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Advice When Children Come Out: The Cultural “Tool Kits” of Parents

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Advice When Children Come Out: The Cultural “Tool Kits” of Parents

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Abstract

The family is one of the main areas of social life where the normalization of gay and lesbian identity is incomplete. Most research analyzes the individual and psychological aspects of how families respond to children's disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity and ignores the social, cultural, and historical contexts. An examination of the cultural discourses, tools, and strategies that are available to parents is necessary for a full understanding of how families respond to gay and lesbian children. The authors conduct an interpretive content analysis of 29 advice books to assess this cultural field and its institutional resources. They find three broad strategies offered to parents: relying on professionals for overcoming the grief of having a gay or lesbian child, normalizing gay and lesbian identity, and using “good” parenting skills. This article discusses how these strategies demonstrate the unsettled and often contradictory cultural field of gay and lesbian identity in the family and its implications for sexual identities beyond the closet.

Keywords: parents, children, gay identity, advice

The family has become a chief battleground in the conflict over the meaning and place of gays in America. It is a deeply personal and emotional issue as real families must wrestle with gay kin who are refusing to migrate or be exiled from their families.

Seidman (2002, p. 97)

Many researchers have noted the enormous changes under way in the lives of American gays and lesbians. In particular, Seidman (2002) argues that lesbians and gays have become normalized, even if incompletely, and that they have moved “beyond the closet” – that is, past a specific historical period in which homosexuals led double lives. Today, he argues, gays and lesbians are involved in a process of normalization, routinization, and disclosure of their identities. According to Seidman, “normalization” involves the subjective acceptance of one’s gay or lesbian identity, whereas “routinization” describes the integration of that identity into one’s social life (Seidman, Meeks, & Traschen, 1999, p. 11). However, Seidman et al. (1999) recognize that normalization and routinization are incomplete – institutionally, culturally, and interpersonally.

Much of the research drawing from Seidman has confirmed this incomplete normalization and routinization of gay and lesbian identities throughout society. Some research finds that despite the success of organizations in securing protections for gay and lesbian citizens, constructions of “citizenship” remain predominantly heteronormative (Johnson, 2002; Waites, 2005), whereas frequent backlashes persist against such gains (Stein, 2005). Other research explores how this incomplete normalization offers gays and lesbians a way to combat sexuality-based stigma (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004) and how this beyond-the-closet context affects heterosexuals’ identities and outlooks (Bech, 1999). Still other research documents both the progress and incompleteness of normalization for gays and lesbians at work (Myers, Forest, & Miller, 2004), in friendships with heterosexuals (Muraco, 2005), and in micro-level interactions (Land & Kitzinger, 2005, 2007). Overall, this research suggests that society is still structured by heteronormativity – the mundane, everyday practices, norms, and institutions through which heterosexuality is privileged and taken for granted as normal and natural (Jackson, 2006; Kitzinger, 2005). Furthermore, this research expands Seidman’s understanding that despite being beyond the closet, the normalization of gays and lesbians is incomplete. Our research extends this body of work to further understand how the beyond-the-closet context matters for gays and lesbians coming out to families of origin.

The family is one of the main areas of social and cultural life where normalization of gays and lesbians is incomplete. Some researchers find that gays and lesbians still harbor fear and doubt regarding disclosure and that the potential loss of familial love plays a significant part in decisions about coming out (Weston, 1991). However, after a long historical period where being out to family meant being out of the family, Seidman (2002) suggests more and more gays and lesbians are insisting that they remain part of their family *and* openly gay or lesbian. Gays and lesbians have come to insist that families recognize them and often their partners. This disclosure has compelled heterosexual kin to struggle with difficult issues around accommodating gay or lesbian family members. Seidman (2002) finds that tolerance is the most common response for accommodating gay and lesbian kin within families. Full acceptance is less common, as is intolerance, which he found was most enduring among highly religious families. In many cases, however, across a range of family types, families continue to struggle with accommodating gay or lesbian kin.

Many political and organizational resources are directed at the fight over the place of gays and lesbians in families, reflecting the degree of contestation over this societal domain. Such resources emerged institutionally in the years after the 1969 Stonewall Inn riots, widely recognized as the beginning of the modern gay and lesbian rights movement (Adam, 1995). Institutional resources important to our analysis come from Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and several organizations of the Christian Right, including Focus on the Family with its Love Won Out Ministries, Exodus International, and National Association for the Advancement & Research of Homosexuality (NARTH). These organizations have provided many of the available cultural discourses around gay and lesbian children.

Founded in 1972, PFLAG operates as a nonprofit social support and advocacy organization for parents of gay and lesbian children. Despite its stated mission to work on policy, advocacy, and education, researchers frequently describe PFLAG as mainly adopting a support group model (Broad, Crawley, & Foley, 2004; Fields, 2001). PFLAG uses parents' personal testimonies and the support group model to foster its social movement goals of civil rights for sexual minorities (Broad et al., 2004; Fields, 2001). Importantly, although PFLAG has strong ties to the gay and lesbian rights movement, its primary focus has never been one of arguing for sexual rights. Its discursive terrain has always been "of and about families and religious values" (Broad et al., 2004, p. 513). PFLAG offers parents the possibility of making their children (and themselves) into "normal queers" and normal families with family values (Broad et al., 2004; Fields, 2001).

Much of PFLAG's discourse in recent years has been constructed in opposition to that of the Christian Right and organizations like Focus on the Family and Exodus International, which gained momentum throughout the 1980s. Focus on the Family is an evangelical Christian organization founded by Dr. James Dobson, which politically and culturally promotes its religious views of the family. The organization has a successful radio show as well as multiple books, a Web site, conferences, and a center in Colorado Springs, all of which offer parenting advice and promote the view that homosexuality is wrong, can be prevented (Martin, 2005, 2009), and can be changed. Focus on the Family along with Exodus International and NARTH all provide information on "reparative therapy" or "conversion therapy" for homosexuality. That is, they offer programs to turn gays and lesbians into heterosexuals. Such programs have been repeatedly discredited as ineffective and harmful by the American Psychiatric Association and other professional organizations (APA, 2000). Nonetheless, these views have shaped public discourses, especially in some religious communities, about parenting gay and lesbian children.

