on what is deemed acceptable, yet at the same time public opinion and viewer ratings will always determine a large proportion of what appears in the media.\(^7\)

Clarke and Kitzinger have also undertaken important work on representations of LGBT people in the media,\(^8\) in their research on representations of lesbian and gay parents in UK talk shows. In their analysis of such talk shows, Clarke and Kitzinger identified six discourses that were deployed by participants and talk show hosts to legitimate the rights and experiences of lesbian and gay parents. These were: 1) an emphasis on being 'just like all (heterosexual) parents': that lesbians and

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3. Id. at 2.
4. Id. at 19, 46.
5. Id. at 127.
6. Id. at 4.
7. Id. at 19.
gay men who parent do so as 'just' women and men, not as lesbians or gay men, 2) the provision of examples of the mundaneness of the lives of lesbian- and gay-headed families, 3) an emphasis upon love as the only factor worthy of attention in families and the accompanying statement that lesbian- and gay-headed families are 'all about love', 4) the refutation of anti-gay attitudes towards lesbian and gay parents amongst the religious right via the claim that God created all people, lesbian and gay parents included, 5) the use of children's gender normative behaviours as 'proof' that lesbian and gay parents do not 'damage' their children and, 6) an emphasis on the benefits for children of growing up in lesbian- or gay-headed households.

Clarke suggests that whilst these accounts afford positive space for lesbian and gay parents, they do so by normalising their experiences. Furthermore, talk shows reinforce negative stereotypes about lesbian and gay parents (such as the presumption that they will 'damage' their children) simply by stating them. As Clarke suggests, when lesbian and gay parents are forced to engage with negative stereotypes, they are responding to agendas not of their own making: they are asked to represent their families on heterosexist terms that allow little opportunity for alternate representations of what it means to be a lesbian or gay parent. Similar to Gamson, Clarke suggests that the spaces accorded within the media to representations of lesbian and gay parents rely upon assumptions of whiteness and middle classness when promoting a particular form of normalisation. Clarke also suggests that families headed by two parents are reified within media representations of lesbian- and gay-headed families.9

Finally, specific attention to the whiteness and middle-classness of the rights claims and representations of lesbian and gay parents more broadly has been provided in the work of Boggis10 and my own work.11 Boggis pays specific attention to how disparities in socio-economic status function within LGBT communities in relation to parenting and suggests that issues of reproductive freedom must encompass not simply the right to have children but also the social and economic support required to access reproductive technologies currently limited to those who can afford them. I have suggested that media representations of lesbian and

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gay parents in Australia not only conform to the norms of middle-class whiteness as Clarke, Kitzinger, Gamson and Boggis all suggest, but also the comparison of white middle-class lesbian and gay parents to white middle-class heterosexual parents relies upon the enactment of the race privilege that white lesbian and gay parents experience over and above their experiences of marginalisation in the context of white heteropatriarchy.

Taking the points raised above in relation to both the normalising function of media representations of lesbian and gay parents and the particular identity configurations of the parents who are accorded representation, the present article examines a sample of articles focusing on lesbian and gay parents from popular Australian magazines. Specifically, the analysis examines four dominant tropes that appeared across the magazines: 1) the deployment of a normative discourse of love to account for lesbian- and gay-headed households, 2) the reification of biological relations as central to parent-child relations, 3) normative constructions of race within the articles that recentred white middle-classness and which are reliant upon the construction of non-white groups/individuals as exotic others and, 4) an emphasis upon two-parent families. From the analysis, it is suggested that whilst these articles reflect the aforementioned increasingly positive stance towards lesbian and gay parents in Australia, they also serve to reify one particular form of family into which all LGBT parents are co-opted.

Further, it may also be suggested that Australian media representations of lesbian and gay parents don't only reflect what are deemed intelligible representations of lesbian and gay parents by the media, but also what are deemed acceptable representations by lesbian and gay lobbyists. It is arguably the case that contemporary LGBT politics in Australia adopt a relatively normative approach to politics in terms of primarily seeking equality with the heterosexual majority.12 Hence, whilst the moniker 'queer' might otherwise be used in a discussion of non-heterosexual and or non-gender normative people, in this article the acronym LGBT (or more specifically lesbian and gay parents as applicable) is used to denote the distance between the politics represented by the articles, and a queer politics that would typically adopt a more radical relationship to what might constitute state recognition. Having said this, it must of course be recognised that there are many reasons why what has been termed a 'homonormative'13 approach to politics is adopted by the majority of


