Exploring Cultural Representations of Same-Sex Marriage: A Content Analysis of Wedding Announcements in *The New York Times*

Aaron Blasyak & Aaron Hoy

Syracuse University

Eastern Sociological Society

February 26-March 1, 2015

Literature Review

- Cultural representations of gays and lesbians have shifted over time (Alwood 1996; Gross 2001; Seidman 2002; Russo 1981; Walters 2001)
- Invisibility – The Polluted Homosexual – The Normal Gay (Seidman 2002)
- The Normal Gay is married (or at least aspires to marry)
- Marriage primarily benefits (white, middle-class) gay men (Ettelbrick 1992; Stein 2013; Walters 2001)

Literature Review, Continued

- Valverde (2006): The Respectable Same-Sex Couple
- News media coverage of same-sex weddings and Pride events, court proceedings and other legal documents
- Marriage de-sexualizes gays and lesbians
- Gays and lesbians vanish into heteronormativity

Research Questions

- What do cultural representations of married gays and lesbians look like?
- Do married gays and lesbians appear “normal” or “respectable”? And if so, in what ways?
- How do they compare to married heterosexuals?
- Are there observable differences between the representations of gay men and lesbians?

Methods

- Wedding announcements in *The New York Times*
- *NYT* Sunday circulation: 1,257,958
- *NYT* digital subscribers: 1,133,923
- The the most visible and prestigious in the US (Blumberg and Paul 1975)
- Once connected to the New York Social Register (Hatch and Hatch 1947) but has since become more inclusive and diverse

Methods: Sample

- Random sample of 902 announcements from June 2011 through March of 2014
- Opposite-Sex: 70.6% (635) vs. Same-Sex: 29.4% (265)
- Gay Male: 69.8% (185) vs. Lesbian: 30.2% (80)
- Mean Age: 36 (entire sample); 32.5 (opposite-sex), 44.5 (same-sex)

Methods: Coding Categories (*a priori*)

- From *NYT*'s website: "You must include the full names of the couple, the date of their event and the approximate time of day. We need their addresses, schooling and occupations. Also mention any noteworthy awards the couple have received, as well as charitable activities and special achievements. And tell us how the couple met."

Announcement Submission

Saved at 09:04 AM on 06/05/2014 | Save | Submit

- Marriage & Ceremony
- First Partner
- Second Partner
- Announcement
- (0) Upload Photos

Need help with this form?

ANNOUNCEMENT & HOW WE MET

* Required Fields

Wedding Announcement*

Please draft a wedding announcement in the form in which you would like to see it published. Example text is included at right.

Example Text

(first celebrator's name here) and (second celebrator's name here) are to be (married/committed) (date here) by the (officiant's name here) at the (name of venue here) in (city and state name here).

(first celebrator), 33, is a (job title/I.D. here) in (location here) for (company/organization name here). (he/she) graduated from (college name here) and received a master's degree in (degree name/subject/university here).

(he/she) is a (son/daughter) of (name here) and (name here) of (city and state name here). (first celebrator's) father, who is retired, was a (job title/I.D. here) in (location here) for (company/organization name here). (his/her) mother is a (job title/I.D. here) in (location here) for (company/organization name here).

(second celebrator), also 33, is a (job title/I.D. here) in (location here) for (company/organization name here). (he/she) graduated from (college name here) and received a master's in (degree name/subject/university here).

(he/she) is a son of (name here) and (name here) of (city and state name here). (his/her) mother is a (job title/I.D. here) in (location here) for (company/organization name here). (his/her) father is (job title/I.D. here) in (location here) for (company/organization name here).