Research on parents responding to their child's disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity often ignores the context of the public, institutionally rooted discourses in favor of more individualized and psychological ones. Most scholarship that examines how gay or lesbian identity matters for family relationships has done so through the eyes of gay or lesbian youth (Armesto & Weisman, 2001; Boxer, Cook, & Herdt, 1991; D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Rostosky et al., 2004; Savin-Williams, 1989, 1998; Waldner & Magruder, 1999). This research generally explores individual-level aspects of gays' and lesbians' family relationships, such as to whom a youth is likely to disclose his or her identity (Armesto & Weisman, 2001; D'Augelli et al., 2005; Rostosky et al., 2004; Waldner & Magruder, 1999), how family reactions matter for mental health outcomes (D'Augelli et al., 1998; Floyd, Stein, Harter, Allison, & Nye, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1989), or how identity disclosure fits onto developmental processes (D'Augelli et al., 1998; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1998). More recent research has fruitfully incorporated the perspectives of other family members, such as parents (Aveline, 2006; Ben-Ari, 1995; Fields, 2001; LaSala, 2000; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Strommen, 1989). This research often describes the immense challenges that parents experience in understanding their child as gay or lesbian (Ben-Ari, 1995; LaSala, 2000; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams, 2005; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Strommen, 1989). Such research often treats the disclosure as devastating news, comparing it to a grieving or recovery process that must be psychologically incorporated. Some studies com-

pare a parent's experiences of learning about a gay or lesbian child as similar to coping with the death of a loved one (Ben-Ari, 1995; LaSala, 2000; Savin-Williams, 2005) and suggest that parents must move through stages of grief that involve shock, shame, guilt, and denial. The vast majority of this work does not take into account how the social and historical context of contemporary families, as well as the cultural and institutional discourses, shape the experience of parenting a gay or lesbian child (for exceptions, see Aveline, 2006; Fields, 2001). How might the current beyond-the-closet context shape families' struggles with gay or lesbian children in new ways?

Sociologists of culture (Swidler, 1986) suggest that in "unsettled times" – periods of deep or rapid social change – people develop and draw on a tool kit of "symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views" to make sense of the world around them (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). When people must learn new ways of organizing and understanding social life, then these cultural stories, worldviews, and discourses become highly important and directly shape action. However, culture is not monolithic. Cultures are composed of many symbols, stories, worldviews, and discourses. Often these are contradictory. Culture does not provide a coherent set of tools that allows people to build only one kind of strategy for managing unsettled times. As suggested above, these conflicting cultural discourses are not free-floating and often have institutional roots, and thus it is likely that parents of gay and lesbian children find themselves surrounded by a variety of conflicting cultural discourses and stories with which to understand their gay and lesbian children.

Therefore, in understanding families' responses to gay and lesbian kin, we need to look not only at psychological processes but also at the cultural contexts in which these responses occur and the tool kits they assemble. Although there are many questions surrounding how individuals decide which cultural tools to pick up and which strategies to pursue, we need to know what kinds of cultural discourses are available and what the cultural field looks like. This article begins to answer this question.

Advice books are good places to tap into such cultural fields (Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1994). These manuals reflect the culturally constructed discourses available in a given historical moment. Advice books are useful sources not because every parent of a gay or lesbian child reads one but because as preassembled cultural tool kits they represent many (although certainly not all) of the culturally available discourses on sexuality and, in particular, represent the ones that parents may draw on when responding to a child's disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity. Through a variety of other cultural avenues (television, news media, magazines, the Internet) parents are likely to discover many of the strategies for understanding and accommodating homosexuality (or not) that are rep-

resented in these advice manuals. Thus, in this article we ask: What are some of the cultural discourses available for parents whose children disclose a gay or lesbian identity? We believe answering this question will help to contextualize the responses of families of lesbians and gay men, while moving research on them away from psychological models that see the process as primarily individual, rather than as also shaped by cultural contexts and the cultural tools available.

Method

To examine these questions, we conducted an interpretive content analysis (Ahuvia, 2001; Martin, 2005; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992) of 29 books (see appendix) that offer advice to parents of gay and lesbian children or offer the personal narratives of parents with gay and lesbian children. Interpretive content analysis suited this project well, for it is best for understanding latent, connotative, or complex meanings in text where the counting of particular textual objects or facts is difficult (Ahuvia, 2001).

Sample

The sample we analyzed is composed of three types of books. The first type, which constituted our primary sample, included books specifically about parents coping with a child's coming out. Our sample includes all books ($n = 16$) of this type published from 1995 to 2005 (see Table 1). We identified these books through a search of multiple databases (e.g., *Books in Print*, Amazon.com) and the resource lists of Web sites directed at parents and gay or lesbian individuals (e.g., PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays [PFOX]). We did not include books that are about having a gay or lesbian friend or spouse or about coming out as gay or lesbian oneself. These books are by authors with a variety of academic, social group, and religious affiliations.

Because the first type of books are written specifically for parents who have gay or lesbian children, we also examined two other types of books aimed at parents in general, where discussions about homosexuality might be woven into cultural discourses about parenting or about sexuality more generally. To examine the advice included within general parenting discourses, we began with Martin's (2005) sample of 34 parenting books that contained advice about children 2 years and older (see Martin, 2005, for a full discussion of the sample). Although Martin discusses advice given to parents who are wondering about the sexuality of young children, we considered only the 20 that included advice about children from preadolescence and beyond. Of those 20 books, only 6 included

Table 1. Advice Books for Parents of Gay and Lesbian Children

Title	Author	Publication date	Author affiliations/expertise	Advice on gay children?	Overall strategy
Advice books for parents of LGBT children, <i>n</i> = 16					
Straight Parents, Gay Children	Bernstein	2003	Former PFLAG national vice president	Yes	Acceptance
Family Outing	Bono & Fitzpatrick	1999	Celebrity gay daughter	Yes	Acceptance
Loving Someone Gay	Clark	2005	Clinical psychologist	Yes	Acceptance
Gay Children, Straight Parents: A Plan for Family Healing	Cohen	2006	Psychologist, founder of the International Healing Foundation	Yes	Disapproval
When Homosexuality Hits Home	Dallas	2004	Past president of Exodus International	Yes	Accommodation
A Mother Looks at the Gay Child	Davis	1999	Mother	Yes	Accommodation
Love, Ellen	DeGeneres	1999	Mother of celebrity lesbian	Yes	Acceptance
Now That You Know	Fairchild & Hayward	1998	PFLAG members	Yes	Acceptance
Beyond Acceptance	Griffin, Wirth, & Wirth	1996	PFLAG	Yes	Acceptance
Our Daughter Martha	Hendrikson	2001	Mother	Yes	Acceptance
Something to Tell You	Herdt & Koff	2000	Academic	Yes	Acceptance
Always My Child	Jennings, with Shapiro	2003	Executive Director of Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network	Yes	Acceptance
Fortunate Families	Lopata	2003	Mother of gay child and researcher	Yes	Acceptance
My Child Is Gay: How Parents React When They Hear the News	McDougall	1998/2007		Yes	Accommodation
Coming Out as Parents	Switzer	1996	Theology professor	Yes	Accommodation

