

Title Page

Gay Male Performances in American Confessional Documentary and Reality Television: *Representation, Discourse and Agency*

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University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

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Christopher Charles Pullen

This thesis examines the performance of gay males presented in American confessional documentary and reality television, and relates this to the construction of homosexual identity. It specifically focuses on the representation of social actors involved in performance, as well as contextualising the contribution of producers. Although it does not present an historical analysis, it examines a timescale: between 1971 and 2004. A central context is the hypothesis that confessional documentary and reality television offer discursive and performative spaces to social actors, who may engage with the idea of ‘performativity’: the ability to influence ideas in society.

The context of individual agency is examined in relation to the potential of ‘capillary’ power: power which may exist outside dominant forces. In this way Michel Foucault’s ideas on power and discourse are foregrounded in relation to theorists who suggest the potential for cultural and social resistance. At the same time sociological contexts, and specifically the idea of social construction are examined. Anthony Giddens’ ideas on ‘experiments in living’ are discussed alongside social theorists who suggest that new forms of social identity may be offered by homosexuals.

A central finding is the observation that models of homosexual identification have progressed towards ‘the domestic’. This not only involves gay males represented in stable romantic relationships and (non-traditional) ‘family’ roles, but also that through connecting themselves with domestic production they potentially influence dominant ideas.

This thesis extends previous ideas of homosexual identity examined in the media (those historically formulated within the context of film and drama studies). In this way it offers new discursive ideas surrounding gay identity, making new connections in confessional documentary and reality television.

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Dedication

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Author's Declaration

Name of Candidate: Christopher Charles Pullen

Award for which work is submitted: Doctor of Philosophy

1. **Statement of any advanced studies undertaken in connection with the programme of research**
N/A

2. **Concurrent registration for two or more academic awards**

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the university's research award, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for an award of any other academic or professional institution.

3. **Material submitted for another award**
N/A

4. **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is all my own work

Signature of candidate

Date

Introduction

Independent Agents and Performative Spaces

Before the 1970s, gay people rarely featured in documentary or factual television, unless it was associated with the ‘problem’ of the homosexual: their condition was a problem to society, or to themselves. However, from the involvement of revolutionary documentary makers,¹ and ‘ordinary gay people’ willing to discuss the details of their personal lives, the 1970s marked a turning point which would see the emergence of new narratives surrounding gay identity. The ‘independent gay citizen’ began to become visible. Unlike the ‘gay specimens’ (seen as objects of examination) in early documentary, or the dramatic version of gay identity (seen as a commodity for the mainstream) in fictional film and television (Capsuto, 2000; Dyer, 2000; Russo, 1987), the independent gay citizen appeared as an agent representing themselves. This may be seen as the beginning of a narrative, which reveals a journey for the gay performer; from emerging with a cautious personal voice (in *Some of Your Best Friends*, 1971), to later becoming a fully productive practicing family member (in *Paternal Instinct*, 2002). Through this journey I argue that gay identity is connected to performance and performativity; it may change, it may reform, and it may progress.

Consequently, this thesis examines the individual potential of gay citizens appearing in ‘performative spaces’ offered by American confessional documentary and reality television, focusing on selected texts between 1971 and 2004. A focus on the performance of gay males is foregrounded, highlighting the idea of ‘individual agency’. At the same time this is contextualised, relating the significance of dominant hierarchies through which ‘production’ is enabled (the context of producers, organisations and dominant ideals). A central theme is an examination of the apparent democratisation of gay identity within confessional documentary and reality television. This is particularly evident in the increasing proliferation of openly gay citizens participating in reality television, who on occasions have

¹ Such as Ken Robinson (*Some of Your Best Friends* - 1971), Peter Adair (*Word is Out* - 1977) (discussed in Chapter 3), and Craig Gilbert with Alan and Susan Raymond (*An American Family* – 1973) (Gay participant Lance Loud was not openly cited as gay in the text but this became influential – see discussion in Chapter 1).

received high profile media attention. Examples of this may be seen in the cases of Pedro Zamora and Richard Hatch, of *The Real World: San Francisco* (Bunim-Murray for MTV, 1994) and *Survivor* (Survivor Productions for CBS, 2000) respectively. Whilst the focus on Zamora may have involved his extraordinary standing as a gay man who as an AIDS activist promoted his political cause (discussed in Chapter 4), and that attention awarded Hatch may have circulated around his alleged ‘Machiavellian’ tactics (Meers, 2002) to become overall winner in a survival challenge (discussed in Chapter 5), performances by gay men and women have become increasingly prominent in reality television (Pullen, 2004a). Similarly this often reveals a political motivation on behalf of the performer (wishing to challenge stereotypical ideals which surround gay identity), as much as financial or personal reward (the opportunity to achieve the status of celebrity, and monetary gain). However before we examine the potential of ‘individual performance’, and the ‘performative space’ offered by documentary and reality television, it is important to initially consider aspects concerning focus, citizenship, identity, and the connection between the producer and performer.

Focus, Intimate Citizenship, Identity, Performer and Producer

In this thesis, through analysis of the selected texts, the role of the male performer and producer will be foregrounded. This is not to say that female performances are less important (and for instance some of the most powerful performances in *Word is Out: Stories of some of our lives* (The Mariposa Film Group, 1977) (briefly discussed below, and more fully as a case study in Chapter 3) are produced by women).² However, whilst the potential of gay men is foregrounded, the idea of gay identity is represented as relative to the idea of a wider gay community, which includes both gay men and lesbians.

Although ideas concerning gender roles are examined (for example the performance of gay males in ‘maternal’ roles in Chapter 6), debates concerning ‘masculinity’ are not explored in particular. In this way the gender dynamic employed focuses on disparities between homosexual and heterosexual types, rather than differences between female and male. Whilst it is accepted that traditional gender dynamics are relevant (particularly in the discussion on ‘materialist

² Evidently the analysis of female performances in this arena would not only be rewarding, but it appears that this is long overdue.

feminism' in Chapter 2 which connects the homosexual and female perspective), the idea of gender subjugation, or empowerment, is examined from a homosexual perspective.

Homosexual potential is related to the idea of revealing the intimate self, and the idea of achieving democratic citizenship. Consequently, Anthony Giddens (1995 [originally, 1992]) idea of *The Transformation of Intimacy* is relevant in examining the strategies of the performances. As Giddens (1995) observes, 'Intimacy, should not be understood as an interactional description, but as a cluster of prerogatives and responsibilities that define agendas of practical activity' (p. 90). Through positing the idea of 'intimacy as democracy' (p. 184) (how revealing and sharing intimate feeling connects with breaking down barriers, and democratises space), such a focus undoubtedly is connected to citizenship potential. Hence this thesis places an emphasis on the ability of homosexual men to reveal their intimate selves (in relationships, and constructing their lives), and in doing so they focus on the power of discourses relating to citizenship in American society.

The American Constitution professes to offer liberty to all citizens. This may be equated to an American ideology of citizenship rights which suggests 'equality, fairness, and freedom from persecution' (Steven Epstein cited in Sinfield, 1998: 23). Although Jeffrey Weeks (1995) has noted that the meaning of citizenship may be contentious, suggesting that this term 'has encoded a particular version of sexual behaviour and private life into its central discourses' (p. 117) (supporting heterosexual norms), this thesis examines contemporary ideals of citizenship which might be related to achieving sexual equality. Whilst ideas of citizenship ultimately connect with economic rights, and commodity (Evans, 1993), the theoretical concept of citizenship employed here relates to discursive possibilities through performing citizenship. Hence Ken Plummer's (1997 [originally, 1995]) term 'intimate citizenship' might be applicable to the citizenship ideology expressed within this thesis, and the political potential. Connecting Anthony Giddens' ideas of 'life politics' (1992a) and 'intimacy as democracy' (1995), Plummer (1997) tells us

The ideas of life politics and intimate citizenship are not the ideas of a relative moral vacuum. They lead to new sexual stories and new communities of support, championing new ways of living together. (p. 161)

Through engagement with revealing details of the intimate self (social sexual identity), the performers discussed in this thesis express the potential of their

personal lives, relating this to the idea of citizenship. Furthermore Jeffrey Weeks et al. (2001) suggests that:

The moment of transgression is characterised by the constant invention and reinvention of the self, and new challenges to the inherited institutions and traditions that hitherto had excluded these new subjects (p. 196).

Consequently the performance of 'intimate citizenship' not only connects to the intimate self, it is mobile and transgressive: it focuses on the potential of homosexual identity.

This thesis examines homosexual identity in relation to the theory of 'social construction', building on the ground-breaking work of Michel Foucault (1998 [originally 1976]), Mary McIntosh (1996 [originally 1968]), Jeffrey Weeks (1985, 1990, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001) and Ken Plummer (1981, 1997) in this area (see Chapter 1). Whilst an emphasis is placed on the social potential of gay lives, this also allows for individuals to connect with the idea of the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983; as discussed in Chapter 1). Consequently, identity ideals are foregrounded, which reveal the possibility of coalescing gay identity forms: gay identity appears homogenous. Similarly a focus on individual potential is examined through the ideas of Anthony Giddens (1992) concerning 'self reflexivity' (see Chapters 1 and 6). This relates to ways in which individuals influence identity ideals, through progressing their social lives outside hierarchical norms: 'personal experience' is foregrounded in the expression of day to day living. Here identity is related to practice and experimentation, rather than institution and hierarchical form. This translates into the possibility that gay men and women can challenge archetypes of identity, and exhibit new identity forms. Evidence of this is may be seen in Chapter 6, where gay men reveal new ideals concerning family identity. Similarly, through examining Robert K Merton's (1996) idea of 'individual adaptation', ideas concerning 'innovation, ritualism and conformity' (p. 139) are explored. This reveals performers attempting to overturn social and cultural norms, through connecting to (or reinventing) dominant ideals, such as the ritual of marriage (also in Chapter 6). This potential is evident in the work of producers (as much as performers).

Murray Nossel (2004) (director of *Paternal Instinct*, discussed in Chapter 6 (see Figure 24)), speaking as an openly gay documentary maker, demonstrates his self reflexivity:

There is something we are facing [as gay men] in our identities, and in our bodies from very early on in age, and what are going to do with that? How do we process that? How do we make sense of it, for the rest of our lives? And in what way does it manifest? I would say these are my pre-occupations as a filmmaker.

Here Nossel identifies himself as an individual agent within the media concerned with the representation of gay identity, examining the idea that his personal reflexive experience is foregrounded in the questions he may pose as a documentary maker. Nossel is concerned with what he terms as the 'axis of identities' inherent in the production of the media: identity is related to the idea of balance, and 'weighted-ness'.

Richard Dyer's (2000) examination of the 'sad young man' may be seen as a 'weighted' archetype of identity (discussed in Chapter 1), which for male homosexuals assigns their identity ideals, in psychological terms, as desirable yet diminished. Consequently this thesis examines the performative ideas of individuals who may reject such 'already established' identity ideals. Murray Nossel, like the performers discussed later, identifies a need to challenge such subjugation through the production of discourse. This may reveal the individual as not only the bearer of their own discursive ideas, but also as an agent involved in 'identity resistance'. For the performer (or producer) this may involve producing discourse which rejects the labelling of deviance (discussed in Chapter 1). Evidence of this may be seen in the performance of David in *Word is Out* (1977):

I thought I was one of those cold people who could never love anyone. ... And when I fell in love with [Henry] ... it meant so much to me. It meant I was a real person. I wasn't just a machine. I had really incredibly deep emotions. It was beautiful. I'll never forget it. I was using part of me – feeling part of me – that I'd never felt before. And the best part too: my capacity to love somebody.

This kind of intimate display reveals not only the propensity for gay men and women to reveal their intimate desires and personal ideals, but also that such performances may be considered as discursive strategies. Here, in the manner in which Foucault (1998) discusses the capillary power of discourse, an individual performs within a power matrix, and potentially engenders change (see Chapter 2).

Although David as a performer in *Word is Out* (1977), and Murray Nossel as director of *Paternal Instinct* (2002) come from different times, it is possible to

provide a relationship not only in their pro-gay stance, but also in their engagement with the idea of alliance between producer and performer. David's performance in 1977 was recorded by openly gay director Peter Adair; Murray Nossel filmed gay couple Mark and Erik involved in surrogate procreation in 2002. Hence a recurring motif within this thesis is the significance of the alliance between openly gay producers and performers. Whilst this is discussed in more depth in Chapter 5 (where alliances are connected to gay and straight cast members working together, and the idea of competition), one significant collaboration occurred in 1973 between the producers of *An American Family* (Craig Gilbert, and Alan and Susan Raymond for PBS, 1973), and 'participant/performer' Lance Loud (discussed in Chapter 1).

Lance Loud's contribution to *An American Family* may be seen as an important beginning in relating the potential of connecting 'the family unit' to gay identity. This is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Lance's standing as an accepted son within an American family is a media discourse which not only endured till his death (this is discussed in Chapter 1 with reference to *Death in An American Family* (Alan and Susan Raymond, 2002)), it possibly inspired the more contemporary reality television texts to include gay identity as a recurring social role. This reformulated ideas of what form the American family may take, and potentially connects with the performative documentaries discussed in Chapter 6. Here in relation to Anthony Giddens's (1992) ideas on 'experiments in living',³ we see evidence of gay people forming families for themselves, at the same time questioning the standing of the American family as 'heteronormative'.

The idea of the family is further explored in the analysis of the iconic representation of Matthew Shepard (who was tragically murdered in a hate crime) (see Chapter 1). In *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium* (Martin Bedogne and Brent Scarpo, 1999), *The Matthew Shepard Story* (Roger Spotiswode, 2002) and *The Laramie Project* (Moises Kaufman, 2002), we are presented not only with producers and performers working in alliance revealing a massive public support for Matthew, but also the American family is represented as accepting the homosexual son. However, in order to examine this potential, it is important to consider the generic and performative context of documentary and reality television.

³ The term 'experiments in living' is coined by Jeffrey Weeks et al (2001: 5). This relates to the work of Giddens (1992, 1995), and the idea of 'life experiments' (Weeks et al, 2001: 28).

The Generic and Performative Context of Documentary and Reality Television

The case studies and performances examined in this thesis are produced within the genres of documentary and reality television.⁴ This suggests that diverse contexts of production are involved in these forms: the former is connected to a tradition of documentary which started in cinema, and the latter is more often seen as an ephemeral product of contemporary television. However, these generic forms are brought together for their ability to provide media discursive spaces for performances by 'ordinary people', more than any suggestion that there is a 'generic' coherence.

While John Corner (2002) applies the term 'post documentary' to reality television (implying there is a disconnection), I argue that all performances in this thesis connect to the idea of documenting social performance. Although Corner's (2002) idea of 'documentary as diversion' may be connected to reality television (in that many game orientated texts prioritise the idea of a recurring programme format, and they focus on the idea of 'play' rather than 'analysis'),⁵ reality television can offer performative space for social actors which is meaningful. Hence the appearance of AIDS activist Pedro Zamora in *The Real World* (1994) (discussed in Chapter 4) potentially equates to the gravity usually connected to traditional documentary. Consequently, while formats may be more apparent in reality television, this does not equate to limiting potential, or providing some better way of telling the 'truth' (see discussion in Chapter 2).

This thesis brings together documentary and reality television to reveal the power of performance. This is mostly apparent in the potential of confession (see Chapter 2). Consequently the term 'confessional documentary' is employed with relation to confessional potential seen in documentary. This signals my focus on personal 'testimony based' documentaries, rather than expositional forms which employ a central argument. Consequently my interpretation of 'confessional documentary' is similar to the idea of 'reality television': both ideas allow for the

⁴ Most texts discussed might be generically labelled as either documentary or reality television. The only exceptions are the docu-dramas: *The Matthew Shepard Story* and *The Laramie Project*. However whilst these texts include actors, a focus is still maintained on the idea the of confessional and discursive potential. Consequently regardless of generic terminology, and who may be involved in representing the original performer, all texts connect to the idea of documenting the agency of ordinary citizens.

⁵ Such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor*.

foregrounding of discursive ideas connected to the performer's personal story more than a producer's argument (although clearly the producer frames this).

Consequently, whilst this thesis recognises the limitations of documentary as 'an ethnographic film tradition that has sought to represent others [such as ethnic and sexual minorities, who] have been told they could not represent themselves' (Nichols, 1994: 91), and praises reality television for providing opportunities for 'performance of resistance' which might be related to Bill Nichols' (1991, 1994, 2002) idea of 'performative documentary', documentary and reality television are brought together for their provision of discursive space more than a debate concerning generic coherence, or history.

Method and Theoretical Approach: Performance and Power

In engaging in a focus on performance and performativity with relation to social identity and narrative employment, this thesis has not engaged with a 'drama' and 'film' studies approach. However, as many prior studies on gay identity within the media have been focused on 'dramatic' and 'filmic' potential, it is important to note that these inevitably have been influential. Most notably the groundbreaking work of Richard Dyer (1983, 1984, 1986, 1990, 2000, 2002) has been prominent with regards to examining gay identity ideals in the media. However whilst this thesis examines Dyer's identity theories on 'stereotyping' (in Chapter 1), the history of gay identity has not been discussed with relation to film, nor drama (see Clum, 2000). This is not to say that these contexts are irrelevant. However as my emphasis focuses on social performance within the media, theories relating to sociology, media and performance studies have been foregrounded. Similarly although 'performance' has been historically connected to the idea of 'drama' (performer connotes with the idea of 'following a script'), these ideas are not inter-related as might occur in an analysis of fictional drama. Furthermore as my discussion relates to the performance of 'social actors' (who I argue are working as 'independent agents' of identity production), rather than 'theatrical actors' (who may be seen as 'subordinates' working to reconstruct identity ideals), a history of dramatic theory is not contextualised. Consequently although gay identity within film and drama is influential, identity ideas employed here are more centrally focused on social possibility, and identity contexts (more than dramatic or filmic history/theory).

Furthermore, although 'queer theory' has been widely connected to the examination of gay identity in the media, and gay social experience (Doty, 1993; Seidman, 1996; Warner, 1993), this thesis does not employ a 'queer studies' approach. It focuses on 'similarity' (to the heterosexual experience) not on 'difference'. While the idea of 'lack of identity fixity' is a central premise in this thesis (e.g. gay men are seen to play maternal roles in Chapter 6), this is related to 'identity potential' rather than 'identity deconstruction'. Consequently unlike 'queer theory' which may be seen as revolutionary and deconstructionist, the transgressive approaches of the performers discussed here may be inventive and structural. As Giddens (1995) suggests, homosexuals are the 'prime everyday experimenters' (p. 135) in producing new identity ideals. Therefore whilst 'identity is challenged', it is reformed in the manner of 'assimilation': extending the periphery to include gay people, not deconstructed in the manner queer theory may emphasise 'difference': taking apart the mechanisms of identity revealing these are repressive. Consequently the idea of performance has been contextualised to foreground the potential that gay social actors may possess in attempting to change and construct social ideas and forms connected to homosexual identity.

The idea of 'performance' and 'performativity' are the central theoretical contexts employed in this thesis. Richard Schechner (2002) tells us that performativity 'points to a variety of topics, among them the construction of social reality including gender and race' (p. 110). Marvin Carlson (1996) further suggests that 'performance can work within society precisely to undermine tradition to provide a site for the exploration of fresh and alternative structures and patterns of behaviour' (p. 15). Consequently, the performances are discussed here for their potential to reinvent and reformulate identity constructs.

In order to evaluate this performative/transgressive potential, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1965) idea of the 'carnival', Michel Foucault's (1998) ideas on discursive power (see Chapter 2), and Victor Turner's (1982) idea of 'liminal' and 'liminoid' performance (see Chapter 3) are foregrounded. Whilst the carnivalesque may be associated with 'licentious behaviour that emerges on festive occasions when the norms of behaviour that govern everyday life are suspended' (Arthurs, 2004: 150), and the Bakhtinian carnival has been connected with examining the aesthetic and the physical mechanics of the grotesque (Morris, 1994: 21), my focus here examines the discursive and iconic potential of the carnival and its connection to identity transgression, rather than its playful/aesthetic subjectivity. I examine carnival for its

identification of binary oppositions with relation to power, and the potential for inversion and hybridisation. Similarly I have employed Turner's (1982) ideas of liminal and liminoid performance for their transgressive potential. These performative ideas allow for the idea of emergence and transition (through the liminal space – within the frame), at the same time they create new space for identity to be framed within (the liminoid potential – creating new frames). Strategies like these may be evident in the representation of homosexuals as dominant providers of narrative (as occurs with the documentaries by gay producers, or where the central focus is on a gay participant), or where they appear as romantically involved partners (as may be evident in the various case studies).

These ideas powerfully invert alleged 'natural' sexual order. In this context the gay male is no longer a lone subject working on his own (possibly seen as an outsider), he becomes central and involves himself in constructing the narrative. This may involve the possibility of transgressing, and reinventing, norms. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1995 [originally 1986]) have noted, extending Bakhtin's ideas further, there exists a 'possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself* by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it' (p. 58). Through the removal of traditional 'power bases' which may form dominant cultural ideology (such as the dominant role of the heterosexual male), we may experience the potential of 'a potent, populist, critical inversion of ... official worlds and hierarchies' (p. 7). This translates to a 'carnavalesque' and 'liminoid' potential' in reality television, and confessional documentary, to displace the heterosexual, and make the homosexual the central site of narrative direction.

The narrative and discursive performativity of gay cast members⁶ reveals a productive potential for them to challenge established sites of power. This may be possible if we consider Michel Foucault's (1998 [originally, 1976]) notion of power that it is 'everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (p. 93). This implies that instead of solely dominant groups (such as media organizations or producers) having access to power, there is a potential for individuals to be involved in power relations. Foucault proposes that power can be fluid, which involves a dynamic not only of interaction between individuals, organizations and hierarchies, but also aspects of power/resistance. Similarly I propose that power can be used by individuals within a 'discursive/performative space'. This may be connected to Anthony Giddens' (1995) idea of 'institutional

⁶ I am using the term cast members in this context to describe performers in the shows.

reflexivity' with regard to the potential of capillary power in connection with reflexivity (discussed in Chapter 2). This also extends to influencing the audience in the manner Mimi White (1992, 2002) describes as generating 'therapeutic discourse'. Here audiences may relate with the interaction between 'confessor and interlocutor', and connect with the discourses produced (see Chapter 2).

The potential to produce 'performative/discursive' spaces might be connected to the idea of an 'oppositional public sphere' (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). Here, in contrast to Jurgen Habermas's (1962) idea of the 'bourgeois public sphere', may be the ability to evaluate 'individual performances' outside ideas of authorised or approved citizenship. Consequently the oppositional public sphere, in its ability to recognise diverse individual agency/performance, engages with Foucaultian ideas of power relations; which may engender the empowerment of the individual as much as the institution.

In providing a focus on the individual this study also recognises the value of materialist feminist theory (see Chapter 2). David Román (1998) tell us:

Building on Marxist and Foucaultian critiques of institutional structures and the constitution of subjects, materialist feminism focuses its critique on social formations and historical forces – those that construct ideologies oppressive to women – in order to demystify and challenge them. (p. 41)

Consequently, the analysis of performances in media should necessarily consider the dominant structures through which such texts are produced (the agendas of production companies, audience expectation and commercial pressures), alongside the agency of individuals (aspirations, political agendas and ability to educate/entertain), and ideas of self representation. In order to discuss the potential of self representation, a discussion follows which examines the idea of subcultural and mainstream pathways with regards to gay identity.

Subcultural and Mainstream Pathways

Jeffrey Weeks (1990) observes, in relation to the political motives of gay people involved in cultural/social performance, that:

Two complementary tendencies were clearly observable by the mid 1970s: first the gradual merging of the gay movement and the commercial homosexual sub-culture into a new, more open and diverse culture - the 'ghetto coming out' ;

secondly, the gradual, conditional integration of homosexuality into the mainstream heterosexual culture. (p. 222)

Today we may consider that these tendencies may have evolved into, on the one hand, ideas of 'assimilationist democracy' – the formation of gay histories which relate, and to a certain degree integrate, with ideas of heterosexuality, and on the other, the promulgation of difference seen in the production of the 'gay subculture' – the celebration of opposed sexual identities to heterosexuality. In other words, these two routes either define 'similarity' or 'difference' (to the dominant order, which is informed by heterosexual social ideals).

However Alan Sinfield (1998) notes that defining difference through 'subculture' is a contentious idea within the gay community itself. He tells us:

Gay subculture is not an elementary monolith; it is fraught with the contradictions of its own history and of its crucial positioning in the prevailing sex-gender system; it is divided by the hierarchies of class, age, education, race and ethnicity that occur in society. (p. 99)

Here Sinfield suggests that whilst the idea of a collective subcultural gay community/identity may exist, this entity, rather than being one body working in a singular direction, actually consists of diverse components, mostly working independently. Similar imbalances exist within the gay subculture as occur in wider cultures. This ultimately leads us to consider that whilst the idea of a gay subculture can be projected within the media, even if it was possible to construct one voice for this, control of this ideal is likely to be the subject of continual debate. Therefore access to dominant power not only becomes increasingly distanced (though lack of coalescence), but also there exists a need to relate dominant ideals to gain access to power. In order to resolve this (to get access to power) it is necessary to relate to identity ideals which connect with already established heterocentric norms, rather than trying to overturn them (as may occur in subcultural representations). In this way defining 'similarity' and 'assimilation' is likely to be more welcome on popular television than defining 'difference' and the 'subculture'.

Joshua Gamson (1996) points out, discussing the potential of 'queer' performance, that:

In the case of lesbians and gays, for example, gender stereotypes used to stigmatise actors (the gay man as woman, the lesbian as man) have been

emphasised in order to undermine them; pejorative labels are emphasised in an effort to get rid of them. (p. 411)

However, this idea is contentious. Emphasising 'queerness' is not always beneficial. If we use the example of 'camp' (a 'feminised performative' type of behaviour, which is connected to the gay subculture (see: Cleto, 1999)), some audience members may read a political intent in the possible display of 'irony' (Babuscio, 1984). However as David Román (1998) suggests, whilst this may equate to a type of 'Brechtian distancing' (the audience reads the irony, and 'intellectualises' the issue), the 'distancing effect' may also 'result in a [superficial] form of dismissal' (p. 111), and separation.⁷ As Babuscio (1984) notes, through 'camp aim[ing] to transform the ordinary into something more spectacular' (p. 44), the performer becomes a 'spectacle' and the audience is distanced. Consequently, strategies which involve defining 'distance', even if it is with irony, ultimately lead the audience to read a 'disconnection' between themselves and the performer.⁸ Social acceptance is more likely to be encouraged by presentations of connectedness, and similitude.

As Kylo-Patrick R. Hart (2000), reminds us (drawing upon the work of Rogers and Shefner-Rogers):

the homophily of [narrative] characters [may be] defined as the degree to which the characters are similar to the viewer. The greater the homophily between the central characters in a narrative work and the individual viewing the work, the greater the chance that the work will be considered credible by that viewer, and the greater the chance that the viewer will be influenced personally by it. (p. 59)

The idea of similarity in appearance, ultimately, is contiguous with the idea of similarity in behaviour. Therefore should a television viewer examine a media performance by someone who not only resembles them in visual appearance (race, physical properties or dress sense), but also behaves in a manner which they recognise as similar to their own, this may encourage the idea of positive 'identification'. The idea of identity, and concept of identification often involves the individual connecting to 'perceived similarities' (Woodward, 1997: 14). Therefore

⁷ George W. Brandt (1998) may agree with this idea. Whilst he tells us that Bertolt Brecht's 'alienation or estrangement effect' is connected to Marxist ideology, he warns us that this becomes 'little more than a *stylistic flourish* when simply used as an *aesthetic*, rather than a consciousness raising device' (my emphasis, p. 224). Hence without the foregrounding of a political ideology, camp may be seen merely as a stylistic aesthetic, and possibly a distancing device.

⁸ Obviously this hypothesis only relates to mainstream audiences. Members of the subculture (in the audience) could possibly read 'closeness' (depending how they identified with the 'camp' performance).

through positive identification of similarities, individuals can connect to images and representations in a powerful way. This may possibly lead to the acceptance of an individual/group depicted. Evidence of this is seen in the documentary *Daddy and Papa* (John Symons, 2002). A brief examination of this follows in order to reveal strategies which question identity norms, and resolve differences.

Daddy and Papa, and the Christian Fundamentalists

The representation of John Symons and William Rogers in *Daddy and Papa* relates to texts discussed in Chapter 6. Here we are presented with two gay males who are involved in the process of adoption. Film maker John Symons and his partner are represented as oppositional identities to foster mother Dora: an evangelical Christian who is concerned that the foster child Zack (whom she is handing over for adoption) will be fathered by two gay males. This opposition is evident in concerns she presents to her friends (and to camera) that two gay male parents will result in the child learning about homosexuality, and he will become homosexual himself. Here the discursive idea of 'threat to the family' is contextualised by presenting the potential gay male parents as 'the ideal family'. This extends to successfully influencing Dora and members of her religious community as to the suitability of John and William as good parents (see Figure 1).

In a sequence which represents the coming together of two very different ideas of what 'family' may mean (for sexually active gay men, and Christian evangelists), Dora's friend Helen Williams makes a speech. This occurs at a gathering of friends and community at John and William's household while baby Zack is also present:

It was really hard for me. Dora kept telling me its going to be alright. 'No Dora I don't think its going to be alright' [I said]. But when I came over here and I met William [and John]. And this house is filled with so much love.. And when I found out that Dora was satisfied, I became satisfied about it, you know. I am going to stop, as I'll be crying. ... In the name of Jesus, Lord, we thank you for this family reunion. Lord we know you know best.

This emotional display reveals the power of resolving opposing identity conflicts (homosexual men and heterosexual Christians), then revealing connections and similarities which may have been unimaginable. In particular not only does Dora

change her ideas concerning the suitability of the gay men as parents, but also she wants to become part of the ‘new family’ (as grandmother). This is represented as something unexpected. John tells us, implying he had equal concerns regarding Dora’s beliefs and social interests, ‘we had been counting on a baby joining our family, but not a fundamentalist Christian as well’. In this way the representation of involvement of both sides, suggests an acceptance of seemingly oppositional ideologies: heterosexual Christians and homosexual men both working together as ‘family’.