Australian activists, yet at the same time we must be wary of how new norms are imposed through a homonormative politics as the analysis provided below clearly demonstrates.\textsuperscript{14}

II. THE ARTICLES

The articles analysed in this paper were collected over a one year period between mid-2007 and mid-2008 from popular magazines published in Australia that included reports on the lives of Australian lesbian and gay parents. While other articles were identified during this time period that reported on the experiences of lesbian, gay and transgender parents from outside Australia, a decision was made to focus on the Australian-specific articles so as to provide empirical findings that highlight the Australian context. No articles were identified in the time period that focused on bisexual parents, a point that itself is noteworthy.

Six articles comprise the corpus examined here (see Table 1). These appeared in popular women’s magazines (\textit{Who}, \textit{New Idea} and \textit{Take 5}), lifestyle magazines (\textit{Notebook} and \textit{Time Out}), and one parenting magazine available freely from a large national supermarket chain (\textit{Coles Baby}). Several of the articles focus on one particular set of gay parents and their narrative of family creation (\textit{Notebook}, \textit{Time Out} and \textit{Take 5}).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Cover Text</th>
<th>Publication Date</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Crooks</td>
<td>Not Your Average Family</td>
<td>\textit{Who}</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>17 Dec. 2007</td>
<td>pp. 44-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Georgiou</td>
<td>Doting Dads</td>
<td>\textit{Time Out}</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>21 May 2007</td>
<td>pp. 58-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Nash</td>
<td>Pride and Joy</td>
<td>\textit{Coles Baby}</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Autumn 2008</td>
<td>pp. 36-37</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<td>\textit{Notebook}</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jan. 2008</td>
<td>pp. 190-191</td>
</tr>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>Two Men and a Baby</td>
<td>\textit{Take 5}</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20 Jun. 2007</td>
<td>pp. 10-11</td>
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\textsuperscript{14} See Damien W. Riggs, \textsc{Becoming Parent: Lesbians, Gay Men, and Family} (2007); Mariana Valverde, \textsc{A New Entity in the History of Sexuality: The Respectable Same-Sex Couple}, 32 \textsc{Fem Stud.} 155-162 (2006).
Articles were read repeatedly by the author with a focus on the article text, the images included, the title of the article, and any coverage of the article on the cover of the magazine. Importantly, and in relation to Gamson's suggestion that media representations of LGBT people can tell us a lot about the social context in which the representations occur, none of the articles emphasised negative stereotypes about lesbian or gay parents and instead focused primarily on the reproductive desires of lesbians and gay men and their attempts and successes in achieving them. Also of note, and in contrast to Clarke's findings, space was given in some of the articles to examining how negative social contexts impact upon the reproductive desires of lesbians and gay men (such as legal prohibitions on access to some reproductive technologies in Australia including surrogacy and access to donor sperm in clinics in some Australian states). The provision of information about this would appear important as it locates lesbian and gay parents within a social context and does not explain away issues of discrimination.

The majority of the articles primarily read as reports of the experiences of lesbian and gay parents, and as such may be seen as orientating to a heterosexual audience in the form of providing stories about 'diverse families'. Two of the articles (from Coles Baby and Time Out), however, went beyond this form of 'exhibiting the other', and instead would appear to be directed towards lesbian and gay parents, in addition to potential heterosexual readers. This claim is made on the basis of the way the two articles provide extensive information about avenues to reproduction for lesbians and gay men, and explore the multiple factors involved in family creation for lesbians and gay men rather than simply reporting the narratives of family of lesbians and gay men. As suggested in the introduction, the following analysis focuses upon four dominant tropes identified through a close reading of the articles. These build upon the previous findings of Gamson, Clarke and Kitzinger, and extend these to examine some of the particular configurations of family that are reified within the articles.

III. Analysis

Love Makes a Family

Reiterating the findings of Clarke and Kitzinger, the repeated use of claims to 'love' as the central aspect of lesbian- and gay-headed families was found in the Australian sample reported in this article. Such claims appeared within the text of articles, on the covers of magazines, and in
the captions accompanying images. A clear example of this appears in *Time Out*,\(^{15}\) where a gay father is quoted as saying “we believe a family is about love.” While such a claim may be taken as reflecting the speaker’s belief about his family, the simplicity of the statement belies the complex ways in which discourses of love circulate in both positive and negative ways in relation to families. One of the primary ways in which claims to love can be misused is inherent in the statement itself: it is an injunction to understand love as the centrepiece of families. This begs the question of what it means to be in a family that does not necessarily display or speak of love in ways that are typically seen as intelligible, or in families where claims to love are used to warrant abusive behaviours. The statement not only enforces a normative idea about what a family should be, but also presupposes that ‘love’ is an inherent capacity of families that will be uniformly experienced.