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Title	Author	Publication date	Author affiliations/ expertise	Advice on gay children?	Overall strategy
Someone I Love Is Gay	Worthen & Davies	1996	Affiliated with New Hope Ministries & Exodus International	Yes	Disapproval
General parenting advice books (Martin, 2005), ^a <i>n</i> = 20					
Caring for Your School-Aged Child	American Academy of Pediatrics	1999	MD	Yes	Accommodation
Common Sense Parenting	Barnes & York	2001	Girls and Boys Town	No	
Black Parenting Book	Beal et al.	1999	MD, MPH	No	
The Irreducible Needs of the Child	Brazelton & Greenspan	2001	MDs	No	
Touchpoints Essential Reference	Brazelton	1992	MD	No	
Field Guide to Parenting	Butler & Kratz	1999	MSW, Parent	No	
Raising Black Children	Comer & Poussaint	1992	MD, MD	Yes	Acceptance
Becoming the Parent You Want to Be	Davis & Keyser	1997	Parenting educator	Yes	Acceptance
On Becoming Preteenwise	Ezzo & Buckman	2000	Religious and MD	No	
Parenting Bible	Goldstein & Gallant	2002	PhD, psychology	No	
Parenting for Dummies	Gookin & Gookin	1995	Parent/writer	No	
Different and Wonderful	Hopson & Hopson	1992	PhD, psychology	No	
Yale Child Study Center Guide to ... Your Child	Mayes & Cohen	2002	MD	Yes	Acceptance
Perfect Parenting	Pantley	1999	Parenting educator	No	
Pocket Parent	Reichlin & Winkler	2001	Preschool teacher	No	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Title	Author	Publication date	Author affiliations/ expertise	Advice on gay children?	Overall strategy
Focus on the Family Parent Power	Reisser	1997	MD, religious	Yes	Disapproval
New Parent Power!	Rosemond	2001	Family psychologist	No	
Complete Book of Christian Parenting	Sears & Sears	1997	MD and RN	No	
Baby and Child Care	Spock & Parker	1992	MD	Yes	Acceptance
Advice books for how to talk to children about sexuality, $n = 8^b$					
From Diapers to Dating	Haffner	2004	Former SIECUS president	Yes	Acceptance
Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know About Sex	Richardson & Schuster	2003	Psychiatrist, pediatrician	Yes	Acceptance
How to Talk to Your Child About Sex	Eyre & Eyre	1998	Parents	Yes	Disapproving
Ten Talks Parents Must Have With Their Children About Sex	Pepper & Cappello	2000	Sociologist	Yes	Accommodating
Let's Talk About S-E-X: A Guide for Kids 9-12 and Their Parents	Gitchel & Foster	2005	Planned Parenthood	No	Accommodating
Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent's Guide ...	Roffman	2001	Sexuality educator	Yes	Acceptance
Talking to Your Kids About Sex	Berkenkamp & Atkins	2002	Sexuality educator	Yes	Accommodating
Beyond the Birds and the Bees	Popcak	2001	Catholic author	Yes	Disapproving

PFLAG = Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; RN = registered nurse; MSW = master of social work; MPH = master of public health; SIECUS = Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

a. Fourteen books were excluded from Martin's (2005) original sample because they only provided advice about very young children. See Martin for an analysis of "signs" of homosexuality in young children.

b. The amount of advice on LGBT issues varies tremendously across the books that do provide some, from a couple of sentences to an entire chapter.

advice to parents about what to do if they thought their child might be gay or lesbian. Finally, we examined 8 books that offered parenting advice about sexuality more generally. We included the 7 of these that addressed issues of homosexuality or same-sex desire. Thus, we had a sample of 29 advice books from which to draw: 16 intended for parents of gays and lesbians, 6 general parenting advice books, and 7 sexuality and parenting books.

Analysis

To analyze the data, we used a multistage coding process. First, we wanted to be able to categorize the type of advice each book offered in a general, descriptive way that allowed us to understand its stance toward homosexuality through categories presented in Seidman's work—as acceptance, accommodation, or rejection/disapproval. According to Ahuvia (2001), who draws from Strauss and Corbin (1990), coding for interpretive content analysis is best done collaboratively using multiple coders with theoretical sensitivity to the topic. All authors had been engaged in discussions of Seidman and such theoretical issues before beginning to examine the data, and thus we assigned each book to be read by two authors. Each person read the book and assigned it to one of the general categories listed above. We had an 88% agreement on initial categorization of books. For those books where there were disagreements (Dallas, 2004; Davis, 1999), a third reader categorized the book and we reconciled the discrepancy.

Thus, in this first stage of coding we categorized each book as having one of three stances (acceptance, accommodation, disapproval) and advising parents from that stance. Books that took an acceptance stance recommended full acceptance of one's child and provided the parent with strategies for how to do this. For instance, parents were often encouraged to get involved with a support group, such as PFLAG, where they would learn about the benefits of having a gay or lesbian child. Acceptance books advised that parents should not only love their gay or lesbian child unconditionally but that they should take pride in them as well. Books that we coded as accommodating were those that told parents to love their children and to find ways to incorporate their children's gay or lesbian lives into the family but still painted the child's gayness as a problem, a tragedy, or as something to overcome. Early on we collectively found that the third category of "rejection" was not appropriate. We found that parents, even in the books least tolerant of homosexuality, were told that homosexuality was sinful, but that it was also changeable through an ongoing connection with the child, not through rejection. In light of this, we renamed this category to disapproval. Disapproving books sought to help parents understand how and why they should

stay connected to their child despite his or her homosexuality and how they might eventually change their child's homosexuality. Of the 29 advice books, 17 were categorized as advocating acceptance, 7 as accommodation, and 5 as advocating disapproval (see Table 1, column 6). In sum, these categories allowed us to describe the sample overall. However, like the cultural field itself, these books are messy and unsettled. No book was purely acceptance or accommodation, and many contained elements of each. Thus, to see in greater depth what kinds of strategies the books offered we coded each in more detail.