Whilst later case studies explore ‘identity potential’ in more depth, it is the connection that gay men may make with the idea of ‘family’, and ‘relationship potential’, which is foregrounded within this thesis. This ultimately leads to challenging identity norms and hierarchical identity ideals.

Emergent Themes

Whilst Steven Seidman (1996) suggests that ‘sexual and social identities [may be viewed] as non-unitary, unstable, pluralistic, and an ongoing site of social and political conflict’ (p. 19), this thesis attempts to explore the idea that homosexual identity works in coalescence: it can be connected to dominant ideals, and performers working to resist subjugation create new pathways. In exploring this idea, I propose that a number of ‘emergent themes’ are evident.

The central theme is that of ‘alliance’. All texts examined reveal a degree of co-operation, and working in union, between producer and performer. Also there are five sub themes, which may be related to the progression of political efforts represented in the texts. These themes are:

- the emerging independent gay citizen;
- the idea of community;
- the potential of partnership;
- the context of family;
- the issue of production.

Whilst these labels do not easily fit time frames, or map exclusively on to my chapters, a progression may be observed from the idea of ‘emerging independent

citizen' in Chapter 3, to the presentation of homosexual 'family', and the idea of 'production', in Chapter 6.

Whilst the latest texts examined are those produced up to 2004, it is important to establish reasons for the starting point of 1971. This relates to the beginning of a 'new era' in the representation of gay people within the media. The earliest texts discussed are *Some of Your Best Friends* (Ken Robinson, 1971) (discussed in Chapter 3), and *An American Family*. As they were produced in similar times (*An American Family* was filmed in 1971), I am suggesting that both texts mark a starting point. While the appearance of unashamed gay men and women in *Some of Your Best Friends* reveals a new confidence in gay potential, the performance of Lance Loud in *An American Family* may be seen as revolutionary as this reveals (as briefly discussed above) 'the gay male son' as an accepted member of the American family (evidence of this is further explored in the Matthew Shepard case study, discussed in Chapter 1). Although *Some of Your Best Friends* is an independent documentary film, and *An American Family* was a highly popular television series, both may be considered to offer 'performative spaces', and are connected (in this thesis), by the emergence of the 'gay independent citizen' in documentary.

The focus on 'independence' marks a distinction from earlier texts where homosexuals appeared in documentary as 'subjects' of distinct expository arguments, such as *CBS Reports: The Homosexuals* (CBS, 1967). Steven Capsuto (2000) tells us that this text discusses the story of:

[A] nineteen-year old sailor [who] had left his girlfriend on the beach and headed for a nearby men's room for anonymous sex. A camera crew filmed his arrest for CBS News as the young man, near tears, lamented, "for life I'll be wrecked by this....." Renowned psychiatrist Charles Socarides commented, "The whole idea of saying 'the happy homosexual' is to again create a mythology about the nature of homosexuality". (p. 51)

Here the focus is on the 'problem' of the homosexual to society, rather than the 'opportunity' that may be offered. Consequently the idea of the 'happy homosexual' is both rejected, and deemed irrelevant. The revolution of the 'independent gay citizen' is that rather than focusing on some overarching expository idea such as 'the problem', it allows for a focus on personal testimony. In this way, citing Bill Nichols' ideas concerning 'expository, participatory and reflexive' documentary (1991, 1994, 2002) terminology on documentary (discussed in Chapter 2), we can propose that the gay citizen emerged from being a lone subject of examination in

‘expository’ documentary to becoming a supported agent of performance in ‘participatory’ and ‘reflexive documentary’. This allowed for a more central focus on the possibilities of gay identity.

This move away from the idea of ‘problem’, towards ‘opportunity’, is foregrounded in *Word is Out* (1977). In a text which might be considered as a large scale anthropological project, the idea of the citizen becomes increasingly apparent with the presentation of intimate testimony. Later, after the advent of AIDS, this provided the opportunity to reflect on the deepest intimacy of homosexual lives. Consequently the ‘AIDS focused’ texts discussed in Chapter 3 *Common Threads: Stories From The Quilt* (Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, 1989) *Absolutely Positive* (Peter Adair, 1990), *Living Proof: HIV and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Kermit Cole, 1993), *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* (Peter Friedman, 1991), focus on the dilemma of AIDS, yet at the same time further explore the connection of gay identity to ‘community, family and partnership’. Hence although *Silverlake Life* presents the tragedy of AIDS - to the extent of showing the diseased AIDS body (including the emaciated body of Tom Joslin after death) – the representation of long term couple Mark and Tom focuses as much on the quality of their loving homosexual relationship, as the necessity to discuss the disease.

Chapter 4 focuses on the contemporary television series *The Real World* (Bunim- Murray for MTV, 1992-present), which is foregrounded for the producer’s commitment to continually include gay citizens within the social profiles presented. Here the idea of ‘alliance and family’ becomes central in the commitment of openly gay producer Jon Murray to include gay participants as part of the reality television family. I argue that the influence of *The Real World* in presenting a community that accepts gay people, extends to most texts which follow this. Consequently, although the iconic performance of Matthew Shepard (discussed in Chapter 1) is related to the idea of accepting the American son (in *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium*, *The Matthew Shepard Story* and *The Laramie Project*), it may also be connected to the idea of presenting community and alliance responses. These ideas are also evident in texts examined in Chapter 5: *Boy Meets Boy* (Evolution for Bravo, 2003), *Survivor* (Survivor Productions for CBS, 2000) and *Experiment: Gay and Straight* (Mark Saxenmeyer, Fox Chicago, 2003), which may also be seen as direct inheritors of ideas disseminated in *The Real World*. At the same time Chapter 5 recontextualises the idea of community in an evaluation of *Gay USA* (Arthur Bresson, 1977) in relation to *Experiment: Gay and Straight* (2003).

Finally, Chapter 6 represents contemporary texts where a focus is made on 'family, partnership and production. Consequently, *Gay Weddings* (Evolution for Bravo, 2002), *Tying The Knot* (Jim De Sève, 2004), *Primetime Thursday: Rosie's Story, for the Sake of the Children* (ABC, 2002) and *Paternal Instincts* are discussed in relation to how gay men have become involved in 'experiments in living' (Giddens, 1992). This involves forming their own family and relationship ideals, and expecting 'equality'. At the same time Chapter 6 includes an analysis of the mainstream reality television series *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy* (Bravo/NBC, 2003-), which finds the text to be ambivalent. Here gay men are both service providers, and authorities on cultural and social ideals. The connection of gay men to the idea of production (both social and cultural), contemporises the debate. This suggests that modern gay identity has emerged from mostly a 'socially constructed' idea, and now it is involved in the 'arena of production': it is connected to the 'family', the idea of 'service', and represents 'a move to the domestic' (see Conclusion).

Conclusion: The Wider Picture

What the following texts will reveal is a contentious journey from the idea of the 'emerging independent gay citizen' as a 'performer of resistance', to the presentation of 'gay partnerships' involved in the 'practice of family'. Connections made between the ideas of community, family and partnership, eventually lead gay identity to become associated with social and cultural production. This becomes apparent in the contribution and participation of gay performers, extending and progressing the idea of the 'emerging gay citizen'. In this way, ideas of gay identity are shown to evolve and progress, suggesting the emergence of a new identity ideal: the gay man as 'producer'.

However, it is important to note, as Joshua Gamson (1996) observes, that 'Fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis of power' (p. 396). Homosexuals have possibly connected with heterosexual dominant ideals, such as the family or marriage (or cultural/social exchange in the case of *Queer Eye*), in order to find acceptance and equality. At the same time, while such dominant structural ideals offer power, they are exclusive: membership is dependent on following the rules. Consequently, it is important to observe that ideas connected with the liberation of identity ideals should not impose new identity norms.

Therefore, should these texts signal the emergence of a new powerful homosexual identity, this must not be something exclusive to those connected to power. Gay men may perform family 'successfully', and they may find access to power; however, as the 'imagined gay community' involves a diverse range of individuals (many of whom do not wish to conform, and may not wish to form families/partnerships), these must not be forgotten.

Therefore whilst this thesis relates an assimilationist perspective, suggesting the performers display evidence that it is beneficial to gain access to heterocentric power, this by no means argues for the transformation of gay identity towards a 'heterocentric ideal', nor that gay identity is fixed. As Jeffrey Weeks (1995) tells us:

[I]dentities can be enabling. Yet I would argue, they are still only ever provisional. We can put on a good performance with them. But we should never believe they are final, or embody some unique truth about ourselves. (p. 89)

Whilst the efforts represented here reflect only a segment of what may be offered by gay individuals (performing identity and relating to the imagined community), it is not intended that such ideas reflect the whole, nor that this represents some ultimate truth concerning gay identity and how this should be fixed. The performances discussed in this thesis represent a moment in time, and efforts by individuals who comment on gay social life. However, whilst these 'fluid identity ideals' are only *temporarily fixed* within the 'performative spaces' offered by confessional documentary and reality television, at the same time they potentially connect to cultural and social ideals which transcend the media space, and contribute to an evolving social world.

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Chapter 1: Constructing Identity, the Politics of Representation, and the American Son

Introduction:

John D'Emilio (1983) tells us that during the early part of the twentieth century:

Gradually a subculture of gay men and women was evolving in American cities that would help to create a collective consciousness among its participants and strengthen their sense of identification with a group. (p. 13)

Here D'Emilio notes the emergence of both the 'gay community', and also the idea of 'gay identification'. For the first time, homosexual people coalesced in urban communities creating a sense of 'collective consciousness' and community. Individuals engaged in this process in order to find a sense of personal identity outside of traditional community and family ideals. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this chapter to examine the diverse forms of gay 'communities' or 'subcultures', it does consider ideas surrounding gay identity, focusing not only on 'identification processes', but also 'identification ideals'. Consequently, the relationship between dominant society and the individual is foregrounded, revealing the potential connection that gay identity may have to archetypal concepts such as 'community' and 'family'.

Issues surrounding representation are examined, relating the social context of 'stereotyping', 'othering' and 'archetypes of identity'. Similarly, gay identity is discussed, focusing on the potential of 'social construction', and the concept of the 'imagined community'. This debate leads into an examination of the cultural power of 'the family unit', and its relationship not only to gay people within this, but also to the invention of families formed by gay partnerships. Finally, the context of the 'American family' is briefly examined, which leads into two case studies which examine the idea of accepting the American son. These discuss the performance of Lance Loud in *An American Family* (Craig Gilbert, and Alan and Susan Raymond for PBS, 1973), and the posthumous iconic performance of Matthew Shepard in *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium* (Martin Bedogne and Brent Scarpo, 1999), *The*

Matthew Shepard Story (Roger Spotiswode, 2002) and *The Laramie Project* (Moises Kaufman, 2002).

Stereotyping, Othering and Archetypes of Identity

Richard Dyer in *The Matter of Images* (2000 [originally 1993]) examines the representation of minority groups. He tells us that 'how we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation' (p. 1). Dyer's political intentions are foregrounded in his remark that 'negative designations of a group have negative consequences for the lives of members of that grouping' (p. 3). Similarly Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1995), in examining eastern culture as mediated by the west, tells us that 'it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances' (p. 21). Culture potentially relates the interests, circumstances, and possibly prejudices, of those who produce the cultural product. Consequently, the representation of homosexuals in a predominantly heterosexual society, is likely to reflect not only power imbalances, but also processes which may involve subjugation, and resistance. This may be related to the production of 'stereotypes' and the process of 'othering'. Similarly, the idea of 'archetypes' may be related to identity and representation, revealing predominant ideas concerning identity types.

Richard Dyer (2000) tells us that stereotypes 'do not only, in concert with social types, map out the boundaries of acceptable and legitimate behaviour, they also insist on boundaries exactly at those points where in reality there are none' (p. 16). Stereotypes in narratives are short-cuts to the explication of larger issues. They are used to present people (or types of people) by the use of simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature. If we consider the example of drama and homosexual identity, John M Clum (2000 [originally 1992]) tells us that stereotypes may take the form of:

Effeminacy (mincing, limp wrists, lisping, flamboyant dress)

Sensitivity (moodiness, a devotion to his mother, a tendency to show emotions in an un-manly way)

Artistic talent or sensibility

Misogyny

Pederasty (... this became the stereotypical formula for homosexual relationships, with its connotations of arrested development and pernicious influence)

Foppishness

Isolation (the homosexual's fate, if he or she remained alive at the final curtain).

(p. 77)

Clum relates homosexual stereotypes as traits (or devices) which playwrights would use to signify a homosexual identity. Although Clum's discussion concerns how homosexual identification was 'covertly performed' (when in Britain the Lord Chamberlain's Office placed restrictions on performing openly identified homosexual roles),¹ the stereotypical traits may be seen as distinct signs which may not only 'characterise an identity', they at the same time may be reductive and subjective. As Michael Pickering succinctly observes in his work *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* (2001):

The stereotypical act of descriptive compression and assessment as it is serially reiterated serves to externalise, distance and exclude those so designated. It does so through constructing their 'difference' in terms which diverge from what is taken to be central, safe, normal and conventional. Stereotyping is in this sense is a way of warding off any threat of disruption to 'us' as the 'same together' through the generation of the essentialised Otherness ... It is a collective process of judgement which feeds upon and reinforces powerful social myths. (p. 48)

The reduction of personal character to simple traits of identity/recognition, in this sense allows dominant groups to identify subordinate groups as bearing signs of 'difference'. This may not only exclude them from becoming part of the main grouping, but also part of this process of signification involves the separation of the 'whole' from the 'other' which in turn fragments the idea of an 'inclusive' society.

¹ In 1968, a 'section of the Licensing Act of 1737 that mandated the censorship imposed by the Lord Chamberlain's office was [finally] revoked' (Clum, 1992: 71) allowing British playwrights for the first time in two hundred and thirty one years to freely depict homosexuals on stage. Prior to this if a playwright wanted to present a homosexual identity it had to be in a covert manner. This would be achieved through performative signs such as bodily gestures, character interests/dislikes and demeanour, rather than verbal affirmation.

At the same time signs of stereotypification (the indication of difference) become part of a myth making process (which may become embedded in society).

We may consider that myths may exist with regards to gay identity/performance which involve stereotypes, and that these have become a vivid and productive tool of representation. The promulgation of stereotypes which surround the idea of gay identity have at the same time allowed the generation of myths as to the likelihood of 'real' homosexual character traits. Ultimately, individuals may be informed in this process by examining identity types displayed in fiction and drama as much as in the experience of meeting 'real' homosexuals. Through such processes, stereotypical traits are used to reinforce the idea of otherness. Consequently, as Pickering notes: 'stereotyping is a boundary – maintaining a move inward, rather than an emancipatory movement outwards' (2001: 49). The idea of designating otherness involves 'selection', 'separation' and 'rejection'. These processes which may be seen to 'divide', on the one hand involve a heightened focus (the other is identified as different and worthy of examination) and on the other distancing or disavowal . Stuart Hall considers disavowal

as a strategy by means of which a powerful fascination or desire is both indulged and at the same time denied. It is where what has been tabooed nevertheless manages to find a displaced form of representation. (Hall, 1997:267)

The representation of homosexuals through stereotyping, and othering, is a process whereby a focus is made by dominant groups (or organisations/institutions) upon gay people, yet they are not considered as accepted (as part of the main group).

Consequently, if we relate the idea of homosexual identity to 'recurring processes of signification' and the 'generation of myths' in society, we may also consider Carl Gustaf Jung's (1991 [originally 1959]) ideas concerning the 'collective unconscious', and the production of 'archetypes'. The idea of the collective unconscious, in psychology, relates to an individual's potential to connect with recurring contexts of experience within society (social contexts, representation, iconography) which may suggest identity ideals. Jung's hypothesis suggests that the individual recognises 'archetypes of identity', which may reveal 'profound and embedded signs' of an identity type. Jung considered archetypes such the 'mother archetype' and the 'child archetype', which may be connected to arcane history, human experience and expression (social contexts and representations in

art/literature). These archetypes may have been formed through images and discourses (for example the mother archetype is related to performing the mother-like role: exhibiting the idea of caring, protecting and nurturing). However, despite this potential to relate archetypes connected to the family idea which may be 'inclusive', it is possible to consider archetypes which may be disconnected from the family, and may be 'divisive'. These may be emblematic of diverse identities related to sensation and difference, rather than family roles. Consequently, since the emergence of 'homosexual identity' in the late nineteenth century (originally connected to scientific analysis – see Weeks, 1990 [originally published in 1977]) it is possible to suggest that 'homosexual archetypes' exist.² This may be related not only to how homosexual identity ideals have developed, but also to how this may be connected to the subjugation of homosexuals in society (the archetype reflects dominant subjugating ideals).³

Richard Dyer's (2000) observation of the 'sad young man' may be considered as an archetype of homosexual identity. Dyer argues that this archetype suggests that 'to be a homosexual was both irremediably sad and overwhelmingly desirable' (p. 73). Here similar to Stuart Hall's (1997) ideas concerning 'disavowal', a focus is drawn towards homosexual identity, yet it is rejected within the mainstream. Dyer examines evidence of the archetype of the homosexual 'sad young man' through examination of iconic pictorial representations, and analysis of popular fiction. Through connecting the representational ideologies: in paintings which suggest the homosexual as melancholic; and in novels which reveal the inner turmoil of the homosexual experience, these discursive ideas are connected together. This suggests that homosexual identity is something sensual, evocative and desirable, yet at the same time it is presented as aesthetic, tortuous and unfulfilled. In this way, Dyer's archetype of the 'sad young man' not only focuses on the homosexual as something interesting to audiences which promotes the idea of producing an identity archetype which may be universally recognised (in western society), but also through such recurring signification within the collective unconscious this ultimately influences the human psyche.⁴

² Also it is possible to argue that 'homosexual identity types' existed before this in culture, for example the idea of 'homosexual' or 'effeminate' men in early theatre (see Miller, 1996)

³ The idea of 'archetypes' connected to *difference* may be related to Erving Goffman's (1986 [originally 1963]) idea of a 'virtual social identity'. This might be formed from 'making certain assumptions [possibly connected to myths] as to what the individual ought to be' (p. 12).

⁴ Although it is possible to suggest this archetype is no longer contemporary (e.g. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (discussed in Chapter 6) presents gay identity as entirely confident, and without regret), ideas which present unfulfilment, yet physical desirability, still seem apparent. This may be evident

Consequently, the extent to which archetypes of identity are influential reveals, for the homosexual, a potential need to reject the idea of a subjugated role. Similarly, homosexuals may not only reject archetypes, they may attempt to form their own identity ideals. This may involve diverse strategies in identity construction, from ideas including connecting gay identity to hedonism, sexual promiscuity and liberating lifestyles which often reject the heterosexual equivalent (for example those represented in progressive television drama *Queer as Folk* (Showtime, 2000-present), to engaging with heterosexual ideals evident in connecting with the idea of romantic partnerships, the ritual of marriage and the ideal family (as discussed in this thesis). However, regardless of which preferences may be involved in performing gay identity, the idea of social construction has been a useful tool in helping to reform identity concepts. This theory has helped to define the potential of homosexual lives. Furthermore, the idea of a socially constructed identity can be connected to both homosexuality and heterosexuality. The discussion continues examining these themes.

Social Construction, Deviance and Liberation

In *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (1995), Jonathan Ned Katz questions the validity of the concept of heterosexuality as the obvious lifestyle choice. He considers that

an official, dominant different-sex erotic- a heterosexual ethic – is not ancient at all, but a modern invention. Our mystical belief in eternal heterosexuality – our heterosexual hypothesis – is an idea distributed widely only in the last three quarters of a century. (p. 14)

Central to his argument is the hypothesis that sexual identities are formed by discursive and institutional influences. His book latches onto a little known fact that the term heterosexual was not only invented at a similar time to the word homosexual, but its original meaning was originally associated with deviance (the desire to pursue pleasure from sex rather than procreation). He tells us that the first known use of the word

in media representations which whilst they focus on the aesthetic desire (to the audience) of the male homosexual, at the same time reject the idea of social/sexual fulfilment (Pullen quoted in Martin, 2004).

heterosexual in the United States occurs in an article by Dr James D Kierman, published in a Chicago medical journal in May 1892. ... [It] was not equated with normal sex, but with perversion – a definitional tradition that would last into the 1920s. (p. 20)

The definition of heterosexuality and homosexuality may be seen to be inter-related, not only in their contemporary meaning as opposites (or alternatives), but also as emerging as ‘sexual identities’ at the end of the nineteenth century, their emphasis on ‘sensual’ rather than ‘social’ reveals their origin from a need to categorise sexual impulses and desires outside the domain of procreation. Whilst it is not the concern of this thesis to examine the benefits of heterosexual or homosexual existence, it is important to evaluate historical contexts which have contributed to homosexual identity.

Ken Plummer (1981) tells us that:

Until the 1970s, to talk of becoming a homosexual was to talk of etiological factors: chromosomes and heredity, strong mothers and weak fathers, Oedipal failure and faulty conditioning, these and many others, have been variously invoked as the cause of homosexuality. (p. 93)

Consequently, early concepts of homosexual identity centred on the likely causes of the homosexual ‘condition’. Parts of Western society had for many years concerned themselves with the likely causes of homosexual activity/impulses. Such attention and regulation may be seen as attempts to control alleged sexual deviation, seen in homosexuality, from its self-appointed natural opposite, heterosexuality.

Ken Plummer (1981) illuminates the different approaches taken by essentialists and social constructionists with relation to gay identity:

For the essentialist, homosexuality is a universal, a form found across cultures and throughout history: and the ‘homosexual’ of ancient Greece is directly comparable to the ‘homosexual’ of London. ... For the constructionist, homosexuality is not a universal essence. Human gender and human sexuality is a diffuse open-ended matrix of potential and possibility – to be narrowed down and organised in specific ways by specific socio-historical form – actions. (P. 94)

Through the identification of essentialist and constructionist concepts of homosexual identity, Plummer reveals the separate paths often taken by those who wish to

contribute to discourse surrounding homosexuality. Although it may be tempting to consider the concept of homosexuality as universal (as the essentialist would believe), as an identity within the hierarchy of dominant society, it is important to consider its cultural and societal context. Furthermore, although we are aware that same sex activity may take place throughout every country in the world, to some degree, these actions may not necessarily be considered as homosexual. Consequently, homosexuality and heterosexuality are discussed in this work as inter-related social concepts developed within the confines of western society/culture.⁵

Michel Foucault, one of the leading writers on sexuality and its relation to power and institutions, tells us in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (1998 [originally published in 1976]) that:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge gradually tries to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct. (p. 105)

Through his ground-breaking work, Foucault illuminated the potential for sexuality to be considered as a construction generated by historical environments, rather than as solely an essence of human existence/behaviour which can be located, classified and established as having an inherent ultimate meaning. Foucault criticised concepts of sexual essentialism and promulgated the notion of sexual social construction.

However, Mary McIntosh pre-dated Foucault in predicting the need to consider homosexuality in relation to historical and social constructs. In *The Homosexual Role* (1991 [originally 1968]) she 'pointed the way in a path-breaking article ... that proposed to consider homosexuality as a social role whose origin and changing content could be studied historically' (Greenberg, 1988:5). McIntosh, in illuminating the limitations of an essentialist viewpoint concerning sexuality (which may be seen to focus on biological or psychological causes, rather than social effects/organisation), suggested that an alternative approach should be taken which

⁵ The concept of a liberated homosexual citizen who chooses to take a sexual/social partner is mostly particular to western culture. Gilbert Herdt tells us of the various incarnations of homosexual social identity with regard to global culture: '(1) age-structured relations as the basis for homoerotic relationships between older and younger males, (2) gender-transformed homoerotic roles that allow a person to take the sex/gender of the other gender, (3) social roles that permit or require the expression of same-gender relations as a particular niche in society, (4) western homosexuality as a nineteenth-century form of sexual identity, and (5) late-twentieth-century western egalitarian relationships between persons of the same gender who are self-consciously identified as gay or lesbian for all their lives' (Herdt, 1997:23)

focused on the homosexual having a social role rather than a medical condition. As Jeffrey Weeks tells us, she pioneered the concept that

Psychologists and psychiatrists [had] not been objective scientists of desire, dispassionate seekers after truth of the body, decoders of the laws of nature, as the sexological tradition proclaimed, but on the contrary [they were] 'diagnostic agents [involved] in the process of social labelling'. (Weeks, 2000:60)

Through the illumination that essentialist psychologists had not been productive in the thorough exploration of homosexual social existence, she highlighted their preoccupation with labelling homosexuality as deviant, an action which consequently fuelled the concept that such activity was outside the norms of accepted society.

Jeffrey Weeks considers that the labelling of homosexuality as deviant operates in essentially two ways:

- 1 It helps to provide a clear-cut threshold between permissible and forbidden behaviour, preventing drift into deviant behaviour by creating the likelihood that a small step will lead to a total fall into the deviant role.
- 2 It serves to segregate the deviants from others, thus containing deviant practices within a relatively narrow group. (Weeks, 2000:56)

Subsequently the promulgation of these labelling methods effectively operates as a method of social control. In this way, once a person has been labelled (identified as deviant), 'there may be a tendency for people to become fixed in their deviance once they have become labelled' (McIntosh, 1996:35).

The labelling of an individual or group as deviant from society's norms leads to their stigmatisation. Such an act may generate expectations surrounding the deviance of a particular group. In the case of male homosexuality this may be considered to be effeminate behaviour, poor self esteem and low sexual morals. The promulgation of defining deviant traits may go so far as to influence the alleged deviant members themselves. Erving Goffman (1986 [originally 1963]) recalls the words of a homosexual with reference to his concerns in meeting an old acquaintance who he discovered was also homosexual.

I met a man with whom I had been at school ... He was, of course, gay himself, and took it for granted that I was, too. I was surprised and rather impressed. He did not look in the least like the popular idea of a homosexual, being well-built,

masculine and neatly dressed. (p. 53)

Consequently, dominant labelling strategies have the power to influence ideas concerning personal perception of identity and expectations. This may occur to the degree that someone within the stigmatised group (who may consider themselves as normal) will expect members of his group to have traits of abnormality.

However, Mary McIntosh did not consider that the idea of the homosexual as a socially constructed role would entirely replace scientific/political analysis surrounding homosexuality. Rather, it would predictably be the task of the social historian 'to hold these two levels together' (Weeks, 2000:61). Jeffrey Weeks (2001) advises that, in investigating homosexual existence

On the one hand, we need to understand classifying and categorising processes which have shaped our concepts of homosexuality – the law, medicine, religion, patterns of stigmatisation, formal and informal patterns of social regulation. On the other hand, we must also understand the level of individual and collective reception of, and battle with, these classifications and categorisations: power and resistance. (p. 61)

Such analysis may be seen to negotiate a pathway through areas illuminating both ideas of essentialism and concepts of social construction. Suggesting that if those who support these ideas work in isolation (ignoring the contingent nature of both), the consequences may be seen as twofold, leading either to: 'social determinism (you are what society dictates) or extreme voluntarism (you can be anything you want to be): neither is true' (Weeks, 2000:61).

Clearly, the work of Mary McIntosh in illuminating a potential path forward to an increased understanding of the homosexual experience, may be seen as both ground breaking (in that she pre-dated Foucault's more famous analysis of discursive, historical and institutional effects), but also liberating (in suggesting a way beyond essentialism, she contributed to a loosening of the chains that had fettered the academic study of homosexual existence/culture). Although McIntosh's work may not have found the recognition, or attention, that it clearly deserved at the time of its publication, the same cannot be said for the work of Dennis Altman in 1971. Whilst both writers were striving for similar ends, the liberation and freedom of gay men and women, their approaches may be seen to be entirely different. McIntosh would be concerned more with ideas of gender difference and the hierarchy of male order, while Altman focused his attention on the liberation of

sexual freedom.

Dennis Altman's ground-breaking work, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, (published in 1971), is considered to be a seminal provocative publication that embodied the spirit of the evolving gay and lesbian liberation movement. This early work was meaningful in that it pointed forward to a 'new world of politics' for gay men and women.

The idea that homosexual people were oppressed, not only individually but as a group or category of human beings, was new ... in the 1960s. ...The idea that homosexuals, acting collectively, could transform the conditions of their individual social lives [that they] could be 'liberated', was transformative, in the language of the time, 'revolutionary'. (Weeks, 2000:61)

This publication marked the emergence of a new political awareness surrounding gay people. Like Mary McIntosh's work it moved the subjective emphasis away from discovering essentialist causes of homosexuality towards placing the spotlight on generating new concepts of identity that questioned the hierarchy of heterosexual order.

Jeffrey Weeks (2000) tells us that that Dennis Altman's work stimulated the discursive potential of identity for homosexuals, rejecting old ideas. Weeks observes that Altman contextualised 'Erving Goffman's discussion of 'spoiled identities' [making homosexuals more aware that] one bears the stigma.' (p. 79), and that there is a need to reject subjugation. Through the labelling of the homosexual as deviant, dominant society had authorised their stigmatisation. Whilst changes in the law had removed some legislative measures surrounding this, dominant society still considered homosexual behaviour as residing on the periphery of accepted moral and social behaviour. Dennis Altman attempted to remove the focus from the stigmatisation of homosexuals, questioning the 'oppression of homosexuals ... [as] part of the general repression of sexuality [indicating that] liberation [could] only come as part of a total revolution in social attitudes' (Weeks, 2000:81).

Altman progressively suggested that a gay community may be constructed in idealistic terms 'based on the eroticisation of everyday life'. He tells us:

It's so much easier, as I have discovered, to write about the transient nature of much of the gay world, which is more exotic, more colourful than the ups and downs of long lived relationships. (Altman, 1971:17)

Whilst Altman later wrote about AIDS (1986) and its impact on the gay community, and the opinions expressed here may have seemed idealistic and confrontational for mainstream society to accept, we have to remember that Altman was writing in an entirely different time. In the early days of the gay liberation movement, gay visibility in a meaningful cultural context, was practically non-existent. Whilst his propensity to draw conclusions about the alleged sexual activity of male homosexuals in the construction of a gay-world may be seen as disharmonious with those who would like to gain acceptance and accord with heterosexual social order, the publication of Altman's work generated meaningful debate. This may be considered as a defining moment in constructing a gay identity, which helped the move beyond essentialist ideas which had subjugated gay social existence.