A second example of this type of claim about love appeared in *New Idea*, which stated that “Jaason, John and Odin are a loving family unit.”\(^{16}\) While this example does not provide such a clear injunction to love as the previous example, it nonetheless constructs a ‘family unit’ as something formed through love – that the very structure of the ‘family unit’ is something that is made possible as a result of love. For many families, it might be the case that it was formed through loving relations between adult members, but the presumption of love as a key aspect of ‘family units’ holds the potential to overwrite the claims to legitimacy of families who experience themselves as a coherent ‘unit’, but who do not organise around the primary principle of love or at least love as it is conventionally understood in a family where all members live together.

Claims to love were also deployed to legitimate the parenting of lesbians and gay men. The lead into the *Time Out* article,\(^{17}\) for example, included the statement “gay men make incredibly loving, nurturing and open-minded parents.” Whilst this positive statement is indeed an important reflection of the overall tone of the article itself, it nonetheless centres a particular image of fatherhood in which it is “incredibly loving, nurturing and open-minded” men that are being spoken of in the article. We must ask what it means for gay fathers reading the article who at that moment do not feel nurturing or loving. How might the injunction to love and nurture overwrite the everyday challenges of being a parent, and a gay parent in particular? The conflation of ‘loving’ with ‘open-

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minded' is also problematic not only for its assertion that all gay men are open-minded parents, but also its implicit contrast between 'loving, nurturing and open-minded' gay parents and those constructed as not open-minded (and thus potentially neither loving nor nurturing).

In her excellent examination of accounts of lesbian and gay parenting, Lehr suggests that whilst there is some merit in speaking of research findings or lay opinion that lesbian and gay parents in couple relationships engage in more equitable parenting practices than heterosexual couples or foster greater acceptance of diversity amongst their children, this can also be problematic in that such families are constructed as better than those families who do not engage in equitable parenting practices or acceptance of diversity. Lehr asks the question of what it means to compare two-parent lesbian and gay families with single mother families (for example): how does the injunction to be 'nurturing and open-minded' pit differing family forms against one another and perpetuate hierarchies of 'good' versus 'bad' families? We can see an example of this construction of love as the capacity of 'good' parents in the cover description of the article in Notebook, which refers to “Devoted dads: Loving stories of modern fatherhood.” Not only is this reference to 'modern fatherhood' an interesting allusion to gay parenting (the topic of the article), but it also serves to construct 'modern' (read: gay) fatherhood as enacted by 'devoted' and 'loving' dads. Again, this assumption of devotion and love creates a hierarchy whereby the 'best' dads are those that display these traits, the implicit contrast being with dads who do not.

The final way in which love was deployed in the articles to legitimate lesbian and gay parenting was in relation to a particular representation of love as possession. Drawing on the work of Irigaray, I suggest that claims of loving another person in familial contexts often result in proprietary claims over the other person and, furthermore, that such enactments of propriety re-centre love as a form of consumption or ownership. In her work on lesbian mothers' accounts of desire and love for their children, Gabb similarly examines how lesbian parents' statements about their children may potentially evoke consumerist understandings of children where children come to stand in for the desire to have something in the context of a society where having things means something.

example of this from the present study appears in the *Coles Baby* article,\(^{22}\) where a lesbian mother is quoted as saying “We love [our daughter] to bits and we’ll make sure she’s happy and has everything she needs.” Here the claim to love is extended beyond the emotion of love, and encompasses the claims of the parents to ensure the child's happiness and give her 'everything she needs'. While it is fair to say that many parents wish to ensure their child’s happiness, this quote exceeds the 'simple' happiness of love (however problematic that term may be), and encompasses the requirement of consumption that is presumed to be the right of all people: that children need 'everything' and that it is parents who can make this happen.