In the second stage of coding, we sought to focus our lens on the core of each book, on the poignant stories, strategic advice, cautionary tales, and "magnified moments" (Hochschild, 1994) within the books so as to deepen our analysis and to see what lay within the generalized categories presented above. Each of the 16 books was again read by two authors, who pulled 10 sections of text (averaging 2,394 words) from each book that best captured the book's advice. This distilment was necessary as coding each book in its entirety was not possible. We then combined this text with data from the general parenting books, which consisted of short chapters or a few paragraphs.

All four authors then read these text sections and made a list of the emerging themes and cultural discourses presented to parents. Following interpretive content analysis, in collaborative discussion we compared these lists and decided on the five most prominent and analytically useful themes—medicalization of gay identity, homosexuality as normal, grief as a response to disclosure, being a good parent, and activism (Ahuvia, 2001). We then conducted focused coding on all the excerpted text for these themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Finally, we wrote initial and integrative memos that combined earlier themes or eliminated them (medicalization, activism), producing the results below (Emerson et al., 1995).

We use the terms *gays* and *lesbians* because the books we analyze primarily use these terms, as opposed to *LGBT* or *queer*. Although we talk about "children," the people we discuss are rarely children at all. They are primarily adults and occasionally adolescents, but we use this term, as do the books, to set them in relation to their parents.

Results and Discussion

We find that the cultural field is unsettled and often contradictory with respect to gay and lesbian identity in the family and demonstrate this through an analysis of three broad strategies offered to parents in advice books. First, these books suggest that parents will experience grief on learning that their child is gay or lesbian, and that to overcome

such grief the parent should seek expert help. In this first strategy, parents are presented with limited options for emotionally responding to a child's disclosure and must seek expert help to cope with these negative emotions. Second, we analyze how these books present parents with the strategy of normalization for fending off stereotypes of gays and lesbians as promiscuous, deviant, immoral, or suicidal loners. Parents are offered a window into the possibility of a "normal" gay or lesbian child. Third, we investigate the books' advice that parents use their own parenting skills and knowledge to accept or accommodate their child's gay or lesbian identity.

Interestingly, two of these strategies run throughout all three categories of books (accepting, accommodating, and disapproving). All three categories of books described parents as grieving and suggested expert intervention, and all three categories of books also suggested that parents use their instincts, skills, and knowledge as "good parents" when managing their child's disclosure. Only the authors of the acceptance and accommodation books emphasized the possibility that a gay or lesbian child could have a "normal" (monogamous, professional, religious, gender-normative) life. The disapproving books, however, advised (re)making gay or lesbian children into heterosexuals through these same normalizing venues. Finally, we note that throughout the books we hear loud echoes of the discourses promoted by organizations such as PFLAG and Focus on the Family, and we acknowledge these echoes throughout.

Grief and the Experts

Across the advice books we examined, a child's disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity is understood as a traumatic occurrence for parents. The child's initial announcement and the process of incorporating it are typically talked about in negative ways. The disclosure is described as "stressful," a "disorienting situation" (Lopata & Lopata, 2003, p. 27), as producing "shock, fear, and confusion" (Dallas, 2004, p. 23), causing parents to feel "angry" or "overwhelmed" (Henrikson, 2001, p. 28), and "scared, confused, worried, or upset" (Haffner, 2004, p. 187). Griffin, Wirth, and Wirth (1986/1996) suggest that frequently crying about a child's homosexuality, even 5 years after the first disclosure, is understandable. On the whole, the books discuss parents' discomfort as a reasonable and normal initial reaction (with the exception of Clark, 2005, who describes this reaction as one of prejudice or disease). Implicit in these discussions is that gay or lesbian identity is unusual, unexpected, or stigmatized (the acceptance and accommodating books) or pathological and immoral (the disapproving books), and that parents will need to cope.

In particular, most authors advise parents to rely on a psychological model of death as a way to understand their reactions and the process of dealing with their gay or lesbian child. All but 4 of the 16 full-length books we examined include an account of the stages of grief parents might go through as they come to terms with their child's homosexuality. (The sections on parenting gay children from the other parenting books were not long enough to present the stages fully.) The advice is based explicitly on the Kubler-Ross model of grieving (Kubler-Ross, 1973) and typically normalizes the negative reactions of parents. Authors based in religious conversion programs advised that "grief—often overwhelming and crippling—is the most common emotional reaction to the discovery of a loved one's homosexuality" (Worthen & Davies, 1996, p. 23). An accommodating book similarly explained that the reaction of "denial and shock," on learning a child is gay or lesbian, is the same that might occur if the parent learned of a loved one's terminal illness (Switzer, 1996, p. 8). This sentiment is also echoed in accepting books connected to organizations like PFLAG:

You might feel terrible grief, as if your child has just died. ... This seems to happen because in a sense there has been a death—of the image of the child that you cherished in your mind. (Bernstein, 2003, p. 208)

Like Bernstein, others describe how parents might grieve the loss of the idealized futures they had wished for their children, following the disclosure of their sexual identity:

All I could think about was losing that image of a daughter-in-law, a beautiful wedding, bridesmaids, and grandchildren. The one thing I looked forward to was spoiling my grandchildren rotten. (Bono & Fitzpatrick, 1998, p. 219)

These books suggest that many parents feel that they must abandon "the dreams and expectations of whom they would become (married, 'respectable' members of the community and the church, having children of their own)" (Switzer, 1996, p. 15). Lopata, a mother who conducted research with Catholic parents, agrees:

Over one-third of the survey respondents said that they are concerned that their gay child will never have children, and are worried that their gay child will live a lonely life. ... These kinds of expectations are so much a part of our social conditioning that we are usually unaware of them until we are faced with their loss. (Lopata, 2003, p. 23)

This model suggests that having a gay or lesbian child is comparable to finding out that someone has died. The grief discourse overwhelms all other possible reactions. Across the books, being happy or indifferent is notably absent as a first reaction to a child's disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity.

The prevalence of the psychological model of grieving leads to perhaps the most common coping strategy provided to parents: Seek professional help. These books, regardless of their overall stance, encourage parents to turn to professionals—medical, psychological, or religious—for assistance in coping with the knowledge of their child's sexual identity. Parents are told to request expert help for themselves or for their child—and often for both. This prescription continues the long history of medicalizing homosexuality (Conrad & Schneider, 1980) and is bolstered by the institutionalized discourses of Exodus and NARTH that see homosexuality as a condition that needs treatment.