Whilst Michel Foucault may be considered as the founding father of social construction with relation to sexual identity, both Mary McIntosh and Dennis Altman (in entirely different ways) may be considered as pioneers in service of the construction of homosexual identity outside the confines of essentialist concepts of homosexual existence: McIntosh in predicting the need to construct a social history for homosexuals (pre-dating Foucault), and Altman in rebelling against the very nature of stigmatising homosexual sexual existence as deviant or subordinate to heterosexual order. Both laid the initial foundations in constructing a gay social history. This ultimately would be connected to the idea of the gay community.

The Invention of the Gay Community

Zygmunt Bauman (1992) tells us that:

Communities are *imagined*: belief in their presence is their only brick and mortar, and the imputation of importance their only source of authority. An imagined community acquires the right to approve or disapprove in the *consequence* of the decision of the approval-seeking individual to invest it with the arbitrating power and to agree to be bound by the arbitration. ... What it lacks in stability and institutionalised continuity, it more than compensates for with the overwhelming affective commitment of its self appointed 'members'.
(p. xix)

In relating the earlier work of Benedict Anderson (1983) concerned with the issue of nationalism and concepts of the *imagined* community, Bauman in exploring the issue

of postmodernism in relation to modern society observes the use and value of imagined communities. The idea of the 'imagined community' does not relate to actual geographic residential areas, but instead is associated with the idea of group membership. Consequently, members of this are not contained by physical boundaries, but rather they are brought together by common bonds. In this way an imaginary community may not only exist across a wide expanse of cultural and physical divide, but also group members may be brought together by common interests and lifestyles. We may consider this is possible with regard to sexual social identities; a macro gay community may be seen to exist which is not confined by physical borders.

Self appointed members of an imagined community may have no direct relation to actual power in the same way that a physical body of individuals may be able to coalesce in unity (in the way a threatened community may be able to blockade a road, or secure a territory). However, through personal testament and personal identification with cultural representations/discourses of their 'group order', the individual may productively relate and engage with the social concepts and cultural values of their chosen community.

The idea of the imagined community may also be related to ideas surrounding personal identity, and concepts of the self. Anthony Giddens (1992) tells us:

The identity of the self ... is a generic phenomenon, [which] presumes reflexive awareness. It is what the individual is conscious 'of' in terms of 'self-consciousness'. Self identity, in other words, is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual's action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. (p. 52)

Consequently, through the self reflexive recognition of 'other' gay identities, gay individuals may be seen to relate to the idea of 'self recognition'. This may not only promulgate the idea of the likely existence of gay people recognising themselves as part of a gay community, but also through the heightened presence of gay individuals in the media, wider audiences may consider the likely physical existence of a gay community or gay communities. The idea of the imagined 'gay community' may be particularly meaningful for gay people themselves, who through being labelled as deviant (by dominant order) may feel disconnected from 'mainstream community', and wish to connect to a personal identity ideal. However, as identity is subjective,

acceptance of membership is an issue of self recognition, and of potential acceptance. Consequently, whilst there may be individuals who identify with the notion of the gay community, there may also be individuals who reject this. Whilst they may feel the idea of the 'imagined gay community' is hypothetically beneficial, the actual represented version of this (how it appears in the media, how society connects with this) is not desirable to be connected with. Therefore there may be individuals who in principle would like to connect to the idea of the gay community, but are not satisfied with its identity form.

Consequently, the term 'gay community' is both highly subjective (in terms of the individual's potential or willingness to recognise themselves), and potentially evocative (in terms of how individuals or groups may relate to this ideology). The validity and durability of the term is discussed by Jeffrey Weeks (2000) who tells us that

The idea of a sexual community may be fiction, but it is a necessary fiction: an imagined community, an invented tradition which enables and empowers. It provides the context for the articulation of identity, the vocabulary of values through which ways of life can be developed. (p. 192)

Weeks illuminates the need for the existence of the term 'community' in relation to homosexual identity. Although we are aware that real gay communities may exist, such as those reported in San Francisco, Toronto or Manchester, most gay people may relate their identity to ideas of an imagined gay community. In this way, a hypothetical social community is alluded to, and to some degree constructed, in service of supporting conceptual ideas relating to gay existence. This philosophical arena may be seen as the location where concepts of gay identity are established, transformed, and also, tried and tested. This concept may be used by those who may consider themselves to be members of an imagined or real gay community, and also, by those who would relate to or comment on gay existence/identity, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Engagement with this arena may be seen to be central to the gay populace, in the negotiation and the production of their personal and cultural identity.

However, the production of identity may not seem to relate to the concept of harmonious representation. Through the testament of disparate individuals and groups claiming membership of the imagined gay community, the term 'gay community' is as John Malone (2000) notes 'unquestionably more diverse than the

general public [is able to fully comprehend, furthermore, its very] ... diversity gives rise to tension within the community itself' (p. 15). Malone, writing in his provocatively titled book *21st Century Gay* (2000), recognises that those who may be seen to speak on behalf of the gay community (for example: academics, leaders of gay political groups, celebrities who are acknowledged as gay and those involved in healthcare and community issues concerning AIDS) are rarely unified in one political cause, or speak with one recognisable voice. Indeed, there are often contradictory messages disseminated by members of the gay community itself.

At the extremes of the spectrum, we find at one end gay couples who want to get legally married, adopt children, and move to the suburbs to raise them in the midst of straight families that are similarly constructed, while at the other end we find single gay men who want the [gay saunas] to function as they did before the AIDS crisis, making it possible to have private sex in this public place with as many different partners as their sex drives can sustain. (Malone, 2000:14)

These are not only provocative in the images they stimulate, but in their lack of congruity with heterosexual lifestyles. Ideas such as the provision of legal rights and the liberty for promiscuity are often capitalised on by those who wish limit the power of the gay community. The religious political right in the United States is one such faction who are not only eager to capitalise on the lack of agreement by those who call themselves members of a gay community, but also actively focus on the aspects of homosexual activity which may be less acceptable to mainstream society (such as sexual promiscuity), claiming this is representative of the entire gay community.

However, the discursive establishment of gay histories and imagined gay communities has provided the building blocks for the production and consumption of cultural and social 'gay identities'. The production of identity in this way may be attributed not only to the meaningful existence of gay people within the community, but also to academic and popular writers alike. Through the production of discourse, dominant society becomes increasingly sensitised to the potential presence of gay people within the larger community. Whilst the concept of the gay community (imagined or otherwise) is politically meaningful, the issue of representation is contentious (there is a continual debate concerning which factors represent the gay community). Nevertheless, the potential of the 'imagined community' is that it not only provides a 'multivalent context of identification', it may also be considered as a

‘metaphorical arena’. This provides a platform for a congregation of different voices, if not always singing in harmony.

Despite this, the discursive potential of the gay community is subjective: it connects to mainstream discourses from a minority perspective. The voices of gay people may be energised through this idea. However, dominant community ideals contextualise the idea of the gay community as existing on the periphery (not at the centre). In order for ideas of gay identity to be more powerfully projected (connecting within dominant power bases, and engaging with equality), gay identity needs to engage with, and resolve issues surrounding, the traditional family unit. Consequently the discussion continues, examining the idea of family, and the potential for gay identity within this.

The Discursive Framework of the Family Unit

John D’Emilio (1983) considers the positioning of gay people within society before the second world war, telling us that:

Although their sexual impulses might eventually bind gay men and women to others like themselves, initially their sexuality created a profound, even disturbing, sense of difference from family, community and society. (p. 20)

Hence through the process of being labelled as deviant, homosexuals found themselves outside dominant contexts of family, community and society. Through the idea of the imagined community gay people could find a sense of ‘collective consciousness’, and possibility the confidence and motivation to connect with other gay people. However, as gay people may be considered as individuals often rejected by the heterosexual family unit, the idea of family seemed distanced from gay identity. Although this work discusses later (in Chapter 6) the innovation of progressive families (which include children) headed by gay partners, the idea of the ‘heterosexual family unit’ still forms the traditional power base in society. Evidence of this may be seen in the support of American President George W. Bush in attempts to amend the United States constitution to limit the idea of marriage to being ‘only between heterosexuals’. In supporting this idea Bush argues

If courts create their own arbitrary definition of marriage as a mere legal contract, and cut marriage off from its cultural, religious and natural roots, then

the meaning of marriage is lost and the institution is weakened. (Quoted in Stanford Advocate, 2004)

Consequently, not only does opposition to the idea of non-heterosexual marriage extend to the highest point of political power in the United States, this resistance is connected to the idea of preserving heterosexual family life. The idea of the 'normal family' becomes a continual point of reference.

Susan Harwood (1997) tells us:

The family is the unit to which society has entrusted its reproductive function. This function entails not only the physical reproduction of our species, but also the reproduction of cultural, social and psychic norms. (p. 37)

Consequently, the family unit is a 'power base' which not only connects to the idea of procreation, it also involves itself in defining what is normal. Therefore should the heterosexual family reject the homosexual family member, this in turn reinforces the labelling of deviance. Just as Michel Foucault (1984) considers the power of discursive institutions (e.g. universities, armed forces, the media, religious organisations) as involving themselves with 'games of truth' (p. 73), the family unit, as the central institution of reproduction, plays an equally powerful role. The discursive potential of the 'family unit' not only 'upholds' the idea of normalcy, it also may be seen as a powerful institution able to influence diverse cultural and social ideals.

Therefore the idea of 'ownership of family', is both contentious and powerful. If we consider the idea of the 'American family', we may be presented with the context of American culture, and American family values. Consequently, representations which relate the idea of the American family, contextualise the idea of family. This may involve presenting either aspects of the ideal family, or relating this idea. Therefore texts titled *An American Family* are both provocative, and potentially powerful. It is interesting to note that *An American Family* is not only the title of a popular television series (discussed below) which included a gay family member, but it is also the title of an autobiographical book relating the ideals of a same-sex family (Galluccio and Galluccio, 2001). Whilst the book records the lives of Jon and Michael Galluccio as same sex partners who adopt children, and the television series concerns itself with the lifestyles of a middle class traditional family, the idea of questioning the form of the American family is central.

Cultural commentators are questioning the fixity of the idea of family in American culture. This may be related to Michel Foucault's ideas on power (discussed in Chapter 2). We can suggest that the family is a fluid institution able to be influenced. If the archetype of the American family is challenged with diverse forms claiming they are representative, there exists a potential for transgression which may overturn power bases. This may be achieved through 'telling sexual stories' (Plummer, 1995) where individuals involve themselves in personal disclosure and storytelling, revealing their intimate lives through the power of confession (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). Here the central focus is on personal testament, and the power of confession. This may be related to Anthony Giddens' (1992) idea of 'self reflexivity', as this allows for the production of a personal voice formed not by tradition or institution, but by practice and experience. Consequently, the work of Kath Weston in *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (1991) and Jeffery Weeks et al in *Same Sex Intimacies, Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments* (2001) which discuss the experiences of gay men and women forming their own version of family, are based on reinventing the form of family through personal experience and practice. Through performing their 'own version of family', they are reinventing 'ideas of family' engaging in 'experiments in living' (Giddens, 1992), rather than conforming to family hierarchical institutional norms (this is discussed more in Chapter 6). This may be related to Anthony Giddens (1995) idea of 'pure relationship' and 'plastic sexuality'. Giddens tells us that

Pure relationship [is a] relationship of sexual and emotional equality. ... Plastic sexuality is decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction. ... [it] can be moulded as a trait of personality and thus is intrinsically bound up with the self. [I]t frees sexuality from the rules of the phallus, and from the overwhelming importance of male [heterosexual] experience. (p. 2)

Consequently, these ideas connect with the idea of rejecting the dominance of the procreative heterosexual family, and place emphasis on the potential of individuals working together with equality. For homosexuals these terms are democratic ideals, which might reveal the potential to challenge the hierarchy of the heterosexual procreative family.

However, the traditional procreative family unit is the defining influence in the establishment and formation of gender roles. Hence ideas such as masculinity for males, and femininity for females, are considered norms in the performance of

heterosexual identity. Although theorist Judith Butler (1990) has argued that gender is a performance rather than an essential behavioural trait, relatively fixed gender roles are not only the norm within the traditional family unit, but archetypes of identity are also central. The idea that the mother is the 'predominant child carer' is a historic archetype. This idea is challenged in *Paternal Instinct* and *Primetime Thursday* (discussed in Chapter 6) with the gay males performing the maternal roles. Another archetype is the eldest son (considered to be head of the children) who plays an elevated masculine role. Lance Loud, as the eldest male sibling in *An American Family*, is discussed in relation to this, and the idea of the 'all American boy'. His relationship to this archetypal identity form is discussed below, and later Matthew Shepard is also discussed in relation to this. This not only introduces Lance Loud as a central performer who possibly inspired and influenced later performers discussed in this work, it also reveals their emerging context: as individual social actors performing (on television and in documentary) as themselves, yet representing an emerging gay 'imagined community', resisting subjugation.

Lance Loud and *An American Family*

The appearance of Lance Loud as a contented if somewhat precocious young gay man in the ground breaking observational documentary *An American Family* in 1973 may be considered as a defining moment in TV history and gay representation (see Figure 2).⁶ *An American Family* could be considered as a precursor to the idea of contemporary reality television in its presentation of 'everyday' people (the Loud family) filmed mostly in casual home and leisure environments, and the construction of narratives which focus on the personal and intimate.⁷ Furthermore Lance Loud is considered by some as providing the 'first televisual coming out sequence', Lance as a social actor performed a homosexual identity (discussed below). This marked not only the emergence of the gay man appearing as himself on serial television, it revealed the opportunity of forming alliances with those who represent you. Lance became close to filmmakers Alan and Susan Raymond, and consequently thirty years later he allowed them to record the final stages of his life in *Lance Loud! Death in An*

⁶ Craig Gilbert, producer of *An American Family*, noted that inspiration for the series may have originated in the observational film documentary *A Married Couple* (Allan King, 1969, Canada) (Ruoff, 2002: 12).

⁷ See Ruoff (2002) for a more developed argument which contextualises *An American Family* in relation to the idea of reality television.

American Family.⁸ Although the power of alliance is discussed in more depth later (Chapter 5), it has been the willingness of gay citizens like Lance to freely commit aspects of their personal lives to camera which has been the central drive of gay performativity and its powerful presence in contemporary reality television (and confessional documentary). The presence of Lance within the context of the family, and his relationship with his mother, became a central focus in *An American Family*. The series was produced in a reality television like manner (filmed over seven months in a real domestic household). This depicted the lives of the wealthy middle class Loud family of Santa Barbara, becoming (at the time of broadcast) a highly popular contemporary text.⁹ Whilst Lance was not shown to openly discuss his homosexuality in the series as it aired, discourse was generated within the text which clearly signalled him as homosexual.

This may be seen in the sequence where Pat Loud (his mother) leaves the family home and visits the 'outsider child' in New York. In New York Pat stays with Lance who is living in the Chelsea Hotel (a hotel famous for its connection with people who surrounded Andy Warhol at the time). Lance and his (male) friend Soren take Pat on the first night of her visit to an 'underground' stage review called *Vain Victory* featuring Jackie Curtis (which included musical numbers performed by sexually ambiguous characters). The following day 'after visiting the Andy Warhol exhibit at the Witney Museum' (Warner Bros., 1973: 49), Lance and his mother visit Central Park together. During this sequence of *An American Family* (episode 2) Lance Loud not only implies his sexuality to his mother, but he also 'came out' to the American audiences who were watching (*Death in An American Family*). However, at no point does Lance announce his homosexuality directly. Rather it is through the use of unambiguous signification (Lance discusses his childhood and his self-identification as outside the family unit) that audiences have considered this potential reading (Ruoff, 2002). In particular, the sequence where Pat and Lance walk towards the fountain in Central Park is most revealing:

⁸ Lance Loud died from complications resulting from AIDS in 2002. He asked Alan and Susan Raymond to complete his story (as mediated through television) which commenced with *An American Family*.

⁹ *An American Family* became a very popular text at the time of its broadcast. This extended not only to coverage in the popular press (including a cartoon commenting on the Louds in *The New Yorker* (Ruoff, 2002: 121) and a review of the series in *The New York Times* by Anne Rophie's (discussed below)), but also the Louds appeared on numerous television guest shows (such as *The Dick Cavett Show* (discussed below). Furthermore a paperback book was published to accompany the series (Warner, 2003), and Pat Loud produced her own book entitled *Pat Loud: A Woman's Story* (Loud and Johnson, 1974).

Lance: I want to stay at the Chelsea forever. I love it there. I think its so *interesting*. ... All those different individual little cells of people. They're all famous and all exciting and they all know what to do ...

Pat: Well I truly believe that's the place for you. I mean New York is. I think you've finally found an area that you ...

Lance: I mean I stood apart so. Like you know when I was thirteen I dyed my hair silver and did all that jazz. It was energy being wasted because ... I don't know. It was like being a little mouse trapped in a box. ... Like I couldn't ever judge it [(his childhood in Santa Barbara)] on the standards that were given to me because ... I mean they just didn't fit.

Pat: I know. ...

Lance: There was so much you guys could have done with me. If you had known.

Although Pat Loud expresses in *Death in An American Family* that this was *not* the point that Lance came out to her (she implies that she and her husband Bill had been aware for some time that Lance was likely to be gay), this sequence remains a defining moment in the representation of gay people on television. It may be considered as the first time on mainstream television that audiences became aware of a gay identity which was not mediated (obviously interpreted), by producers of drama, or expository documentary. Rather through its presentation as observational documentary, it is suggested that Lance was not only likely to be gay but he was performing as himself rather than being a subject of a particular discourse or examination. Although Lance would later openly discuss his sexuality in various media texts after *An American Family*, and though he considered his representation as unflattering (Suderburg, 1997), this veiled appearance of a 'real' gay man (as peripheral outsider, yet maternally understood family member) possibly stimulated a transfiguration of the imagined concept of the American family.

Death in An American Family records details of Lance's life from his participation in *An American Family* to his experiences after this (involving his role in the pop music band The Mumps, his connection to Andy Warhol, and his work as a media journalist), and his untimely death from AIDS. The production of *Death in An American Family* was stimulated by Lance himself whilst in the final stages of his life, suggesting that the project should possess a 'cautionary vibe' (Lance Loud,

Death in an American Family). The programme sets out to record Lance's feelings at being involved in *An American Family*, the ramifications of becoming a media celebrity who became known as openly homosexual (an issue which would have been provocative at the time), and it is used as a warning to audiences regarding his involvement with drugs (possibly leading to his death from AIDS). David Keeps (previous employer of Lance, as editor of the popular magazine *Details*) succinctly describes Lance's role as a media celebrity, and the ramifications of this:

When you take a condition of fame and you place it on an ordinary person's shoulders they can respond in a number of ways. [Lance] wore fame, he wore being a role model, and being a gay man, and he wore being a brave soul like it was a piece of chiffon, when it was really a heavy piece of armour. (*Death in An American Family*)

David Keeps identifies the difficult task it would be for Lance to become the centre of media attention. Lance at the same time had broken boundaries by not only becoming the first reality television star: he had identified himself as a 'contented' 'real life' homosexual. At the same time he may be considered as the first televisual media 'factual' 'role model' for male homosexuality. This would enable him to project a representation to non homosexual audiences who may not be aware of homosexuality (thereby possibly enlightening them), and to homosexual audiences themselves (presenting himself as an icon for self identification/reflexivity). As no prior representations of homosexuals existed in the area of documentary/factual production on mainstream television (as contented individuals included as part of a family life),¹⁰ its significance is substantial.

However, although we may view Lance's contribution as a major landmark in the representation of gay identity on television, at the time of *An American Family's* original broadcast, reviews were not always supportive. This may be seen in a critique originally published in *The New York Times* by Anne Rophie. She describes Lance as 'the evil flower of the Loud family [who] dominates the drama [and as] the devil, always has the best lines' (quoted in Warner Bros., 1973: 14). She also makes connections between Lance's appearance/behaviour and his likely sexual persuasion:

Lance returns from Europe to Santa Barbara ... The camera catches him clowning with clothes and make-up, trying on pretty things with his sisters. It

¹⁰ There had been documentary representations of homosexuals prior to the appearance of Lance, yet these were unlikely to use representation which would suggest such acceptance (see Introduction).

shows him visiting his father in his office, lying about going to school to study journalism, camping and queening about like a pathetic court jester a Goyaesque emotional dwarf. ... Craig Gilbert [(producer)] says some of his footage shows Lance wearing gold lame gloves, lounging in a dark village pad [(New York)], apparently high, fogged-in, in a world of men who swing on pain inflicted and pain received. Is Lance the true American son? (quoted in Warner Bros., 1973: 14)

At the time Lance passed off the relevance of this 'character assassination' with the 'glib' comment "I took a couple of aspirin and it was gone" (Lance on the *Dick Cavett Show*). However, it is inevitable that this cruel attempt at demonisation would not only become a source of contention for the Loud Family (for discussing Lance in such a personal, destructive manner),¹¹ it may be considered that its ready inclusion in the mainstream press reflected some residual public opinions regarding resistance to the inclusion of homosexuality as part of normal American family life. This is reflected in the main point of contention that Anne Rophie builds up to in questioning Lance's potential as a 'true American son'. The issue of Lance's positioning in relation to this idea is foregrounded in *Death in An American Family*, and directly addressed by Lance's father Bill.

Death in American Family placed emphasis not only on the closeness between Lance and his mother Pat (something which is foregrounded in *An American Family*), it further reveals Bill Loud's close relationship with his son, and his (belated) respect for Lance's lifestyle. Evidence of this may be seen in a sequence where Bill Loud emotionally recalls his feelings for Lance (after his death), and Lance's homosexuality.

Words can't express how you feel when you lose a child ...so you don't cry out loud, but at night I find myself 'tearing up' pretty well. You tell yourself 'time heals all wounds', you think of what you should have done. ... My 1950s 'establishment dadism' was "forget about it", life was tough – get on with it. And I should have gone with his more sensitive side. (Bill Loud, *Death in An American Family*)

Whilst it is tempting to believe that these words (emotionally delivered by Bill) may be produced to provide some sense of emotional *closure* in attempting to come to

¹¹ Jeffrey Ruoff tells us that Anne Rophie owed Lance Loud an apology, and despite having the opportunity many times, including writing her biography, she had never taken the opportunity to Ruoff's knowledge (Ruoff, 147 – footnote 36)

terms with the family's loss, its inclusion by the producers reflects not only Bill's personal feelings but may also be considered as an important reflection of society's changing attitude towards accepting homosexual sons (something which *An American Family* as a text (and its performers) had contributed to). Bill's intimate confession (direct to camera, and presumably stimulated by filmmakers Susan and Alan Raymond who became good friends of the family whilst filming *An American Family*) reveals a change in discursive potential surrounding heterosexual fathers and homosexual sons since the production of *An American Family* in 1973, and *Death in An American Family*, thirty years later. Bill Loud describes a personal journey, from his original relationship to the idea of '1950s establishment dadism' (where the homosexuality of a son would be rejected or ignored) to his current feelings of acceptance for Lance and his homosexuality (Lance's sensitive side is accepted as important).

Furthermore, an important sequence between Lance (seen in the hospital) and Bill (on the phone – not represented visually) illuminates an inversion of roles where Bill supports his son as part of the American family ideal, and Lance makes light of his contribution. Interestingly this is contextualised with reference to sequences from *An American Family* which Anne Rophie discussed as representing evidence of Lance's unacceptable performance (when Lance returns from Europe to Santa Barbara – presumably Rophie thought he should have stayed in 'other' Europe and not returned to 'heartland' America). The conversation between Bill and Lance follows:

[the visual representation is of Lance (accompanied by sister Michele) in hospital on the phone to Bill, it is inter-cut with images of Lance from *An American Family* as described]

Bill: I was just thinking of you [as represented in *An American Family*], riding on your bike from Wood Dale by the cathedral in Santa Barbara. You come flashing down there with your arms straight out [looking happy, content and carefree].

Lance: Well, I was an athletic 'transexualist' [sic].

Bill: You were just an 'all American boy', that's all, 'all American Boy'.

This sequence is represented as the last time Bill talks to Lance in *Death in An American Family*. It foregrounds not only the closeness between Bill and Lance but

it highlights the idea that Lance was not an outsider (*transexualist*, as Lance describes himself), but moreover that he was an accepted member of the family (representing an ideal of an 'all American boy'). It is stimulating that Anne Rophie's *character assassination*, which built up to the allegation that Lance was distanced from the idea of a 'true American son', is here counterpointed with a clear testament from the 'American father' that indeed Lance was the 'all American boy/son'. Whether this enfranchisement by Bill was inspired by defending Lance against the memory of Rophie's earlier protestation may never be known. However, its inclusion in *Death in An American Family* signals a development in the relationship between Lance and Bill, which transcends Bill's earlier 'over- masculinised' ideas on fatherhood and acknowledges and values the childhood sensitivity of Lance.

Lance Loud's influence on what gay identity/representation may be was not only ground breaking in terms of its early appearance (1973). Its strength lies in the connection made between the idea of the family and the homosexual. Hence as Paula Rabinowitz (1994) has noted, discussing the idea of family identity (in relation to fiction and fact):

It was through fiction that nostalgic claims about family/history could be maintained. Because feminists and gay activists had begun their political analysis of gender and sexuality with an emancipation of the family and its role in production, suppression, and exploitation of women and homosexuals, the family was opened for institutional inspection [by documentary]. (p. 135)

Consequently, through the actions of feminists and gay activists, and the emergence of observational documentary, the hierarchical dominance of the (heterocentric) family household began to be questioned. This led to the examination of 'real' family structures through documentary, rather than the concept of 'idealistic families' which was mostly based on fiction. *An American Family* would be praised by celebrated anthropologist Margaret Mead who described it:

as new and significant as the invention of drama or the novel – a new way in which people can learn to look at life, by seeing the real life of others interpreted by the camera' (Mead, quoted from *TV Guide*, January 6 1973, in Ruoff, 2002: xvi)

It not only marked the emergence of anthropological observational documentary on television (in the family home), it signalled the possible acceptance of gay identity as

part of the family structure. Contrary to drama (as discussed above concerning John M Clum's observations) which still remained influenced by a history of stereotypical typification surrounding gay identity (keeping it outside the family), factual representation of gay identity (as exhibited by Lance) allowed the linking of homosexuality and the idea of family.

Lance Loud's media presence may have influenced gay performers, who in later confessional documentaries discussed the 'deeper contexts of homosexual social existence' with confidence (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, this may have started the impetus to include gay people within social profiles produced in television. Evidence of this may be seen in contemporary reality television texts, such as *The Real World*¹² (see case study Chapter 4), where gay identity became a prominent, and recurring, social role. Through Lance's connection and alliance with producers Alan and Susan Raymond, his life (and death) would be represented on television. Lance's presence as an accepted homosexual son would not only become influential: it would become a personal media narrative which would endure for over 30 years.

The idea of the accepted American homosexual son may also be related to the representation of Matthew Shepard. Whilst the following analysis focuses on three diverse, documentary orientated, texts which report the tragedy of the murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998, the central focus which follows continues to examine the idea of homosexual acceptance within the family unit.

Matthew Shepard Case Study

Journey to a Hate Free Millennium succinctly paraphrases the incident of Matthew Shepard's murder in its opening sequences:

Matthew Shepard was beaten and tied to a fence for 18 hours in freezing cold temperatures. Once found his face was caked in blood except where the tears streaked down his cheeks. (*Journey to a Hate Free Millennium*)¹³

The graphic details of Matthew's murder became a point of reference which encouraged many Americans to consider the horror of hate crimes purported against

¹² The producers of *The Real World* admit they had been influenced by the precedence of Lance Loud (Murray, 2003).

¹³ Matthew Shepard, aged 22, was beaten to death (and robbed) by two male youths who suggested he had made sexual advances towards them. There was public outrage to the murder which involved candlelight vigils and public demonstrations (Barrett, 1998, 1999; Bull 1999).

defenceless individuals. At the same time this involved exhibiting the idea of accepting the homosexual American son. This connected to discourse considering religion, and the idea of the American pioneer and the heartland of America.

The following analysis considers the iconic performance and representation of Matthew Shepard in the documentary *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium*, alongside the documentary dramatizations *The Matthew Shepard Story* and *The Laramie Project*. Unlike other texts within this thesis Matthew, as a gay performer, is represented after his death. Although because of this we may not so easily assess his individual agency in media representation, the discussion examines the agency of individuals commenting on Matthew's life, who may be seen to work in alliance supporting the idea of gay acceptance (see Figures 3 and 4).

All the texts are centred on the idea of confession: *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium* represents members of the public who comment on the incident; *The Matthew Shepard Story*, although a documentary drama, features discussions between Judy and Dennis Shepard (Matthew's parents) concerning the suitability of the death penalty for one of the perpetrators (Arron McKinney), and *The Laramie Project* although a drama made for cinema (which includes some actual news footage), features main dialogue derived from interviews with members of the general public in Laramie who were concerned with defending the reputation of their town, and who are represented by actors.¹⁴ The performative strategies within these texts, whilst different (involving interviews with members of the public, actors, and actual archive footage) unsurprisingly focus their attention on the actual bodily harm perpetrated against Matthew, and the emotions of those who recall the event. This is particularly evident in discussing the discovery of the body, and the profusion of blood (see opening quote in this section).

While *The Matthew Shepard Story* opens with a graphic representation of the physical bodily harm perpetrated against Matthew, this is soon followed with a sequence where a policewoman unties the body from the fence, and cradles his form with no accompanying dialogue. *The Laramie Project* similarly discusses the discovery of the body from the perspective of the policewoman, however the most graphic account is delivered by a young man; the first person who discovered the body and called the police:

¹⁴ *The Laramie Project* evolved out of an idea by Moises Kauffman for a performance project. This involved research by his theatre group who interviewed 200 people over 6 visits to Laramie to construct a theatre performance, which was then became made into the film.

