

Strategies to Undo Markedness: The LGBTQ Use of Heteronormative Script and Social Injustice

Narratives at a Civil Union Hearing

by

KERI ANN GRIFFITH

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has been approved for the Department of Linguistics

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Kira Hall

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Karen Tracy

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Andy Cowell

Date \_\_\_\_\_

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we  
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Griffith, Keri Ann (MA, Linguistics, Department of Linguistics)

Strategies to Undo Markedness: The LGBTQ Use of Heteronormative Script and Social Injustice Narratives at a Civil Union Hearing

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As sociolinguistic research has demonstrated, identity is a fluid, performative, and perpetually negotiated phenomena (Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 2005), by which individuals make subtle interactional alignments that can have far reaching societal impacts. However, for identity alignments to be meaningful and understood, individuals must make use of resources that are culturally salient and ideologically recognizable, and then make transformations to these resources by creating new meaning within them (Eckert 2008). One ideologically recognizable framework that is prevalent in everyday practice and serves as a productive resource for identity work is *heteronormativity*: the belief or assumption that there are two distinct genders (i.e. male and female) that behave in traditional gender-appropriate ways, including the performance of heterosexual desire (Cameron & Kulick 2006; Kitzinger 2005). This study analyzes the testimonies of three same-sex couples that were presented in the 2011 Colorado hearings on Senate Bill 172, the same-sex civil union bill. I focus on how each couple uses a heteronormative-themed narrative within their testimony as a means to assert themselves as unmarked moral members of society. In an analysis that draws from critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and sociolinguistics, I illustrate how this strategy challenges the very notion of heteronormativity: first, by calling into question who can be a ‘typical member’ of this group, and second, by making explicit that gay and lesbian individuals can have the same morals, values, and lifestyles as heterosexuals.

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## 1.0 Introduction

In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state in the U.S. to legalize same-sex marriage; since then, seventeen additional states have followed suit in passing same-sex marriage legislation<sup>1</sup>, and four states have passed legislation allowing same-sex civil unions<sup>2</sup>. As is typical for a civil rights movement, the discussion of equal marriage rights has permeated the political, personal, and public domains. At the 2012 Democratic National Convention, a young man tied the personal with the political: twenty-one year-old Zach Wahls gave a speech on his two moms, Terry and Jackie, to the packed Charlotte, North Carolina crowd. Drawing from his testimony he gave at an Iowa hearing in 2011<sup>3</sup>, Wahls' speech painted a picture of his family that depicted a sense of 'normalcy' as he stated, "Now people always want to know what it's like having lesbian parents...we're like any other family. We eat dinner, we go to church, we have chores." Wahls continued his speech, directly addressing Mitt Romney's statement that every child deserves a mother and a father by rebutting, "I think every child deserves a family as loving and committed as mine. Because the sense of family comes from the commitment we make to each other to through the hard times so we can enjoy the good ones. It comes from the love that binds us. That's what makes a family."

Zach Wahls' speech was especially powerful for several reasons: first, he self-identifies as heterosexual, and he spoke on behalf of two homosexual people, his two mothers. Secondly, in civil rights movements we tend to hear the stories of the first line of the marginalized population; Wahls provides an entirely new perspective, giving a voice to the children who also face consequences due to their parents' marginalized identities and consequent lack of rights.

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<sup>1</sup> California, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, District of Columbia, New York, Washington, Maine, Maryland, Rhode Island, Delaware, Minnesota, New Jersey, Hawaii, Illinois, New Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> Oregon, Nevada, Wisconsin, Colorado.

<sup>3</sup> Zach Wahls' testimony was in 2011 in Des Moines, Iowa. He was arguing against an amendment which would ban same-sex marriage in Iowa.

Finally, Wahls' speech was effective rhetorically as he uses the linguistic strategies of listing traditional heteronormative practices to frame his "non-normative" family within a heteronormative framework. Wahls further positions his family as "normal" as he draws upon the heteronormative values of "commitment" and "love" in his description of them.

Similar to Zach Wahls' memorable "My two moms" speech, this current study focuses on the use of heteronormative alignment as a means to construct a non-marked identity, and ultimately, as an argumentation strategy in supporting equal rights for same-sex partners. Specifically, this study analyzes the testimonies of three same-sex couples, focusing on how each couple uses a heteronormative-themed-narrative within their testimony as a means to simultaneously negotiate their identity in the moment, and also argue for passing the same-sex civil union bill, Senate Bill 172. In the following theoretical section, I draw from Celia Kitzinger (2005) and William Leap (1999) as a means of understanding how society traditionally operates from a heteronormative perspective of privilege, whereby heterosexuality is essentialized as the normative way of going about life and other forms of sexual identification are positioned as "deviant" or "odd." Then, I explore the notion of the *heterosexual marketplace* (Eckert, 1997) as a means to expose how the ideology of heteronormativity is so pervasive in our culture. This concept allows us to see how institutional and social structures encourage children and adolescents to assimilate to normative gender roles and heterosexual identities. Finally, I explore definitions of Queer Theory and Queer Linguistics (Motschenbacher, 2010) along with the concept of Queer Time (Halberstam, 2003), which enable me to navigate the difference in people's expectations versus real-world constructions of gay and lesbian identities by focusing on heteronormativity and its effects on gay rights.

I then discuss the notion of testimony as a form of *institutionalized talk* (Heritage, 2005). The next section discusses the roles of narratives; first, I briefly explicate the elements of narratives, following the academic works of William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1967). I then show how identity work can be accomplished within narratives using Michael Silverstein's (2003) conceptualization of *indexicality*. I continue the discussion of identity construction within narratives by finishing up the chapter with a discussion of Butler's (1997) notion of *performativity*.

In order to foreground my study, I provide a brief history of gay and lesbian rights in Colorado, followed by an explanation of Senate Bill 172. My methodology chapter follows, primarily focusing on how I acquired the data, what the procedure was for giving testimony during the hearing, and the transcription conventions I chose to focus on. The narrative analysis of three same-sex couples at the Senate Bill 172 hearing in Colorado comprise my data chapter. After this, I discuss the strategies used by these couples to navigate the heteronormative terrain. I conclude the paper by highlighting how gay and lesbian citizens align with heteronormativity as a way to demonstrate shared values and practices, construct a non-marked identity, and ultimately, argue for the passage of Senate Bill 172.



## 2.0 Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

I draw from Critical Discourse Analysis<sup>4</sup> to navigate the social terrain of our society, connecting the speakers' talk to larger ideologies in our culture. This theoretical approach informs this study as it enables me to discuss how speakers negotiate between the embedded power dynamics of our society and their own moral stances. By using Mikhail Bakhtin's (1982) conception of *intertextuality*—intertextual analysis shows how texts selectively draw upon orders of discourse – the particular configurations of conventionalized practices (genres, discourses, narratives, etc.) which are available to text producers and interpreters in particular social circumstances...” (Fairclough, 1992, p.194)—I explore how the testifiers draw upon, reinterpret, and transform the text of the heteronormative narrative as a strategy to undo, or negotiate, their marked identity as a lesbian or gay citizen

According to Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen (2000), CDA has three dimensions of analysis. The first dimension involves the analysis of “discourse-as-text,” or, the language of the text—the linguistic analysis of the organization and linguistic nuances of specific texts and utterances; the present data focuses on instances of radial identity categories (i.e. family) and speaker deixis within the testimonies (p. 448). The second dimension of analysis looks at “discourse-as-a-discursive-practice,” or the ways in which the text manifests, and thus becomes a tangible and readily understood commodity which then may be consumed, distributed, and reinterpreted (p. 448). This current study focuses on the “text-types” aspect of the second dimension of analysis by examining the presence of heteronormative narratives and social injustice narratives within the testimonies. The third and final dimension of CDA is “discourse-as-social” where the analysis focuses on the “...ideological effects and hegemonic processes in

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<sup>4</sup> I will henceforth refer to Critical Discourse Analysis as CDA.

which discourse is a feature...” (p. 449). This present study seeks to explore the ideologies that influence gay and lesbian testifiers to employ heteronormative and social injustice narratives, and in turn, understand the identity work these narratives accomplish within the hegemonic framework.