When parents are advised to get help for their child, the purpose of seeking counseling and the suggestion of which party ought to do so (the child or the parent) differ depending on the book's overall stance. For instance, one disapproving book declares that homosexuality is a mental disorder that can be "cured" (Cohen, 2006), whereas one accommodating book suggests that counseling might help "alleviate" the homosexuality (Dallas, 2004). The majority of the accommodating books offer stories from parents who initially had hoped that psychological counseling could change their children into heterosexuals, only to abandon that mindset later. Bernstein (2003), whose overall strategy is acceptance, cautions parents against seeking professional help for the child and stresses the negative consequences of therapies that aim to change a child's sexuality, such as a possible suicide (p. 37). However, the majority of these books still propose getting children into counseling, not with the goal of changing them but to address their "condition" and to make sure they are psychologically healthy and well adjusted. Books that advocate accommodation, rather than full acceptance, typically recommend taking children to therapy to help them individually cope with a homophobic world. For instance, Davis (1999, p. 47) advises, "If you think your child might be gay, get him or her into some counseling. It is a very frightening and lonely time for kids, and they need all the help they can get. How would you like to be upside down and backwards?" Although the accommodation books are rarely negative about gay and lesbian people directly, they voice concerns like the one above about gayness being "upside down and backwards" that the authors feel require some type of professional help.

Books advocating acceptance generally do not suggest providing *children* with individual medical or psychological treatment. Rather, these books propose that *parents* or *families* seek outside support (often from PFLAG). Along with a variety of suggestions, such as being loving and supportive, reading about homosexuality, and talking to one's husband/wife, even acceptance books recommend that parents find counseling to overcome grief. One book, after giving a variety of supportive suggestions, makes certain not to diminish the importance of psychotherapy:

None of this is meant to discourage families from seeking counseling or psychotherapy as an additional tool to help them integrate their gay or lesbian child. Therapists who are truly knowledgeable can provide guidance and offer resources, and clarify any misconceptions the family may have. (Herdt & Koff, 2001, p. 60)

Another accepting book echoes the importance of a counselor helping a parent "get to the point of being able to listen" by providing a time and place "to work through your feelings of discomfort" (Jennings & Shapiro, 2003, pp. 37-38). Suggestions like these create an understanding of families in an emotional and psychological crisis following disclosure.

A view of the grief model and the prescription to seek therapy as part of the tool kit parents use when dealing with a child's disclosure provides some insight into the cultural moment that parents and children navigate. Namely, this view supports Seidman's claim that gays' and lesbians' incorporation into the family is incomplete. The fact that so many of the books highlight the sentiment of grief suggests that the possibility of gayness in a child is not imaginable or considered by many parents (Martin, 2008). Yet this model of grief exists alongside another cultural discourse that rejects stereotypes of gays and lesbians and instead normalizes them.

Rejecting Stereotypes and Making "Normal" Queers

Although grief may send parents to doctors, psychiatrists, or support groups to cope with their child's disclosure, normalization is a cultural tool that emphasizes the many positive, potentially (hetero)normative aspects of a gay or lesbian life that parents can focus on to get past the grieving. Seidman et al. (1999) argue that the recent post-closet changes regarding homosexual identity are not necessarily indicative of a broader acceptance of homosexuality per se but rather an acceptance of a certain type of person—the normal gay: "The normal gay is expected to exhibit specific kinds of traits and behaviors. He is supposed

to be gender conventional, well adjusted, and integrated into mainstream society; she is committed to home, family, career and nation" (p. 14). Similarly, Duggan (2002) describes this as homonormativity—a stance that makes gays and lesbians similar to heterosexuals through monogamy, domesticity, and consumption. She argues that homonormativity and the politics that surround it upholds heteronormativity both culturally and institutionally and results in a demobilized, depoliticized gay and lesbian community. Although there is much debate in LGBTQ communities over whether such normalizing tendencies constitute progress or not (Gamson, 1998), here we examine the cultural discourses of normalization and how advice books use them to reassure parents that their children's gender identities, relationships, families, communities, and religion are normal. This strategy likely has its institutional roots in PFLAG (Fields, 2001).

Gender

Because gays and lesbians have long been associated with nonnormative gender presentations, these books offer parents the strategy of normalizing gender as a way to cope with a child's disclosure. Social scientists understand both gender and sexual identities to be socially and historically constructed, and often conceive of them not as binary but as two independent continuums (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Sheldon, Pfeffer, Jayarante, Feldbaum, & Petty, 2007). However, authors in our sample and the families they cite primarily understand gender and sexuality as fixed, as biologically based, and as inextricably linked. Across the entire range of books, gender nonnormativity and its relationship to homosexuality are presented as something parents must make sense of while coming to terms with their child's gay or lesbian identity. For books that advocate acceptance, a child's gender presentation is celebrated as children find their "true selves."

Often, for those advocating accommodation, gender nonnormativity separates "normal" gays from the "other" gays by marking gender deviance. One mother (Davis, 1999) writes, "The homosexual that no one notices is the plain, ordinary person next door who has no intention of drawing any notice to himself. ... Nobody knows he's gay" (p. 63). She contrasts this unnoticeable gay person with other more effeminate gay men who "would love to wear high fashion women's clothes on a model's ramp. He probably has a few too many female hormones" (p. 63). Note that "gender deviance" here is rooted in biology.

For books advocating disapproval, homosexuality and gender inversion are conflated. The gender identity of a gay or lesbian child must be

"healed" in order to make the child normal and no longer gay or lesbian. Affiliates of New Hope Ministries (a conversion therapy organization) use an argument made by Focus on the Family (Reisser, 1997) and argue that homosexuality is causally linked with parents' inappropriate modeling of gender: "Some fathers think that being too affectionate with their sons will turn them into homosexuals. Actually the exact opposite is true: young boys who are liberally affirmed by their fathers will be less likely to look for that affirmation in the arms of other men when they are older" (Worthen & Davies, 1996, p. 125). (See Martin, 2005, for a discussion of this view in childrearing.) Another author, a practicing conversion therapist, directs parents to "help your child heal into the fullness of their true gender identity and fulfill their heterosexual potential" (Cohen, 2006, p. 8). The underlying message in these disapproving texts is that gender is so inextricably linked with sexuality that changing gender presentation or identity is tantamount to changing sexual identity or orientation. The author goes on to encourage mothers to

Take your daughter clothes shopping. Spend a day at the salon or spa. Make yourselves look and feel beautiful. Affirm her beauty and femininity. ... She needs to internalize your love and acceptance. She needs to internalize you, her role model of femininity. (Cohen, 2006, p. 85)

Thus, for those books with disapproving strategies, transforming and normalizing the child's gender presentation provides a strategy of action for parents.