I noticed something just lying by the fence. Now I think it's a scarecrow. I think it's a Halloween guy. [But] I notice his chest moving up and down. Still thought it was a dummy some kind of mechanism, but when I saw hair (his hair), I knew it was a human being. (*The Laramie Project*)

All three texts focus on the transformation of Matthew's body from attractive form to lifeless corpse. The emphasis on the profusion of blood, the evidence of tears, and the iconography of a body tied to a fence, although described in terms of its likeness to a scarecrow, is more readily associated with the image of Christ on the cross (similarly located high on a hill in common iconography).

In establishing Matthew as an iconic form; de-humanised and tortured, tied to a fence, the producers supply a quasi religious iconic image. However, rather than locating this as part of established religion, or complimentary to Christian iconography, this image is used to critique established notions of middle America, and the ideas of right wing Christians. The discovery of his body on wild landscape in the heart of middle America, and the representation of Matthew as man who loved the country, comments on the ideology of the pioneers (and the myth of the frontier), and their relation with nature and countryside.

Geoff Kings tells us that 'the archetypal American narrative, the myth of the frontier offers a series of thematic oppositions' (King, 1999: 25). This is a process where the idea of the frontier is foregrounded, relating contrasting ideologies. Evidence of this is apparent in a song dedicated to Matthew Shepard, titled *American Triangle*. This song was composed by popular singer songwriter Elton John with Bernie Taupin, and is performed over the final sequences in *The Matthew Shepard Story*:

Western skies don't make it right. Home of the brave don't make no sense.
I've seen a scarecrow wrapped in wire. Left to die on a high ridge fence. It's a cold, cold wind ... blowing Wyoming. See two coyotes running down a deer.
Hate what we don't understand. You pioneers give us your children. But its your blood that stains their hands. (*American Triangle* – lyrics by Bernie Taupin)¹⁵

The lyrics of *American Triangle* connect with the idea of the frontier, and places the narrative of Matthew Shepard within this. Here we are presented with the juxtaposition of deer with coyote, signifying an opposition between sensitivity, and

¹⁵ See Appendix 1 for full lyrics

the order of nature (suggesting Matthew is the deer, and his killers were the coyote). At the same time aspects of frontier/pioneer culture are foregrounded: the nature of the elements, the wildlife, and the children. Through revealing opposing values (sensitivity against the order of nature) a discourse is generated which elevates the emerging role of the children (as sensitive), who are discussed as inheritors of the land, and producers of a new pioneer order. The ideology of the pioneers, and the iconography the frontier is not only examined in the composition by Elton John and Bernie Taupin, it is apparent in the narrative constructions and visual display which surround Matthew Shepard within the texts. This is evident in the continual reference to the land of America, and Matthew's love of the countryside, camping and hunting.

In *The Laramie Project* the reference to the countryside/frontier is mostly conveyed in presenting the iconography of the landscape (particularly where Matthew's body was discovered), and is particularly apparent in the representation of the gay farmer who comments on Matthew's death, and says "I love this land", accompanied with high distance shot of the Wyoming landscape. Similarly in the *Matthew Shepard Story* and *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium* the focus continually returns to the fence and the countryside outside Laramie. Also this connection is further highlighted in the *Matthew Shepard Story* when Dennis Sheppard summarises Mathew's last moments of consciousness (at a legal hearing concerning the sentencing of Arron McKinney):

He had his long-time friends with him, the beautiful night sky, the daylight and the sun to shine on him one last time. He had the smell of the Wyoming sage brush and the scent of the pine trees from the snowy range, and he had God. We think about him all the time ... and at special times of the year like the first day of classes at [the University of Wyoming] and the opening day of hunting season. (*Matthew Shepard Story*)

Through connecting Matthew's memory with the idea of nature, and the countryside, the producers use the idea of landscape as 'an instrument of social power to naturalise social and cultural constructs and relations through which social and subjective identities are formed' (Patin, 1999: 41). The social ritual of hunting forms part of the pioneer ideology, and consequently is used in connection with Matthew to directly locate him at the heart of American cultural history.

Consequently, an identity is produced which locates the image of the gay man

as part of nature and the landscape. In this way, like the Bakhtinian ‘carnival’ (see Chapter 2 for full examination of Bakhtin’s ideas) an inversion of hierarchies occurs, whereby the heterosexual male is displaced by the homosexual male. At the same time the identity of the gay man is re-appropriated to the countryside from the city. Metropolitan concepts of gay identity (Sinfield, 1998: 191) have been the predominant foundation of contemporary gay identity. This may be seen in the fact that gay identity is usually displayed as forming its social history in the city (e.g. San Francisco, see D’Emilio, 1990). Charles Kaiser (1997) tells us in his book dedicated to the formation of gay identity in the city that ‘in the post war period, New York City became the literal gay metropolis’ (p. xii) and how in general ‘urban centres represent the figurative gay metropolis: the place where gay men and women found the courage and freedom to build the foundation of a community’¹⁶. The idea that gay identity is only freely exhibited and possibly contained in the city is vividly described in the film *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (Stephen Elliott, 1994, Australia), by a lead character played by Terence Stamp:

Bernadette: It’s funny. We all sit around mindlessly ‘slagging’ off that vile stink hole of a city. But in a strange way it looks after us. I don’t know if that ugly wall of suburbia has been put there to stop them getting in, or us getting out.

This provides an opposition between countryside and city, linking homosexual identity with the city, and indicating that its safety is ensured if it remains there. Should homosexuals leave the city, as the characters in *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* do, a tension is created which unsettles the prescribed ‘natural’ order: heterosexuals should produce in the country, homosexuals should be retained in the city.

If we consider that ‘traditionally, work is masculine and consumption is feminine’ (Sinfield, 1998: 180), we may also consider: countryside is work/masculine, and city is consumption/feminine. These oppositions may reveal the likely connotation of homosexual with the city; that which may equate to consumption, passivity and femininity, rather than masculinity, activity and production. Consequently, the inversion of this in the *Matthew Shepard Story* is highly progressive, by displacing Matthew from sole existence in the city, and locating him within the heart of the countryside, homosexual identity is not only

¹⁶ Liner notes (Kaiser, 1997)

masculinised, it is at the same time located at the heart of production. This is a highly progressive connotation as it transforms the gay man from consumer to producer. As Alan Sinfield (1998) tells us:

Much of the traditional hostility towards gays seems to be sited on [the contentious relationship with ideas of production]: we disturb the assumption that parenting a heterosexual family, working round the clock in the household and factory [or countryside], and rearing children suitable for the labour force is the natural way to live. (p. 175)

Matthew's association with the heartland of America, and by token the myth of the pioneer spirit, engenders the transformation of the gay man from submissive city dweller/consumer, to valued producer and indispensable component of American culture/myths.

This polarising of gay identity in representing the murder of Matthew Shepard is further developed by identifying Matthew with the iconography of religion. This is partly apparent in the reading of Matthew's body as similar in iconic value to that of Christ of the cross (discussed above), but more evident in the use of the representation of the Angel Action performance (a counter demonstration against the religious right, present at the trial of the perpetrators). Angel Action represented an alliance of supporters defending Matthew's reputation (see Figure 4). The threat to this was evident in the appearance of Fred Phelps (a right wing Christian extremist) and his followers, who demonstrated outside the law courts. They were armed with offensive placards (directly commenting on the lives of homosexuals) some of which read: 'AIDS Cures Fags', 'Matt in Hell' and 'No Special Laws for Fags'. Although not many in number, the band of Phelps' followers understandably received media attention. In *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium* commentary is recorded by the producers; Phelps holding a placard on each arm, wearing a white cowboy hat, tells a reporter "these *kissiepoo* preachers are sending this nation to hell in a faggots 'hand basket'".

The Angel Action response to this was led by Romaine Paterson.¹⁷ This consisted of a group of people who would involve themselves in a visual performance outside the court room where the killers were being tried. This

¹⁷ Romaine Patterson appears in *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium*, and is represented by actors in both *The Matthew Shepard Story* and *The Laramie Project*. Other than the contribution of Matthew's parents (Judy and Dennis Shepard), Romaine may be considered as an equally central performer who stimulated the most dynamic response to hate for gay people which surrounded the murder of Matthew Shepard.

involved a number of people constructing costumes made of tubing and white shower curtain which would present the appearance of the individual as an angel. The wings of the costumes were designed to be high enough above the shoulders of the performer to eclipse the abusive placards of Phelps as the performers stood in front of the opposing demonstrators. The purpose of the performance was not only to blot out the visual messages of hatred provided by Fred Phelps' anti-gay demonstration, it was also designed as a tribute to the memory of Matthew. The staging and significance of the Angel Action event (in response to the Phelps' demonstration) forms a central narrative strand in all three texts. Furthermore it represents the alliance of performers connecting to and stimulating discourses which suggest accepting the gay American son.

The appearance of Dennis and Judy Shepard in *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium* provides the most emotional response to the loss of Matthew (see Figure 4). The central focus of this becomes discussing the baseball hat which Dennis had lent to Matt before his death (this is also focused on in *The Matthew Shepard Story*). Judy and Dennis disclose they had discovered the hat whilst cleaning out his apartment. Dennis reveals that Matt had wanted to borrow the hat, and he had responded "don't lose it". Now the hat is found, and Matthew is lost, it becomes an iconic prop. The connotation of the baseball hat suggests the gay American son as connected to sport, and the outdoor life. It is not insignificant that during Judy's and Dennis' recollection of the story of the hat, Dennis briefly places the hat on his knee as if physically reconnecting with the memory of Matthew. This type of emotional intimacy represents not only Dennis' desire for closeness to his lost son, but it is also discursively powerful by connecting the accepting parents to the gay all American son.

The connectivity between the memory of Matthew and performers/producers who wish to explore the context of his demise, reveals a discursive exploration which examines the idea of accepting the gay American son. Further to Dennis and Judy, and those who participated in the texts discussed here, many ordinary people mobilised themselves in responding to Matthew's life. This involved public demonstrations illuminating Matthew's loss (such as candlelight vigils in his memory). The circumstances of Matthew's posthumous performance may be tragic, but provided an opportunity for a nation to explore their feelings regarding the loss of an American son, who happened to be homosexual.

Conclusion

The issue of representation and identity is contentious: those subject to being represented may not consider all forms of cultural representation (representing their group) as something they wish to identify with. Hence for all social groups or citizens who may consider they belong to a community (imagined or otherwise), the image and discourse presented, connected to representations, may not appear as individuals desire. Whilst it is not the intention of this thesis to make value judgements as to the suitability of representations, and possibilities for identification, that surround gay identity, this chapter has discussed the processes involved in representation, and the potential for identification. Through a discussion on stereotyping, the process of othering, the idea of identity archetypes, and the labelling of deviancy, it is suggested that homosexuals have been subject to these processes in a manner that has subjugated gay identity. At the same time homosexuals have resisted such processes through constructing their own identity ideals, in the process of social construction. Through examining homosexual identity as a socially constructed form, it is possible to consider the potential to produce identity forms which connect to the social lives of gay men and women. The productive nature of relating to a socially constructed gay identity form is that it rejects ideas of essentialism, which for the heterosexual majority has allowed the labelling of homosexual activity as a form of sexual deviancy.

The idea of a 'gay community', and its relationship to the idea of 'the family unit', may be considered the central contexts which the gay performers discussed in this thesis foreground in their performances. The diverse texts in the following chapters may be connected to one central theme: how gay people present their social lives, and how this connects to the larger social world. Consequently, the idea of the 'imagined community', and its potential for positive identification, may be a central drive in evaluating gay performance in confessional documentary and reality television. Through the identification of the 'imagined gay community', it is possible for diverse members of this to connect with and profit from the potential that 'collective consciousness' may provide. Although different performers are presenting diverse versions of what they may consider as the real gay community (depending on what they want to identify with), the central premise that there is some 'connectivity' is a powerful discursive tool. Hence, the idea of a 'diverse yet connected imagined community' is useful: it brings together different voices which

may possess some performativity, working together.

Although Lance Loud and Matthew Shepard are discussed in this chapter, as high profile and influential performers, they are foregrounded here, not so much for their outstanding impact on the media, but more for their contextual representation as gay men accepted within the family unit. The context of the family (as an ideal form) has not only been central in the formation and reproduction of social and cultural capital within dominant society, it is a discursive form to which connections have increasingly been made within the gay community. Consequently, later case studies (as already implied) focus on this potential: for gay men to connect with family, and procreation, and challenge archetypes of homosexual identity. These ideas present to the 'imagined gay community' the prospect to reinvent, and reform publicly celebrated forms of identity. Therefore the family orientated performers discussed later in this work, represent an evolution of identity form which may be connected to the appearance of Lance Loud (in 1973) and Matthew Shepard (in 1998) within the heterosexual family. This journey may be considered as from 'emerging acceptance' in Lance Loud, to 'evidence of acceptance' in Matthew Shepard. The performances connect to the idea of forming the homosexual family (Chapter 6). This is a complex journey which involves, for the gay performer, not only a willingness to testify to the reality of their homosexual lives (through confession), it also connects to alliances within the media (between producers and performers). Along this journey we have to also consider the social catastrophe of AIDS (how resistance to this reinvented gay identity) and at the same time the potential of mainstream reality television (how the element of competition, and celebrity offered 'opportunity').

However, in what context does this performative potential exist? The texts discussed in this thesis are produced within the form of either 'confessional documentary', or 'reality television'. The following chapter consider the potential of performance, within the arena of documentary. Whilst documentary provides the opportunity for gay identity to present an 'authoritative voice', at the same time it is suggested that the documentary arena is a 'heterocentric world'. The potential of performance within this world is that while it provides an 'authenticating location' (where gay identity may be enfranchised), at the same time it has to connect with or respect heterosexual driving forms (such as marriage and procreation). This provides an opportunity for gay identity, but also a challenge.

Chapter 2: Performance and Documentary: Power, Carnival, Confession and Opposition

Introduction:

A disembodied voice of an ex-service man tells us in Ken Robinson's pro-gay political documentary *Some of Your Best Friends* (1971):

I fought in Vietnam for this reason? To come back and see a bunch of faggots parade up and down Hollywood, that's really disgusting!

Commenting on scenes from a gay protest march depicting gay men and women in revelry and defiance, the anonymous voice reveals evidence of the contentious relationship between performance and documentary. A comparison is made between the documentary 'seriousness' of the Vietnam war (of which we need no representations), and the performative 'triviality' of gay men and women involved in protest (which is vividly displayed as vulnerable for assessment). Here a deliberate juxtaposition is made between performance (as ephemeral ongoing work of social construction) and documentary (as evidential provider of historical fact).

Bill Nichols (1991, 1994, 2001) has already revealed a correlation between the idea of performance and documentary, suggesting the role of performance emerged in (certain) documentaries in the 1980s (2001: 138). Whilst it is not the remit of this thesis to argue for a particular date when performance influenced documentary form, the validity of these terms, their definition, use and connotation, reflect diverse political contexts. Consequently in developing Nichols' ideology, the inter-relation of performance and documentary (as disparate and possibly conflicting ideologies) is of a central concern in the following analysis, as is the involvement and potential of the individual operating within this milieu.

Those involved in performance within confessional documentary and reality television not only have their own goals and desires, their contribution is an ingredient which may reveal potential 'oppositional agency' (attempting to disturb the status quo). Danny Roberts of *The Real World New Orleans* (2000) tell us:

[When] Julie a 20-year-old Mormon who called homosexuality 'disgusting' during her audition ... "learned I was gay she had to completely break herself

down and change her views ... by the end of the show, she [became] as anti-homophobic as it gets ... I want the public to have the same reaction (quoted in Barrett, 2000: 41)

Performers by appearing in the media involve themselves in power relations. Danny Roberts' appearance in *The Real World* (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) not only influenced 'roommate' Julie, but also a wider audience as to the possible reality of homosexual social existence. The idea of personal agency, its discursive potential and the evident use of power involved are highly relevant issues in examining performance and documentary.

This chapter discusses not only the nature of performance and documentary, and their contentious relationship with each other, it considers the power structures, and the potential that may be involved. Using Michel Foucault's model of power, and Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of the Carnivalesque, it will consider the potential of discursive strategies. Similarly it will relate the relevance of 'materialist feminism' (Carlson, 1996; Román, 1998), confessional performance (Foucault, 1998) and the idea of 'therapeutic discourse' (Mimi White, 1992). Also it will examine the idea of the 'oppositional/proletarian public sphere' (Negt and Kluge, 1993; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994) as a theoretical arena where such performances/ideologies may occur.

Documentary and Performance

Paula Rabinowitz (1994) (writing on the politics of documentary) tells us that:

Documentary performance and address is always about crossing boundaries – racial, sexual, class, gender, regional, temporal – as outsiders to a subculture enter into it, or as insiders from a subculture project it outward. (p. 9)

Marvin Carlson (1996) (in his introduction to performance) similarly tells us:

Performance can work within society precisely to undermine tradition to provide a site for the exploration of fresh and alternative structures and patterns of behaviour (p. 15). Unable to move outside the operations of performance (or representation), and thus inevitably involved in its codes and reception assumptions, the contemporary performer seeking to resist, challenge, or even subvert these codes and assumptions must find some way of doing this "from within". (p. 172).

Herein lies the quandary of those attempting to involve themselves in cultural resistance through participating in documentary and performance; in order to influence or change the system you have (to some degree) to engage yourself with the mechanism you may be trying to critique or take apart. This chapter considers such political agency, and the extents to which individuals will involve themselves in order to take apart and/or subvert expectations within performance and documentary. However, before we examine the performances of individuals (in later chapters), it is important that we consider the histories/ideologies which surround the terms 'documentary' and 'performance'.

Those involved in documentary may be seen to engage with 'the encoding of history in documents' (Rabinowitz, 1994: 18), and an evolution of media documentary form (Nichols, 1991, 1994, 2001) predisposed with the idea of conveying actual social reality. Those involved in performance may conversely find themselves in an 'embodied practice' which privileges the 'body as site of knowing' (Carlson, 1996: 191) and 'resists conclusions, just as it resists sorts of definitions, boundaries and limits' (Carlson, 1996: 189). Consequently, documentary and performance appear as terms which may represent opposing discourses: documentary implies order, history, establishment, and a cohesive canon of documentary events which lead to social enlightenment; performance may suggest signs of disorder, historical negotiation, anti-establishment sentiment, and a programme of not necessarily related confrontational events. Documentary may be seen as a regulated framework, and performance may be viewed as an individual's inter-relation and negotiation with social and media environments. Yet as documentary must involve the performance of individual subjects, and performances may be documented, both terms appear inter-related. However, it is only when a performance is documented, that the social act of performing can transcend its ephemeral connotation, and become as enduring as the term 'document' may imply.

Bill Nichols (2001) establishes that there are many voices and modes involved in documentary. Developed from his earlier work (1991, 1994), Nichols proposes that these may be considered within an historic framework which starts with early Hollywood fiction as a precursor. Tracing the emergence of documentary through a system of modes, he critiques their potential to convey documentary fact:

Poetic documentary [1920]: resemble fragments of world poetically – lack of specificity, too abstract

Expository documentary [1920s]: directly addresses single issues in the historical world – overtly didactic

Observational documentary [1960s]: eschew commentary and re-enactment; observe things as they happen – lack of history, context

Participatory documentary [1960s]: interview or interact with subjects; use archive film to retrieve history – excessive faith in witness, naïve history too intrusive

Reflexive documentary [1980s]: question documentary form, de-familiarise the other modes – too abstract, lose sight of actual issues

Performative documentary [1980s]: stress subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse – loss of emphasis on objectivity may regulate such films to the avant-garde, “excessive” use of style.

(Nichols, 2001: 138)

By imposing an historical framework, which suggests development and progression, he defines a system of evaluation, and a process of hierarchical organisation. This proposition is both useful (it allows us to evaluate modes and methods of performance in relation to form and discourse), and contentious (the idea of imposing an order/value system suggests a goal of conveying ultimate documentary truths, or facts).

Stella Bruzzi (2001) suggests that the idea of retrieving reality or truth may be an impossible task, even in the context of documentary, for

the closer one gets to the document itself, the more aware one becomes of the artifice and the impossibility of a satisfactory relationship between the image and the real. (p. 21)

Similarly Jane Feur (1983), relating the issue of ‘reality’ to live television, tells us that to make this equation is to ‘ignore all those determinations standing between the event and the perception of it – technology and institutions to mention two’ (p. 13). In this way neither documentary, nor live television has the potential to convey reality. The distance between the real event and the representation is significant. Yet documentary has this privileged relationship with the idea of reality (and truth). This may be partially due to the idea of documentation, which implies some official

authorised function, a corollary of which would be that documentation possesses some licence to convey reality.

Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs (1997) however do suggest a negotiation which may bridge the almost impossible divide between documentary and reality:

‘[R]eality’ is never translatable to a fixed ‘document’ to be possessed or perused, [however] multiple, unstable ‘realities’ are present as profilmic events and experiences, [and consequently] we [must] realise that documentaries do exist, in rhetorical and political dimensions’ (p. 3)

Documentaries do present aspects of reality, but in their politicised context (as representations) we must not forget that meaning is subjective, and consequently must be evaluated. Consequently in Nichols terms (2001), the ‘performative documentaries’ of the 1980s although not as overtly didactic as the ‘expository documentaries’ of the 1920s, still possess a discursive ambition to present a truth or individual rhetoric specific to the text as produced. Similarly the ‘reflexive documentaries’ of the 1980s which intend to reveal the mechanism of production (by suggesting that by this ‘unveiling’ or ‘dismantling’ in some way dilutes the propensity to a ‘point of view’), bear similarities to the ‘participatory documentaries’ of the 1960s where the evident ‘outside force’ may be seen to engage with the text. Despite Nichols’ illumination of documentary modes (and their varying potential to convey reality, or documentary fact) the ability to reproduce reality (as it would have existed had the camera not been present) is contentious. The context of ‘documentary reality’ should always be counterpointed to the production, and the discursive bias of the text, rather than the likelihood that we are experiencing an unmediated version of ‘reality’. As Linda Williams (1993) tells us:

the truth figured by documentary cannot be a simple unmasking or reflection. It is a careful construction, an intervention in the politics and semiotics of representation. (p. 20)

The construction, and reconstruction, of reality is highly charged with all the politics potentially involved in representation. It similarly involves the potential for subliminal reading, reinterpretation and negotiation; of what reality may consist of.

As Stella Bruzzi (2000) tells us, the relationship between reality and the text must be that; ‘from within such a performative framework, the very notion of a complete, finite documentary is continually challenged and reassessed (p. 180).

Similarly as Bill Nichols (1994) has observed, although we consider the existence of documentary as a form which is complete and conclusive:

more recently though documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction. A shift in epistemological proportions has occurred. (p.

1)

This shift in 'epistemological proportions' has engaged with the idea of individual agency. The individual may be now considered as the co-producer of the text, rather than the subject of an ethnographic project which highlights the distance between the observer and the observed. Consequently, contemporary confessional documentary like reality television not only raises what Nichols (1994) calls 'vicarious participation' (p. 74), but also a corollary of this reconfiguration is the increasing profile of performance within documentary potential. At the same time the 'anthropological unconsciousness' which Nichols maintains upholds documentary conventions involving 'whiteness, maleness, body of the observer, the experimental [and the] canonical conventions of western narrative' (1994: 65), becomes diluted or distanced. The increasing role of performance as Nichols (2001) succinctly observes as emerging in 'performative documentary' in the 1980s, defines documentary's increasing predilection for performance.

Marvin Carlson (1996) defines performance and performativity 'as almost ubiquitous tropes in the postmodern consciousness [which] owe allegiance to no particular field or discipline' (p. 193). At the same time they 'are occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves with alternatives' (John A Mac Aloon cited in Carlson, 1996: 196). Performance may be seen as a social ritual which allows the individual to negotiate or transcend their social role.

Grahame F Thompson (1985) similarly considers the potential for:

Performance ... as a surface in which the capacities for habitual interrogation and ethnical dialogue take place in a tension of personalised decipherment.

This surface operates as a substitute for the dual concepts 'text' and 'context' and is made up of a series of effects, producing different types of agreement, disagreement and resistance to the normalisation of the reading (p. 90)

Performance may be seen as a tool of individual agency which may allow the performer to challenge predominant hierarchical readings, and established sites of authority.

The increasing profile of individual performance within documentary may engender a transfiguration of the 'interpretative arena' of documentary itself. Bill Nichols (1994) suggests that this involves:

a definite history and familiar array of issues and arguments such as (1) narrative, rhetoric, and meaning, (2) style and effect, (3) content and validity, (4) ethics, ideology, and politics, and (5) institutions, disciplines, and their consequences. (p. x)

Similarly not only are these documentary hierarchical constructs and expectations potentially challenged, but also the body of the performer and self representation is foregrounded. This distinction between the established anthropological tradition of documentary, and the potential of personal performance, highlights a distinction similar to that between literature and the vernacular.

Testimonials are first person, oral more than literary, personal more than theatrical. Such work explores the personal as political at the level of textual self representation, as well at the level of lived experience. (Nichols, 1994: 8)

Similar to the observation of Jon Dovey (2000) of 'first person media', 'television's theatre of intimacy serves up these [personal] "truths" for us as vivid, framed portraits of identity' (p. 104), Nichols recognises the emergence of the vernacular and performative as potentially encompassing the hierarchical and imposing.

In relation to Jon Corner's (2002) ideas on 'post documentary' (p. 263), where the documentary tradition has been challenged by new forms of performativity in reality television, the increased focus on the 'individual performer' has the ability to deconstruct the hegemonic bias of documentary. Through the emergence of the performer (rather than the producer or broadcaster) as a 'quasi-central' component in attempting to create meaning, a displacement occurs which counters the pre-eminence of an historic foundation. The foundation established by Nichols (1991, 1994, 2001) which reveals a linear passageway from poetic documentary in the 1920s to performative documentary in the 1980s, is vulnerable to collapse from the increasing emergence of performance. As Marvin Carlson (1996) tells us:

This removal of a centre, a fixed locus of original meaning, brings all discourse, all action, and all performance into a continuing play of signification, where signs differ from one another but a final, authenticating meaning of any sign is deferred. (p. 135)

Relating to the idea of deconstruction, the media producer is displaced and this is countered with the emergence of the performer. This highlights a *void*, and an *augmentation*. Through dispensing with the authoritative/obvious producer, the performance and the performativity of the individual take over, and contribute to the construction of the narrative; which may appear to be non-authored (in the traditional sense), yet is personal and immediate. This contributes to a reconfiguration of the role of the performer in documentary from subject for examination to agent of expression.

Diverse Identity, Materialist Feminism and the Rejection of Realism

Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs' edited work, *Between the Sheets, in the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary* (1997) provides the first significant complete work to consider the issue of gay performance within documentary. Despite their contribution in assembling a substantial work which extends the academic study of homosexual participation in documentary, an issue at hand is the difficulty of trying to find a term which can encompass all groups that may not be heterosexual. Holmlund and Fuchs (1997) admit that although the potentially all-encompassing term 'queer':

is posed as a national movement [it] frequently means specifically Northern [American] and/or metropolitan, while Southern queers living in the South are viewed as an amorphous group of 'others'. (p. 8)

Whilst providing a term which may encompass all 'other' homosexuals may be difficult, Jeffrey Weeks et al (2001) provide some solution to this in adopting the term 'non-heterosexuals', whilst admitting that 'there can be no simple history of homosexuality as a transhistorical experience' (p. 13).

Even though there have been attempts to coalesce aspects involved in constructing homosexual social identity, such as the provocatively titled *The Construction of Homosexuality* by David F. Greenberg (1988), we must not forget that in Edward Said's (1995) terms 'it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances' (p. 11). Consequently, such attempts at creating space for homosexual social identity must relate to the author's own perspective in forming this. The predominant authorities involved in writing on gay

representation/identity (in academia, and popular culture) potentially write from the perspective the 'white western'. Consequently, the representation of homosexuality must be related to its authorial context, and we must consider the potentially diverse political agendas which may be involved. Not only is there a lack of historical unity when discussing homosexual social history but also the issue of 'otherness' must be contextualised: it may not simply involve the binary opposition of the homosexual to the heterosexual.

This lack of cohesion and historical unity is evident in considering the potential groups of homosexual 'others' discussed in Holmlund and Fuchs' work. This is particularly evident in the work of Chris Cagle (1997) which discusses the idea of a 'Queer South'. The idea of the South is discussed in binary opposition to the North, and consequently the South is related as a potential 'other'. To provide evidence for this inter-relation, Cagle (1997) discusses the idea that this may be related to gay men and women leaving the South for the North, thereby emphasising a divide between the 'urbanity' of the North (suggesting sophistication and civilised order) and the 'backwardness' of the South (connoting earthiness and natural order).

The concept of exile is central not only to understanding patterns of lesbian and gay migration, identification and community imagining but also to addressing the body of Southern media work made by filmmakers no longer residing in the South. (p. 35)

Like the relationship between the heterosexual and the homosexual, which may engender the heterosexual to consider the homosexual as his 'exotic' other, the distinction between the urban sophistication of the homosexual of the North, and the rural simplicity of the homosexual of the South may represent a similar power relationship. In order to explore this identification of the South as 'exotic other' to the homosexual, Cagle discusses the work of Marlon Riggs and his documentary *Tongues Untied* (1989).