## **2.2 Heteronormativity**

As sociolinguistic research has demonstrated (Bucholtz & Hall 2004), identity is fluid, performative (Butler, 1993), and perpetually negotiated. Individuals make subtle interactional alignments that can have far reaching societal impacts. However, for identity alignments to be meaningful and understood, individuals must make use of resources that are culturally salient and ideologically recognizable, and then make transformations to these resources by creating new meaning within them (Eckert, 2008). One ideological framework that is prevalent in our everyday practices and that serves as a productive resource for identity work is the dominant ideology of *heteronormativity*: the belief or assumption that there are two distinct genders (i.e. male and female) that behave in traditional gender-appropriate ways: specifically, by having the normative sexual preference in desiring the opposite gender, that is, having heterosexual desires (Cameron & Kulick, 2006; Kitzinger, 2005). Heteronormativity, then, values heterosexuality above all other sexualities, and furthermore, views all other sexualities as ‘deviant’ (Cameron & Kulick, 2006; Kitzinger, 2005). In the current study, I explore the ways in which gay and lesbian individuals align with a heteronormative-narrative during their testimonies as a strategy to construct a non-marked identity, as well as to argue for the passage of a civil union bill.

It should be noted that queer feminist Lisa Duggan (2003) calls the alignment or adherence to heteronormative ideology by lesbian and gay individuals *homonormativity*. Duggan’s research focuses on how these individuals’ assimilation to a heteronormative lifestyle

causes a division in gay culture based on ‘worthiness,’ with gay individuals who assimilate to the heteronormative lifestyle deemed most worthy, and individuals who deny these values least worthy. Here, Duggan is yet again subjugating gay men and lesbians to another label/identity within which they just might not fit. The addition of another label, ‘homonormative,’ not only diminishes the unique and individual identities of a group of people (whose only similarity may be that they are not heterosexual), but also subjects these individuals to the exact same type of prescriptivism that heteronormativity employs; this is what Judith Irvine and Susan Gal (2000) call *erasure*, where the diversity of a particular group of people is limited by ignoring or emphasizing one particular element, i.e., their normative practices. Therefore, due to the problematic and limiting nature of the term *homonormative*, I do not use it in this study; rather, I choose to use the term *heteronormativity* as this term is more stable and understood within our culture.<sup>5</sup>

### **2.3 Heterosexual Marketplace**

Heteronormativity obtains and maintains its ideological dominance by encouraging young adolescence to conform to traditional gender and sexual preferences through ritualized institutional and social activities at school, and thus, is the integral ideology which drives what Penelope Eckert (1994) calls the *heterosexual marketplace*. Specifically, Eckert argues that such activities as playing for the football team (for boys) and becoming cheerleaders (for girls) encourage normative gender roles, with boys becoming more masculine and obtaining/maintaining power, and girls being more submissive and feminine. Furthermore, school dances are a cultural ritual that value heterosexuality over any other sexual identity, and this is evident in the crowning of the ‘king’ and ‘queen’. Teens are encouraged to participate in

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<sup>5</sup> I should note that I do not personally agree with the social implications of heteronormativity, but I do understand this ideology is embedded within our culture and needs to be discussed, especially in the way it impacts individuals who do not necessarily fit into the heteronormative “mold”.

these cultural practices - and therefore to deny other practices and identities - so that they may attain status as successful members in society. The heterosexual marketplace not only values heteronormativity as the cultural norm, it also perpetuates the ideal of heteronormativity by placing social significance on traditional gender roles and heterosexuality. Therefore, the heterosexual marketplace is important for this study on two accounts: first, it frames the cyclical nature of the heteronormative ideology in our culture; secondly, this provides a backdrop for the experiences that gay men and women endure: that is, the institutional and social mechanisms that have come to shape their identities.

#### ***2.4 Queer Time versus Straight Time***

Judith Halberstam (2005) claims that *queer time* "...develop[s] in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction..." (p. 313-314). Therefore, queer time is often the foundation for queer theory arguments in that it takes a stance against heteronormative values and structures. However, opponents of equal rights for gay and lesbian citizens also use queer time rhetoric, claiming that gay and lesbians have deviant lifestyles. However, *straight time*, according to Fairclough (1992), "...is an emically salient, socially efficacious, and experientially real cultural construction of temporality across a wide range of political and social positions. I hypothesize that straight time is shaped by linked discourses of heteronormativity, capitalism, modernity, and apocalypse..." (p. 228).

Aligning with the dominant ideology of straight time, or the traditional life trajectory, is powerful for gay individuals as this strategic move challenges the very notion of heteronormativity: first, by calling into question who can be a 'typical member' of this group, and second, by making explicit that gay men and lesbians can have the same morals, values, and lifestyle as heterosexuals. I argue that it is the very notion of deviance, or a non-normative

lifestyle, that the gay and lesbian testifiers are directly countering in their testimonies when they explicitly align with heteronormative values. The strategy for gay individuals to draw upon heteronormative ideals and values falls in line with Tom Boelstorff's (2007) belief that "The term queer itself marks this stance of being always ready within, in bed with, complicit and contaminated by, the normative with which it engages." (p. 241); thus, I argue that it is necessary for the gay men and women to engage with heteronormative ideologies in order to negotiate a non-deviant identity and establish credibility as a family-oriented individual.

## **2.5 Queer Linguistics**

Finally, in order to fully explore and understand how gay men and women are able to make identity negotiations - specifically in aligning with heteronormative narratives - we must turn to Queer Linguistics. Branching from the Queer Theory movement, Queer Linguistics aims to unveil the discourses and practices which perpetuate a heteronormative ideology, and furthermore, call into question these mechanisms (Motschenbacher, 2010). Also, Queer Linguistics does not understand identity as an a priori manifestation, but rather, as something that the individual accomplishes/negotiates within the moment (Motschenbacher, 2010). Therefore, within the framework of Queer Linguistics, gay men and lesbians are not merely marginalized people who accept identities that are projected onto them (i.e. 'deviant' identities), but rather are actively constructing and contesting various identity positions through dominant discourses of heterosexuality.

Using these theoretical perspectives as a foundation, I aim to expose one strategy that gay individuals employ during their testimonies, that of a heteronormative-narrative-alignment. As will be explicated in the data, these same-sex couples keenly negotiate their identities within their testimonies by aligning with heteronormative values through anecdotes about their families.

Heiko Motschenbacher (2010) discusses how categories can wound people, but also how they can help people. As he states, "...uses that do not conform to this performative history, either by showing a complete clash with it or by allowing for less prototypical members of the category than traditionally permitted, are an adequate strategy" (p. 178). Following Motschenbacher's argument, I contend that gay individuals' alignments with heteronormative values are not necessarily moves towards trying to be heteronormative, nor are they political stances that agree with the marginalizing and degrading nature of heteronormativity; rather, I argue that lesbians and gay men draw from dominant discourses surrounding heterosexual practices, and align themselves with them, as a means to reconceptualize their practices as 'normal'.

### **3.0 Testimony as Institutionalized Talk**

Researchers from several branches of discourse analysis have explored the courtroom as a fruitful site of investigation in understanding speech acts that occur within this institutional setting (Wodak, 1980; Penman, 1990; van Dijk, 1993; Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Tracy, 2012). Thus far, much of this research focuses on institutionalized speech acts, such as witness interrogations (Heritage & Clayman, 2010), judge ruling formulations (Tracy, 2012), and jury proceedings (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Testimony follows the three integral parameters that utterances must adhere to in order to qualify as institutional talk. First, John Heritage (2005) states that the speech event or utterance usually "...involves the participants in specific goal orientations that are tied to their institutional-relevant identities." (p. 105). Second, there are specific restrictions to what may qualify as a permissible utterance within the specific institutional setting (p. 105). Finally, the speech event "...is associated with inferential frameworks and procedures that are particular to the specific institutional contexts" (p. 105).

Another common finding among this body of research is the concept of *stake*. Within the setting of a courtroom, individuals have great stake in the outcome of their speech act; thus, their speech is articulated and constructed to adhere to their personal motivations (Bruner, 1991). This concept of stake is particularly relevant for testimonies, as these speech acts are sites for individuals to provide the audience in the courtroom with their version of a story, or to provide a specific view of their world, in order to elicit beneficial consequences from the presiding judicial body, whether jury, judge, or in the case of the present research, state senators (Potter & Edwards, 2003). The present study builds upon the concept of stake by analyzing testimonies at the hearing for Senate Bill 172 and uncovering the strategies that the testifiers use to argue for passing the bill.