Another though perhaps less obvious example of this conflation of love with consumption appears in the *Notebook* article,\(^{23}\) which states that two gay parents “enjoy being a family, and like most proud parents, they're wide eyed with pride and love.” While, as with all of the statements quoted thus far, this is a positive image of gay parenting, it nonetheless evokes an image of love that involves 'pride'. As the parents being referred to have an infant, it is hard to imagine where the source of pride lies: while it is standard to refer to 'proud parents', it is important to ask to what such pride refers. One suggestion would be that it refers to the pride of reproduction or demonstrating one's capacity to have children, rather than pride in the child's achievements in their own right.

While it is important to recognise that positive references to love in relation to lesbian and gay parents in the article are a welcome move away from past constructions of lesbians and gay men as engaged in 'pathological love' or as not eligible to be parents, it is nonetheless important to consider how discourses of love, even when deployed positively, can reinforce particular normative understandings of family.

Furthermore, and as Clarke suggests, discourses of love in media representations of lesbian and gay parents may largely be seen as responding to the heterosexual injunction to prove the validity of lesbian and gay parents. Thus, while some of the articles quoted above were directly citing interviewees, others were the words of the reporter, who understandably place their own slant on what they think will be an intelligible representation of lesbian and gay parents. To cite 'love' as the centrepiece of lesbian and gay families may be thought by many as the best way to counter negative stereotypes. For lesbian and gay parents themselves, such as those quoted here, the injunction to claim love, or

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pride, or to give a child 'everything they need', may be experienced as a pressure upon them to conform to a model of family shaped by heterosexist assumptions about lesbian- and gay-headed families. Examining how love functions in media representations of lesbian and gay parents must thus move beyond simple dichotomies of good and bad, and instead examine the subtleties and complexities of how claims to love function to warrant particular images of what it means to be a lesbian or gay parent.

Claims to Biology

In many cultural contexts, claims to the centrality of biological relations to kinship continue to be deployed to prioritise particular family forms over others. While in many cultures it is indeed the case that claims to biological descent are a cornerstone for ensuring the recognition of rights (for example in Australia, where claims to kinship relations are required within indigenous communities to ensure access to land and the passing on of cultural practices), in other cultures, claims to biology are often less about rights per se and more about the hegemony of biological discourse that privileges the nuclear, biological family.

The deployment of biology as an organising discourse appeared in the articles examined here in a number of ways. First, there was considerable attention paid in all of the articles to the relationships between the parents and the children. This may, at least in part, be explained by the heteronormative assumption that families are formed as a result of the reproductive capacities of an opposite-sex couple. This type of assumption may thus lead to an injunction upon same-sex couples to account for their ability to reproduce. So, for example, the descriptors attached to the parents in most of the articles served to position the parents in a relationship to biology, such as: "Kirk's biological child" and "Kendi, a Sydney communications officer who gave birth to both the couple's children." Both of these examples, reported in Who, clearly make the assumption that it will be of interest to readers who carried the child or whose sperm was used. Whilst some of the interviewees actively resist this by stating that they were unwilling to name the biological father, the articles nonetheless clearly orientate to a norm of biological relations.

The second way in which biology is reified in the articles is by some of the parents themselves. This is particularly the case when comparisons

are drawn between children conceived through surrogacy for gay men and the possibility of such men becoming parents through fostering arrangements. In Australia, in comparison to the US (and increasingly the UK), children placed in long-term foster care (where parenting rights are removed from birth parents) are likely to remain with foster parents until they come of age. In this sense, long-term foster placements in Australia provide a family context for children. Yet a binary of biology versus foster care is constructed whereby two interviewees are reported as considering and then dismissing foster care as they wanted to be "full time dads" (Take 5)\textsuperscript{25} and in another article stating that they "felt fostering was too temporary" (Notebook)\textsuperscript{26}. Obviously these are the beliefs of individual people, but they nonetheless reflect an assumption that a 'full time dad' is one who has a biological relation to a child. This was reiterated in a list provided about the 'types' of gay parents known to one interviewee quoted in Time Out: "We have dads who have become fathers through known donor arrangements, co-parenting agreements, surrogacy and those with children through previous relationships with women."\textsuperscript{27} Again, the relationships described here only appear to encompass biological relations, further dismissing gay parents who provide care for children not biologically related to them.