Relationships and Family

The accepting and accommodating books attempt to reassure parents that gay and lesbian children will develop personal relationships and families just like any other "normal" children. According to Fairchild and Hayward (1998), "Most gay people with whom we talk seem to feel that being involved in a long-term, stable relationship offers their greatest chance for personal fulfillment" (p. 127). Advice books regularly emphasized that gays and lesbians are not only capable of long-term stable relationships but that they desire them. Authors provide readers with countless examples of committed gay and lesbian relationships that look and sound like heterosexual ones. Davis describes her son:

[We] flew to Hawaii three years ago to celebrate a same-sex union ceremony. ... Emotional vows were exchanged pledging a lifetime commitment of love and fidelity. It was one

of the most sincere and moving ceremonies I have ever attended. (Davis, 1999, p. 163)

Furthermore, some authors strongly suggest that parents integrate their children's gay and lesbian relationships into stable (heterosexual) families. This strategy allows parents to help their children psychologically, remain bonded to their children, and indirectly help society.

The families we interviewed who were most successful in integrating their lesbian or gay children recognize same sex relationships as a normal variation of intimate partnership and family formation. ... When families act courageously by integrating their gay children and their partners, they help those children to realize that potential and our society is better off for it. (Herdt & Koff, 2001, p. 120)

Even one book that is disapproving of homosexuality depicts acceptable homosexual relationships that are normalized through religion, discretion, and monogamy. Authors from two conversion organizations describe a dilemma faced by one soon-to-be-married, heterosexual woman with a lesbian friend named Mary:

They wondered whether to invite Mary and her lover, worrying that the lesbian women might be openly affectionate and thus alienate the other wedding guests. After struggling with the options, they invited both women, who were discreet about their relationship during the whole event. (Worthen & Davies, 1996, p. 21)

These books provide the tools for parents to normalize their gay and lesbian children and maintain prior expectations for their children. They do little, however, to help those gay and lesbian children who choose less homonormative lives.

Community

Not only are gay and lesbian individuals themselves normalized but "the gay and lesbian community" is also normalized, again in opposition to negative stereotypes. Acceptance and accommodation authors work diligently to refute widely held beliefs regarding gay communities, beliefs that portray gays as antifamily, frivolous, drug using, or promiscuous. In the accepting and accommodating books, the gay community is described as a normal group of people, the same as any other (hetero-

sexual) group. As one acceptance text explains, "We learn that the much-maligned 'lifestyle' of the average gay person is about as lurid as our own, centered on such mundane matters as job, family, friends, home, hobbies, and church. The gay community, it turns out, contains about the same proportion of saints and rascals as any other" (Bernstein, 2003, p. 3). In this example, the gay community becomes upstanding, containing at worst some "rascals." Other authors explain away the behavior of the few "deviants" by placing blame on effeminate gays who take drugs and party, in opposition to politically active, socially contributive gays. For example, one author tells the story of "Jake," who had been partying, taking drugs, and hanging out with this wrong, deviant kind of gay. Then, "as he began to meet a different kind of gay person, Jake gradually gave up his outward affectations of effeminacy. ... And soon, as he was no longer hating himself, he stopped blaming others for his unhappy state" (Fairchild & Hayward, 1998, p. 28). Separating their gay children from the much-maligned gay community is presented as an important strategy parents can use to cope with the revelation of a gay and lesbian child's identity.

Books that primarily advocate disapproval do not normalize the "gay and lesbian community," instead further constructing it as a dangerous realm of temptation and wounded individuals. However, they do allow for the possibility of normalizing gay and lesbian children through *distance* from the gay and lesbian community, or by winning "the battle of love." As Cohen (2006) writes, "You must win them back. It is either going to be you or the boyfriend or girlfriend. Your love will last. The partner's, according to statistics about homosexual relationships, will not" (p. 65). The same book recommends going to a gay bar as a way to understand the community the child is part of, with the intention of eventually removing the child from that community:

You might even consider going to a "gay" bar with your son or daughter as an act of unconditional love. I know the "yuck" factor kicks in. What are you afraid of? ... I think it would do you and your son a world of good if you are willing to enter his world, whether it is the "gay" bar or his school club or the GLBT support group. That is true love in action. Create an alliance of love. Win his heart. (Cohen, 2006, p. 111)

For disapproving books, there was no normalizing the gay and lesbian community, only pitying it and trying to understand it to save one's child. This advice draws from much of the discursive rhetoric of the "reparative therapy" movement described earlier.

Religion

Because of the tumultuous relationship between homosexuality and religious institutions in the United States (Moon, 2002), the accepting and accommodating books, even those not directed at a primarily religious audience, go to great lengths to offer parents tools for reconciling religion and their child's sexual identity. Lopata et al. (2003) write, "My strong social justice beliefs nurtured by the church and my internal understanding that 'homosexuality was bad, period!' came together to form the one question I needed to answer: Can Jim be gay AND a faithful Catholic? That became THE question for me" (p. 49). Advice books demonstrate that reaching resolution on the religion question can be accomplished by accepting that children are part of a new church, by changing denominations oneself, or by reinterpreting Biblical passages.

Most authors work to normalize gays and lesbians as church-going folk, perhaps going to a different church, but committed to religious values nonetheless:

The people were very much like the people in our own congregation, they worshiped as we did, and, when communion came, we were just as welcome as anyone else to come forward and receive the elements of bread and wine. Most of the worship service was familiar, an ecumenical blend of liturgy, but with scriptures and hymns that we knew. (Henrikson, 2001, p. 51)

In other books, parents watched their gay or lesbian child exchange marriage-like vows with their partner in a church ceremony or found gay-friendly churches. Books authored by PFLAG representatives offered finding a new denomination as a possible strategy:

I felt a lot of resentment toward the church, realizing that he could never be ordained as a minister in that denomination. About that time, I became interested in another denomination which had a different and more generous outlook. As I thought more about it, I decided that I really didn't want to be part of an organization that made such distinctions. So I left the church, which was rather traumatic. (Griffin et al., 1986/1996, pp. 82-83)

Other authors, sometimes through the voices of the parents whose stories they recount, show their readers that it is possible to reinterpret church teachings and the Bible. This work of reinterpretation helps to normalize gay and lesbian children, as it suggests ways that they can be both religious and gay or lesbian.