Following Johnstone's (1989) assertion that "Persuasion strategies are the range of options from which a speaker selects in deciding on an appropriate tactic or combination of tactics for persuasion in a given situation," my analysis explores how individuals use their testimony as an opportunity to negotiate their identity within a heteronormative and institutional framework. This is illustrated in how the same-sex-coupled testifiers use two narratives in coordination as a strategy to argue for the passing of the civil union bill (p. 143).



#### **4.0 Narratives and Identity Construction**

This study focuses on narratives within testimonies at a Colorado Senate hearing. For the purposes of this paper, my understanding of what constitutes a narrative is drawn from Labov & Waletzky's (1967) definition of a narrative as a recollection of a specific sequence of events by an individual, though co-production can and does occur. Building upon their previous literature on narrative analysis, I seek to understand how narratives function within everyday speech and play an integral role in identity work.

Further informing the narrative approach of this paper is Barbara Johnstone's (2004) chapter, "Discourse Analysis and Narrative" (Schriffin, Tannen & Hamilton 2001). In this chapter, Johnstone outlines Labov and Waletzky's previous work and expands it by focusing less on the form of narratives, as her predecessors do, and instead more on the function of narratives. In the vein of Johnstone's work, I argue that narratives are not merely recollections of events, but rather resources for individuals to forge social relationships, create versions of realities, and reflect power dynamics. Johnstone's work helps lay the groundwork for this paper, as I seek to understand the function of narratives within the testimonies, specifically by analyzing how these narratives play a role in the identity construction of the testifier.

#### **4.1 The elements of narratives**

One resource that allows testifiers to provide evidence for their argument is the use of a personal experience narrative—an individual's account of events that he/she has experienced first hand (Johnstone, 2001; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). As this study is primarily concerned with narratives, I briefly outline my understanding of a) what constitutes a narrative, and b) how I apply this understanding to my testimony excerpts.

Drawing from Labov & Waletzky's previous work, Johnstone (2001) states that personal experience narratives usually consist of an abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. It should be noted that not all of these are necessary elements of a personal experience narrative. The abstract of a narrative summarizes the whole story prior to the telling of the story, and thus, this element may be omitted depending on the individual's preference. An element that cannot be omitted from a narrative is the *orientation*, clauses in the narrative that serve to set up the time, place, people, and events that occur within it. The *complicating action* usually follows the orientation, and consists of clauses which detail the events that build towards a critical point, or, the *resolution*, which finalizes the action of the narrative. Another element of narratives is the *evaluation*, or the way the teller signals what is particularly tell-worthy or what she finds important for the audience to know (Johnstone, 2001). Finally, the *coda* is the last element of a narrative, which, similar to the abstract, summarizes the story, and may also be omitted. The following sections will explore two specific kinds of narratives that were emergent within the testimonies: heteronormative script narratives and social injustice narratives.

#### **4.2 The function of narrative in testimonies: Narrative as Strategy**

Following Johnstone's (2004) concept that individuals carefully construct versions of history, reality, and identity through narratives, I argue that the use of narratives within a testimony is a useful site of investigation for constructions of identity. More specifically, the aim of this paper is to highlight how individuals (i.e. testifiers) use narratives as a resource to negotiate a normative family-centered identity within the institutional setting of a hearing. Schriffin (2003) discusses how "...identities as social beings emerge as we construct our own individual experiences as a way to position ourselves in relation to social and cultural expectations" (p. 169-170). Schriffin's understanding is evident within the testimonies when the same-sex couples

demonstrate their keen awareness of heterosexuals' expectation of deviance and non-heteronormative values, and they position themselves accordingly by aligning their lifestyle with the heteronormative ideology. Moreover, Kim's (2010) synthesis of Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall's (2005) seminal work, states that:

“They argue that —desire cannot be separated from power and agency and stress the importance of —the ideologies, practices, and identities that produce social meanings of sexuality (486). Since linguistic anthropology emphasizes that language is —the mediating level between structures of power and human agency (492), examining the constitution of sexual practices and identities in situated speech becomes a potentially valuable tool for understanding how individuals both reproduce existing systems as well as creatively alter them.” (p. 245)

So it can be understood that gay and lesbian individuals are aligning with the heteronormative ideology while simultaneously attempting to “creatively alter” it. This alignment is apparent in the narratives of the same-sex couples analyzed here. It is a strategy that is used both to highlight the similarities between these two categories of heteronormative and presumed non-heteronormative, but also, and more subtly perhaps, to change the culturally embedded notion of gayness as ‘deviance’. In order to remedy this heteronormative power dynamic, same-sex couples must explicitly provide a legitimate instance of these so-called heteronormative values, which each couple does in their respective testimony through the use of a heteronormative script. I propose that gay and lesbian testifiers align their narratives with what is ideologically understood as a *heteronormative script*—I use the term heteronormative to refer to an ideology which holds a “straight” sexual orientation to be the norm, with all other sexual orientations therefore viewed as deviant. I use the term script to refer to the clauses which comprise the narrative and describe the daily routines that revolve around the family, responsibilities, and embedded values of the heteronormative ideology. I argue that the gay and lesbian testifiers use this heteronormative script in order to navigate the complex social, moral, and legal terrain involved in legitimizing their claims to normative, family-centered identities.

Bucholtz & Hall (2004) also have a name for this sort of interaction—*tactics of intersubjectivity*, by which they mean the strategies that speakers use to negotiate their identity. Specifically, Bucholtz & Hall state that “...the term tactics...invoke[s] the local, situated, and often improvised quality of the everyday practices through which individuals, though restricted in their freedom to act by externally imposed constraints, accomplish their social goals. Our second term, intersubjectivity, is meant to highlight the place of agency and interactional negotiation in the formation of identity” (p. 494). I argue that one tactic that the same-sex couples employ is the use of the heteronormative script to highlight similarities between themselves and heterosexual families, attempting to close the ideological gap and express shared values and beliefs<sup>6</sup>. As will be explicated in the data section, the tactics of *adequation* and *authentication* are used by the testifiers to make comparisons of sameness between them and their presumably heteronormative audience, and then to claim legitimacy to an authentic family-centered identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

What makes the use of the heteronormative script potentially even more powerful in argumentation is the presence of a social injustice narrative afterwards. In this way, the heteronormative script can be viewed as a preface to the social injustice narrative. In each of the testimonies of this study, the gay or lesbian individual begins their testimony by explicitly aligning themselves with heteronormative ideologies in an attempt to draw in their audience by demonstrating shared values. The social injustice narrative follows this preface, and is a sharp juxtaposition as it focuses on differences through the tactic of *distinction* as the speaker details inequalities that he/she has endured due to his/her gay identity, thus creating a social boundary which distinguishes the gay community from the heterosexual community (Bucholtz & Hall,

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<sup>6</sup> Once again, I do not mean to argue that couples/families in the gay community do not have heteronormative values, but rather quite the opposite. My aim is to expose how this ideology is embedded within our culture and demonstrate the ways in which individuals navigate this ideological terrain by negotiating alignment.

2004). Highlighting an identity which is systematically denied recognition by the law is another tactic, *illegitimation* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004); the testifiers use this tactic in order to show how they lack the necessary resources, or rights, that would enable them to care for their families. Thus, by first connecting with the audience on shared values—despite the speaker’s sexual orientation—then exposing the reality of the lack of equal rights—because of the speaker’s sexual orientation—the gay and lesbian testifiers construct non-marked family-centered identities that cannot properly care for their families due to lack of rights, thus making a compelling argument for passing Senate Bill 172.

## **5.0 A Brief History of Same-Sex Legislation in Colorado**

To foreground the importance of Senate Bill 172 in Colorado, I briefly explore the state's history with same-sex marriage legislature. In 1975, an attorney understood the statute of "any two persons" to be void of any specific gender/sex restrictions, and in turn, a county clerk issued several same-sex marriage licenses. However, the state attorney claimed that the marriages were not valid, and the licenses were revoked. In 1992, the state of Colorado enacted legislation, Amendment 2, which did not allow subjects to use homosexual behaviors or lifestyles to "claim any minority status, quota preferences, protected status or claim of discrimination." Two years later, the Supreme Court found this amendment to be unconstitutional in *Romer vs Evans*. In 2006, an amendment was added to the Colorado Constitution outlawing same-sex marriages and common-law marriages between same-sex partners. Later in 2006, Colorado put the Colorado Domestic Partnership Benefits and Responsibilities Act to a vote, which would have extended more rights to same-sex domestic partners with the hope of increasing state revenue significantly, but this referendum was defeated by a slim margin. The Designated Beneficiary Agreements Act of 2009 brought a few rights to same-sex couples: they now would be able to make arrangements in the event of an illness or death, and the surviving partner was now entitled to death benefits.