Tongues Untied highlighted not only the issue of the South as 'other', it also involved a highly autobiographical account (see Figure 5). Bill Nichols (2001) tells us that director Marlon Riggs and 'other social actors speak on and off camera about their experiences as black gay men. Some recite poetry, some recount stories, some participate in sketches and re-enactments' (p. 18) often involving intimacy between black gay men never represented before. *Tongues Untied* however became controversial as it was partially funded by public money. It was used 'out of context'

by republican political candidate Pat Buchanan, hoping to discredit his rival George Bush (senior), for wasting public money (in supporting the body which helped fund the project). This involved using an extract from the documentary:

Pat Buchanan's 'attack ad' people took one portion of Riggs' video that speaks explicitly to the racism within the lesbian and gay community, a shot of gay white men's bare [buttocks] on Castro Street [San Francisco], over which Riggs describes the 'sea of vanilla,' [suggesting that this is similar to] the racism with which he and his black brothers must contend. The images in this segment were represented as one more image of the (white) gay sexuality that the religious right has constructed as the 'gay agenda'. (Deitcher, 1995: 100)

Ironically the publicity that the film obtained through its misrepresentation (using a brief extract which was out of context) contributed to awareness and popularity of the film. Riggs provided evidence of unexplored black gay homosexuality, and at the same time criticised white homosexuals for failing to live up to an ideology of liberation and freedom which should include the black gay community (heightening distinctions of 'otherness' between black and white).

Cagle considers Riggs' contribution, relating Bill Nichols' distinctions between interactive and performative documentary:

If interactive documentary exhibits ... an 'excessive faith in witnesses' and 'naïve history' then loss of emphasis in performative documentary marks a deflection from historical specificity toward a more evocative history. (1997: 38)

Through placing emphasis on performance and witness and moving away from historical hierarchical organisation, Riggs not only critiques heterosexuals, he evokes a discursive arena which provides commentary on the inability of homosexual identity to represent the diverse non-heterosexual identities which may exist. In the case of Riggs there exists not only the idea of subjugation of the homosexual, but also that of the black man and the South. This consequently reveals the complex political struggles involved in attempting to explore and fulfil a proliferation of diverse subaltern strategies. *Tongues Untied* presents a vicarious representation of images and issues surrounding Black gay male sexuality. At the same time it may be considered a critique on the lack of cohesion in the political aims of homosexuals, who are potentially seen as one homogenous unit.

Although we may consider a lack of cohesive identity, we may discuss the political aims of non-homosexuals as analogous to those of feminists. Homosexuality, like feminism, recognises the 'white male heterosexual' as its binary opposite (in terms of power, rather than sexuality). Consequently, it is this oppositional relationship that links the potential and aims of the homosexual and the feminist: to critique and challenge the dominant site of power. Marvin Carlson (1996) and David Román (1998) both highlight the importance of 'materialist feminism' in relating its importance for subaltern cultures. Materialist feminism extends from the idea of 'cultural materialism'. Alan Sinfield (1998) notes that:

Cultural materialists argue that the notion of an unchanging human reality inhibits thoughts of progressive change by perceiving oppression and injustice as 'the human condition' – tragic but inevitable. They declare that cultures are produced by people in history, and regard high culture with some suspicion since it is almost certainly promoting particular interests behind the claim of universal relevance. (p. 146)

Cultural materialism, in rejecting the idea of universal truths, 'frames cultural production in terms of constituency that may be engaged' (Sinfield, 1998: 149), potentially allowing homosexuals, and other subaltern groups, the ability to counter/critique/reinvent cultural production. Extending the idea of feminism from solely a subjugated gender position, 'instead of liberal universalism or cultural essentialism, material feminism [through the model of cultural materialism] views gender as culturally constructed within a set of power relationships' (Carlson, 1996: 145). Like the ground-breaking work of Judith Butler (1990) suggesting that 'gender is not a noun but a free-floating set of attributes' (p. 33) and ultimately that its formation emerges from within a 'matrix of power relations', the materialist feminist perspective recognises the complexities, and potential, of gender performances in cultural production.

Marvin Carlson extends the work of Sue-Ellen Case (1988) to define the material feminist position, that while it may be inspired by the feminist ideas it is not solely relevant to specific gender orders:

The materialist position 'underscores the role of class and history in creating the oppression of women', rather than assuming 'that the experiences of women are induced by gender oppression from men or that liberation can be brought about by virtue of women's unique gender strengths' (Carlson, 1996: 145)

Through recognising the relevance of class and history in forming our identity hierarchies, Carlson recognises the potential of the material feminist perspective to extend beyond simply issues of male and female heterosexual divide.

David Roman (1998) extends this idea to consider materialist feminist performance theory, calling attention to 'representational structures [and] their [political] ramifications' (p. 41). Roman (1998) tells us, relating the work of Jill Dolan (1988), that:

Materialist feminist performance theory and practice foregrounds and destabilises the representational apparatus [and in this way it is able] as Dolan argues 'to demystify compulsory heterosexuality and the construction of gender as the founding principle of representation' (p. 42)

This type of destabilising may be achieved by moving away from realism (which may relate to heteronormative ideology), and emphasising aspects of individual performance which may critique already established notions of what can be reality.

As E. Anne Kaplan (1988) reflects on the use of realism by early feminists, commenting on the limitations of *cinema verité* style documentary:

Realism as a style is unable to change consciousness because it does not depart from the forms that embody the old consciousness. Thus prevailing realist codes of – camera, lighting, sound, mise en scène - must be abandoned and the cinematic apparatus used in a new way so as to challenge audiences' expectations and assumptions about life. (p. 80)

Consequently, feminists and homosexuals involved in performance within documentary must to some degree recognise this proclivity in realism to represent the heteronormative. As David Roman (1988) reminds us when negotiating ideas of realism for the homosexual, 'the young and healthy heterosexual couple signify both reproduction and regeneration of the community' (p. 248). Consequently, representational ideology is essentialised in this manner, and any other configuration is rejected as abnormal.

Diane Waldeman and Janet Walker (1999) tell us, relating feminism and documentary:

While often accused of falling into a realist illusion that documentary films present real women, feminist documentary practices and studies have looked for ways to avoid that illusionist pitfall while at the same time acknowledging the

political stakes in representing the images and voices of women who are not professional actors and whose documentary representation seeks to build consensus with actual women for the audiences of these films. (p. 11)

Besides the issue of who has ownership of dominant definitions of realism, the tension between real people and their social representation is a central issue in discussing documentary and performance. The use and appearance of social actors involved in performance (rather than professional actors involved in fiction) reveals the potential motives of those involved (as individual agents), and the 'self representational' value of documentary compared to fictional representations. In the same manner that feminists have been critical of 'dominant cinema (defined as Hollywood fiction film) and [supported] ... the development of an alternative feminist cinema' (Waldeman and Walker, 1999: 6), homosexuals need to be aware of potential subjugation in both fiction and documentary, and of performative opportunities that may exist in both.

Differing agendas/potential may exist which could allow us to easily make distinctions between the feminist and the homosexual, the most significant being the ability of the male homosexual to (covertly) become part of the (dominant) male order, and the distinct opposition in which the heterosexual female may be located, in relation to the heterosexual male. However, the oppositional position between the heterosexual male and the homosexual/feminist is the predominant aspect which should unite them both, a corollary of this being that such a union may be inspired by the potential to break down subjugation.

Just as Waldeman and Walker (1999) set out to 'engage in dialogue with the dominant strains of documentary history from the perspective of feminism' (p. 40), this thesis takes on a similar approach in relating feminism to homosexual politics. However, whilst the term 'feminist' implies that power in these terms is held solely by white male heterosexuals (who may oppress), the potential of performance in 'material feminist' terms is that it provides the ability to 'destabilise representational apparatuses' (Román, 1998: 42) by all those involved in attempting to counter subjugation. Consequently, rather than adopting a model of power in Karl Marx's terms, where 'every kind of production system entails a definite set of social relationships between individuals involved in the production process' (Giddens, 1992b: 35), we must consider a model of power which is more progressive: one which imagines the potential of the individual as much as the system and the dominant groups which apparently control it.

Foucault: Power, Discourse and Institutional Reflexivity

Those involved with performance and documentary ultimately engage themselves in a power relationship. Michel Foucault (1998 [originally 1976]) has suggested that:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere ... power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society. (p. 93)

This implies that instead of solely dominant groups (such as media organisations) having access to power, there is a potential for individuals to be involved in power relations. He proposes that power can be fluid, which involves a dynamic not only of interaction between individuals, organisations and hierarchies: it also involves aspects of resistance. David Gauntlett (2002), discussing Foucault's ideas, reminds us that 'power is productive' (p. 121), and it displays evidence of being potentially used by all those who come in contact with it.

Nancy Fraser in her seminal work *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (1989) explores the potential of Foucault's ideology (and also critiques this), she tells us:

Foucault's account establishes that modern power is 'productive' rather than prohibitive. This suffices to rule out those types of liberationist politics that presuppose that power is essentially repressive. [He] demonstrates that modern power is 'capillary', that it operates at the lowest extremities of the social body in everyday social practices. (p. 18)

If we consider the relationship between homosexuality and legislation, and the potential power relationships involved, although we can imagine the repressive power of subjugation executed by those who create and uphold laws, we may not easily recognise the ability of power to be productively used in resisting subjugation. However, the nature of Foucault's model is that it allows us to examine capillary power. In these terms, power (executed by subjugating forces) may be deflected and re-energised in resistance (by objects of subjugation).

If we consider Foucault's discussion in the *History of Sexuality, Volume I*, this evident resistance, reconfiguration and re-appropriation of power becomes apparent. As Gauntlett (2002) tells us:

It was precisely the discourses about sexuality, in Victorian times and the early twentieth century, which sought to *suppress* certain kinds of behaviour, which simultaneously gave an *identity* to them, and so (ironically) launched them into the public eye. (p. 121)

In this way the power that was used by institutions and authorities against those involved in prohibited sexual behaviour (prohibitive legislation and scientific examination of allegedly deviant sexual practices such as homosexual sex and non-procreative sex) actually resulted in defining an identity for those who became subjects for examination. Consequently, we may consider that efforts made to prohibit homosexuality, at the turn of the century (such as legislation against homosexual acts, and scientific analysis which concerned homosexual deviancy) produced 'resistance which would drive gay liberation movements in the twentieth century' (Gauntlett, 2002: 121). Similarly, analysis of homosexual (sexual) behaviour became a focus which not only stimulated attention to homosexual desire, it at the same time allowed the opportunity for resistance to subjugation, and for a new homosexual identity to emerge.

Consequently, Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, (published in 1948) not only became an influential text in the reformulation of public perception as to the possible existence of homosexual men in society, it also may be considered as a point of 'power performance' which stimulated ideas concerning homosexual identity. Kinsey et al (1948) stated that 37% of American men had experience of at least one homosexual activity to the point of orgasm since adolescence (p. 626). He was able to contribute to the discourse suggesting, as Jeffrey Weeks notes (1985), that:

Traditionally there had been a gap between two antagonistic interpretations of sex, the hedonistic, which justified sex for its immediate, pleasurable return, and the reproductive, where sex is only to be enjoyed in marriage. [Illuminating] a third possible interpretation which had hardly figured in either general or scientific discussion: 'of sex as a normal biological function, acceptable in whatever form it manifested'. (p. 212)

Through the observation of sex as an accepted biological function, rather than a tool necessarily to be associated with marriage (or uncontrolled sexual desire), Kinsey was able to develop a more conceptual understanding of sex as a scientific attribute, rather than as a device in service of, or against, dominant heterosexual order.

Through the separation of sex from necessarily being associated with procreation or marriage, increasingly the public (through the power of discourse) were becoming aware of the likely existence of homosexual people in the community.

Consequently, the generation of discourses can be equated in relation to power. We can argue that the subjugation and examination of homosexual behaviour resulted in opportunities for performances of resistance. This potentially redirected power, capitalising on the attention and publicity involved allowing the formation of new discourses of resistance. In this way the oppression of homosexuals by the police at the Stonewall Bar in New York in 1969, actually produced resistance and galvanised a small group of homosexuals who would stimulate a world movement towards gay liberation. As Larry Gross (2001) tell us: although 'police raids on gay bars were neither new or unusual' (p. 40) at the time, when the raid took place at 'the Stonewall bar in Greenwich Village on June 28, they did not expect to set off a riot [or moreover] ignite the explosion of a militant gay rights movement' (p. 40). This almost incidental ignition of power resistance (stimulated by forces opposing gay rights), actually set into motion an energised political awareness among homosexuals (and others who may sympathise) which would endure and inspire a generation to react (and perform) against such subjugation.

However, in Foucaultian terms such resistance of power does not necessarily result in a simple single lasting effect, nor do such actions possess the same potential, or are executed with the same aims and desires. Foucault (1998) suggests there is a:

plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relation. (p. 96)

The resistance by the homosexuals at the Stonewall bar in 1969 may be seen as a 'spontaneous resistance', which later inspired various acts of resistance by individuals and groups who would coalesce in order to respond. This resistance and consequent generation of power, may be seen to be productive within a 'matrix of power relations' (involving an array of elements where there are no fixed points).

Consequently rather than power resting at one point or location (or with one group), it flows 'in and out', between points of resistance, and never results in an ultimate equation or definition (the retention of power is conditional).

Although power may be considered as fluid, and uncontrollable, we may consider that the essence of power may be linked not only to the idea of discourse, but also the proposal of truth(s). The actions against homosexuals ultimately generated debates as to the suitability of gay people to possess similar rights and liberties to heterosexuals. Foucault 'emphasises that a discourse can also be understood as a series of events. Discursive practices occur at a particular time, and are like events in that they create effects within a discursive field (Danaher et al, 2000: 34). These discursive fields represent subject areas where issues are debated, and conclusions may be drawn. The Stonewall demonstration involved actions by agents of institutions who generated discourse; those who formed legislation (government), and those who upheld legislation (the police force). Prior to the events at Stonewall, homosexuals did not belong to organisations which may have generated powerful discourses.¹ However after the stimulation of power directed against them, the action of resistance encouraged homosexuals to form their own support groups and political bodies.² This resulted in an increase of discursive power, allowing opportunity for the formulation of homosexual 'truths'.

Foucault uses the term 'games of truth' to define a process whereby 'public institutions [and organisations] authorise their activities [through discourse] by claiming to speak the truth' (Danaher et al, 2000: 40). Foucault (1984) tells us:

In societies like ours, the 'political economy' of truth is characterised by five important traits. 'Truth' is centred on the form of scientific discourse and institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement ... it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); ... it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles). (p. 73)

¹ However there existed organisations since the early twentieth century which supported or examined same sex relations. Richard Dyer discusses the importance of Magnus Hirschfeld (a sex researcher) at this time who was the leader of a prominent gay organisation in Weimar Germany (Dyer, 1990: 10). The ground breaking work of Hirschfeld is also discussed in the documentary *Desire* (Stuart Marshall, 1998, UK).

² Capsuto (2000) provides an extensive list of gay liberation organisations (some of which existed before Stonewall): AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Artists, Daughters of Bilitis, Gay Activists Alliance, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, Gay Liberation Front, Gay Media Task Force, Mattachine Society of New York, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, National Gay Task Force and Queer Nation. (p. xvi).

The establishment of truth is formed through discourse generated by institutions, and potentially individuals, involved in this process. For the homosexuals of Stonewall, the beneficial advent of power resistance stimulated the formation of new organisations with distinct discursive strategies able to present possible homosexual truths. However, despite this, due to the fluidity of power and the plurality of resistances, the focus of discourse against homosexuality would extend from solely those generated by institutions (government, scientific, religious) to those made by individuals who would use their 'unique' potential (as popular figures) to become conduits for anti-homosexual discourse.

Evidence may be seen in the action of the media celebrity Anita Bryant, 'known for her Florida orange juice commercials' (Clendinen and Nagourney, 1999: 291). She became a very popular figure on television. In the 1970s she used her position to propose legislation against homosexuals. Taking a personal stance, she issued a statement 'demanding to know why the White House was to 'dignify [gay] activists for special privilege with a serious discussion on their alleged "human rights"' (Clendinen and Nagourney, 1999: 291). The extents to which she engaged and tried to motivate public opinion included direct references to religion and its possible potential, suggesting that at one point that 'God had inflicted a drought on California because the state was tolerant of gays' (Clendinen and Nagourney, 1999: 306). Bryant and then later John Briggs in California 'played on resentments and fears that all US citizens are raised to demonise lesbians and gay men' (Deitcher, 1995: 52). Although this encouraged the development of fundamentalist Christian right wing groups, the Anita Bryant crusade also ironically 'restored a sense of common political destiny to lesbians and gay men and helped establish within the movement awareness of urgency and of the need to organise' (Deitcher, 1995: 52). Consequently, actions against the rights of homosexuals ironically stimulated a reawakening in homosexual desire itself. This highlighted the need to resist subjugation, and ideally achieve meaningful social enfranchisement (see Chapter 6 concerning similar arguments regarding resistance to gay marriage).

Although power in Foucaultian terms may involve the potential of a 'plurality of resistances', which enables and stimulates various forms of actions and may generate diverse strategies, the nature of power in this context suggests that it fluctuates from one point to another and no eventual conclusion is established. Foucault's model of power however, is not without its critics. David Gauntlett notes that Marxist critic Frank Lentricchia (1982) said that 'Foucault's theory of power,

because it gives power to everyone, everywhere, at all times, provides a means of resistance, but no real goal of resistance' (quoted in Gauntlett, 2002: 119). This suggests that because power is capillary in this model, it flows too easily from one point to another without necessarily recognising a purpose of organisation, or political contextualisation.

Similarly, Mark Poster (1990) states that Foucault's use of 'power' 'as he employs it, is too vague and unlocalised. Power is everywhere, the critics contend, the prospect of democratisation is slim' (p. 161). Furthermore, Terry Eagleton (1991) suggests that:

Foucault and his followers abandon the concept of ideology altogether, replacing it with the more capricious 'discourse' ... It is perfectly possible to agree with Nietzsche and Foucault that power is everywhere, while waiting for practical purposes to distinguish between more or less central instances of it. (p. 8)

As Eagleton contends in examining the idea of 'ideology' (as politically charged) and 'discourse' (as lacking political contexts), the central distinction that critics of Foucault seem to make is his liberal use of the idea of power without necessarily contextualising the dominant forces.

Nancy Fraser (1989) observes that 'Foucault enables us to understand power very broadly yet very finely, as anchored in what he calls 'micro practices'' (p. 18). Similarly she notes that 'modern power is unlike earlier powers, according to Foucault, in that it is local, continuous, productive, capillary, and exhaustive' (p. 22). This indicates the ephemeral, yet productive, nature of Foucault's notion of power compared with earlier Marxist ideologies of power, which recognised organised predominant power hierarchies. However, Fraser claims that while:

His modern account of power is both politically engaged and normatively neutral [a]t the same time he is unclear as to whether he suspends normative notions or only the liberal norms of legitimacy and illegitimacy (p. 19).

Fraser relates such uncertainty to the idea that 'legitimising influences' (such as the power that media producers may hold in constructing normative narrative ideology) are necessarily evident in constructing a meaningful equation of power, identifying three statements:

(1) social practices are necessarily norm governed, (2) practice-governing norms are simultaneously constraining and enabling, and (3) such norms enable insofar as they constrain. (p. 31)

She concludes that 'one cannot have social practices without constraints' (p. 31). In essence any liberal model of power which does not recognise predominant constraints must be limiting. Also Fraser warns us that 'original and valuable dimensions of [Foucault's] work stand in danger of being misunderstood for lack of an adequate normative perspective' (p. 33). This criticism appears to equate to a failing to recognise normative power hierarchies, such as the means of production influencing culture and individuals themselves.

Similarly, Anthony Giddens (1995 [originally 1992]) has suggested that Foucault's ideas on power need to be re-contextualised. He suggests that modern power should be related to its reflexive potential, suggesting the idea of 'institutional reflexivity'. In examining Foucault's ideas on 'power-knowledge' with regards to the potential for social action (p. 28), he tells us:

Without denying its connectedness to power, we should see the phenomenon rather as one of *institutional reflexivity* and constantly in motion. It is institutional, because it is a basic structuring element of social activity in modern settings. It is reflexive in the sense that terms introduced to describe social life routinely enter and transform it – not as a mechanical process, not necessarily in a controlled way, but because they become part of the frames of action which individuals or groups adopt. (p. 28)

Here Giddens focuses on the possible limitations of Foucault's ideas, suggesting that his power model should be modified to accommodate the idea of 'frames of action' (power mobilised together: not necessarily totally free flowing). Hence, while the idea of resistance is foregrounded in Foucault's work (suggesting the potential for resistance and response – as argued above), we must not forget that institutional frameworks exist, and that individuals may have to connect to these in order to progress new ideas. Consequently, the potential for power in Foucaultian terms has to be contextualised to acknowledge 'all forces' which may be involved in 'exchange'. In this way Giddens' (1995) idea of 'institutional reflexivity' takes on board the potential of capillary power, however at the same time it suggests a certain matrix of organisation. This might recognise hierarchical forces and counter cultural

ideals, but at the same time it may connect to the performative potential of the individual.

Carnival, Inversion and Hybridity

The potential of power, and its relationship to performance, may be seen in Mikhail Bakhtin's (1994) idea of 'carnival ambivalence' and the 'carnavalesque'. This is particularly relevant in evaluating the discursive potential of reality television texts, which may invert logical or alleged natural order (where homosexuals are presented in a manner similar to heterosexual couples, as contented). The appearance of gay men and women as meaningful subjects on documentary and reality television appears to fulfil this promise: the gay male/female is no longer a lone subject of derision or entertainment (identified in binary opposition to the contented heterosexual couple); instead, he/she plays a central role, involving themselves in the performance of 'self representation'.

Bakhtin's ideas regarding the carnival were developed in examining the work of French humanist writer Francois Rabelais (c. 1494-1553). In *Rabelais and his World* (1965) Bakhtin considers the constitution of folk humour as 'a second reality outside the official realm; [he considers its as] a complex system of meaning existing alongside and in opposition to the 'authoritarian' world of dominant orthodoxy' (Morris, 1994). He considered that folk culture could be divided into three apparent forms:

1. *Ritual spectacles*: carnival pageants, comic shows of the market place.
2. *Comic verbal compositions*: parodies both oral and written, in Latin and the vernacular.
3. *Various genres of billingsgate* [(abusive language)]: curses, oaths, popular blazons.

(Bakhtin, 1994: 196)

Although these forms essentially involved humour, satire and parody, they were 'closely linked and interwoven in many ways' (p. 196). This suggested that whilst these forms of entertainment, or ritual, were outside the dynamic control of official governments or recognised orders, there existed a cultural coalescence which enabled the 'carnival audience/participant' to consider these forms as more heterogeneous

than disparate. This provided an arena for the audience not only to involve themselves with carnival play, they could also make inter-generic identifications (recognise connections and common themes in the differing carnival-like forms), which transcended the simple and the local. It provided an opportunity for audiences to critique established order through participation in play at organised popular events. As this did not require the individual to engage in hierarchical relationships (which would presuppose the legitimacy of an established order), it provided a democratising arena for the staging of popular and/or individual performances which potentially could criticise established power/authority.

Similarly through the potential of parodying serious literature, formal cultural ideologies were critiqued. Bakhtin (1994) tells us that:

The Latin parody or semiparody was widespread. The number of manuscripts belonging to this category was immense. The official ideology and ritual are here shown in their comic aspect. Laughter penetrates the highest religious forms. (p. 202)

The opportunity to parody serious cultural forms, at the same time provided the instance of critiquing established culture. Through taking the Latin language and corrupting its 'proper' use, the performer/writer would involve themselves in providing democratising political potential. This could comment on tradition, intellectual sensibility and the role of the church; enabling all three to become subjects of popular discourse (making them accessible) rather than objects of veneration (keeping them in the domain of authority). Hence this type of parody brought closer the popular and the classical, allowing both to be equated and analysed at a time when distinct divisions were made, and upheld, which normally kept them apart.

The essential point with 'carnival' play, was that these forms were 'based on laughter and [were] consecrated by [popular] tradition ... they were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal and political cult forms and ceremonials' (Bakhtin, 1994: 197) in medieval Europe at the time. Involving themselves with 'protocol and ritual based on laughter .. they offered a completely different, nonofficial extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world' (p. 197). Through examining the potential of folk culture to provide an alternative arena for oppositional discourse, Bakhtin like Foucault, takes emphasis away from the idea that there is an exclusive ownership of power. Rather than this being possessed

solely by dominant powers/influences, a liberating potential exists for the individual to involve themselves in enjoyment/performance, and consequently power relations.

As John Fiske (1994) has noted regarding Bakhtin, in his examination of 'carnival and style':

Carnival is concerned with bodies, not the bodies of individuals, but with the 'body principle', the materiality of life that underlies and precedes individuality, spirituality and society ... it is a representation of level materiality on which all are equal, which suspends the hierarchical. (p. 243)

Consequently, all who participate in the carnival do so in an equalising environment. As Bakhtin tells us, the 'carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators' (1994: 198). The eroding of distinctions between performers and audience is a central premise, which allows us to consider that normal 'rules of engagement' are suspended, and all who participate in the carnival to some degree become part of the ritual, and consequently its cultural meaning (and power potential).

As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1995 [originally 1986]) have noted in their seminal examination of Bakhtin's work: *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, there exists a 'possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself* by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it' (p. 58). Through the removal of hierarchies which may form dominant cultural ideology, we may experience the potential of 'a potent, populist, critical inversion of ... official worlds and hierarchies' (p. 7).

Inversion is a powerful tool of the carnival. Stallybrass and White (1995) recognise that this encompasses many aspects of carnival culture and iconography. They discuss literature which describes a:

.... reversible world and a world upside down (WUD) which encodes ways that carnival inverts the everyday hierarchies, structures, rules and customs of its social formation. Status degradation through exposure of the grotesque aspects of the body and exorbitant exaggeration of its features is an essential aspect of this. [Similarly there is a] linking up of inversion of hierarchy (kings become servants, officers serve the ranks, boys become bishops, men dress as women and so on) with a privileging of the bottom part of the body (feet, knees, legs, buttocks, genitals, anus) over the rational and spiritual control of the head. (p. 183)

This carnival strategy involves identifying binary oppositions with relation to power, and inverting their relationship. This polarising, whilst amusing and potentially seen as harmless, at the same time allows the author/performer to displace the normal locus of power; exchanging the dominant party with the subordinate. In this way the exchange of roles between the king and the servant, suggests in the carnival terms, not only an inversion of hierarchies, but also an illumination of their potential equality, and (un)necessary inter-relation. Similarly, the exhibition of the grotesque (displaying the normally concealed), not only comments on the nature of aesthetic judgement (juxtaposing what is supposedly disordered/ugly with that which is composed/appealing), but also by focusing on the hidden functional parts of the body, the inner workings are revealed, suggesting a breaking down of divisions between body and mind. This erosion not only argues that all humans rely on the nature of the body to sustain the mind: it directly comments that this applies to kings and servants alike. Thereby the notion of the carnival, especially through inversion, illuminates and critiques binary and ultimately bi-polar relationships. Whether it is the inversion of hierarchies or the reversal of roles, social performance and ideas surrounding identity are potentially parodied, critiqued, and become subjects of discourse.

The process of inversion involves not only displacement and reconfiguration, it also potentially engenders the formation of a new hybrid identity. Rather than displacing and reconstituting actual power, Stallybrass and White tell us that hybridisation ‘produces new combinations and strange instabilities [often including] inversion and demonisation [or subjugation] mixed up together’ (1995: 58). If we briefly examine the context of the reality television programme *The Real World* (Bunim Murray for MTV, 1992-present) in relation to the idea of the family, aspects of inversion and hybridisation are productive, if somewhat contentious (*The Real World* is discussed as a case study in Chapter 4).

The Real World inverts the hierarchical ideology of the home, or household, by presenting a ready-made dwelling inhabited not by a family but by a collection of disparate individuals brought together by media producers for popular entertainment. It presents a ‘temporary’ living space rather than the idea of a permanent abode (each series is filmed in different locations each season), suggesting that it presents a metaphor for transitory development and identity exploration, rather than producing an environment which may be associated with the permanence of family relations and fixed identity structures. As Paula Rabinowitz (1994) notes:

The cultural politics of identity and ethnicity begin within the self, constructed in the maze of family networks; history's impact is filtered through family conflicts and emotional organisation of psyches formed in the two parent [heterosexual] home of TV fantasy left over from 1950s sitcoms. (Rabinowitz, 1994: 15)

The production of the TV family home relates to the politics of identity, and may be considered as the media audience's site of normalising engagement with popular discourse. As Rabinowitz suggests, its establishment furthermore may be traced back to the idea of the 'fantasy' family established by popular sitcoms such as: *I Love Lucy* (Desilu for CBS, 1951-5) and *Father Knows Best* (CBS, 1954)³. This essentially white heterosexual arena may be seen as the place where dominant ideologies are exhibited, such as the expected roles of male and female engagement and the maintenance of normal social life.

This 'comfort zone' is critiqued by *The Real World*, by not only presenting individuals who must try to form some type of postmodern family, but also at the same time the constitution of the household is based on social types which are expected to generate narratives, and discourse, which may not necessarily support heteronormative family ideology. This may be seen in *The Real World's* propensity to not only include diverse racial/social types, but also diverse sexual/social types. By including in its 'ersatz family' (as equal members) social types which may not engage in the means of family procreation (in traditional terms),⁴ it generates discourse which looks beyond normative family frameworks. In this way it critiques family ideology, and hybridises identity ideals.

As Rabinowitz (1994) further notes: 'serialised TV shows used the formula of the 'American family' and focused on the dynamics of the home to outline generations of conflicts among races, classes and religions' (p. 15). Consequently, this history of family representation is defined by conflicts as much as accord, and relates not only to formations of the 'American Family', but also to the diverse ways in which this ideal may be viewed or modified. *The Real World*, like the appropriately named *An American Family* (Alan and Susan Raymond for WNET-13, 1973, USA) (see Chapter 1), continues in this history, developing and reinventing

³ A radio version of the series titled *Fathers Know Best?* (with a question mark), preceded this: first broadcast in 1949. (Sackett, 1993: 88)

⁴ Clearly increasingly it is reported that same sex couples have involved themselves with procreation, and form families with children (see: Weston, 1991: Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). However, as the homosexual couple do not produce offspring themselves, exclusively (usually a third party plays a role), it cannot be considered as normative procreative engagement.

ideas of what may constitute the American family (this idea is further discussed in Chapter 1).