This emphasis upon biology as the primary way of creating family is stated more plainly in the Coles Baby article,\textsuperscript{28} where an interviewee is reported as saying that despite the challenges of being a gay parent, it was important for him to go ahead with plans for surrogacy as "if I don't go ahead they just won't be created." Here the 'creation' of a child is depicted as the only option for this interviewee to start a family and that it is therefore incumbent upon him to 'go ahead' and do it. Finally, and in reference again to surrogacy, some interviewees emphasised how gestational surrogacy ensures the perpetuation of biology as a property managed by the parents: "The surrogate is in no way biologically linked to the child, leaving the biological father and his partner as the legal parents" (Time Out)\textsuperscript{29}. Not only does this quote emphasise the legal possession of biology by the parents, but it also re-centres the distinction of biological/ non-biological relations by drawing a line between the 'biological father and his partner'. In this quote, a father is biologically related to a child, a non-biologically related father is just a 'partner'.

\textsuperscript{25} Two Men and a Baby, TAKE 5, 2007, at 10-11.
\textsuperscript{26} Devoted Dads, Notebook, Jan. 2, 2008 at 190-191.
\textsuperscript{27} Georgiou, supra note 15.
\textsuperscript{28} Nash, supra note 22.
\textsuperscript{29} Georgiou, supra note 15.
It is of course important to recognise that discourses of biology are central to how the law in Australia defines family and that 'proof' of biology can often be necessary for ensuring the rights of lesbian and gay families. However, it is also the case that many lesbians and gay men negotiate the creation of families with children to whom they are not biologically related and that they manage to do so with varying degrees of support and success. In relation to the articles examined here, it is important to consider how both the reporters and the interviewees themselves reify biology as central to familial relations. While the above points about the legal status of biological relations are salient, most of the instances of reference to biology in the articles were not in relation to the law but rather were a more general reference to the presumption of biology and the construction of a binary between biological and non-biological relations. In this sense, the articles may be seen to clearly orientate to notions of biology as they shape lesbian- and gay-headed families, and in so doing present a particularly narrow image of what it means to become a parent as a lesbian or gay man. Furthermore, and with particular reference to practices such as surrogacy, all of the articles report the considerable expense involved in the process. Factors such as the cost of reproduction draw attention to issues of class as they shape access to family formation, and it is important to recognise that the priority accorded to biological relations may in many instances be a luxury only afforded to relatively affluent lesbians and gay men.

**Constructions of Race**

Within the articles, discourses of race were deployed in ways that typically marginalised or exoticised non-white people or communities. This occurred in two distinct ways. One appeared in relation to the discussion of a white gay father's understanding of his Taiwanese partner's family: "Jeff’s extended family is made up of people who have descended from his parent's village who are often not biologically related. When you think about it these were the first alternative families, and Jeff and I continue that tradition" (Time Out). In this example, the white interviewee not only constructs an exoticised image of his partner's family which is marked as differing from the norm of biological relations outlined above, but he also locates himself within a linear trajectory of 'alternate families' in which a mixed-race gay family living in Australia are seen as a natural progression to the extended family practices of

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30. *Id.*
the Taiwanese. This is problematic in the sense that it positions the
Taiwanese families described as 'alternative families', rather than as
potentially the norm in their own cultural context and it also constructs
a parallel between the speaker's own family and those of his partner's
family, in ways that potentially ignore the incommensurable differences
between the two. While it may be possible for us to consider some
sort of 'continuation' of family practice if this were elaborated by the
interviewee's partner based on their perception of the similarities or
differences between the two cultures, it is hard not to see the interviewee's
assertion of 'continuity' as an enactment of racial privilege in which
non-white cultures are compared to, and assimilated into, the norms of
whiteness.

The second way in which non-white people are depicted in the articles
appears in the New Idea article, which focuses upon Australian actor
Jaason Simmons and his plans to marry his male partner and parent
his adopted son. From the onset of the article, we are provided with
stereotyped images of the adopted child, his birth family and culture,
such as in the statement that Simmons “plans to wed his lover [...] and
together raise the boy John rescued from an African orphanage.”
Here a discourse of 'rescue' is used to construct the two white men as
benevolent and as saviours of the young boy. Claims such as these serve
to render invisible the global economic disparities between countries
involved in transnational adoption and the race privilege evoked by
white adoptive parents. This failure to examine racialised inequities
and their role in the production of global economies of adoption (where
children from Africa and Asia are produced as commodities for sale)
continues throughout the article, where one image caption states that
"Odin left a life of poverty for a new beginning in America.” Here
the child’s life prior to adoption is constructed as inherently negative,
with America being represented as an unquestioned opportunity for
betterment. Accounts of adoption such as these not only fail to examine
the racial privilege of adoptive parents; they also perpetuate the binary
of pathological non-white/benevolent white that have long shaped
adoption discourse.