State Representative Mark Ferrandino and State Senator Pat Steadman presented the Colorado Civil Union Act in 2011. This legislation aimed to extend even more rights than the Designated Beneficiary Agreement Act afforded same-sex couples, specifically in the form of medical and death rights and inheritances, and more family-centered rights: the ability to adopt the partner's children, family leave, insurance coverage, and responsibility of conservator and guardian rights. The bill passed in the Senate, but was ultimately defeated in the House. In 2012

the bill was re-introduced, and once again passed in the Senate, but was defeated in the House. A third version of the bill was introduced in 2013, Senate Bill 172, a call for civil unions in the state of Colorado. Similar to marriage, Senate Bill 172 extends rights of property, inheritance, caretaker benefits, survivor benefits and financial responsibilities to both partners in the civil union. However, unlike within marriage, civil union partners cannot file a joint tax return. The bill was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senate Appropriations Committee and the Senate Constitutional Committee. Three weeks later, both the State House and Senate passed Senate Bill 172, which was sent to Governor John Hickenlooper to sign on March 21, 2013. The law went into effect on May 1, 2013.

## **6.0 Methodology**

The current study focuses on a Colorado hearing that contests Senate Bill 172, the call for civil unions in the state of Colorado. The hearing begins with the Chair initiating introductions between the six senators, followed by Senator Steadman presenting Senate Bill 172 to the audience. After an overview of the bill, the Chair allows each of the six senators an opportunity to ask Senator Steadman any questions concerning the bill. Finally, the Chair opens up the floor for the citizens to approach the floor and testify. Each person is allotted a three minute time limit and is instructed to provide a self-introduction and a statement of whom he/she is representing before they begin their testimony. Several same-sex couples testify jointly, and in these instances, the total time allotted is six minutes. Although the senators are permitted to ask the testifying citizens questions, they questioned only three citizens out of the total of 45 testimonies. The recording of the entire hearing lasts for 3 hours, 44 minutes, and 51 seconds.

I did not transcribe the hearing in its entirety; rather, I listened to the hearing and took notes on each of the individual testimonies, highlighting the testimonies in which a narrative emerged. Analyzing the data according to Labov's narrative structure units (abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda), I was able to parse excerpts that display the structure and content of narratives. In total, 16 narratives emerged within the data: nine from citizens in support of Bill 172, and seven from citizens against Bill 172. Because my focus is on content and ideological concepts, I decided to transcribe the narratives broadly as spoken by the citizens, only noting the quality of the voice, pauses, restarts, and words with emphasis.



## **7.0 Data Analysis**

The present study analyzes the testimonies of three couples, all of whom identify as gay, live in the state of Colorado, and are proponents of Senate Bill 172. The first couple is Louis and Jesse. This couple has a son who is Louis' from a previous relationship, and of whom they enjoy to spend time with, whether watching him play basketball, or playing board games at home. The following testimonies of Jesse and Louis contain specific key elements that work towards creating a heteronormative narrative, which in turn is followed by a social injustice narrative about Louis' back injury and unfortunate hospital visits.

The second couple is Shawna and Lisa; their family includes them and their two sons, but it remains unclear whether they adopted these children as a couple, or if their sons are from previous relationships. Similar to Louis and Jesse, Shawna and Lisa also provide descriptions of their routine family life, followed by a social injustice narrative that discusses how lack of rights has impacted healthcare issues and in turn, their family.

The final couple whose testimonies I analyze are Anna and Fran. Following the same pattern as the two previous couples, Anna and Fran begin their testimony by listing activities in which they enjoy doing with their son. Again, this heteronormative script narrative is followed by a troublesome anecdote about how the lack of rights has, and continues to, negatively impact their growing family.

### **7.1 *Straight Time, Lists, and Adequation***

First, I argue that all of the couples within my data begin their testimonies with a *heteronormative narrative*, and again, I use the term heteronormative narrative to refer to the practices and categories which are repeatedly drawn upon by these citizens to align with heteronormative ideals concerning the family-unit and timeline trajectories of straight families.

These descriptions can also be understood as strategic moves in negotiating their identity as worthy even ‘normal,’ citizens in their communities. One of the tactics utilized is *adequation*, whereby an individual purposefully focuses on qualities which are shared with the interlocutor or audience thus downplaying differences (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

The first instance of using adequation is seen in Louis’s testimony. As Louis begins his narrative, he employs this tactic by listing activities which are commonly associated with normative ideals about family:

10                                When I met Jesse three years ago (.) I  
11        was a single gay man (clears throat) raising a nine  
12        year old son (.) Like mo -- most single parents  
13        know (.) it is hard work to raise a kid by yourself (.)  
14        between homework (.) my work (.) and all of the  
15        other responsibilities of our life (.)

Here, Louis is working to undo his marked identity as a gay male father by aligning with typical, heteronormative, practices that revolve around the concept of responsibility. Also, as family is an integral part of the heteronormative ideology and straight time trajectories, it is poignant that the concept of parenthood is the first to be drawn upon in his narrative.

Another example of using lists is found in the following excerpt, in which Louis explicitly states that he, his partner Jesse, and their son, are just like the other families in their neighborhood.

17    We’re  
18        all -- we’re like all other families in our  
19        neighborhood (.) Our son was on the middle school  
20        basketball team (.) we have two little dogs (.) and  
21        we spend nights doing homework with our son (.)  
22        playing board games (.) and watching the latest ep –  
23        - episode of American Idol (.)

In order to validate his claim of being like all of the other families, Louis once again lists activities that he and his family engage in: after-school sports, playing board games, and

watching television. This list adheres to the notion of adequation as Louis explicitly seeks to cite ‘sameness’ in comparison with his fellow neighbors. He demonstrates that he and Jesse are involved and dedicated parents, as they spend quality time with their son. Once again, the activities that Louis mentions in his testimony refer to typical events and practices in which straight families, or families that fall within a straight time framework, engage. Therefore, Louis’s alignment with these heteronormative ideals is evident as a tool to begin building a common ground with the presumably straight individuals in the audience of the hearing, extending outward into society as a whole. Louis aims to bridge the ideological gap between his actual values that he possesses and the assumed marked or deviant/non-normative lifestyle he leads in the eyes of his opposition (often straight, heteronosexual individuals). Louis’s narrative alignment through the tactic of adequation seeks to diminish any assumptions about him and his family and to show how they have the same values as their heteronormative family counterparts. Also, Louis’s alignment with heteronormative ideals is a strategy to eliminate markedness as he seeks to describe how he is similar to his neighbors rather than highlighting any differences. Louis is clearly speaking to an audience that he feels is, at least in part, representative of this heteronormative ideology, and thus uses his alignment to focus on similarities.

In their testimonies, Lisa and Shawna also use lists in order to focus on similarities with other heteronormative families and disregard any differences. Take the following excerpt:

29     On a Tuesday morning (.) my guess is that our  
30     house (.) might look a lot like yours (.) We’re  
31     awake by five thirty (.) if we sleep in (.) making  
32     lunches (.) for the office for the school (.) folding  
33     laundry that’s her job (.) by the way.

Just as Louis did within his excerpt, Shawna makes a statement of comparison claiming that her family is similar to other families (seen in lines 29-30), and she validates this claim by listing

every day, mundane activities in which she and her family participate in. Once again, using a list to claim participation with these normative straight time practices helps Shawna create an identity which is less marked by focusing on qualities of ‘sameness’ versus difference with her audience.

Shawna continues to use the same persuasion and negotiation strategy of adequation as she goes on listing more activities shared by her and her partner:

36     Balancing the check book (.) um (.) balancing  
37     nutrition for a thirteen year old who fully believes  
38     that pepperoni pizza is a vegetable group (.)  
39     deciding who’s gonna walk the dogs (.) who’s  
40     going to do all the errands pick up the dry cleaning  
41     (.) all of that jazz (.) We are remarkably similar to  
42     our neighbors (.)