However whilst carnival ‘inversion’ and ‘hybridisation’ (making the racial outsider and the homosexual as much a part of the family as the white heterosexual) is productive in reinventing ideology (or discursive expectations), the issue of ‘abjection’ is contentious. The inversion of hierarchies suggests that ‘low groups’ involved in this iconography may have the ability to critique the actual site of power. Hence the idea of reversing the roles between king and servant may seem productive; the king is displaced and we see the servant in his role illuminating a disparity in potential/opportunity. However, carnival play/performance may be seen to be less about ordered signification (consistently critiquing subjugating forces), and is more ambivalent (and consequently is often politically problematic). As Robert Stamm (1982) tell us:

On the positive side, carnival suggests the joyful affirmation of becoming, the superseding of the individuating principle in what Nietzsche called ‘the glowing life of Dionysian revellers’ ... On the negative, critical side, the carnivalesque suggests a demystifying instrument for everything in the social formation which renders such collectively difficult of access: class hierarchy, political manipulation, sexual repression, dogmatism and paranoia. Carnival in this sense implies an attitude of creative disrespect, a radical opposition to the illegitimately powerful, the morose and monological (p. 55)

Carnival in its ability to provide performative credibility to the individual, does so outside the ordered political world; which may respect or recognise distinctions between ‘low’ and ‘high’ groups. The benefit of eroding distinctions between low and high is that this constitutes a democratising process. However, this ‘apparent’ utopian ideal at the same time erodes distinctions between low groups themselves. In this way as Stamm recognises, whilst freedom may exist for ‘joyful affirmation’ (without constraints), there also exists a ‘creative disrespect’ (potentially uncontained). This may not only be used ‘appropriately’ against the ‘illegitimately powerful’, but also may be conferred on those who are ‘similarly disenfranchised’. Stallybrass and White tell us that although carnival is ‘refreshingly iconoclastic’ in its ‘uncritical populism’ it ‘often violently abuses and demonises *weaker*, not stronger, social groups – women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who ‘don’t belong’ – in the process of *displaced abjection*’ (1995: 19).

Stallybrass and White (1995) discuss the idea of displaced abjection in relation to the representation of the pig. Whilst within Christian discourse 'the pig was usually emblematic of definable sin, ... [and] it became increasingly associated by the bourgeoisie with offences against good manners' (p. 51), conversely, at the carnival the pig was celebrated for providing 'the pleasure of food'. However at the same time it became 'the symbolic analogy of scapegoated groups and demonised 'Others'' (p. 53). Evidence of this is provided by Peter Burke (1978: 200) who describes 'the pigs in the Venice carnival, which were chased across Piazza San Marco and stoned by onlookers' (quoted in Stallybrass and White, 1995: 53). In this way the pig became a focus of displaced abjection: the process whereby 'low' groups [such as the carnival participants] turn their figurative and actual power, not against those in authority, but against those who are even 'lower' (women, Jews, animals, particularly cats, dogs and pigs) (Stallybrass and White, 1995: 53).

As carnival performances may be considered less as 'symbolic action 'which is mere *play*, [and there exists a potential to articulate] cultural and political meanings' (Stallybrass and White, 1995: 43), the issue of displaced abjection is contentious. Whilst carnival provides the opportunity to turn 'figurative power' against those who would oppress, it at the same time potentially allows power to be used in all directions. As there are no structures which inform where power should be exerted, it potentially enables a destabilising of lower groups themselves; generating further potential for discontent and subjugation.

We may consider that displaced abjection occurs equally in the environment of confessional documentary and reality television, where power arenas are not defined and performers may act ambivalently. Evidence of this may be seen in the representation of performers, presented as individual agents outside hierarchical norms. This is particularly apparent in the reality television texts (discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6), where it is suggested that performers are at liberty to act as they wish (within the confines of the television format rules). Hence performers such as James Getzlaff (in *Boy Meets Boy*) and Richard Hatch (in *Survivor*) are presented with opportunities to express their resistance to power against who they see fit. Consequently when Getzlaff punishes cast member Franklin as being a heterosexual outsider (pretending to be gay), and Hatch humiliates cast member Gregg suggesting he may be bisexual, they may be engaging in displaced abjection as they punish individuals who may actually be allies. Evidence of this may be seen in that if Franklin presented himself as a homosexual suitor, we may question his stability as a

heterosexual; and that if Gregg was revealed to be bisexual he may be sympathetic to homosexual ideas. Consequently Hatch and Getzlaff are represented as punishing peers within the cast who possess little power, rather than producers who control and direct the narratives. We may call this displaced abjection, particularly if the party punished or held responsible may be an ally rather than a controlling, or subjugating force.

Bakhtin's idea of the carnival is productive: individuals may involve themselves in parody, inversion and hybridity. These strategies can critique established sites of power and may engender performers to construct new identities, providing potential for transgression, reinvention and displacement. At the same time the issue of 'displaced abjection' is contentious, allowing the individual to misappropriate culpability; possibly encouraging deferment, suppression and containment. Nevertheless, Bakhtin's ideas on 'carnival ambivalence' are similar to Foucault's ideas on 'modern power', providing the potential to consider the efforts of individuals involved in a matrix of 'possibility'. Performers are not necessarily contained by dominant power ideologies; they may engage in strategies which can critique them.

Confessional 'Therapeutic' Discourse and Public Spheres

Joshua Gamson in *Freaks Talk Back* (1998) considers the potential of non-heterosexual identities in talk shows:

There are spots not only of visibility but the subsequent redrawing of the lines between the normal and the abnormal. They are, in a very real sense, battlegrounds over what sexuality and gender can be in this country. (p.5)

Although he admits that talk shows work in this way 'not so much with an explicit pro-gay agenda, but with an ideology of liberal pluralism' (p. 117), the potential to generate oppositional discourse is significant within this arena.

Like the talk show, the confessional documentary and reality television programme involve themselves in the production of textual spaces for the generation of discourse which presents the voice (of what we might call) 'the general public'. It may appear that 'public access' talk shows (such as *Donahue*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Rikki Lake*) actually provide more opportunity for members of the public to involve themselves in debate than reality television and documentary, which may

exclude the idea of 'spontaneous' discourse. However, we must recognise that such alleged 'spontaneity' is mediated, and essentially talk shows, like documentary and reality television, are produced under restrictions which are not that dissimilar (all texts involve: producers, editors, directors and researchers with certain agendas and criteria to fulfil narrative expectations); all may be considered to possess similar relationships to the idea of the general public discourse, and public debate within the media. Consequently, Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt's idea of the 'oppositional public sphere' (1994) although discussed/developed in relation to 'audience participation and public debate' as evidenced in the talk show, may equally be applied to confessional documentary and reality television.

Livingstone and Lunt in examining the discursive potential of the talk show, discuss the foundation of the term 'public sphere'. They relate this to Jurgen Habermas's (1962) seminal work in establishing what they term as a 'bourgeois public sphere', and suggest that an 'oppositional public sphere' may theoretically exist in examining the contemporary work of Nancy Fraser (1989, 1997) and Mouffe (1988). Livingstone and Lunt (1994) tell us:

... that critics such as Fraser and Mouffe suggest that the media can facilitate the expression of diverse political and social interests in order to form a compromise between negotiated positions. (p. 35)

They work with the idea of the public sphere as being beyond the confines of 'authorised' public debate which may allow only 'recognised authorities' and 'established citizens' to engage in meaningful debate (which may be seen in the idea of the 'bourgeois public sphere'). They suggest that the idea that of public debate should allow confrontational ideology, by engendering those outside sites of recognised power to become engaged in the potential of public debate (in the environment of an oppositional public sphere).

Livingstone and Lunt's idea of the 'oppositional public sphere' is partially inspired by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's (1993 [originally 1972]) idea of the 'proletarian public sphere'. Negt and Kluge (1993) explore the antecedent work of Jürgen Habermas, they suggest his contribution to the debate rests on two points:

- (1) his attempt to reconstruct the public sphere as a fundamental *historical* category, linked to the formation of bourgeois society under liberal capitalism;
- and (2) his delineation of the public as a *fourth* term, distinct from the state, the marketplace, and the intimate sphere of the family. (p. xxvi)

The innovation of the term public sphere (as both Negt and Kluge, and Livingstone and Lunt suggest) is that it brings together the idea of private (family) and the public (work/social performance), allowing the idea that public debate can occur outside authorised government institutions/organisations. Livingstone and Lunt (1994) tell us that Habermas' 'private domains have historically been linked by the roles of worker and consumer, while the public domains have been linked by the roles of citizen and client' (p. 15). The emphasis on ideas which surround the 'bourgeois public sphere' relate to authorised citizenship, public status and potentially a hierarchy of rational debate (elevating the public sphere over the private sphere).

Distinctions between private and public spheres may also relate to gender identity. Anahid Kassabian (2001) tells us that:

The public sphere includes forms of free exchange of ideas (e.g., newspapers, town meetings) and social space (e.g., the park, the town square), and is male. The private sphere, also known as the domestic sphere, includes the home and all its associations (e.g., food, clothing, child-rearing, affective values), and is female. (p. 34)

This suggests that whilst Habermas' ideas link the idea of the public and private spheres (working together), a gender distinction is made which elevates the public (as masculine), and subjugates the private (as feminine). Furthermore this suggests that the disenfranchised citizen (such as the homosexual, or the racial minority) would probably be placed outside 'accepted' social, and domestic, space(s). They would be considered lower in position to the female, and not estimated as able to take part in the 'public', and/or 'private', sphere(s). This position would preclude for the homosexual (and the member of a racial minority), meaningful participation in public debate.

Livingstone and Lunt recognise difficulties in applying the limits of Habermas's 'bourgeois public sphere' to the ideology of contemporary media; which although it may allow (some) disenfranchised citizens to participate in debate (merging the private, and the public, spheres), ultimately it is controlled by commercial organisations. Livingstone and Lunt (1994, citing Holub) acknowledge that the public sphere in Habermas' terms:

... exists now only as a promise. Party politics and the manipulation of mass media have resulted in 'a 'refeudalisation' of the public sphere, where representation and appearances outweigh rational debate' (Holub, 1991; 6) and

the rational-critical public is transformed into a mass, manipulated by persuasive authority (p. 19)

Livingstone and Lunt suggest that Habermas' idea of the 'bourgeois public sphere' does not recognise the discursive potential of modern media, as it is too bound up with 'persuasive authorities' (such as production companies) which may manipulate the discursive potential. Claiming that 'the tendency of 'the bourgeois public sphere' ... is to become increasingly institutionalised and specialised and exclude dissenting voices' (p. 25). Negt and Kluge (1993) similarly criticise the limits of how a 'bourgeois public sphere' can integrate with contemporary 'collective experience' (which may include all diverse social identities which make up modern society). They identify the potential of a 'proletarian public sphere', defining this idea as a:

... radical form of democracy [which] involves not just the empowerment of constituencies hitherto excluded from the space of public opinion, but also a different principle of organization, a different concept of public life. (p. xxi)

This suggests that the 'proletarian public sphere' offers a form of democracy for 'disenfranchised' and 'enfranchised' citizens to engage together in public debate. As Nancy Fraser (1997), tell us, relating the potential of equality and diversity for multiple publics (which includes subaltern groups) that in:

... stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public. (p. 81)

This model (promoting the idea of the oppositional public sphere) allows us to consider reality television and confessional documentary, as providing a site for 'competing publics' and a 'forum for the expression of diversity, the contestation of positions, and the interfacing of many discourses, [engendering these to become] part of the political process' (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 34).

Consequently, the evaluation of documentary/reality texts within an 'oppositional' or 'proletarian public sphere' displays 'resistance against the hegemony of the bourgeois public-private division and its conventions' (Van Zoonen, 2001: 675). The voluntary appearance of reality television participants who belong to minorities (such as gay people) within the public sphere similarly may relate to a desire to achieve 'social enfranchisement' (Clarke, 2000) for themselves, or their group. In this way our televisual participants, and those who would produce,

or edit their televisual appearance, have the power to engage with ideas of social representation/identity within an arena which we may theorise as an 'oppositional public sphere'.

Livingstone and Lunt explore the work of Moscovi (1984) in illuminating 'four conditions for the emergence of social representations' within the (oppositional) public sphere. They cite Moscovi who tells us that these might be 'the equivalent, in our society, of the myths and belief systems in traditional societies: they might be said to even be the contemporary version of common sense' (Moscovi, 1981: 181). Livingstone and Lunt suggest that these ideas relate to audience discussion programmes:

[1] The representation of an issue must emerge through conversation of ordinary people (the studio audience); [2] a vital contribution is provided by 'amateur scholars' who mediate between scientific knowledge and laity (the experts); [3] the debate is typically held at a time of social concern or crisis (the topical issues); [4] ... the social representation may emerge through a variety of debate forms, resulting in vocabulary, lay theories, casual explanations, cognitive frames and prototypical examples. (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 31)

Although these conditions are focused on the formal features of audience discussion programmes, it is not difficult to make connections between these and confessional documentary and reality television. If we take Livingstone and Lunt's/Moscovi's observations, and relate them to Michel Foucault's ideas on confession (1998) and Mimi White's ideas concerning 'therapeutic discourse' (1992, 2002), we can explore the representational ideology, and the potential, of confessional documentary and reality television as similar to the talk show.

Although a studio audience is not (usually) present 'conversation emerges' in a similar manner (through exchange between interviewer and subject; general conversation recorded between reality participants; and implied conversation made in confession direct to camera (to the producers and ultimately the audience)). This conversational model displaces the idea for a need to have obvious 'amateur scholars' (as discussed by Livingstone and Lunt with regards to the talk show). The 'therapeutic discursive' (White, 1992, 2002) relationship between those involved in conversation, or confession, implies a similar relationship to that between a subject and his/her therapist. This also presupposes the existence of an 'amateur scholar' or 'therapist' through discourse (the 'therapist' may be considered as the person who is confessed to, or the audience). There may also be a suggestion of 'intensity and

intimacy', between the person who confesses, and the ultimate audience they confess to.

If we take the example of the idea of confession direct to camera, this intimate relationship between the person who confesses and the object who they confess to may be considered in aesthetic form to be engendered by:

... the static stationary camera angle [which] is constantly a frontal medium-close to close shot giving the impression of a talking portrait in which the subject directly addresses the camera/audience, creating an intimate, engrossing and often emotionally charged rapport between subject and viewer. (Atwell, 1988: 573)

Although this quote relates to the intimate confessions seen in *Word is Out* (1977) (discussed in Chapter 3) where an interviewer is present stimulating the confession, this 'intensifying device/strategy' might easily apply to similar performances in *The Real World* and *Survivor* (and other reality television texts) where instead of an interviewer present (stimulating discourse) a solitary confessional performance may be executed by an individual in the 'diary room' or 'confessional' direct to a camera.

Michel Foucault (1998) argues in considering the potential of the confession:

... confession is the ritual of the discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile. (p. 61)

Confession relates not only the idea of a framework for performance itself, it implies a binary opposition between the confessor and the subject they are involved in confession with, and the need for a response which comments on the performance. In a similar manner Anthony Giddens (1995) posits the idea of 'institutional reflexivity' (discussed above). This model suggests that a degree of reflexivity is present in personal exchange, which might be connected to the idea of therapy.

Mimi White (1992) similarly has expanded the idea of confession and reflexivity, connecting this to therapy. She tells us that:

therapy can be ... understood as a relation within discourse or as a particular strategy of discourse; [and] as a means of generating narrative by setting in a

place a sequence of symbolic interpersonal exchanges. ... A therapeutic cure is often less important than the process of therapeutic engagement itself. (p. 12)

It is through this engagement that we (the audience) also participate in this process. Through confessional discourse, the performer expresses their personal account or experience to other performers and the audience, ultimately generating narratives and contributing to discourses, the resolution of which may be less important than the actual process of 'therapeutic engagement' which encourages stimulation (if not closure).

Mimi White (2002) tells us 'therapeutic discourse' can transcend this idea of one person confessing direct to another, as occurs in staged representation of intimate confessions (either direct to camera or an intimate confession involving two people). The involvement or presence of other people who may comment on the discourse suggests that:

... an indeterminate group of people can move in and out of positions of confessor and interlocutor instead of sustaining a more stable exchange between two people fixed in positions of patient and therapist. Television viewers may in turn identify with someone posing questions [or raising issues] or with any number of interlocutors, including one who provides some sort of response; they can exert authority, such as it is, or recognise its limitation. (p. 316).

Emulating the relationship between therapist and patient, confessional documentary and reality television potentially provide a powerful discursive framework, which extends out to engage the participation of audiences. Essentially this produces evidence of a power relationship. The presence of the interviewer, commentators and the audience are the essential elements required to activate this process. Although in the talk show it may be more evident who is involved in this relationship (the talk show host usually demands or licences a confession from a guest, and the studio audience comment on this) a similar process in confessional documentary and reality television occurs: confessions/conversations are made in varying forms, participants comment on relevant discourses/narratives and audiences ultimately engage in this. In Foucaultian terms of modern power this type of engagement/power relationship can be highly productive, allowing the confessor to engage with the subject expressing their discourse, and subsequently allowing the interlocutor (which may include various audiences in this role) to become involved

in a power matrix which may stimulate 'power resistance' (deflecting the discourse) or 'power production' (empowering the discourse).

The performer becomes part of a process which allows them, through confession, to generate not only a performance stimulating discourse; they also become involved in a power relationship operating within an oppositional public sphere. As Livingstone and Lunt (1994) remind us (indicating the potential of factual television):

Access and participation programmes [such as reality television and confessional documentary] should ... be evaluated in terms of how well they express a diversity of public voices and challenge the established power to recognise the complexities of everyday life. (p. 35)

The appearance of non-heterosexuals within reality television and documentary, is not only provocative in terms of discussing the potential of an 'oppositional public sphere' (able to critique established ideals), it at the same time reveals the complex nature of diverse social existence, and the power structures/potential that may be involved.

Conclusion

Roland Barthes' seminal essay concerning the performance of music, *The Grain of the Voice* (1977), draws a distinction between *phono-song* and *geno-song*. It distinguishes *phono-song* as a situation where, as Grahame F Thompson (1985) observes, 'everything in performance is understood. [which] serves pleasurable communication, involving clear *representation*, clear *expression*, clear *interpretation*, etc.' (p. 83). While in *geno-song* the performative aspect 'exceeds culture', working

through the body not the soul [i]t forms a signifactory play which has little to do with communication, the representation of feelings, expression of moods, etc. It is concerned with pure *jouissance*. It produces a loss of the subject (Thompson, 1985: 83).

The distinction between these two interpretations may be similar to the differences between documentary and performance. Documentary, like *phono-song*, suggests the idea that there exist conventional performances which involve clarity and easy

distinction (relating to pre-existing anthropological/identity/representational expectations); performance, like *geno-song*, may involve interpretation and freedom beyond the idea of expectation. Rather than reinventing/reinterpreting the subject, its liberal freedom involves 'excess' (breaking down conventions with performative freedom which may transcend the idea of adhering to anthropological, identity and representational rules).

This potential to confront established ideology and displace representational norms within the domain of documentary calls for what Alexandra Juhasz (discussing the potential of American video users/producers in the late sixties and seventies) describes a 'discourse of decolonisation and a commitment to counter-cultural production' (1995: 40), suggesting an enormity of potentially organised 'power resistance', and reinvention.

However as Bill Nichols (1994) tell us:

Performative documentary embodies a paradox: it generates a distinct tension between performance and document, between the personal and the typical, the embodied and the disembodied, between in short history and science. One draws attention to itself, the other to what it represents. One is poetic and evocative, the other evidential and referential in emphasis. (p. 97)

Consequently, these tensions and oppositions (which cloud the idea of an organised resistance) illuminate as Tomas Waugh (1997) advises; that 'performative documentary runs the risk of misunderstanding' (p. 123). This may occur as the opposition of the 'evidential' (documentary) and the 'evocative' (performance) presupposes (for many) the superiority of the 'evidence', over 'evocation'. If evocation is 'always transitory', and evidence is 'what we know', in order to compromise such tension it is inevitable that a negotiation must take place which contextualises the idea of performance and documentary.

Performances may be fluid, ephemeral and capillary, yet through performative engagement with documentary (which is seen as lasting), an opportunity occurs which temporarily allows a reconfiguration of what documentary may be. Confessional documentary, and reality television, extend the potential of individual agency, and at the same time expand the context and limits of documentary form to allow space for the personal empowerment of the participants through their performances. Consequently the idea that documentary provides an anthropological landscape in which we 'solely' observe our subjects (placing our interpretation on them) is contentious: the agency of individuals is foregrounded in

performative forms. This intensity/opportunity enables a reformulation which foregrounds the individual as narrative provider, interpreting themselves. This displaces the hierarchy of documentary, and draws attention to the possibility of performance. Through confessional documentary and reality television, documentary order is recontextualised suggesting the 'document' is no longer an object for analysis, but moreover is an agent involved in production.

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Chapter 3: Autobiography and Confessional Performance in Documentary: Politics, AIDS and Family

Introduction

Danny Cooper tells us in *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* (Peter Friedman, 1991):

I do consider myself to be the luckiest human in the world. ... From a family that accepted me [to my life with Brady] we fought and we built a life together, and we were accepted, and then to have him die in my arms [(from AIDS)]. ... And then to have a second chance of another man to love [(Ben)], and [he] loved me back, and [to have] a good job. I consider myself to be very lucky, very very lucky.

Danny, in the company of his lover Ben Royal, emotionally delivers this autobiographical performance direct to camera. This scene is the closing sequence in *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana*. It may be seen as representational not only of the issues discussed earlier in the text (the importance of family acceptance and the consequences of AIDS), but it also provides evidence of the significance and power of confessional performance within documentary.

Fighting in Southwest Louisiana is an important documentary which may be located within a canon of 'confessional' gay documentary texts. Here confession is used not only as a signifier of 'direct intense delivery' to audience or interviewer, it also connects with the idea of producing the autobiographical project. The confessional documentaries discussed in this thesis therefore may be seen to provide a framework which intensifies autobiographical storytelling, rather than 'expository documentary' (Nichols, 1991, 1994, 2001) which may be overtly didactic (revealing an imposed argument which may be authored by one person, or body). In this way the focus of the documentaries discussed here is as much about the personal stories and the self reflexive analysis of the subject, as the framing, or the context provided by the producer. This may lead us to consider them in terms of confessional 'performative documentary', which in Bill Nichols' terms may 'primarily address us,

emotionally and expressively, rather than pointing us to the factual world we hold in common' (2001: 132, my emphasis). The 'we' Nichols succinctly refers to is the heterosexual majority, and the subjective idea of common knowledge/values supposedly held by this alleged mass. Therefore confessional performative documentary has the potential to foreground dissenting voices and counter-cultural ideology: something which may be useful in attempting to enlighten the larger community regarding concerns held by the homosexual minority.

Whilst this thesis is not able to discuss all significant works which might be related as contributing to a 'canon of gay confessional (or performative) documentary texts', we may suggest that this movement commenced in the 1970s with texts such as: Ken Robinson's independent study *Some of your Best Friends* (1971) and Peter Adair's (the Mariposa Film Group headed by Adair) large scale anthropological project *Word is Out* (1977).¹ These ground-breaking texts used confessional performance as a powerful method of discursive delivery. Later, after the impact of AIDS confessional documentaries frequently reported on this. This engendered not only new contexts for documentary to deal with, it at the same time revealed a new intimacy and vulnerability which surrounded the documentary participant.

This chapter discusses the emergence of confessional performance in documentary with relation to gay identity. At the same time it explores the significance of AIDS in this context. As Simon Watney (2000) tells us, concerning early visibility of AIDS 'victims' in American society:

With large numbers of affected people, within a culture with a strong discourse for civil rights, the notion of People With AIDS (PWAs) represented a collective resistance to discrimination and the widely prevailing notion of the times, together with a strong rejection of 'victim-hood' status. (p. 261)

The appearance of people with AIDS in early confessional documentary became a powerful discursive tool for resisting subjugation surrounding the syndrome. Evidence in this thesis may be seen in case studies which focus on individuals who discuss their personal, familial and social concerns; for example *Absolutely Positive* (1990). Also the gay person with AIDS could be represented as a content or loved partner within a sharing same sex relationship. Evidence of this is vividly provided

¹ *An American Family* (1973) is not contextualised here, as no openly gay confessional performance occurred in this (see Chapter 1, and note 5 below).

in *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* and *Silverlake Life: The View From Here* (1993). Furthermore, documentaries could also focus on not only on the lives of those who had AIDS, it could also attempt to reinvent mainstream ideas regarding the memorial and identity of people with AIDS, as can be seen in *Common Threads: Stories From The Quilt* (1989) and *Living Proof: HIV and the Pursuit of Happiness* (1993). Whilst these documentary texts essentially focus on the issue of AIDS, they do not necessarily exclusively comment on gay identity. Hence although they come from varying provenance (including texts produced by mainstream and independent producers) they have been brought together as a whole for their propensity to reveal aspects of gay identity/performance.

Whilst today AIDS has become a global epidemic which now affects diverse populations throughout the world (and most distinctly those living in the third world where availability of less expensive generic AIDS treatment drugs is a contentious issue),² origins of media performances concerning AIDS mostly focused on the syndrome's effect on homosexual males. Whilst the case studies predominantly depict male homosexuals with AIDS, it is important to note that these performances not only concern resisting the subjugation of homosexuals with AIDS, moreover their resonance bears a distinct relationship to a wider population. As Bree Scott-Hartland and Mary Hanerfeld tell us in the documentary *Living Proof*:

Bree Scott-Hartland: [As the gay community] we were politically strong enough to begin to get ourselves mobilised to do [something about AIDS, including many actions] from 'street action' to social service agency building. Because we were the first people to recognise [AIDS] among ourselves we had a community in place, [now] we have begun to join in a world-wide community to represent many different populations of people affected by [AIDS]

Mary Hanerfeld: The gay men they were pioneers. [They] struggled so we can get some free medicine. Its so expensive to keep us alive.

In this way the early involvement of the gay male community not only signalled issues which surrounded their own personal lives, moreover, their early involvement and political action (at a time when the US Reagan administration appeared to be little concerned) heralded the emergence of wider concern for a larger population

² World Heath Organisation (2004) informs us that worldwide in 2003 there were: 34 - 46 million people living with AIDS, there were 4.2 – 5.8 million new infections and 2.5 – 3.5 million died from the disease. Issues surrounding the availability of generic drugs and its effect on people from the third world is discussed elsewhere by myself (Pullen, 2004b).

affected by AIDS. Consequently, it is important to note that whilst these documentaries have been selected for their representational potential to overturn stereotypical notions which might surround gay identity and its relationship to achieving social enfranchisement, moreover, we must not forget the political potential of those involved in commenting on AIDS in documentary which extends far beyond the remit of this study. The case studies selected therefore will be discussed mainly in terms of their discursive potential to comment on gay performance, representation and identity, rather than their larger connection to AIDS (as an issue of world-wide concern).

Confession and Discourse

However, before we explore these case studies, it is important to re-examine the idea of confessional performance. Earlier in this thesis (Chapter 2) I made the connection between the idea of confession and discourse, and the relationship of this to 'capillary' power. For this I examined the work of Michel Foucault, and I proposed that confessional performance can be powerful in its property to generate discourse. This is highly significant as powerful discursive performances may allow the performer to key into already existing 'discursive power bases'. These 'power bases' (or areas which are of concern to the majority of mainstream society) may be considered in American culture to be connected to the idea of subjects which constitute evidence of citizenship potential. This may translate in American culture to: ideals of democracy and citizenship; marriage and coupling as an ideology; display of honour and dignity; connections with dominant religion; health and beauty ideals; educational potential, and eligibility for the army. If a performer (positively) connects with these ideals/discourses, they have the potential to contribute to the evolving discursive arena. Therefore for example should a confessional performer produce 'positive discourse' relating same-sex coupling, this may connect to the idea of marriage, and this may be consequently powerful in discursive terms.

The production of discourse may be generated by the inter-connection of the interlocutor and the confessor (the person who requires the confession and the person who provides the confessional performance). As discussed above this may be related to Mimi White's idea of 'therapeutic discourse' (1992). White (2002) tells us that 'an indeterminate group of people can move in and out of positions of confessor and

interlocutor' (p. 316), allowing them to recognise a power relationship. This idea translates to the possibility that an audience may 'connect' with the confessional performance and may potentially identify themselves within the relationship thereby strengthening the discourse (seeing its suitability). Furthermore, the person who confesses is not only authorised to execute the confession (by invitation from the interlocutor), they involve themselves with the idea of performance.

Performance, Liminal, Liminoid and Antistructure

Richard Schechner (2002) tell us that 'the underlying notion is that any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed, is a performance' (p. 2). In this way although we may be tempted to initially consider that the interlocutor (and the production team) is (or are) in control of the text, the liberty given to the confessor displays an equally performative potential. Although we may consider that they may be framed and edited in a certain manner, the presence of the confessor displays tangible evidence of this.

If we relate the idea of performance to identity, we may consider that the idea of performance can be connected to the idea of 'identity performance', possibly involving connections to identity ideals.³ Hence my thesis suggests that to some degree performers are involving themselves to produce performances of resistance, to the extent that they may wish to overturn stereotypical identity constructs (as discussed in Chapter 1). In this way the representation of a same sex couple depicted (or performing) as content, possibly counterpoints the stereotypical representation of the single isolated homosexual person unable to find a partner (as evidenced in many fictional dramas – see Bourne, 1996; Capsuto, 2000; Clum, 2000; Dyer, 2000, 2002). This creates not only a connection, but also the possibility of a discursive re-invention (or modification): discourse is generated which suggests that homosexuals can have relationships similar to heterosexuals. Furthermore in producing discourse, the documentary participants become subjects involved in performance. This performative context may be connected to their 'liminal' and 'liminoid' potential, in terms of social ritual.