The disapproving books also foreground religion, God, and prayer. However, as we might expect given the efforts of the religious organizations described above, these books emphasize religion as a pathway for making gays and lesbians "normal" heterosexuals. The authors affiliated with religious conversion organizations suggest entrusting one's child to God, as a way of alleviating the worry produced when the gay identity was disclosed:

She said out loud in the car, "God, I have had enough of this! Whether he kills himself, or if I never see him again, or if you take Larry's life, as you might do, or whatever happens—he is yours. I can't go on one more day with this overwhelming concern for him that's been consuming me for eleven months." (Worthen & Davies, 1996, p. 73)

Other books emphasize prayer as a means to change or to normalize gay and lesbian children, exemplified by this father's account of how his son's behavior shifted after praying:

I prayed and thanked God for my wonderful son and family. ... I implemented a systematic plan to get my son back. And it worked! After two years of implementing my plan, I now have a son who no longer spends thirty minutes in front of the mirror or has to have clothes from a particular shop. He now clomps around and acts like a male adolescent seeking his own independence and not like a sulky, sullen kid. (Cohen, 2006, p. 106)

As these examples demonstrate, parents are offered a variety of religious strategies for accepting, accommodating, or changing their gay and lesbian children.

Normalization strategies, whether achieved through gender, relationships, community, or religion, are abundant in advice books to parents. These books offer cultural tools, examples of ways for gay and lesbian children to fit into families, and strategies to help parents reject stereotypes of gays and lesbians, at least in reference to their own children. If a parent is able to see her or his gay son as masculine and "normal," then his homosexuality is less problematic. Similarly, if a lesbian daughter can maintain her religious faith, then the presence of a life partner is tolerable.

At the same time, the numerous strategies advocated to "normalize" gay and lesbian children and to reject stereotypes also illustrate a profound *discomfort* with homosexuality, or with particular "types" of homosexuals. The work of normalization seeks to minimize those aspects

of homosexuality that might prove difficult to integrate into the heteronormative family context: the effeminate son, the masculine daughter, a short-term boyfriend or girlfriend, gay and lesbian friends, or the rejection of religion. As Seidman (2002) would predict, the advice books offer strategies to produce a socially acceptable gay or lesbian, a version of homosexuality that meets most heteronormative cultural expectations, and allows continuation of parental expectations for gender presentation, relationships, and religion. Although these books often refer to "loving someone gay," our analysis shows that a more appropriate sentiment might be "loving a particular type of gay." This homonormativity forecloses possibilities for other sexual and social lives that gays and lesbians might form, as well as other types of same-sex relationships. Acceptance of the normative gay or lesbian comes at the expense of those gays and lesbians who do not fit within those norms. This celebration of a particular type of gay or lesbian also naturalizes the homo-hetero binary and forecloses the possibility for individuals who might engage in same-sex sex relationships without adopting a label (Durber, 2008). These advice books do not attempt to destabilize or challenge the normative meanings of bodies, sex, and relationships; rather, they assume or take for granted that there are gay or lesbian individuals and straight individuals, and proceed to offer advice on coping with them from this stance. The tension noted in these advice books seems to mirror discussions of normality *within* the gay and lesbian community itself, especially around how to achieve the largest gains in the civil rights arena (Gamson, 1998). Similarly, many gay and lesbian advocates have worked tirelessly for acceptance into traditional social institutions (e.g., marriage), or for broader inclusion in religious environments, signaling an investment in "normalizing" discourses. Still other organizations and scholars are working on ways to move beyond such normalizing trends (Duggan, 2002; Polikoff, 2008).

Good Parenting

In tension with the advice to "seek an expert" but consistent with the advice on how to normalize gay and lesbian children, "be a good parent" is a strategy that implores parents to rely on their already-developed skills and knowledge as "good" parents to understand their gay or lesbian children. Parenting, especially mothering, is culturally understood as both natural and instinctual. Parents are seen as possessing all kinds of knowledge, often learned from their "natural" connection to their children (Hays, 1996). Furthermore, good parents protect their children from the dangers of the world, raise responsible citizens, provide unconditional love, and are responsible for their children's mental health and career achievement (Anderegg, 2003; Hays, 1996). The advisors in these

books utilize these cultural conceptions of parenthood to provide parents with another set of tools for managing their child's disclosure of sexual identity.

Good parents love their children unconditionally, and parents whose children have just disclosed their homosexual identity are reminded of this aspect of parenting, its specialness and naturalness. Betty DeGeneres, who calls herself "EveryMom," tells parents, "Still, at its heart this book is all about love—specifically, about loving our children, all of our children. You might think that such a book should not be needed. What could be more natural, more innate, than loving your children?" (1999, p. 14). She explains that, when your child discloses his or her sexual identity, "They need to know that your love is pure and unconditional. Such love is something they are not likely to get from anyone else in the world—only from a mother or father" (1999, p. 15). Primarily in books advocating acceptance, the everlasting, natural, and special bond between parent and child is emphasized as a place for parents to begin the acceptance process. At the same time, this bond is cited as a reason to accommodate a child's disclosure, rather than to disapprove of or reject the child. It is presented as the simplest tool a parent can use for managing disclosure:

I could never turn my back on any of my children. I don't know what they would have to do for me to throw up my hands and give up on them. My love for Dan was greater than my anxiety about his homosexuality. (Griffin et al., 1986/1996, p. 100)

I finally realized that I loved my son no matter what, and that is all that really mattered in our relationship. And yes, I was still his mother, and he still was my "little boy." (Davis, 1999, p. 59)

In contrast, for disapproving books, unconditional love from a mother and father allows sexual identity to be "directed and redirected in a variety of ways" (Reisser, 1997, p. 327). Parents' love and good parenting can save children from homosexuality.

Across the spectrum of books, parents are also advised that they possess a special knowledge about their child and should use it to understand their child's disclosure:

I continue to have mixed feelings. I have moved a long way toward an accepting attitude, but when I am candid, I will admit that if I could choose it, I wouldn't have chosen it this way. ... Rick is my son, the same person who was

the infant and the child, the boy and the adolescent in my life and my affection for him comes first. (Fairchild & Hayward, 1998, p. 58).