After the list, Shawna claims that she and her family are “remarkably similar” to other families in her neighborhood. Once again, by listing activities that revolve around the notion of family and responsibility, Shawna focuses her adequation tactic around straight time concepts versus deviant concepts that are related with being gay, and in turn, seeks to construct a normative identity.

Similar to both Louis’ and Shawna’s heteronormative narratives, Fran also describes family-centered activities:

18             We are here today testifying because we love  
19     Colorado .. We love biking in Durango .. skiing  
20     Copper Mountain .. we love hiking in Garden of the  
21     Gods .. we love jogging around Wash Park .. we  
22     love taking our son to Denver Botanic Gardens and  
23     riding light rails to Nuggets games and to see  
24     performances at the Buell (H) We love the  
25     neighborhood public school .. we send our son to ..  
26     because of these things and more we are willingly  
27     and even gladly .. pay our share of taxes .. and give  
28     our money and time to support Colorado charities  
29     and non-profits ..

Fran's long list of activities that she and her family partake in not only draws upon notions of straight time ideals—capitalism and family, most notably—but is also another example of how adequation is a useful tactic to combat a marked identity. Thus, Fran's aim is not only to align her lifestyle with heteronormative values, but also go a step further and demonstrate how she and her family are part of a normative culture, rather than a queer or marked culture. Focusing on similarities between two categories—or two groups of people, that is, straight and gay—is not only a powerful identity negotiation tactic, but also a useful persuasion strategy.

## **7.2 Comparisons, *Deixis*, and *Authentication***

Categories are cognitive representations of how we organize, understand, and interpret our world (Jayyusi, 1984; Lakoff, 1987; Medin & Rips, 2005; Stokoe, 2012). The most common category that is drawn upon within the data is that of family. However, what is even more noteworthy than the abundance of this category is how it functions within the narratives. The category of family, along with its related subcategories of responsibility, commitment, care, and love, is drawn upon in order to negotiate a normative identity, and thus negate a non-normative identity of being deviant. In doing this, these couples are thereby redefining the parameters of who can be a legitimate member of a normative family (or who can be a legitimate member of a heteronormative family). This follows Douglas Medin and Lance Rips (2005) statement that “Not only do people categorize in order to understand new entities, they also use the new entities to modify and update their concepts.” (p. 3). The gay and lesbian testifiers compare themselves with their presumed heteronormative audience, often referring to the category of family, which can be seen as a strategy to redefine who may be included as a typical member of this category.

Also, Bucholtz & Hall's claim regarding the hierarchical nature of markedness further informs how gay and lesbian couples within these data not only work to undo their marked

stance of being deviant because of their sexual identity, but also to achieve social equality by arguing for the passage of Senate Bill 172 (p. 372-373): “Because markedness implies hierarchy, differences between groups become socially evaluated as deviations from a norm and, indeed, as failures to measure up to an implied or explicit standard. Hence such differences are used as a justification for social inequality.” Bucholtz & Hall (2004) mention another useful strategy to undo a marked identity, to claim legitimacy in a normative category—*authentication*. More specifically, authentication “...foregrounds the processes by which authenticity is claimed, imposed, or perceived...” (p. 498). I argue that in referencing the category of family, and making explicit comparisons to other, presumably heteronormative families, these couples are validating their identities as typical family members—that is, the role of parents—who possess the same values of care, commitment, and responsibility that other normative families have.

Additionally, the concept of *deixis* must briefly be explored here, as the following excerpts have specific deictic representations. Deixis, according to William Hanks (2005), is when “Actors engage in verbally mediated interaction under specific social conditions that both constrain and enable their abilities to relate to one another and to the world around them.” (p. 191). For the following excerpts, the speakers make comparisons between themselves and their audience by first mentioning themselves, followed by a comparison to that of the audience. These comparisons follow Miguel Campos Pardillos (1995) notion that “From the point of view of stylistics and the interactional function of language (as in Brown and Yule 1), this usage of presupposed deixis as a rhetorical device has the purpose of joining both speaker and addressee within the same context” (p. 59). The employment of these comparisons allows the speakers to put themselves in the same category as the audience, that of being family-centered individuals with similar lifestyles and practices.

One example of drawing upon the concept of family and its related categories is found in an excerpt of Louis' testimony, where he describes how Jesse completed his family:

15 I was so happy  
16 when I met Jesse (.) He came into our life because  
17 he fin -- he finally completed our family (.) We're  
18 all -- we're like all other families in our  
19 neighborhood (.)

As Louis constructs his family-man identity, he also makes a direct comparison as he says, "we're like all other families in our neighborhood." Louis restarts his sentence after he said "we're all --"; it is likely that the trajectory of Louis's unfinished sentence could have been "We're all the same." I understand that it is not my job to speculate what the intentions of the speaker are, or even begin to recreate possible other sentences he could have spoken, but I do think that there is more to this restart than what is initially read or understood. Louis may have restarted and reformulated his sentence in order to avoid constructing a sizeable ideological leap for people in the audience who do conform with heteronormative views, and thus do not share the view that "we are all the same." Instead, the 'we' in the revised utterance refers to Louis and his family alone, not the "we" of everyone, and points outwards towards the neighbors as the baseline. Here, Louis and his family are the deictic center, in that they are the referent that consequent utterances point to.

Drawing upon the category of family in order to make a comparison of sameness is also found in Shawna's testimony.

25 our family includes two  
26 sons (.) um Isaac my step-son who is thirteen (.)  
27 Joseph (.) Lisa's step-son whose is twenty (.) and a  
28 couple of crazy dogs named Romeo (.) and GG (.)  
29 On a Tuesday morning (.) my guess is that our  
30 house (.) might look a lot like yours (.)

Once again, deixis plays a role in the heteronormative alignments, in that when relating oneself to “other” (presumably heterosexual) families, the gay testifiers first reference themselves (thus being the deictic center), and then refer outward to other heteronormative families. This is evident as Shawna begins describing her family, consequently ending this description with “On a Tuesday morning, my guess is that our house might look a lot like yours.” The order in which she chooses to deliver this sentence is significant; Shawna states “our” first, then follows with “your.” Ordering the genitive pronouns in this manner starts with a deictic center of speaker that points outward toward listener, with the starting point of the speaker, or more broadly, the gay community, and then pointing to the heterosexual community. The effect of this ordering is that the gay community is at the center of the consequent comparison, not heterosexuals. If this sentence were ordered the other way around, with the deictic center being “your” followed by “our,” the effect and meaning would drastically change as the following comparison would focus on heterosexuals. Subsequently, the sentence may then read, “...my guess is that your house might look a lot like ours.” In this instance, Shawna is bringing the heterosexual realm into her own, which to her heterosexual audience may not be appealing or too far of a stretch conceptually. However, attempting to align oneself by pointing to the other realm, the heterosexual realm, seems like it is less of an ideological leap, and requires the action on behalf of the speaker, and not of the audience.

Later in her testimony, Shawna makes another comparison of similarity between her family and the other families within her community by using the tactic of authentication. Once again, it seems that Shawna is keenly aware of this apparent perception of “deviance” towards her and her family as she readily list instances of her family’s daily life which they believe are in



line with heterosexual norms, and in turn, aims to legitimate her identity as an authentic family-value-embued individual.

36     Balancing the check book (.) um (.) balancing  
37     nutrition for a thirteen year old who fully believes  
38     that pepperoni pizza is a vegetable group (.)  
39     deciding who's gonna walk the dogs (.) who's  
40     going to do all the errands pick up the dry cleaning  
41     (.) all of that jazz (.) We are remarkably similar to  
42     our neighbors (.)

Shawna validates her family's lifestyle by explicitly stating "...we are remarkably similar to our neighbors," much like Louis and Jesse claimed in their testimony. Such a statement not only demonstrates that Shawna and Lisa's lifestyle and values are not different from their heterosexual neighbors, but it also implies the embeddedness of a heteronormative ideology in our culture—the very need to express sameness implies that difference is being countered. Thus, by drawing upon the concept of family and the daily routines in which families engage, Shawna is making a claim to her authentication as a legitimate member of a family, and more specifically, of a family who possesses normative values.

The final example of how the concept of family is used in a comparison to connote sameness is in Fran's testimony.

32                     our work colleagues and our  
33     fellow PTA parents .. all can see that our  
34     relationship is no different from theirs ..