The terms 'liminal' and 'liminoid' have been widely discussed in relation to the work of Victor Turner (1982). Turner tells us that his analysis charted his 'personal voyage of discovery from traditional anthropological studies of ritual

³ See Pullen 2000, which also considers the performance of identity through confession.

performance to a lively interest in modern theatre, particularly experimental theatre' (p. 7). Consequently these performative ideals may be traced from their emergence within social ritual in society, rather than solely from being associated with performance within the media (or theatre). Although this study does not focus on theatre (or anthropology), the idea of performance may be highly relevant in considering the potential of performers in documentary. Evidence of this may be seen in that the dialogue of the subject is voluntary and not scripted (although certain aspects/subjects may be stimulated by the interlocutor). Furthermore, the facial expressions and movements are equally attributed as personal to the confessor (they are personally emotive, rather than prescribed by the producer). Most notably we may consider an organic approach may exist in that the dialogue between the interlocutor and the subject is 'interplay'. In this way stimulating discourse can be controlled to a degree by the confessor as much the interlocutor (subject to what happens in the editing room, and the way it is contextualised as an eventual media product). Our performers may be seen as both 'producers' and 'subjects' of performance. This leads us to consider not only the tension between the idea of individual potential, and the possibility of reinterpretation, it reveals a distinction between 'staged' performances and 'voluntary' presence/performance. The terms 'liminal' and 'liminoid' may be useful in attempting to discuss this tension.

The idea of 'liminal' may be derived, as Richard Schechner (2002) suggests, from the word 'limen' - 'literally a threshold or sill, an architectural feature linking one space to another, [more] a passageway between places than a place itself' (p. 58). The communicative property of the liminal performer has to recognise hierarchies and institutions which they perform within. At the same time liminal performances are about ritual and transition. Liminal performances are authorised and required: the performative potential is to some degree expected. The eventual result in ritual terms is the passing of a person from one stage of life to another. We may consider this idea to be connected to the idea of documenting the performances of citizens, as occurs in documentary. There are certain ritual expectations involved with the documentary process which involves authorising the 'citizenship' potential of the subject examined. When the performer appears before the camera, certain conventions are applied (the relationship between the interlocutor and the confessor is established and authorised as worthy for exhibition), and a connection is made which results in the subject being presented as worthy for documentation (or possibly

transition into recognised citizenship). Therefore we may suggest that there is a liminal potential in the appearance of subaltern identities in documentary performance. This involves ritual transition from unknown or unfamiliar identity, to 'suitable to be recognised' identity. Whilst this analysis may appear simple, it is evident that a ritual transition may occur in considering the appearance of subaltern identities (such as homosexuals) which may be considered as liminal in potential (providing a ritual of transition from disenfranchised to franchised).

In the process of transition, the concept of ascribing 'meaning' may also be apparent in the performance. This may involve exhibiting details of 'lived' experience, which also connects to the idea of reflection and goals. As Turner (1982) tells us:

Thus experience is both 'living through' and 'thinking back'. It is also 'willing and wishing forward', i.e., establishing goals and models for future experience in which, hopefully, the errors and perils of past experience will be avoided or eliminated. (p. 18)

Consequently, the confessional performer involved in performing discourse in documentary has the potential not only to transcend their subaltern role of 'disenfranchised', it also allows them to exhibit ideal goals and models which may be indicative of the social grouping they are representing. Therefore, discursive connections made between same-sex coupling and the idea of heterosexual marriage, suggest that an equation should be made which may lead to equal rights for homosexuals. However, liminal performance may not necessarily suggest the means for such progressive ideology.

Marvin Carlson (1996) tells us, although liminal performance:

... might seem to mark sites where conventional structure is challenged, this structure is ultimately re-affirmed. ... Liminal performance may invert the established order, but never subverts it' (p. 23).

Consequently, in order to provide meaningful performances within liminal frameworks, you have to recognise established rules and contexts. In this way while documentary provides the arena for performance, it at the same time comes with expectations (which relate to dominant ideology in society). This may require the performer to relate recognised contexts. For the homosexual this may require

relating your same sex partnership to that of the coupling of male and female, and the constitution of marriage. Consequently, authorised ritual transitions, which might be evidenced in the liminal performances of homosexuals within the arena of documentary, necessarily have to connect to audience expectation. If a same sex couple act in the manner of a heterosexual couple this may be acceptable, however if they transgress this boundary, the performance may be less likely seen as 'liminal' (passing through the threshold from one area to another), but may be more 'liminoid'. The liminoid performance involves less reference to hierarchal norms such as institutions, and is more concerned with play, detraction and possibly rebellion. It extends beyond the liminal frame (the authorised, or normally expected context). Therefore liminoid performance provides the possibility of extending the liminal framework (thereby potentially developing and reinventing the arena).

Richard Schechner (2002) argues 'generally speaking, liminoid activities are voluntary, while liminal activities are required' (p. 61). Consequently, whilst authorised confessional performance may be liminal (necessarily required by the interlocutor), other more voluntary (more free) performances may be liminoid. Turner (1982) tells us, considering contemporary society and culture:

... liminoid phenomena are often parts of social critiques or even evolutionary manifestos-books, plays, paintings, films etc., exposing the injustices, and immoralities of the mainstream economic and political structures. (1982: 54)

In this way, Turner makes the connection that liminoid performance often involves more free expression, connecting aims of performers more directly to the idea of dealing with contentious issues. This suggests a type of free expression, and potential play in performance. Consequently, we may consider that the term liminoid may be connected to Mikhail Bakhtin's (1965) idea of the carnivalesque, as the carnival exists outside organised hierarchy and is 'voluntary' more than 'required'. Marvin Carlson (1996) similarly has noted, that liminal and liminoid performance may be related to Bakhtin's theory of the carnival. He notes that:

[Bakhtin's] vision of carnival as an open testing ground for new social and cultural structures, clearly marks it as an example of what Turner would classify as liminal or liminoid activity. (p. 28)

However, whilst Carlson has connected liminal *and* liminoid activity, the idea of

liminoid performance may be more easily connected to Bakhtin's idea of carnival ambivalence. This makes more sense as carnival is more concerned with play and leisure, and therefore it is not authorised transition (liminal) but expressive play (liminoid). Consequently, the liminoid performer operates within the context similar to that provided by the carnival. This potentially provides the means of 'the possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself* by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it' (Stallybrass and White, 1995: 58). Through such deconstruction and possible re-configuration an arena is provided which may allow the performance of counter-cultural ideology, or actions against dominant structure, or 'antistructure'.

Consequently, *carnival play* and *liminoid performance* can be connected to the idea of 'anti structure', and political potential. According to Turner (1982):

'Antistructure', ... can generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in the mainstream social and political roles (whether authoritative or dependent, in control or rebelling against it) in the direction of radical change. (p. 33)

Although we may suggest that liminal performance is only possible in confessional documentary (due to the requirements, expectations, rules and regulations of performance), it may be possible for liminoid performance to be exhibited in independently produced texts, which might allow for more confrontational, politically challenging ideology to be foregrounded. Hence, while essentially *Silverlake Life* may be a documentary, its textual potential may be seen as more antistructure and liminoid, than liminal. The idea of authorised liminal performance, may be less apparent in *Silverlake's* confrontational self authored strategy (the performers are the producers, and emotional un-staged sequences are foregrounded).

Consequently all documentary texts discussed below may be related to the idea of liminal and liminoid performance (and carnival ambivalence/play), and their potential to be considered as antistructure. The more commercial, or mainstream orientated texts such as *Common Threads: Stories From The Quilt* (1989) and *Living Proof* (1993) may be considered as exhibiting the potential for liminal performance (in their ability to provide distinct organised (heterosexual) frames of reference, which although are productive, are also prohibitive). Other more

independent/performative texts such as *Some of your Best Friends* (1971), *Word is Out* (1977), *Absolutely Positive* (1990), *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* (1991) and *Silverlake Life: The View From Here* (1993) may be considered as more liminoid (and carnivalesque), in their ability to allow more liberal expression without the (necessary) framing of dominant hierarchy. Whilst liminal performances may involve the potential to connect to the idea of role reversal, liminoid performances may re-contextualise the structures of ideology. Liminoid documentaries, in their ability to represent a collective potential (or movement), may be read in relation to the idea of anti-structure and community, as this provides not a:

... structural reversal, a mirror-imaging of [dominant social] structure, or a fantasy-rejection of 'structural necessities', but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, violation [and] creativity. (Turner, 1982: 44)

In this way their potential is to reinvent and confront pre-existing ideologies, in a progressive manner, which might lead to the enlightenment/education of audiences. Although Richard Schechner (2002) suggests that Turner's ideas were utopian, in that 'he predicted that the "liberated and disciplined body itself, with its many untapped resources for pleasure, pain and expression," would lead the way to a better world' (p. 62), it is evident that the following texts (which exhibit liminal performative contexts) nevertheless possess the potential to reformulate identity constructs which surround gay identity in a most progressive manner.

Early Confessional Performances before AIDS

Some of your Best Friends (1971) may be considered as a landmark: it was the first 'confessional performative' documentary text which was not only produced by an openly gay producer (Ken Robinson), it also featured openly gay citizens freely discussing issues surrounding their social life and identity (see Figure 6).⁴ Although its production was stimulated as a project for a master of arts degree (for the University of Southern California), and its distribution has been limited (mostly at arts festivals (Robinson, 2004)), its precedence, and relationship to the more celebrated *Word is Out* (1977), makes it important. Both *Some of your Best Friends* and *Word is Out* define a slowly emerging movement in documentary at this time:

⁴ We must note that whilst the documentary features a number of 'openly' gay performers, at the same time some sequences also feature gay people who wish their identity to be concealed. This is evident in certain sequences where a shadowing is deployed to conceal personal identity.

the gradual unveiling of gay social existence, and identity concerns, authored as much by gay performers themselves, as the producers who represent them. In this way, although both texts are separated by some six years, and they may be considered to have been produced under very different production restrictions (*Word is Out* was a large-scale anthological project), they both bear witness to a willingness of gay people to reveal intimate details of their lives (to larger audiences). Consequently, they have been brought together here to discuss the emergence of the gay performer within documentary, and the appearance of the 'independent gay citizen' (see Introduction).⁵

As early confessional documentaries (prior to the advent of AIDS), their main focus of attention is attempting to convey the desires and concerns of the gay performers represented. A central issue in both texts is not only a concern regarding a lack of social equality afforded to homosexuals, but also a recurring motif in the performances is the recalling of experiences concerning their treatment for homosexuality as a medical illness. This relates to a recurring focus within the dominant medical establishment at the time which might be considered as 'approaching gay identity with pathology'. This consequently may be seen in a desire to inhibit 'deviant' sexual behaviour.

Some of your Best Friends opens with an extract from a British aversion therapy documentary. A male voice tells us (after describing the classic aversion treatment – electric shocks administered to a patient who chooses to view sexual pictures of a same sex body): "When a man has been conditioned by society to hate and fear homosexuality, this re-orientation can be a very great relief". These words reveal the evident persecution of gay people in society (for being different to the mainstream). At the same time it unambiguously suggests that should homosexuals attempt to erase their inner nature, a great sense of relief may be awarded. In this way the opening comments of *Some of your Best Friends* reveal the irony of such imposed ideas: should homosexuals reject their nature, they will feel more secure (by hiding their true identity). This sense of security or 'relief' will be gained at the rejection of desire. Through connecting gay identity to pathology, the supposed

⁵ Although Lance Loud's performance in *An American Family* (1973) occurs after *Some of your Best Friends* (1971) and before *Word is Out* (1977) it is not discussed in relation to these texts (in this chapter). The reasons for this are evident in the fact that Lance did not openly discuss his sexuality in the text of *An American Family*. Hence although Lance's performance certainly is significant in the context of my thesis, its relationship connotes more with the 'counter cultural potential' of his presence in the media (connecting gay identity to the family – see Chapter 1), rather than an emerging confessional documentary ethic as discussed in this chapter.

desire of the mainstream is fulfilled (removing the illness) in the loss of desire in the homosexual.

In *Word is Out* a number of homosexuals openly discuss medical/psychological treatment aimed at curing their sexual behaviour (see Figure 7). Rick tells us:

It all wound-up with my mother and father-in-law going to my parents and telling them that unless they signed papers to have me treated in a mental sanatorium, they would have me committed to a state mental hospital - the insane asylum, literally. When I first met the doctor in the sanatorium, he told me, "Well we could castrate you, but lets try some treatments and see what we can do there". ... I must have been twenty-three then. I underwent some fairly lengthy series of shock treatments.⁶

Rick had initially rejected the potential for himself to fulfil his homosexual desire (by marrying a woman). Although he had a lasting relationship with another man, this was kept as a secret. Consequently Rick (and his then male lover) both married and concealed their homosexual tendencies. What is evident in Rick's testament is that when his homosexuality became disclosed instead of him being responsible for the issues surrounding this (deceit and mistrust), due to the legislative and medical subjugation of homosexuality (laws and scientific discourse which labelled homosexuality as deviant) he became subject to persecution and torture, beyond his control.

Through the intimate disclosure of issues surrounding the treatment of homosexuality as a mental illness, both *Some of your Best Friends* and *Word is Out* display resistance to the idea that homosexuality should be pathologised. At the same time whilst *Some of your Best Friends* opens with the inclusion of an extract from the British aversion therapy film, later it provides personal testaments (similar to *Word is Out*) against these ideas. This includes a highly politicised sequence where contributor John Platania addresses a student meeting (at the University of Birmingham) where both people in favour of aversion therapy and those opposed to it are present. He emotionally delivers the message "Mental institutions - bullshit. Shock therapy - no thank you. If a man's got a problem you don't burn it out of him - you try and help him settle it, and not in this way". These comments relate not only

⁶ Although we are not provided with the exact dates which these stories relate to, it is likely that these occurred before 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association 'removed homosexuality from the official manual that lists mental and emotional disorders' (APS, 2004): after this time it would have been unlikely that such action could take place (officially).

to the ordeal of actual physical and mental harm caused by the execution of electric shock therapy, but also provide a highly politicised platform against discursive subjugation. This sequence highlights opposing views, which may contribute to discursive formulation, by presenting two factions involved in confrontational performance. The inclusion of those pro-aversion therapy (alongside those opposed) allows the documentary producer to exhibit the performative traits of those who condone the persecution of homosexuals. This does not allow for a meaningful dialectic (between two equal sides), rather a biased approach is adopted which understandably favours those opposed to such treatment.

The stories recounted in these texts not only acknowledge a history of persecution (the aversion therapy and the discrimination), in a similar manner that black Americans discuss a history of slavery and persecution: this contextualisation allows for the definition of a historical foundation upon which audiences may be encouraged to realise a coalescence of a social grouping (gay communities) beginning to emerge. Similarly for the homosexuals themselves, they may have considered that they were relating to the idea of the 'imagined community' (see Chapter 1), where identifications may be made which allow for the idea of 'bonding together' of those who estimate they have common causes. This political orientation (apparent in many of the performances) signifies an emerging social identity (and possibly a burgeoning gay community/communities), and allows for the recounting of stories of resistance. Hence, whilst Rick tells us in *Word is Out* of his subjugation and torture at the hands of both his family and psychiatric staff, at the same time he reveals how he overcame such oppression.

The foregrounding of stories such as these in *Some of your Best Friends* and *Word is Out* marks out a period for gay people, where they may consider that they are gradually emerging as able to more freely define their own social identities. At the same time they discuss restrictions which made them conceal their identities and feelings of persecution against homosexual behaviour. Participant Don Kilhefner tells us in *Some of your Best Friends* of feelings of isolation:

For most homosexuals it's an internal type of violence. ... Isolation is forced upon us. ... Loneliness is part of the violence perpetrated against homosexuals. I can remember the Saturday nights I didn't go to those graduate student parties. I spent a lot of time by myself.

These sentiments recall feelings of likely rejection, should his true identity be revealed in his youth. In this way Dan highlights the nature of imposed isolation. Hence these reflections display evidence of an era where homosexuals had felt themselves as subjects labelled as deviant. Such labelling by dominant society involved discussing homosexuality in essentialist terms. In this way, through mainstream groups focusing on homosexual sexual behaviour, and marking this as 'other', the central impetus had been discussing the essence of sexual activity. *Some of your Best Friends* and *Word is Out* provide a platform for performances which remove the focus from sexual activity as nature, and relate the potential of constructing identities through social discourse. Hence we may see an emergence of social construction as a productive tool for identity construction (used by homosexuals), and a rejection of essentialism as a subjective device of othering (used by the mainstream).

We may consider this gradual emergence as a fulcrum on which the balance had begun to change, allowing a shift where gay people could begin to consider themselves less as 'subjects' (dominant order commenting on sexual behaviour as essence of deviance), and more as 'agents' (involving themselves in the potential of constructing their own social identities). In this way (as discussed in Chapter 1) the significance, and potential, of social construction began to emerge. Consequently the performances seen in *Some of your Best Friends* and *Word is Out* bear testament to the opportunity (provided by the producers) of constructing social identities within the arena of documentary.

It is significant that both texts involve themselves with the idea of a need for homosexuals to provide themselves positive identifications, and role models. This is particularly relevant in *Some of your Best Friends* where Don Kilhefner tells us:

Identify with somebody? Who can you identify with? ... That athlete, that writer, that scientist: they are also homosexual? ... Well for a young homosexual to find a role model, its really difficult to find one.

What *Some of your Best Friends* and *Word is Out* do is attempt to provide positive identifications. It is noteworthy that both texts not only include a wide range of people from various age groups and racial backgrounds (who are happy to identify themselves as gay), at the same time these texts capitalise on their status in society through disclosing their professional status. This includes a wide range of gay

performers identifying their professions: in *Some of your Best Friends*, John Platania (attorney), Troy Perry (priest) and an unnamed person (teacher); and in *Word is Out*, Pat (Women's Army Corp.), John (Navy), Whitey (tree surgeon), George (assembly line worker in factory), Mark (corporate business man) and Michael (university student and athlete). Through connecting their homosexuality with their profession or vocation, the potential to overturn stereotypes surrounding gay identity is foregrounded. Therefore instead of the stereotypical entertainer, service industry or effeminate connotative roles which may have been more easily associated with gay identity at that time (such as for the male homosexual in drama - actor, hairdresser, flower arranger, dress designer and hotel employee) we are presented with a wider range of professions which counter predominant stereotypes.⁷ Particularly the employment roles within the areas of armed forces, corporate business and athletics notably comment on the elevated position of the gay citizens involved in these areas.

Therefore through presenting a diverse range of gay citizens as competent within esteemed professional and vocational areas (normally associated with enfranchised citizenship, these roles form the backbone of commerce, defence and physical prowess), an inversion is stimulated whereby those apparently lacking power are conversely shown to be competent within this powerful milieu. In particular, the performance of John Platania in *Some of your Best Friends*, directly comments on the oppositional potential, using his role as an attorney against the legislative system itself. Although being the subject of a police entrapment incident, whereby he was charged with lewd behaviour (he was arrested discussing potential sexual activity with another male, who consequently revealed himself as a policeman), he was able to argue to the courts that he was unjustly arrested, and the case was overthrown. Although the act of lewd behaviour could have carried a sentence of one month to two years if he had been found guilty,⁸ through his position as an attorney he was able to disprove the allegation, suggesting that the arresting police officer had been indeed lying (although no action was taken against this illegal activity). In this way his connection with legislative knowledge (and possibly his standing as a professional within this arena), allowed him to subvert or disengage the system charged with prosecuting his alleged behaviour.

⁷ It is important to note that *Word is Out* represents a balance of professional identifications which includes potentially stereotypical professions associated with homosexuality. This may be seen in the inclusion of Harry and Roger (actors).

⁸ Also *Some of your Best Friends* tells us that at the time that sodomy, considered a crime against nature, carried a sentence from a small fine to life imprisonment (recent precedents in the United States have overturned this part of constitutional legislation).

Consequently the representation of gay citizens as confident and empowered working within society, allowed for the presentation and realisation that gay citizens could competently perform within enfranchised and dominant arenas of employment. At the same time their dedication to pursuing an identity for gay citizens could allow them to invert or critique the dominant system itself. This may be seen not only in the case of those involved in professions which concern commerce, defence and physical prowess, at the same time all those involved as performers within these documentaries identified themselves as candidates for enfranchised citizenship.

AIDS: Community, Aesthetics, and Intimacy

The idea of citizenship, creativity and testimony play a central role in *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* (1989, US), *Absolutely Positive* (1990, US) and *Living Proof: HIV and the Pursuit of Happiness* (1993, US). These texts are discussed here together not because they may necessarily be seen as contemporaries of each other (in stylistic or formal terms), but moreover because they are connected as they foreground the issue of AIDS. This is highly relevant as not only did the advent of AIDS influence gay identity with relation to stimulating the emergence of 'networks of resistance' and the 'coalescence of partnerships' (discussed below), it also provided the opportunity for increased 'personalisation and intimacy'. Through testimony in confessional documentary, gay performers not only responded to AIDS, but also ideas surrounding gay identity began to evolve. Although AIDS undoubtedly became connected to various social and racial groups, my discussion continues to focus on the performances of gay males, and relative discourse, within this context.

Barry Miguel tells us in *Living Proof* that it is important "taking part in the community, contributing to community. That's what is really important. If we could just try to keep a focus on living". This quote may be representational of ideas in all three texts: it is important for people with AIDS to be part of the community, and to focus on the potential of living, rather than the likelihood of early death. At the same time there is a focus on artistic creativity and aesthetics. This may be seen as the performers present themselves as creative performers (artistic models or producers), and it is apparent in that the texts present iconic images connecting to AIDS (suggesting powerful representational forms). *Common Threads* and *Living Proof*

are connected to the idea of artistic creation and the iconic representation in our knowledge that the former concerns the production and design of memorial panels for the AIDS Memorial Quilt,⁹ and the latter concerns the filming of a photo-shoot focusing on people with AIDS, which was held for the purpose of producing a 'coffee table' book (*Living Proof* is also the title of the book by Carol Jones (1994)). *Living Proof* and *Common Threads* concern themselves with different creative products: a work of art, and a mass produced photo book. They also approach the idea of representation from different aspects: *Common Threads* concerns attempts at remembering, or recording the lives of those who have died from AIDS, in the manufacture of original designed artistic fabric panels; *Living Proof* sets out to record the beneficial possibilities of living with AIDS, in the production of an iconic book (presenting healthy-looking images of people with AIDS).

Through artistic creativity, the audience is presented with potential 'icons of art and aesthetics' relating to AIDS. However, whilst this process 'connects' the audience to the person with AIDS through relating the art, it at the same time 'distances' the disease by focusing mostly on the creative aesthetics. Therefore unlike *Absolutely Positive* in which we are presented with intimate confessional performances involving purely discourse discussing the tragedy of AIDS, *Common Threads* and *Living Proof* use the device of an artistic creative product (the discussion of the book or the quilt) in order to dilute the full realisation of AIDS. In this way although both texts are highly celebrated and commercially successful products which focus on people with AIDS, they to some degree make palatable, and appealing, discussions which surround AIDS. This is enabled by focusing on the 'artistic form' of the creative products (the quilt in *Common Threads*) and the 'aesthetic' of the performers (the healthy looking models in *Living Proof*), rather than fully confronting the intimate details of the illness (focusing on the diseased body).¹⁰

This type of distancing (or to some degree sanitation) may be symptomatic of meeting mainstream sensibilities. As Alexandra Juhasz (1995) tells us 'mainstream media has been reluctant to deal with AIDS because this story is [mostly] about homosexuals and homosexual lifestyles not to mention 'blood , semen, sexuality and death'' (p. 11). Consequently, although *Common Threads* and *Living Proof* are formidable in their attempts to present mainstream audiences with meaningful

⁹ Full details of the AIDS Memorial Quilt can be found in (Names Project Foundation, 2004)

¹⁰ Having said this *Common Threads* does represent a number people who have AIDS and look unhealthy, however, there is no focus on the rigours of medical treatment of symptoms of the disease.

discourse which surrounds AIDS (the importance of remembering lost loved ones, and the possibility of living with AIDS), they resist close examination and favour an aesthetic distancing. In this way as Juhasz suggests, the implied reality of AIDS discourse (at that time – strong connections with the male homosexual body) becomes ‘predominantly’ mediated through focus drawn on the aesthetic, and sentimental, appeal of the quilt, and the appearance of healthy looking people with AIDS - rather than the homosexual (diseased) body.

This is particularly evident in a sequence in *Living Proof* where we are presented with the ‘photo shoot’ of the ‘swim team’. Here a correlation is made to the idea of community and the gay male, yet at the same time we are distanced from the imagined aesthetic of the homosexual body (with AIDS) through the presentation of healthy and athletic bodies. A ‘swim team’ member tells us that “for a lot of people they don’t have the sense of community that we have in the swim team, and I think this really shows in the photograph”. This sequence focuses on discussion from various members who form part of the swim team, and at the same time the staged photograph is presented for analysis. This reveals seven gay males (wearing only swimming costumes) staged in a line posing together in intimate contact with each other (see Figure 11). The pose suggests intimacy, camaraderie and friendship between the swim team members. At the same time their bodies are revealed as healthy and athletic. This image is in a direct contrast to images of the person with AIDS as possessing a diseased body, emaciated and decaying. Here we are presented with a vision of glowing healthiness.

Whilst this is not unproductive (it is important to consider the potential of people living with AIDS, or who are HIV positive, who may appear mostly healthy), this aesthetic (people with AIDS who appear healthy) is presented as *the* central story (in the photo book and documentary). Although this strategy is clearly appealing to the audience, and to some degree it may be considered a ‘positive way’ of dealing with the disease (though the presentation of healthy bodies which might educate audiences to consider that people with HIV are not necessarily diseased), it does deflect the real issues (the impending shortening of life from contracting AIDS).

Despite this, *Living Proof* does attempt to represent the reality of AIDS. Evidence of this may be seen in discussions which surround the demise of swim team member Ross Johnson (who died during the making of the documentary). However the retelling of his death is further distanced and sanitised (from the reality

of dying from AIDS) with images of Ross swimming contently underwater (in healthy physical form). This representation is accompanied with descriptions of how he was able to hold his breath for extreme lengths of time. A swim team member tells us at Ross' funeral "Ross, using his legs like a dolphin, could undulate perfectly to the bottom ... and be among the coral and the fauna ... for an unnatural length of time". This is an immortalised description of Ross, and is accompanied with the equivalent sequences of him underwater at the swim team. Although the diseased body is distanced, and kept from view, an eternal vision is presented which connects his memory with both a healthy imagined aesthetic, and a connection with nature and the eternity of the sea. *Living Proof* distances the real AIDS diseased body (in attempting to educate and re-invent iconography which surrounds people with HIV) at the same time it attempts to make connections with ideas of health and nature (suggesting longevity and eternity rather than immediate issues of mortality). This performative ideology connects with the idea of 'liminal performance' (Turner, 1982), where although the diseased body is distanced, at the same time the performance is produced within a recognised (liminal) framework which connects to a larger audience. This framing or liminal potential connects with ideas which surround eternity and nature (the memory of Ross in the sea). This displaces a need for a representation of the graphic reality of death from AIDS, generating ideas of eternity as its liminal framework (something mainstream audiences may more easily connect with).

Conversely, although *Common Threads* uses the AIDS quilt as a liminal framework upon which the reality of the syndrome can be presented (filtering/mediating its immediate effect), it nevertheless fully acknowledges the fragility of life, and the bleak reality of terminal illness (something which is suspended to some degree in *Living Proof*).¹¹ At the same time it proposes a 'call for action'. This is evident in the performance of Vito Russo (author of the celebrated *Celluloid Closet* – a highly influential work which focuses on gay identity and film) where he addresses a crowd at a political rally, and expresses concerns about the inert motivation of the American government concerning AIDS:

My name is Vito Russo, I am a writer from New York City and I have AIDS. I am here today as I don't want to die. I know there are drugs out there that can

¹¹ This is not to say that *Living Proof: HIV and the Pursuit of Happiness* entirely avoids discussions concerning illness and symptoms of diseases resulting from AIDS. Rather, the image of the diseased body is resisted, and symptoms are discussed in a manner which does not vigorously detract from the positive stance provided by the text: the benefit of living with HIV.

save my life, and I want to know why they are not being tested more quickly. I am here today because I don't want a quilt (the AIDS Memorial Quilt) with my name on it to be [ceremoniously displayed] in front of the Whitehouse next year.

This performance is highly poignant as Vito Russo did die shortly after this time, and an AIDS panel was made in memory of his name (which would have been displayed in the manner Vito suggests) (see Figure 9). This political contextualisation occurs in *Common Threads* in the closing stages of the documentary (after earlier sequences which discuss the illness and effects on those now charged with making a memorial panel for the quilt).

In order to build up to this highly politicised confrontation, gradually throughout the text we are presented with details of the increasing number of Americans to die from AIDS. The accumulation of numbers recording the death toll from AIDS connects to the idea of presenting numbers of soldiers lost in war (a common strategy in recording the human cost of a war to a nation). Vito Russo develops this analogy when recalling a conversation with a younger male.

He was a 32 year old guy. He said "[so many of my friends have died] I only have acquaintances now". You know a lot of people who have lost their friends, and that's an experience [which is a rare occurrence] in a lifetime, except during war.

This connection is productive as through this Russo links not only the idea of losing valuable citizens, but also connects with the idea of patriotism, and a need for the American community to come to the aid of those who are affected by such tragedy in the larger community. However, despite this powerful political presence at the end of the text, direct confrontation is not the essential driving force in *Common Threads* (as generally we are presented with personal discussions concerning the coming to terms of relatives with the idea of loss concerning AIDS). The same cannot be said of *Absolutely Positive* which continually challenges the audience to consider contentious issues, such as the real efforts of homosexuals involved in combating AIDS. In this way although *Absolutely Positive* features a range of social identities, it does not avoid intimate discussion surrounding the diseased homosexual male body (which seems to be avoided in *Common Threads* and *Living Proof*).

Absolutely Positive opens with an introduction from film maker Peter Adair.