Characters Remaining: 9500

Findings: Professional Variables

Table 1A. Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Professional Accomplishment Variables, by Sexual Orientation

Variable	Opposite-Sex	Same-Sex
Occupational Prestige (%)		
Prestige Neutral	37.3	32.3
Prestigious	37.8	35
Highly Prestigious	24.8	32.7
# of Degrees (Mean/ S.D.)	3.37 (1.23)	3.4 (1.3)
Professional Accomplishments (Mean/ S.D.)***	.52 (1.12)	1.26 (1.79)
Community Involvements (Mean/ S.D.)***	.17 (.55)	.32 (.71)

Table 1B. Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Professional Accomplishment Variables, by Same-Sex Couple

Variable	Same-Sex	
	Gay	Lesbian
Occupational Prestige (%)***		
Prestige Neutral	25.9	47.4
Prestigious	37.3	29.5
Highly Prestigious	36.8	23.1
# of Degrees (Mean/ S.D.)	3.42 (1.28)	3.35 (1.35)
Professional Accomplishments (Mean/S.D)	1.32 (1.87)	1.13 (1.6)
Community Involvements (Mean/S.D.)	.34 (.76)	.29 (.58)

High Professional Accomplishments and Community Involvements

The New York Times

April 22, 2012

Diego Prieto and Brad Oscar

Diego Prieto and Brad Oscar, both actors, were married Monday evening at the Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater in Washington. Molly Smith, a Universal Life minister and the theater's artistic director, officiated.

Mr. Prieto (left), 36, is a member of the company of Only Make Believe, an organization that puts on performances for children at hospitals in New York and Washington; Mr. Oscar is on the organization's board. Mr. Prieto was part of the ensemble of the musical "Ragtime" at the Lyric Theater in Oklahoma City last summer. He played Abuelo in the musical "Barrio Grrrl!" at the Kennedy Center in 2009, as well as in a touring company of that show in 2011. He graduated from Virginia Tech.

He is a son of Monica B. Rouco of Washington. His mother is a Spanish interpreter and translator in the emergency room of Children's National Medical Center in Washington.

Mr. Oscar, 47, is perhaps best known for his work in "The Producers" on Broadway. He originated the role of Franz Liebkind and went on to play Max Bialystock, one of the leading roles. Last year, he played Uncle Fester in "The Addams Family." Until earlier this month, he appeared in a workshop production of "Big Fish," a new musical, at the New 42nd Street studios. He graduated cum laude from Boston University.

He is the son of Francine N. Oscar and Paul A. Oscar of North Bethesda, Md. His mother retired as an independent conference coordinator in Washington. His father, a civil engineer, retired as a partner in Loiederman Associates, an engineering firm in Rockville, Md., that is now called Loiederman Soltesz Associates.

The couple met at the Arena Stage in 2005 during rehearsals of the musical "Damn Yankees." Mr. Oscar played Mr. Applegate, a salesman who also happens to be the Devil, and Mr. Prieto played Vernon, a ballplayer for the Washington Senators. It was directed by Ms. Smith, their officiant.

Findings: Religious Variables

Table 2A. Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Religion Variables, by Sexual Orientation

Variable	Opposite-Sex (%)	Same-Sex (%)
Ceremony ***		
Religious	75	50.2
Secular	25	49.8
Venue***		
House of Worship	30	14.7
Residence	7.7	15.5
Banquet Hall, etc.	46.7	40.8
Non-Traditional	12.4	15.8
Government Bldg.	3.1	13.2

Table 2B. Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Professional Accomplishment Variables, by Same-Sex Couple

Variable	Same-Sex	
	Gay (%)	Lesbian (%)
Ceremony		
Religious	50.3	50
Secular	49.7	50
Venue		
House of Worship	14.6	15
Residence	15.7	15
Banquet Hall, etc.	39.5	43.8
Non-Traditional	17.8	11.3
Government Bldg.	12.4	15

Religious Ceremony and Venues

September 9, 2011

Lauren Hill, Jonathan Patrick

Dr. Lauren Marie Hill, a daughter of Catherine R. Hill and Dr. Robert B. Hill of Hockessin, Del., was married Saturday to Dr. Jonathan Edward Patrick, a son of Joan Patrick and Robert A. Patrick of Tampa, Fla. The Rev. Richard G. Malloy, a Roman Catholic priest, performed the ceremony at Old St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Philadelphia.

The bride, 29, will take her husband's name. She is a fourth-year resident in plastic and reconstructive surgery at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington. She graduated magna cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania, from which she also received a medical degree. She competed in the national figure skating championships from 1997 to 1999. In 1997 she won a silver medal in novice figures in Nashville; in 1999 she won bronze in the seniors figures in Salt Lake City.