As evident in previous narratives, deixis plays a significant role in the heteronormative narrative embedded in the testimony of Fran. She states that their colleagues, "...all can see that our relationship is no different than theirs." Once again, Fran chooses to use herself and her partner's relationship as the deictic center of the comparison, and then she points out toward the other groups' relationships. As in Shawna and Lisa's excerpt, the effect of using this order of

pronouns has a huge semantic difference than if they were switched—imagine if the sentence read, “[they] all can see that their relationship is just like ours.” This would force the audience to make the ideological comparison and possibly negotiation to relate their relationship with that of a lesbian-identified woman. Therefore, Fran does all of the negotiating in her sentence, as she uses herself and her partner as the deictic center, attempting to align their lifestyle with that of other, more heteronormative lifestyles.

Also, it is noteworthy that Fran mentions PTA parents, which implicates her involvement in the PTA, or the Parent Teacher Association. This helps demonstrate Fran’s care and engagement in her son’s activities. Diane Moon (2005) asserts that “The form and content of these accounts make the genre of testimony performative, in both cases producing subjects while making certain categories unthinkable” (572). Therefore, by drawing upon family related concepts, such as responsibility, Fran and Anna seek to authenticate their identities as caring mothers, and in turn, deny the alternative identity of being deviant people due to misconceptions about their sexual identity.

### **7.3 Social Injustic Narratives, *Distinction*, and *Illegitimation***

Another type of personal experience narrative that is common among the same-sex couples’ testimonies is one which describes a social injustice that the individual has endured.

Specifically, *social injustice* refers to an unequal distribution of rights, opportunities, and power based upon various socio-demographic categories, such as race, gender, religion, and so forth.

The three testimonies I examine all contain narratives which detail social injustices based upon the speakers’ sexual orientation; the point of these narratives is to focus on a difference between them and their audience, that of inequality. Highlighting difference is a strategy defined by Bucholtz & Hall (2004) as *distinction*, which is the “...converse of adequation, in that in this

relation difference is underscored rather than erased.” (495). Also, the tactic of *illegitimation* is employed by the testifiers to show how they are denied equal rights, and therefore, do not have the same access to resources to take care of their families that straight families do.

The relationship between these social injustice narratives and the heteronormative script narratives is that the latter always precede the former, so it seems that the heteronormative script narratives are functioning as a preface to the social injustice narratives. Thus, I argue that the testifiers ultimately use their heteronormative narratives, and the tactics within them—adequation and authentication—to construct a family-value-oriented identity, and express how they are similar to their heteronormative audience. They conclude their testimonies with a social injustice narrative to provide an account of how, despite all of their similarities and normative lifestyle, they are not the same in the eyes of the law.

The first social injustice narrative is from Louis and Jesse’s testimony. Following Louis’ description of their family and claim that they are similar to other families, Jesse provides a social injustice narrative to highlight how he and his family are different from other families. Specifically, Jesse discusses how he and his partner experience difficulties with health professionals because their relationship is not legally recognized:

26 This is Jesse again (.) Six months into our  
27 relationship (.) Louis had uh fairly traumatic back  
28 injury that put him out of work for almost two years  
29 (.) Um (.) in the culmination of his issues with his  
30 back he was going through back surgery (.) um  
31 which (.) resulted in a week-long stay in a hospital  
32 (.) And (.) as a younger couple it was not something  
33 we had ever considered about drafting a will or  
34 having the basic legal protection that most other  
35 couples are afforded (.) even (.) common law  
36 marriages in the state of Colorado (.) Um (.) that  
37 process made us think what we needed to do to  
38 make sure that our family was protected and that we  
39 were able to care for one another in a way that most

40 other families are able (.) Uh (.) we entered into a  
41 designated beneficiary agreement (.) and (.) before  
42 we went into the surgery room (.) I had that little  
43 piece of paper folded in my pocket (.) unfortunately  
44 for me (.) at the hospital where we went (.) I was  
45 asked continually (.) what is your relationship to  
46 this person (.) and this is visiting hours for family  
47 only (.) And regardless of the fact that I had power  
48 of attorney (.) regardless of the fact that I have this  
49 piece of paper (.) I wasn't treated with the basic  
50 dignity to care for my partner (.) and to be there  
51 with my son (.) um ver -- very fortunately had staff  
52 on hand who said (.) oh let me see the paper (.) ok  
53 great (.) and let me into the room (.) but that never  
54 shoulda never been an issue to begin with (.) Um (.)  
55 when he was released from the hospital (.) and we  
56 took him home (.) and he was ending (.) kinda  
57 period of his -- his pain medication (.) um (.) I went  
58 to go pick up his medication like most people in a  
59 committed relationship would do (.) go pick up the  
60 pain medicine since you just got a back surgery (.)  
61 y- you can't really go do it yourself (.) and I had to  
62 argue with the pharmacist to pick up his pain  
63 medication (.) Because I had no legal recognition  
64 that he was my partner (.) and that I was there to  
65 care for him (.) I think it (.) [Hx] (.) it's backwards  
66 that in our state we allow that to happen (.)

One way that Jesse constructs his social injustice narrative is through vocabulary choice. He employs several words that are associated with misfortune, or are indicative of his stance towards his marginalized identity. As Jess first sets up his social injustice narrative, he uses the word 'traumatic' when describing his partner's back injury, as seen in line 27. Though Jesse does hedge this description of Louis's back injury with 'fairly,' it can be understood that the tone of the following narrative is going to be powerful. Further along in his testimony in line 43, Jesse uses the word 'unfortunately' as he begins to describe his experience at the hospital where Louis had his back surgery. Employing a word such as 'unfortunately' definitely sets up the audience to expect an event/experience that is less than favorable. A final example of Jesse's

intentionally negative vocabulary is found on lines 65 and 66, at the end of his social injustice narrative, when he states that “it’s backwards that in our state we allow that to happen.”

Specifically, when Jesse employs the word ‘backwards,’ he uses the directional metaphor to make a claim that equal rights in Colorado are regressing and not progressing towards equality.

Jesse also produces a social injustice narrative by employing comparisons, in order to highlight difference. The first instance of comparison is found in lines 32-36; here, Jesse describes how as a younger couple, he and Louis never imagined they were at the age that they would need to draw up a will. Furthermore, being a young couple, he and Louis did not stop to reflect on how they did not have the resources to care for their family that ‘most other couples are afforded.’ Here, ‘most other couples’ can be understood as heterosexual couples in the state of Colorado. So, Jesse provides a specific example of how he and his partner do not have the same rights as heterosexual couples by using a comparison, all the while he continues to draw upon the concept of the family unit in order to construct a more heteronormative aligned identity.

Jesse continues to contrast his family’s experiences with those of ‘most other families’ in lines 36-40; again, ‘most other families’ can be understood as heterosexual families in the state of Colorado. Since Jesse and Louis are a younger couple, they did not anticipate creating a will, however their lack of rights and health issues required that they draw up a legal document so that they could ‘care for one another in a way that most other families are able.’ Jesse wanted visitation rights at the hospital that Louis was staying at after his surgery, so they entered into a designated beneficiary agreement. Jesse compares this process with the fact that other (presumably heterosexual) families are simply granted these rights—rights to visitation and protection—while he and his partner are subjected to long and costly processes in order to obtain rights that are similar, but not the same, as those which heterosexual families are granted.

Jesse's final comparison of his and his family's plight with that of a heterosexual family is found in lines 42-51. Within these lines Jesse does not make a direct comparison, however, the contrast he is evident as he describes how, despite having the designated beneficiary agreement printed and readily available in order to validate his claim as a family member of his partner, he was still harassed at the hospital about his visitation rights. Jesse does not refer to 'most other couples' or 'most other families' that he does in the previous examples, but the comparison is implicit as he states that he '...wasn't treated with the basic dignity to care for...' his loved ones: using the word 'basic' implies that other people are treated with such dignity, and these other people that Jesse is referring to are heterosexual families. Jesse effectively demonstrates how his family has been negatively impacted through his use of comparing his rights with those of heterosexual families.