When I found out Don was gay, it was hard, certainly. ... I guess I could have said, "get out of my life and don't ever come back." And he could have agreed. But he wouldn't have been out of my life. I would have been the one to lose. I would have lost the things we have shared and all our closeness. He's a loving, honest, and wonderful son. He told me he was gay, and he's still a loving, honest, and wonderful son. (Griffin et al., 1986/1996, p. 17).

By advising parents to draw on their understandings, emotions, knowledge, and natural instincts as parents, advisors are sometimes drawing on a different version of the normalization story than the one told above. When advocating that parents use their instincts, those advisors who recommend acceptance and accommodation also simultaneously ask parents to disregard their cultural knowledge about homosexuality and to "remember who your child is." That is, when a child discloses a gay or lesbian identity, because a parent knows her or his own child, knows he or she is a good person, then the parent also knows that all those horrible things she or he has heard about being gay or lesbian cannot be true:

Yet the gay person before you is the same person he or she has always been. It is important to understand this. You may be shocked by the revelation, but this is the same person you have loved and who has loved you. Do not let the shock change your view because a label has been assigned. Do not permit the years of negative conditioning to transform your perception of the gay person you love into a monster who fits the stereotypes. ... You have no reason to suddenly believe that this person has become emotionally unbalanced, morally deficient, or depraved. (Clark, 2005, p. 171)

Occasionally, being a good parent means using gender-normalization strategies like those described in the previous section. In these examples, knowing one's child means knowing and remembering the many ways he or she is gender normative:

Images flooded my mind of Martha, dressed in little pink dresses as a toddler, holding her baby brother, learning to

ride a bike, folding newspapers for delivery. I thought of times I had sat in the audience nearly bursting with pride as she played her violin. ... But looking at her I could only think of how feminine she was. How could I agree with her that she might be a homosexual? I couldn't even imagine the term in relationship to her! (Henrikson, 2001, p. 26)

Advice and exemplars that follow this model did not rely on changing cultural ideas about gay and lesbian sexuality; rather, they pushed parents toward using their "special" and biographical knowledge to reassure themselves their child was gender normative despite his or her disclosure.

Finally, throughout the advice books, parents are called on to conjure up their natural instinct of protecting their young. Fairchild and Hayward (1998) make direct use of this strategy, explaining that parents should advocate for their gay or lesbian children, because "most people are reluctant to confront a mother who is basically daring them to attack her young" (p. 18). Although all the books acknowledge the difficulties gays and lesbians face in society, the key difference among the responses of acceptance, accommodation, and disapproval is how each depicts what it is that a child needs protection from. In the accommodation and acceptance books, the child needs protection from a homophobic world:

Parents often say, "How can I be expected to receive it as good news when I know it means pain and a more difficult life?" The answer is that you are not expected to be joyful in anticipation of pain and difficulties. You're asked to face that pain and those difficulties as an adult and parent, to help your son and daughter to get through tough times and grow from their experiences. (Clark, 2005, p. 193)

In the disapproval books, however, the child needs protection from the gay community. For example, Cohen outlines a 12-step program for parents to use to win the battle against the gay community: "It's either going to be the homosexual community or your family and the supportive community that you work to develop" (2006, p. 9). According to Cohen, "whoever loves the most and the longest wins!" (2006, p. 13).

Cultural understandings about what good parents do for their children provide tools for parents to make sense of their child's disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity. The good parenting strategy works with the strategy of normalization and against the strategy to seek advice from professionals because good parents already instinctually know and understand their children even when they are gay or lesbian.

Conclusion

This beyond-the-closet period in which gay and lesbian identity has moved toward normalization can be described as an unsettled time. As gays and lesbians disclose their identities, families have been compelled to face their own understandings, fears, stereotypes, and knowledge (or lack thereof) of gays and lesbians. As families work through a child's disclosure, they pick up cultural tools that help them shape strategies of acceptance, accommodation, and/or disapproval. To understand this process, we first must understand the shape and content of the cultural field from which they fill their tool kit.

Our research on advice books that describe this cultural field suggests that it is scattered with a variety of mismatched tools, sometimes within the same book. At the same time, however, Seidman's suggestion that "some sort of tolerance seems to best describe the dominant pattern of families accommodating gay kin" is on target (2002, p. 121). Complete acceptance, or even joy, is rarely presented as a possible reaction to a child's disclosure, and accounts of parents being happy and excited about a child's gay or lesbian identity are absent from the data. On the other hand, rejection is also absent. Even within the disapproving books, none said that a parent should reject or disown a child completely. In this way, this cultural field is indeed beyond the closet.

Parents are likely to collect a variety of tools from this field for responding to, understanding, and reacting to a child's disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity. We find the prominent tools to be grieving with an imperative to consult professional counselors, rejecting stereotypes of gays and lesbians in favor of normalized ideals, and relying on good parenting. Although all of these tools can be taken up and used for a variety of strategies and purposes, in general they are more often described as tools of accommodation and acceptance of gay or lesbian identity.

This sample has several limitations. First, race and its intersections with sexuality are rarely discussed in these books. This supports Seidman's claim that some gays and lesbians are more "normalized" than others and suggests a privileged, particular construction of gay or lesbian identity. It also makes non-White gays and lesbians and the issues they grapple with invisible. Second, the books say little about bisexual, transgender, or other marginalized sexual identities. Thus, we are not able to make any claims about whether the cultural discourses available for parents whose children present these identities are the same or different. Third, these books include a very narrow definition of parents and family. Parents themselves are always assumed to be heterosexual, and parents are seen as the key members of the family whereas siblings, grandparents, and others are ignored. Although sociologists have argued that

families are increasingly diverse, most of the advice for the families of gay and lesbian individuals is focused on the heterosexual parent-child relationship. Thus, we are able to say little about if cultural discourses for other types of families or family members are similar or not.

With a better map of the existing cultural field, we now need research that addresses the question of which cultural tools parents choose, and how and why they do so. Research that follows parents through the process of a child's disclosure could examine which cultural ideas parents consider, reject, and make use of in coming to some strategy for responding to and accepting, accommodating, or disapproving of a child's gay or lesbian identity. We then might ask how a family's particular social location influences how they pick and choose from among this variety of cultural ideas or how a son's or daughter's cultural representation of his or her identity and life might shape the tools for which parents look. Attention to homonormativity would be especially useful for understanding this latter process, as most of the tools available in the existing advice books seem to only address a particular kind of gay or lesbian identity and life. The answers to these questions and others like them will be important to future research concerning family, culture, and sexuality.

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