Further in the article, we are provided with a direct quote from
Simmons' partner who states that “People say: 'who's his real father?'
I am. Birth parents are a little overrated. The father lived alone in a
mud hut; drank a lot of alcohol, he could barely look after himself.”

31. Russell, supra note 16.
32. JANE JEONG TRENKA, JULIA CHIYERE OPARAH & SUN YUNG SHIN, OUTSIDERS WITHIN: WRITING ON
Whilst this quote directly counters the emphasis on biology provided in the previous section, it does so in the context of adoption, where the role of the birth parents is constructed as 'overrated'. Not only does this potentially undermine the relationship between children placed for adoption and their birth parents, it also perpetuates the discourse of 'real' parents by emphasising the contrast between 'good' parents who do all the things described in the previous section on 'love,' and the things that 'bad parents' do, such as drink a 'lot of alcohol' and 'barely look after' themselves. Yet despite this acknowledgement of the child's birth father (however negative that representation may be), the article includes reference to the fact that "When the two men wed later this year, Tasmanian-born Jaason will officially become Odin's second father." In this statement of Simmons' status as the 'second father', the child's birth father is rendered invisible as is their relationship to one another.

As is typically the case in media articles, the racial identities of white people are rarely if ever mentioned in the articles examined here. The majority of interviewees in the articles appeared in the images accompanying the articles to be white lesbians and gay men and yet these parents are never marked as racialised. The only instance where the race of the parents is mentioned is in the instance outlined above where the couple were mixed-race. Yet, in all bar one instance when this couple were referred to across three separate articles, only the racial identity of the non-white parent was mentioned with no explicit reference to the racial identity of his white partner. In the one instance where his identity as white was explicitly named, it was by the interviewee himself, where he stated in *Take 5* that "with Jeff being Taiwanese and myself being Caucasian, we decided we could use two egg donors – a Caucasian egg donor for Jeff and an Asian egg donor for me. That way whichever egg was fertilised, our baby would reflect each of our racial backgrounds."

In this instance we can see the problematic deployment of race as referencing biological categories despite the fact that the mapping of the human genome project found no 'race gene', and despite the fact that elsewhere the same parent claims that he and his partner are 'continuing the tradition' of biology not mattering. In contrast to this, his emphasis on gamete matching would very much suggest an investment in race as biologically determined, and that the creation of a child reflecting both of its parent's racial identities is made to matter.

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Statements such as these about gamete-matching echo Mamo's findings that lesbian couples looking to conceive through donor sperm will often negotiate racial matching when selecting a donor. Whilst, as Mamo suggests, this is often warranted through claims to the need to create family coherency, it nonetheless privileges a notion of coherency that centres upon biological and visual similarities. Finally, in regard to this last quote, the interviewee problematically collapses a Taiwanese identity into an Asian identity, thus rendering visible the tenuous foundations on which claims to racial matching often lie, in addition to valorising the ways in which racial categories function through assumptions of visible appearance in ways that privilege white, Western accounts of relationality and intergroup differences.

While the examples examined in this section focus on the voices of particular reporters and gay parents, they nonetheless may be said to reflect broader social discourses about transnational adoption and the practice of racial matching. That these articles were deemed intelligible by the publishers tells us much about how discourses of race are understood within the Australian context and how accounts of race and reproduction continue to be shaped by the norms of whiteness. While these accounts are not limited to lesbian and gay parents, they do display how discourses of race and sexuality intersect with one another to make possible particular accounts of parenting that are reliant upon stereotyped, marginalising and exoticising images of non-white people and communities.