As Jesse describes the specific instances of social injustices he encountered, such as not being able to see his partner in the hospital, and being harassed at the pharmacy when trying to pick up medication for his partner, he strategically relates these events with his lack of rights as a gay male. In explicitly linking these social injustices with the socio-demographic identity of a gay male, Jesse cleverly uses the tactic of illegitimation to make an argument that, in order to care for and protect his family like other families, he must first have the same rights as these heteronormative families, thus arguing for passage of Senate Bill 172. Jesse, in turn, effectively uses the tactic of distinction to demonstrate ways in which he and his family are different than traditional, heteronormative families, by making explicit that they are from different social groups because of unequally distributed rights. Also, it is important to note that even within the social injustice narrative, Jesse draws upon family related categories and concepts. The persistence of aligning with these family values throughout their entire testimony strengthens

Louis and Jesse's argument as they construct a normative identity. Their consistent use of the family-unit is a way to for them to combat their marked identities as deviant and immoral, and in turn, showcases their family values.

Similar to Jesse's social injustice narrative, Shawna's narrative revolves around health care issues. In the following excerpt, Shawna describes the difficulty in caring for Lisa, who has multiple sclerosis, due to their lack of equal rights to health insurance coverage. Shawna begins her social injustice narrative in lines 41-62, then after Lisa 'donates' her time to speak, Shawna continues and finishes her narrative in lines 86-108:

41                                      We are remarkably similar to  
42                                      our neighbors (.) and we are actually markedly  
43                                      different because our family also deals with the  
44                                      specter of a chronic illness everyday (.) Lisa has  
45                                      multiple sclerosis (.) Often called the invisible  
46                                      disorder (.) symptoms come and go (.) Today she  
47                                      was able to walk to the capital (.) we took the  
48                                      elevator (.) next week she could be in a wheel chair  
49                                      (.) About five months ago (.) I got uh very scary call  
50                                      from the parking lot of King Soopers (.) where Lisa  
51                                      had gone to shop (.) and uh (.) she called me and  
52                                      said she could not walk (.) and needed her help at  
53                                      home (.) She is the strongest person I know (.) and  
54                                      she is also recognized all of her gifts (.) Having our  
55                                      relationship legally recognized as a civil union will  
56                                      mean I can better take care of her (.) such as (.)  
57                                      making sure I have health insurance that will cover  
58                                      my partner (.) regardless of whether I might have  
59                                      seven additional papers of legalese (.) that will help  
60                                      us in taking care of more than uh thousand two  
61                                      hundred dollars of prescription medication per  
62                                      month (.) and that's with insurance.

Continued portion of Shawna's social injustice narrative:

86                                      She's donating her- you're supposed ta tell me that  
87                                      honey um (.) one of (.) one- you know one of the  
88                                      issues we have faced is uh is health (.) for sure (.)  
89                                      and healthcare (.) um (.) I went (.) like a lot of  
90                                      people we sit at the table and (.) juggle our bills (.)

91 um (.) and when we're facing like I said the the cost  
92 of a mortgage or more of just prescription drug  
93 medication (.) um (.) it is very frightening to think  
94 um (.) if we lose our insurance (.) the cost of those  
95 medications could be (.) frankly out-of-reach (.) Um  
96 (.) Lisa gives herself a shot every night she's given  
97 herself (.) over two thousand five hundred shots (.)  
98 um everyday (.) and she doesn't complain about it  
99 (.) all she asks is that um occasionally I (.) am the  
100 one who does the laundry folding (H) (.) um (.) This  
101 is really about us being able to take care of each  
102 other (.) and have responsibility for each other (.)  
103 and most of the people we know (.) even if we  
104 differ vastly in uh opinions of other things (.) they  
105 will agree that we should have the ability to take  
106 care of each other (.) And be responsible for one  
107 another (.) And that's why we thought it was  
108 important to speak up.

Shawna immediately establishes her social injustice narrative in lines 41-45, where she informs the audience that her partner, Lisa, has multiple sclerosis. In lines 46-53, Shawna provides a brief anecdote on the effects of Lisa's illness, which she uses as a transition to discuss her family's lack of equal access to healthcare. Lisa, then donates her allotted testimony time, so Shawna continues with their social injustice narrative on line 86.

In the second half of the social injustice narrative, Shawna describes how Lisa's health issues have in turn caused economic obstacles for their family to overcome. One strategy that Shawna uses to shape her social injustice narrative is the use of specific vocabulary—she chooses words that convey to the audience a sense of despair, showing how she and her family are facing challenges. Shawna begins by discussing the healthcare 'issues' she and her family have endured, in lines 87-89. She continues describing these obstacles as she mentions the 'cost' of medication, in lines 91-93 as well as in lines 94-95. The repetition of mentioning the cost of medication helps Shawna emphasize how her family is financially affected due to lack of equal healthcare rights. Shawna further builds upon this economic hardship in lines 93-95 as she



discusses her fear over the possibility of losing the health insurance she and her family do have, and the consequent increase in cost this would incur. By specifically using the word ‘frightening,’ Shawna clearly expresses the anguish she feels because she does not have the same access to healthcare rights that heterosexual families enjoy, which impedes her ability to properly care for her family. Shawna closes this statement by noting that if she and her partner do in fact lose the healthcare they currently have, the cost of managing Lisa’s multiple sclerosis (medications, doctor’s appointments, etc.) would be ‘out-of-reach.’ Again, by carefully selecting her words, Shawna successfully demonstrates how she and her family have suffered financially, and may continue to suffer financially and otherwise, because they do not have the same access to healthcare that heterosexual families have rights to.

Another tactic that Shawna uses to construct her social injustice narrative is verb choice—some of the verbs she uses within this narrative seek to express how she and her family have struggled due to their lack of rights, specifically because her and her partner’s identity as lesbians. One such verb that Shawna employs is ‘to face,’ which she uses twice. First, Shawna states in lines 87-89 “you know one of the issues we have faced is uh is health for sure and healthcare.” Here, she introduces the audience to the primary challenge that she and her family have encountered: healthcare. Shawna continues in lines 91-93 describing her family’s plight as she states, “and when we’re facing like I said the cost of a mortgage or more of just prescription drug medication.” Shawna could have chosen another verb that met the essential meaning of ‘to face,’ that is, a verb that would express the experience of dealing with an issue. However, Shawna chooses the verb ‘to face’ which possesses a more nuanced meaning, that of ‘confronting’ an issue head-on, or face-forward. So although Shawna discusses how she and her family are victims of unequal rights—which have negatively impacted her family on several

counts—she chooses a verb to describe this predicament that shows how she and her family are not helpless, they confront their problems and seek solutions. This is noteworthy because it demonstrates how, although she is enduring hardships, Shawna still possesses the mental and emotional capacity to protect her family. Shawna points out that what she lacks is the equal access to healthcare she needs to properly take care of her family, especially in light of her partner's illness.

After providing an account of how she and her family are quite similar to other families in their neighborhood using the tactic of adequation, Shawna then employs the strategy of illegitimation as she details the difficulties that she and Lisa face due to their lack of equal rights, thus focusing on how they are different than other families. Once again, the order in which these narratives occur is especially powerful as an argumentation device as the heteronormative narrative draws upon shared family values between the speaker and the audience, then the social injustice narrative exposes the sharp difference between the speaker and audience. This argumentation is achieved by employing the tactic of distinction—Shawna exposes how, although she and her family have similar values and practices to other normative families, they are still victims to social and institutional boundaries, namely, the lack of equal rights and notions of marked identities that are projected onto them.

The final excerpt is from Anna and Fran's testimony. Similar to the previous testimonies, their social injustice narrative focuses around the family unit, specifically, describing the difficulty in having the same rights to care for and protect their family. As is the order of narratives in the previous two testimonies, Anna and Fran's heteronormative narrative precedes their social injustice narrative. Anna begins the following excerpt, with Fran finishing the

testimony. It needs to be noted that MC stands for Madame Chair, who is the presiding moderator for the hearing.

62 Being an invisible couple in the eyes of the law (.)  
63 has (.) and continues to affect us in countless small  
64 and large ways (.) like many families we wanted to  
65 have the same last name (.) but because our union  
66 isn't recognized I had to go through a long and  
67 costly process to change my name that included  
68 being fingerprinted and having an FBI criminal  
69 background check .. Similarly (.) we had to spend  
70 hundreds of dollars to petition a judge to ensure that  
71 Jeremy had both of his parents listed on his birth  
72 certificate .. now that second parent adoption is  
73 legal .. if we have a second child (.) we would have  
74 to go through a costly home study (.) so that that  
75 child could be adopted by the parent that didn't give  
76 birth to him.  
Fran 77 My family [is my responsibility.  
MC 78 [Fran.  
Fran 79 @sorry@ hu hu hu .. my family is my  
80 responsibility. I am responsible for Anna and  
81 Jeremy (.) yet current Colorado laws do not provide me  
82 the tools that I need to care for and protect them  
83 (.) for example (.) we travel with Jeremy's birth  
84 certificate .. because our validity as his parents can  
85 so easily be challenged (.) we also carry cards in our  
86 wallets (.) with the number of a service that we pay  
87 to have our powers of attorney (.) and end of life  
88 decisions (.) uh (.) immediately available to fax to  
89 any hospital (.) so that we can be assured that uh  
90 because uh (.) because we cannot be assured that we  
91 would be recognized as anything more than friends  
92 (.) in an emergency situation (.) and even those  
93 faxes don't guarantee that a hospital or doctor  
94 would allow us to make medical decisions for each  
95 other in an emergency.