The bride's father is a general surgeon in private practice in Haddonfield, N.J. Her mother, who worked at her husband's practice, retired as a registered nurse.

The bridegroom, 37, is a cardiologist on staff at the Washington Hospital Center in Washington. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame and received a medical degree from Georgetown.

The bridegroom's father, who is retired, is the former director of business development at Sypris Electronics, a company in Tampa that makes electronics and provides engineering services for the Defense Department.

Religious Ceremony/ Venue Continued

September 9, 2011

Rebecca Allan and Laura Kaminsky

Rebecca Ann Allan and Laura Kaminsky were married Thursday at the Manhattan Marriage Bureau. Josephine Tagliarini, a staff member in the office of the New York City Clerk, officiated.

Ms. Allan (left), 48, is a painter who is represented by the 2/20 Gallery in Manhattan and by Patricia McGrath, a private dealer in Bridgehampton, N.Y. She is also the head of education at the Bard Graduate Center in Manhattan. She graduated from Allegheny College and received a master's in painting from Kent State University.

Ms. Allan is the daughter of Patricia Allan and Timothy R. Allan of Hamburg, N.Y. Her father is a visiting professor of history at the State University of New York College at Fredonia. Her mother retired as a teacher of the blind in the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District in Tonawanda, N.Y.

Ms. Kaminsky, 54, is the artistic director of Symphony Space in Manhattan, and is also a professor of music composition at the Conservatory of Music at Purchase College. Some of her work is to be presented in two concerts on Sunday as part of Sept. 11 memorials, one at the Puffin Cultural Forum in Teaneck, N.J., and the other at Symphony Space. She graduated from Oberlin College and received a master's in music composition from the City College of New York.

Ms. Kaminsky is a daughter of Eva D. Kaminsky and Dr. Leonard Kaminsky of Manhattan. Her father retired as a dentist whose private practice in Manhattan was managed by Ms. Kaminsky's mother.

Findings: Family

Table 3A. Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Family Variables, by Sexual Orientation

Variable	Opposite-Sex (%)	Same-Sex (%)
All Family		
Yes	23.7	21.9
No	76.3	78.1
Parental Occupation***		
Yes	70.2	44.9
No	29.8	55.1
Surname Change***		
No Change	43.7	93.9
Adopted Spouse's	53.5	2.3
Hyphenated	2.8	3.8

Table 3B. Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Family Variables, by Same-Sex Couple

Variable	Same-Sex	
	Gay (%)	Lesbian (%)
All Family		
Yes	20.5	25
No	79.5	75
Parental Occupation		
Yes	44.9	45
No	55.1	55
Surname Change***		
No Change	97.8	84.6
Adopted Spouse's	0.5	6.4
Hyphenated	1.6	9

Parents Not Mentioned

November 6, 2011

Joaquín Tamayo Jr., Ruben Gonzales

Joaquín Ricardo Tamayo Jr. and Ruben James Gonzales were married Saturday evening in Washington. Glennda Testone, a friend of the couple who became a minister of the Open Ministry for the event, officiated at the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Mr. Tamayo (left), 34, is the assistant director of the Education and Society Program at the Aspen Institute in Washington. He graduated from Columbia and received a master's in public affairs from Princeton. He is a son of Margaret Tamayo and Mr. Tamayo Sr., both of Los Angeles.

Mr. Gonzales, 35, is the deputy vice president for resource development at the National Council of La Raza, a Latino advocacy organization, in Washington. He graduated from Santa Clara University. He is a son of Christine Aragon of Phoenix and Ruben M. Gonzales of Austin, Tex.

Conclusion #1: Same-Sex Couples

- Marriage, according to some critics, leads to homonormative assimilation: gays and lesbians appear identical to heterosexuals through marriage
- A juxtaposition of professional success and relative distance from religion and family
- Complicates the assumption of pure assimilation

Conclusion #2: Gay Men vs. Lesbians

- Gay male couples are overrepresented; lesbian couples are underrepresented
- However, lesbians marry at a higher rate than do gay men (Badgett and Herman 2011; Gates, Badgett, and Ho 2008)
- A possible explanation: gay male couples violate wedding normativity (Kimport 2012), making them more “interesting” to *NYT* editors