Privileging Parent Couples

As Clarke suggested in her analysis of UK talk show representations of lesbian and gay parents, there is a normative presumption that lesbians and gay men parent in couple relationships and that this is the best context in which to raise children. This type of assumption was explicitly articulated in some of the articles examined for this article. One interviewee in Who was quoted as saying “Sophie has the love of two dads, two loving parents, which is all you can really ask for.” Here the fact of having 'two loving parents' is constructed as 'all you can really hope for', the implication of this being possibly that this is the least you can ask for. This type of logic also appears in Notebook, where a gay

parent is quoted as saying “we both want to be involved; we both want to be the best parents we can be. Ethan doesn’t have a mum – he has two dads, but most of all he has two parents.” While the emphasis here on dual involvement is a fair claim for this couple to make, the concluding statement that the fact the child has two parents and that, 'most of all', this is important evokes the presumption that having two parents is the most important thing. As Lehr and Clarke suggest, this presumption of a two-parent model as the 'ideal' context in which to raise children is constructed through implicit comparison with other models of family depicted as less ideal: for example, single parent families and possibly also multi-parent families.

In addition to these explicit statements valorising two-parent couples, all of the articles reified couples in mundane ways. This included the fact that all of the images depicted coupled parents, in addition to statements such as “two same-sex couples share the joy and challenges of parenthood” (Who). While some articles did refer to the fact that single gay men or lesbians can create families, this typically defaulted back to reference to couples, such as in the following example from Time Out: “Surrogacy sees a gay man or gay male couple firstly choosing an egg donor [...] With the assistance of a surrogacy agency, the male couple are introduced to a surrogate.” In this example, the article begins by recognising that single gay men can engage in surrogacy, but in the same sentence goes on to refer solely to the 'gay male couple'. Examples such as this highlight how the norm of coupled parents plays out in representations of lesbian and gay parents in the media.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Through the identification of four tropes evident within a sample of Australian popular media articles on lesbian and gay parents, the findings presented in this article both support previous research on this topic and extend it in important ways. The findings replicate UK research by Clarke and Kitzinger which found that discourses of love are often deployed to legitimate lesbian- and gay- headed families. The analysis presented here extended this by examining how claims to love not only normalise particular family forms, but also produce forms of ownership within families that reify consumerist notions of relationality. Also replicating previous findings, the analysis found that

38. Georgiou, supra note 15.
coupled parents are exclusively represented within Australian media articles and that this is often constructed as the best environment in which to raise children. The findings also outlined two tropes previously given little attention in research on media representations of lesbian and gay parents: those of representations of race and the privilege given to biology. In relation to the former, significant proportions of two of the articles evoked problematic accounts of race that either marginalised or exoticised non-white people and communities or reified race as a biological category. Furthermore, neither were the racial identities of the predominantly white interviewees remarked upon by reporters nor were their identities as apparently middle-class lesbians and gay men. With regard to the privileging of biology, not only were biological relations routinely reported on in the articles, biology was often constructed as the most appropriate (or indeed in some cases only) means through which to form a family.

These findings have important implications both in relation to what they tell us about the broader social context in Australia and what they tell us about the claims of lesbians and gay men as parents. In relation to the social context, the analyses presented here would suggest that while there are an increasing number of positive representations of lesbian and gay parents in the media and in society more generally, and while this may reflect more positive attitudes towards such parents, there are still many limits imposed upon the representations deemed intelligible. Primary amongst these are the push for lesbian and gay parents to explain themselves in terms of a heteronormative agenda that, while not centring upon negative stereotypes of lesbian and gay parents per se, nonetheless reinforces a set of white, middle-class, couple parent norms for families that are formed through biology. The fact that this image mirrors the image of most families who receive positive attention in the Australian media is no accident and suggests that representation may still require conformity amongst lesbian and gay parents.

In relation to lesbian and gay parents themselves, this requirement for conformity produces a set of problematic choices: is it enough to simply be included or represented on any terms or should representation actually reflect the diversity of lesbian and gay (and bisexual and transgender) parenting communities? As Gamson suggests, the ability of certain lesbian- and gay-headed families to conform to a particular dominant image is the privilege that comes with white middle-classness and this fact cannot be overlooked when we are examining media representations. In other words, while the media does reflect the opinions of the wider
society (in addition to its own agendas), it is also shaped by those willing to be represented and their own complicity in practices of exclusion. While we must acknowledge that some lesbian and gay parents may perceive representation in any form as a positive thing, this perception must be located in a relationship to a range of practices of inclusion and exclusion that deem only certain people intelligible.

To conclude: what is needed in relation to future representation of LGBT parents in the media are truly diverse samples of participants: parents in all forms of relationships, from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and with a diverse range of accounts of family formation. Engaging with what Gamson terms 'paradoxes of visibility' requires acknowledging how these paradoxes are formed through exclusion and how certain members of LGBT communities currently experience inclusion at the expense of others.