First, Anna sets up her social injustice narrative with a powerful metaphor in lines 62-64:

Being an invisible couple in the eyes of the law has and continues to affect us in countless small and large ways. Here, Anna likens her identity as a gay woman to being invisible—specifically within the institution of the government—making the claim that, because she is a

lesbian, the government does not recognize her, see her, and therefore she has no rights.

Similar to Jesse and Shawna, another way that Anna and Fran produce their social injustice narrative is through careful word choice. They each select verbs that put them in the position of the subject of the phrase, that is, the person who is the recipient of the action of the verb; also, they choose verbs that connote how their family is enduring a series of events rather than are willing participants of these events or actions. For instance, in Anna's opening lines, she uses the verb 'affect' which directly shows how she and her family are being impacted due to her and her partner's identity as gay women. Another carefully selected verb is found in lines 84-85, when Fran states that her and Anna's 'validity' as their son's parents "can so easily be challenged." Not only does Fran choose the verb 'challenged,' which describes to the audience how her identity as a mother is called into question, but she also uses the word 'validity' when speaking about her identity as her son's mother—using these two words in tandem create a powerful claim expressing that she and her partner's authenticity as their son's parents is constantly questioned, with the inference that this is due to their lesbian identities.

Finally, one last example of Fran's keen verb selection is on lines 92-95, when she states how a "doctor would allow us to make medical decisions for each other in an emergency." In this sentence, Fran and Anna are the recipients of the action, that is, they are being 'allowed' by the doctor to make decisions, they cannot do this of their own volition. Therefore, Fran further demonstrates how she and her partner are the objects of actions and thus do not have the right to make decisions of their own, for themselves or for their family—this lack of agency in the verbs that Fran and Anna use are indicative of their lack of rights.

Another way that Anna and Fran construct their social injustice narrative is by employing the auxiliaries 'had' and 'have' throughout their testimony. These two auxiliaries followed by

the infinitive form of a verb can be used to denote that an action is being forced upon the speaker. For instance, in line 66 Anna states that she “had to go through a long and costly process” in order to change her last name so that she and Fran would have the same last name—a tradition and right that many heterosexual married couples partake in. In this statement, ‘had’ precedes the infinitive ‘to go’ thus expressing that this was a process that Anna endured because she must, not because she was obliged or desired to. Also, it is noteworthy that Anna does not just merely mention this process, but she describes it as ‘long’ and ‘costly,’ further demonstrating how this was an event that she and her partner, Fran, endured.

Anna continues using the auxiliary in lines 69-72, where she discusses how she and Fran wanted both of their names on their son’s birth certificate, so they “had to spend hundreds of dollars to petition a judge.” Once again, Anna uses the auxiliary ‘had’ followed by the infinitive ‘to spend’ as a way to express how she and her partner were forced to spend a large sum of money in order to obtain the same basic right to legally claim identity as mothers, a right that heterosexual mothers are naturally afforded. As Anna describes the possibility of expanding her family in lines 73-76, she states that she and Fran “would have to go through a costly home study” in order for the non-biological mother to be granted full adoption rights. Here, Anna provides another example of how she and her partner could possibly experience more economic hardships in the future should they decide to expand their family. Moreover, the use of the auxiliary ‘have’ in this sentence expresses the sense of being required to withstand the adoption process. By using the auxiliaries ‘had’ and ‘have,’ Anna and Fran express that they endured hardships and difficult legal processes because they must do so in order to ensure they have similar—though not the same rights and resources to take care of their family that heterosexuals possess.

Anna and Fran's social injustice narrative details the trying experiences that they have faced in order to have their family be recognized as a normative family: for Anna to obtain the same last name of her partner, have both parents' names on their son's birth certificate, and obtaining power of attorney to be able to make decisions for their partner in the event of an emergency. These rights are afforded to straight families, and Anna and Fran's social injustice narrative exposes how they lack these rights because of their sexual identity by using the tactic of illegitimation. So, similar to the previous two couples, Fran and Anna use the tactics of distinction and illegitimation in tandem to highlight how, despite having similar normative practices and morals, they are subject to denial of rights, and therefore are different than their heteronormative counterparts, at least within legal system.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

In this paper I exposed how gay and lesbian individuals undo their marked identity by employing narratives in order to construct a more normative identity. This analysis follows Heritage's (2005) understanding that "Examining participants' lexical choices, therefore, can give a very exact window into how they are oriented to the state of affairs they wish to describe, the circumstances they are in, and the ways in which those circumstances are to be navigated" (p. 137). Specifically, I explored how same-sex couples used narratives to navigate a heteronormative framework within the institutional setting of a hearing in order to 1) construct a non-marked, family-centric identity and 2) make a compelling argument for passing a bill on civil unions. First, by exploring the tactics of adequation and authentication, I exposed how the couples positioned themselves in the same category as the audience; this is achieved by drawing upon family concepts and typical straight time events and practices. In using these strategies, the couples are able to construct identities that fall within a heteronormative framework, and therefore are not viewed as being different than the identities and lifestyles of the audience members.

However, the focusing of similarities in the heteronormative narratives is contrasted in the social injustice narratives where difference is highlighted. Specifically, once the testifiers made explicit comparisons of sameness, they then use the tactics of distinction and illegitimation by providing anecdotes about how their families are different due to lack of equal rights. Thus, the heteronormative narratives serve as prefaces to the social injustice narratives. The purpose of this order of storytelling is for the heteronormative narratives to draw the audience in by making explicit comparisons of sameness, then directly follow this up with a social injustice narrative

that exposes difference, therefore focusing on the lack of rights these individuals possess due to their marked identity of being gay.

Once again, I do not argue that these lesbian and gay individuals are necessarily aligning with heteronormative ideals, but that they are redefining the ideology altogether. These testifiers are claiming legitimacy to categories (family) and timelines (straight) that wholly exclude them solely based upon their sexual preference. However, in providing several instances of shared family values and practices, gay speakers construct their identities as unmarked and normal. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) discuss such tactics as they state, “The way in which discourse is being represented, respoken, or rewritten sheds light on the emergence of new orders of discourse, struggles over normativity, attempts at control, and resistance against regimes of power” (p. 449). This is precisely what is occurring within the data: gay and lesbian individuals are appropriating values and practices in order to construct and legitimate normative identities in order to argue for the passage of a civil union bill. As the civil rights movement for marriage equality marches on, it is important to understand the hegemonic powers that are at play, and the ways in which the advocates for these rights navigate these structures. These individuals are not mere pawns in a political game, but are voluntary participants in an ideological debate about who deserves certain rights based upon specific identities. Thus, it is imperative we seek to understand how identity is not only constructed, but also how it is legitimated within our society.



## **9.0 Implications for further research on narratives**

I urge future researchers in discourse analysis to see the significant role that narratives play in identity construction, specifically in how personal narratives are used to position oneself in line with, or against, hegemonic structures in our culture (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). Moreover, Bamberg & Andrews state that:

“If it is possible to delineate more clearly where and how discourses that run counter to hegemonic discourses emerge, and if it is possible to describe the fabric of these counter discourses in more detail, we should be able to make headway in designing alternative strategies to public, institutionalized power relations, resulting in more egalitarian reciprocity and universal moral respect.” (p. 353)

I agree with their sentiment that if researchers unveil the productivity of narratives—and understand the ways in which marginalized people construct their identities and make sense of their world—then researchers may too expose ways in which these narratives can aide in the quest for equal rights. Ostensibly, personal narratives are stories told by people about people; but beneath the words, these narratives are about taking an ideological stance, self-advocacy, and even social action.

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