He recalls the autobiographical nature of the project. He tells us that he became involved in producing *Absolutely Positive* through a personal need for himself to further explore his 'own story about AIDS' (Peter is HIV positive and openly gay). Peter tells us after the first sequence of the documentary which features exclusively homosexual males with AIDS, 'These stories had a familiar ring, because they are my story. We all share the two biggest events of our lives, coming out and testing positive'. In this sense *Absolutely Positive* follows on from his work in *Word is Out* which involved a public coming out for many of the participants (see Figure 10). As an 'autobiographical text' *Absolutely Positive* not only allows for the presentation of personal confessional discourse by the individual performers, it also relates to the political personal contextualisation of Peter Adair, as an openly gay man who had now began questioning issues surrounding the acceptance of AIDS. Throughout the documentary, we are presented with intimate confessions, direct to camera. In comparison to *Living Proof* and *Common Threads* the presentation is unsophisticated, raw and lacks a formalistic or stylistic framing (there is little contextualisation of accompanying scenes/editing and music is rarely used in a melodramatic or humorous way). Consequently, the project focuses more squarely on the individual performer and the context of the producer (Peter Adair) in a manner very similar to *Word is Out*. Yet at the same time it does not involve itself with diverting or framing attention away from the issue of AIDS (as *Common Threads* and *Living Proof* may do in their focus on the aesthetics (and sentiments) of the quilt, and the book).

Absolutely Positive presents personal and intimate dialogue. This may be seen in sequences where performers discuss their own human and sometimes irrational sensibilities. In one sequence a performer discusses uncomfortable feelings regarding potential physical contact with people with AIDS (before he fell ill from the disease himself). Similarly signs or symptoms of AIDS are contextualised in a humanistic manner, which avoids sensationalism, or sanitation. This is particularly evident in the sequence where Peter (a male nurse with AIDS) discusses the discovery of the disease in himself. He tell us:

I was brushing my teeth, and I noticed something on my tongue. ... It was very, very little, it was on the side, but I hated it. ... I could not stand it, and I got very upset. I went to a very good friend. And showed him the side of my

tongue. ...The expression on his face [was] the 'Oh Fuck!' expression.

Here Peter presents his own intimate and humorous recollections to the audience. This breaks down the tension between the audience and the person with AIDS in a manner which frames 'personal experience' and humanises the discourse.

In this way *Absolutely Positive* places the person with AIDS directly in context with their intimate feelings, humanity and evidence of the disease. The sharing of such intimacy, and evidence of disclosure, may be connected to feelings of ostracisation and a need for an accepting community who may be educated, or made to understand. This is similar to the observations by Patricia Joyner Priest (1995) concerning talk shows:

The Women's movement and gay rights advocacy groups ... have traditionally used self-disclosure to highlight the connections between private realities and politics. In addition to consciousness-raising sessions, an increasingly common tactic of social activism is the act of *coming out*. (p. 105)

Although Joyner Priest discusses coming out in the context of revealing your (possibly concealed) sexual identity, and the issue of coming out may be an inevitable by-product of openly discussing your personal life (as a homosexual) in documentary, the term may also be applied to revealing the personal reality of AIDS. Hence Peter's disclosure of his intimate feelings and his responses to discovering the disease in himself. Also he provides evidence not only of his feelings/situation as a gay man with AIDS, he connects with a wider discursive network which may be influenced concerning the position of gay men and people with AIDS. Therefore the disclosure of such intimacy bears the signs of both a willingness to testify, and a call for action and understanding.

We are told in *Absolutely Positive* by one gay male performer:

Nobody knows what those people have gone through. Nobody knows the amazing strength, and the love, and the generosity that those people have.

Those 'awful gay people' that this world thinks of, and the amazing angels that they are, and the amazing love that they give their friends.

The performer appears to emotionally break down during this sequence. Here the idea of community and gay identity are foregrounded, and made personal. At the same time this performance highlights supposed dominant negative views concerning

gay social existence and the likelihood that these ideas are generated as a means of subjugation. This performance displays evidence of a transformation and tension within gay identity, which reveals the desires/observations of gay people themselves, and groups that comment on gay identity. Through responses to AIDS (and dominant groups connecting gay identity with AIDS), homosexuals coalesced, forming groups of resistance who were able to work together. They had emerged and defined community and social networks in response to the disease. This would relate to fighting the effects of the disease, and dominant cultural/social concerns surrounding AIDS, the latter often suggesting that the male homosexual was not only the likely carrier of the disease, but that there was a certain culpability.

AIDS as Sign of the Other, and Communities of Resistance

Consequently dominant society may have used AIDS as a further tool to encourage the subjugation of homosexuals. In mainstream sensibilities, this may have involved an evolution from homosexuals seen as 'imagined others' (historically subjugated by dominant heteronormative ideologies), to homosexuals recorded as 'evident with disease' (bearing signs of otherness). This connection between 'imagined other' and 'diseased other' would be easy to make, as it would provide tangible evidence to encourage the continued 'othering' of homosexual identities.

This impetus to encourage the continued subjugation of the homosexual (through connecting with AIDS) was apparent in mainstream media. Kylo Patrick R. Hart (2000) tell us:

In 1985, ... CBS anchor man Dan Rather introduced a story about AIDS by emphasising that scientists now realise the disease can strike within the bounds of 'respectable society', and that it does not result solely from the 'immoral' actions of intravenous drug users and gay men. (p.35)

Although Patrick's interpretation of this event may be sardonic, it nevertheless identifies an important issue regarding mainstream sensibility. Through separating the normal (the respectable) and the abnormal (those considered to be immoral), a distinction is made which supports those who are supposed to be 'us' (regular people) and distances 'them' (the outsiders). Actions such as these maintained divisions which would encourage the separation of identities. These strategies were

often evident in news reporting and the media at the time. Larry Gross (2001) discusses this in the media's approach at connecting AIDS to gay people, calling it the 'gay cancer' and the 'gay plague'. (p. 95). This involved the subjugation of 'outsiders'. Also it maintained the deferment of equality to homosexuals, who were considered to be culpable for AIDS.

This sense of 'imposed' culpability (targeted towards the immoral outsider) is imaginatively foregrounded, and exposed as partisan, in *Living Proof* where Henry Nicols (not identified as homosexual) tell us:

I am viewed as what they call an innocent victim. They look at my situation, they say 'He was ten years old when he was infected. He was infected in blood products. There was absolutely nothing he could do, he was infected through no fault of his own'. That really bothers me, because if you say I am an innocent victim this implies that somewhere there have to be a few guilty victims. And it still shocks me that people could think you could do something to deserve AIDS.

Henry appears as an attractive male youth (dressed in a Scout uniform). He tells us earlier he had disclosed his HIV status as part of his Eagle Scout project, and suggests that he hopes to run for president of the United States in 2008 (when he would be eligible in terms of his age). Through this performative contextualisation, Henry not only comments on the role of youths (and AIDS), but he also exposes a process of social labelling which separates the allegedly guilty from the innocent. Although Henry advises us that he is considered not guilty, his powerful production of discourse reveals strategies within mainstream media and society which imposes a sense of culpability on those considered as outsiders. Hence the advent of AIDS encouraged those who would subjugate homosexuals to continue to do this, with fresh ammunition which could be mediated as further signs of difference.

However despite this process of subjugation, AIDS provided a platform and a connection which enabled the reformation and construction of social groups. Although gay groups may still have been subjugated (like drug users, and those with alleged immoral actions discussed above), through homosexuals (and other disenfranchised groups) responding to AIDS as a means of ameliorating the situation and resisting an imposed social identity, there arose an opportunity for coalescence, encouraging the formation of groups of resistance. This reformulated ideas

surrounding gay identity from dominant ideas which considered homosexuals as individual 'others', to recognition that homosexuals were able to form 'productive groups'. Homosexuals mobilised themselves and worked together to combat the threat of AIDS. This may be seen in the media as the emergence of the homosexual from singular identity (seen in isolation), to evaluated as component members of resistance groups (viewed as larger, albeit still subjugated, social groupings).

Although homosexuals had been observed in groups and communities prior to AIDS (demonstrations and combined responses to oppression, and gay communities like those in San Francisco), the advent of AIDS reconfigured, and expanded, collective identity formation surrounding gay identity. This may be seen as an emergence from emphasis on the individual and his/her personal discourse, to the ability to connect to larger social groupings concerning gay identity. Larry Gross (1988) had observed (concerning gay performances in factual programming) 'that gay people [had not been] allowed to define themselves except in individual autobiographical terms' (p. 198). The advent of AIDS reconfigured this potential, and engendered connective networks which surrounded gay identity. This encouraged homosexual identity to evolve from 'personally autobiographical' to potentially 'community responsive'.

Whilst individual autobiographical terms form the essence of confessional performances discussed here, what began to emerge (as evidenced in the case study documentaries) was the idea of coalescence, and conjoined political motivation. Although opportunities for coalescence and community networks undoubtedly existed before the advent of AIDS (see the discussion on *Gay USA* (1977) in Chapter 5), reactions to the disease enabled a 'new collective responsiveness'. Consequently, a recurring motif in *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt*, *Living Proof: HIV and the Pursuit of Happiness* and *Absolutely Positive* is evidence of the formation of community and familial-like networks in response to the disease. The advent of AIDS (however tragic, devastating and incomprehensible) offered the potential for gay individuals to make such connections in mobilising their response to AIDS (thereby generating community discourse, rather than individual discourse). This impetus led to further developments concerning gay identity which would extend beyond the idea of community, friendship and family-like networks (in response to AIDS): it would lead to a willingness in documentary to reveal the intimacy of same-sex partnerships. Evidence of this may be seen in *Silverlake Life: The View from*

Here and Fighting in Southwest Louisiana, which although they concern themselves with the tragedy of AIDS, for the greater part they disclose the potential intimacy, and sincerity, of homosexual love.

Coupling, Commitment, Family Household and AIDS

Peter Friedman produced *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* (1991) he was also a co-producer involved in *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (US, 1993). Beverley Seckinger and Janet Jakobsen (1997) inform us that Friedman played an influential role in promoting *Silverlake Life*: he was reported to say that the film 'would become one of the most in-depth portraits to date of what it is like to live with AIDS' (p. 146). Whilst both films discuss the issue of AIDS with relation to male homosexual partnerships, *Silverlake Life* became a highly celebrated text, not only discussed in terms of the powerful discourse provided concerning AIDS, it has furthermore been examined in its relationship to the idea of observational documentary, direct cinema and issues surrounding performance (Nichols, 1994, 2001; Seckinger and Jakobsen, 1997).

Through the involvement of film maker Tom Joslin, and Mark Massi (his lover), *Silverlake Life* records intimate details of the rigours of living with, and dying of AIDS (see Figure 12). The project had been stimulated by Joslin in an attempt to record the illness in Massi. As the project developed Joslin also discovered he was infected with the disease: he subsequently became ill and died before Massi. Consequently Friedman became involved during the production in order to help to complete the project. The intimacy provided by the text includes sequences rarely seen in documentary. Most notably we are provided with a highly moving sequence where Tom Joslin has just died and Mark Massi emotionally sings to him, and later Tom's emaciated body is unceremoniously wrapped and sealed in a body bag by the undertaker.

The relationship between Massi and Joslin becomes a central context through which the documentary reveals the tragedy of AIDS. Seckinger and Jakobsen (1997) tell us (concerning Massi and Joslin's involvement as film makers and subjects) 'the film's participant-camera shooting style enables simultaneous readings of the transparency and the intentionality of its content' (p. 151). Similarly Bill Nichols (1994) tell us that

The film defies all conventions of the home movie even though it is one. It addresses pain, anger and death. ... Mark Massi holds the shaking camera, aimed at the dead body of his lover in the bed they have shared for years. Knowledge, in its traditional association with a coherence and control, demands expansion to encompass tremulous, immediate experience itself, for such moments must be called a form of knowing. (p. 10).

Consequently, issues which surround the production of *Silverlake Life* concern as much the 'knowing' context of the producers, as documentary attempts to record some 'un-mediated' observational truth concerning AIDS. Hence the foregrounded co-presence of 'transparency' and 'intentionality' within the text may be seen as contentious. This may be apparent in the sense that we may be seeing 'intensive sequences', rather than 'unmediated events'. The apparent closeness between Massi and Joslin undoubtedly comes across in many sequences where they are intimate (they had been partners for 22 years), and understandably the documentary becomes more performative, rather than observational. Joslin and Massi reveal details of their intimate lives living with AIDS (and Joslin dying from the disease). Although it appears as if it was executed in the manner of a 'home movie' (and may be considered apparently 'observational like' in aesthetics), a documentary product is created which may be seen as both intentionally political, and at the same time intimately revealing.

The tension between intimacy and observation in *Silverlake Life* undoubtedly centrally focuses on issues surrounding AIDS. However, part of this political process (the willingness of Joslin and Massi to disclose the intimacy of their lives and Joslin's death from AIDS) records their commitment to each other as long-term partners. This discourse potentially resonates with many audiences, not only those who may have AIDS and are in partnerships, but also potentially those who may not know much of either AIDS or homosexuality yet may relate to the idea of partnership, commitment and love. Consequently, whilst this thesis recognises the foregrounding and emotional significance of AIDS apparent in *Silverlake Life*, the following discussion more squarely focuses of the discursive potential of the text for its ability to convey issues which surround the idea of same sex partnerships. *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* is also discussed in these terms, despite its similar (albeit less graphic) relationship to AIDS.

Silverlake Life and *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* share similarities not

only in their connection to Peter Friedman and their discursive potential regarding commentary on AIDS, they also produce storytelling which focuses on same sex partnerships, and make connections with the idea of home life and daily routine. Although *Silverlake Life* necessarily foregrounds the symptoms and treatment for illnesses which have occurred because of AIDS, and *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* discusses the effects of AIDS as a context from the past and as a potential spectre in the future, both texts relate issues surrounding the routine lives of the performers, often focusing on the context of household as part of this.

In *Silverlake Life* the 'death bed' of Tom Joslin (as noted by Bill Nichols above) becomes a powerful iconic symbol of the same-sex household, and daily living. We may consider its presence as the climax of the discursive potential which focuses on the relationship between Tom and Mark. The presence of the bed (connoting an intimate area where the couple sleep) occurs many times in the text (most frequently as Tom is seen to approach death). However, an early sequence in the film occurs which may be considered to directly connect with the death bed sequence ('book ending' an early scene which displays intimacy with their later scene of emotional closure). The early sequence reveals both Tom and Mark in bed together, viewing themselves on a video monitor in the bedroom (as if constructing the best images for the documentary):

(The image of Mark and Tom first appears on a television screen. This supplies us with the image they are viewing. The following image is that provided by the monitor. They appear to look off camera as if we are observing them. They appear relaxed in intimate proximity on the bed next to each other, with both pairs of arms stretched above their heads, partially connected)

Mark: How is that for dramatic effect? (commenting on the image)

Tom: What a composition! Watch this. I am really gonna. ... (Tom moves his hand to connect with Mark's hand – he moves his fingers watching the corresponding image on the screen)

(Mark then in correspondence moves his hand, and emulates Tom's movement – his fingers moving slowly above his own head)

Mark: You are supposed to imagine its some plant blowing in the breeze

Tom: Actually it looks like some kind of amoeba to me.

Mark: That's because you are probably more primordial [than me].

This sequence then goes on to discuss symptoms from AIDS. However, it is discussed here for evidence of the intimate, tactile and emotional relationship between the two performers. The close physical representation is connected to the idea of enduring relationships though the performance being staged using the liminal framework of the double bed (the site of marriage consummation and romantic engagement – normally connected to heterosexuals). Hence the connotation we may read here is that the close proximity and emotion displayed between the two connects with the idea of devotion and commitment normally associated with heterosexual marriage. This may be seen furthermore not only in their physical location and bodily performance, but also in the verbal connection made to the idea of the origin of life and primary instincts in nature (amoeba and primordial). Consequently, this brief scene comments on their potential as committed intimate partners. It relates natural desires/instincts which may exist between two men. The liminal potential of the staging, or framing, is further extended by the liminoid play of the performance. This connects the idea that the intimacy and normal instincts usually associated with the heterosexual (as imagined in the marital bedroom) can equally be applied, or imagined to apply, to the homosexual. This liminoid context (creating space outside the frame, or extending the frame) suggests promoting the idea that same sex relationships are potentially similar to heterosexual pairings.

Silverlake Life focuses on the bedroom as a recurring location where Tom is not only seen to be ill (as a victim of AIDS): this location forms a staging arena where we may connect with the intimate relationship between Tom and Mark. Similarly, *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* relates the context of the house, and the household, as part of its diegetic construction. This may be seen in the sequence which is discussed at the start of this chapter where Danny Cooper and Ben Royal present their performance within the liminal context of the hallway (or drawing room) (see Figure 13). This location contextualises their performance. Danny and Ben sit intimately together as if holding court beneath an historical painting of two respectable gentlemen (possibly from the early twentieth century) (see Figure 13). This setting provides a connotation of connection not only with historical contexts (presumably the painting was selected as it in some way may be considered to be

referential to themselves as men together), it also places them within the confines of an important historical building. This may not only be seen as a staging area for their relationship, its historical importance is also of relevance to the local community.

Danny discusses the importance of the building as a metaphor for his (and his partner's) acceptance within the community of Vinton, Louisiana. Danny tells us, recalling his original connection with the house in which he lived at that time with his previous partner Brady:

When Brady and I bought this house it was condemned. ... It was kind of a town, you might say, 'pride'. No one in town wanted to see it torn down, because it was the last 'gingerbread'¹² house in town. ... So when we bought it, and began restoring it, every week it was [featured] on the front page of the [local newspaper].

Danny here reveals his connection to the wider community. Not only does he contextualise the house as an important part of local heritage worth preserving, both on his behalf and also indirectly for the community, he makes clear that he regards the building as the centre of his social and familial world. This may be seen not only in his attempts to preserve an important building, but also his standing as a local postman is foregrounded as a central issue in his sense of belonging.

Consequently, the performances of Danny and Ben in *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* connect to the wider community in a way which extends beyond their possession of the house and their standing as its owners. Evidence of this may be seen not only in Danny's role as community service provider (as postman to the local populace); Ben also reveals to the audience that they met 'in Houston at a country and western bar'. Here the correlation between country and western music (the music of the people), Danny's role as postman and their standing as preservers of local heritage places them as central among the community. Furthermore, Danny remarks that any local hostility (for being known as openly gay) is not that dissimilar to what might be expected in San Francisco. Danny rejects the idea that he may need to protect his relationship/lifestyle by living within the metropolis and finds equal acceptance within the heartland of small town America.¹³

¹² The term 'gingerbread' refers in this context to architecture possessing elaborate but unsubstantial ornamentation. The gingerbread house in question appears to have been constructed around the turn of the 20th century. Hence it was of interest to preserve as part of local heritage. (see Figure 13)

¹³ For connections between gay community and urban community see: D'Emilio, 1983, 1990; Kaiser, 1998.

This is not to say, however, that issues surrounding a lack of acceptance are not foregrounded in *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana*, nor in *Silverlake Life*. Danny tells us of a major conflict he had with the local postmaster, who after finding out that Danny was gay, blocked his continued employment after a period of probation. Danny took legal advice and confronted this issue, and ultimately he was re-employed by the post office, thereby overturning the postmaster's original action. Similarly Danny tells us that after Brady (his first partner) died, Brady's family made attempts to overturn his will which left the 'gingerbread house' to Danny. Although Danny and Ben had at one point been evicted from the house through the legal courts, they had been involved in overturning court rulings regarding the will on a number of occasions. At the time of producing the documentary we are given the impression that Brady's family were still attempting to gain possession the house which Danny and Ben live in.

Despite this lack of acceptance from certain members of the community (his postmaster employer, and his deceased lover's family) we are given the impression that generally Danny has been accepted within the community. This appears particularly evident in the community response to Danny after the loss of Brady. The general tone suggests that the community believe he had experienced a personal loss similar to when a wife or husband dies. Danny tells us:

When [Brady] died there were a group of people here [at the house] waiting for me to get here. The neighbours brought over food, there were cards from all sorts of people through town - sent to me not his family.

Consequently, the most predominant negative responses to Danny and his position within the community, or his role as a same sex partner, are suggested to have been generated by those who had either personal agendas (Brady's family, who were concerned about the acquisition of property) or those who were unable to accept his sexuality and abused their position (the postmaster, who attempted to make him leave the post office). In this way Danny's role as an accepted member of the small-town/rural community overturns pre-existing stereotypes which might suggest that homosexuals are only welcome in the city, as this is the likely place where they will be afforded protection. Furthermore, Danny and his partner are valued and connected within a 'redneck community' (in what may be considered a cultural backwater - the town of Vinton, Louisiana) in a way which might have seemed

unimaginable if we consider the persecution of homosexuals as recounted in *Word is Out*. *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* therefore displays evidence of a potential for gay people to be integrated (or exist in relative harmony) within the context of rural communities. This idea moves away from earlier ideas which suggested they remain as hidden and concealed, or should form part of *ghettoised* metropolitan communities. This suggests a movement from rejection (or containment), towards acceptance and integration to a certain degree.

Having said this it is noteworthy that both *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* and *Silverlake Life* do connect with the idea that immediate families (of relationship partners) tend to be less accepting than might be imaginable. Although Danny tells us that his own mother told him (after coming out to her at the age of fifteen) “I’ll love you, I’ll stand behind you, and I’ll fight every battle with you, and I’ll be right there for you”, we are presented with a different picture in *Silverlake Life*. Mark Massi recalls feelings concerning Tom Joslin’s mother, after the death of Tom. Mark tell us “the fact that Tom had to die for her to see how much I really did love him [I find really upsetting]”. Earlier in *Silverlake Life* we are presented with details of the difficult relationship that existed between Mark and Tom, and Tom’s parents. This contentious relationship is mostly recorded through the presentation of footage from Tom Joslin’s earlier film *Blackstar* (of which extracts are presented within *Silverlake Life*). Here we are presented with details of a tension which existed between Tom Joslin’s parents, and their acceptance of Tom’s homosexuality, and consequently Tom’s partner Mark. This sequence (from *Blackstar*) occurs in the early part of *Silverlake Life*:

(Tom Joslin interviews his mother then his lover Mark. Tom first asks his mother what her responses were after he announced he was gay)

Tom’s Mother: Family life has always meant so much, and to think that you might not have a family of your own was always a great disappointment.

(Tom asks his mother what she thinks of Mark)

Tom’s Mother: I don’t know how frank I should be. We don’t think alike. We don’t live alike. I think he resents a great deal about me. I resent something about him.

(the image and sound of a chainsaw is segwayed between Tom’s mother’s

dialogue and Mark's response)

Mark: She's a typical liberal. On the surface she is nice and kind to us. ... She accepts the fact we are homosexual. [However] she feels sort of sorry for us in her own little way.

These extracts recorded some 17 years earlier from *Blackstar* (produced by Tom Joslin in 1976) provide the historical context of Tom's parents' feelings regarding Tom and Mark's relationship. It is not surprising that Mark Massi expresses such heartfelt concern that it would take the death of his partner for him to prove himself as a worthy partner for Tom in the eyes of Tom's mother.

Consequently, the exploration of relationships between close relatives and the gay performers in *Silverlake Life* and *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* reveals a tension which focuses on the retention of family property, and the desire for procreation. Hence whilst Brady's family concerned themselves with attempts at obtaining Brady's house (rejecting its inheritance to Danny from Brady), and Tom's mother focused her concern on the failure of her gay son to provide an heir (rejecting Mark as a suitable partner as he contributes to Tom's inability to have a family), these attempts at rejecting homosexual partnerships deliberate on issues surrounding wealth, inheritance and family life. Consequently, ideas which surround the potential acceptance of same-sex pairings by close families concern themselves with perceived threats to the continuance of family identity and financial security.

However, *Silverlake Life* and *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* do progressively examine the potential that the gay individual may have to form devoted relationships. At the same time, they consider the reception of this not only by close familial relations but also by the wider community. Whilst both texts may appear progressive in their potential to provide a platform for liminal (and liminoid) performance, which may in some way invert or critique dominant ideology (which suggests that coupling and sexual partnerships should only be franchised for heterosexuals), they at the same time recognise the limitations that subaltern identities must bear (the contentious position in which gay people may find themselves within the larger family and community environment). Consequently, although both films, are highly progressive, and they reveal signs of development regarding same-sex coupling, they contextualise themselves within the reality of meaningful scenarios. In other words, they recognise limitations (for gay identity)

and a need to fit in, rather than an expansive potential to overturn dominant ideals.

Conclusion

The emergence of gay performers in *Some of your Best Friends* and *Word is Out* set a precedent: this indicated the significance and power of confessional autobiographical performance. Whilst later AIDS-focused texts would relate the disease as a threat to the gay community and society at large, equally these would reveal performances based on disclosure, intimacy and the construction of the autobiographical social project. We may consider that this can be defined in terms of the emergence of gay performance which related identity possibilities through social construction, and rejected a history of subjugation which focused on essentialism and pathology. Gay performers progressively began to create identity constructs based not on defending their essential sexual activities, but by relating the social worlds they had lived in, and the imagined idealistic social spaces they would desire (to live within).

Through the relationship of liminal performance, we can see how the context of these exhibited and imagined social worlds has been necessarily related to the heterosexual experience. Hence through this liminal framing and contextualisation, powerful discursive performances have revealed similarities between homosexual and heterosexual social lives. Through the advent of AIDS, a coalescence became apparent which allowed the focusing of resistance to be spearheaded by male homosexuals. This defence against potential devastation provided an opportunity for the male homosexual to be seen less as an isolated subaltern component but instead as an active citizen working with peers, forming community and social bonds which would extend beyond the periphery of the gay community. This in a sense allowed for a reformulation concerning the reception of gay identity: the idea of a powerful and responsible, socially aware gay community began to emerge.

Whilst the more mainstream texts such as *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* and *Living Proof: HIV and the Pursuit of Happiness* may be seen to somewhat sanitise the graphic reality of AIDS, and possibly take the focus from the male homosexual, these texts nevertheless became celebrated discursive arenas which would stimulate debate, revealing a coalescence of gay social constructs.

Consequently the imagined potential seen in *Some of your Best Friends* and *Word is*

Out which is homogenised and partly sanitised in the mainstream texts is progressively revealed as graphic in *Absolutely Positive*, *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* and *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana*. The progression from isolated individual to content couples (albeit troubled with AIDS) may be seen as an emergence of the gay performer from subjugated yet active respondent, to increasingly franchised and enabled identity producer.

Through the presentation of contented same sex couples in *Silverlake Life* and *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana*, we may consider that a watershed has been reached. These texts, although clearly focusing on the advent of AIDS (to lesser and greater degrees), provide an arena for the association of ideas of normality which might surround same-sex couples (living in the family household). A progression from this point will be considered in later chapters, most notably in the instances where same sex couples may involve themselves in creating families (either through adoption or surrogate procreation, discussed in Chapter 6). Hence in the manner that *Silverlake Life* and *Fighting in Southwest Louisiana* provide evidence of the reservations that family relatives have against same-sex coupling (issues surrounding inheritance and failing to have family life with children), this imagined threat to heterosexual parenthood is further discussed. We will see that texts such as *Paternal Instinct* (Murray Nossel, 2003) do offer some resolution to this, in revealing the willingness of same sex couples to construct families, which involves procreation, and consequently focuses on the continuance of the family name (not that this should necessarily form the essence of what is required for same-sex couples to be franchised by the mainstream).

The significance of the family is foregrounded in the texts discussed above, and those that will follow. The formulation of same-sex relationships transgresses the normal boundaries of what may be considered in dominant terms as the traditional family. Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Caroline Donovan (2001) recognise that although the traditional heterosexual family still may be seen as the hierarchical template for regular healthy social life, same-sex families may be seen as progressive and potentially influential. They tell us that:

Non-heterosexuals feel they have more possibilities for two reasons: greater choice and openness in their relationships, and second, the belief that they can escape many of the structural differences, especially those of heterosexuality,

which limit traditional relationships. (p. 50)

Through this analysis the writers suggest that same-sex partners who construct families ultimately have the propensity to influence the contemporary concept of the family, considering that it should be seen more in terms of 'practice' rather than purely of 'institution'. This emphasis on practice rather than institution is clearly evident in the texts discussed here. Similarly, ideas of democracy are foregrounded in same-sex relationships, as compared to traditional ideas neither partner is expected to fulfil the subordinate or dominant role (as may be considered in evaluating the relationship between male and female: the expectation to fulfil gender-specific roles). Therefore the performances discussed here provide evidence of the ability for non-heterosexuals to create 'new patterns of life [which give not only] new meanings to their relationships, [but contribute to] a constantly evolving society' (Weeks et al, 2001: 50).

The relevance of this evolution is further discussed in the next chapter which while it still focuses on gay performance, moves outside the arena of traditional documentary and considers the significance of the performative narrative constructed documentary *The Real World* as an influential case study. Here within the (youth) family household (constructed by the producers), the gay performer became a recurring family member. This apparently sanitised, constructed world nevertheless provided an arena which would both promulgate the acceptance of gay performance, and at the same time would stimulate the potential to further develop gay identity constructs, including connecting this to romance.

Chapter 4: *The Real World*: Recurring Social Profiles, Romantic Narratives and Pedro Zamora¹

Introduction

The Real World is a ground-breaking MTV television series which has been produced each year since 1992. Although the show predates the term 'reality television' (see Holmes and Jermyn, 2004), we may consider the text as an early instance of this idea in its observation of social actors ('ordinary people'). The producers of *The Real World* regularly (usually annually) bring together a number of youths who are recorded living together in a household.² The opening sequences include a 'documentary like' claim. We are told:

This is the *true story* of seven strangers, picked to live in a house and have their lives taped to *find out what happens when people stop being polite* and start getting real.³

This is the only instance where the participants are made to follow a script. Using the words of the producers, we are presented with a claim of mediating 'social reality', rather than fiction. Since its inception, *The Real World* has consistently included gay participants as a recurring feature in the social profiles offered by the series.⁴ This has provided an opportunity for producers and performers alike, to stimulate many occasions where discourse has been generated relating to issues surrounding gay identity, and the politics of gay social existence. The most notable occasion may be that of *The Real World* San Francisco (1994).

This series offered openly gay Cuban Pedro Zamora publicity for his cause as an AIDS activist (see Figure 16). Pedro had already been involved in performing to

¹ This chapter includes material on *The Real World* which appears in an edited form in another publication (Pullen, 2004a)

² At the time of writing, the fifteenth season (Philadelphia, 2004) is the latest occurrence.

³ This occurs in every series. The text presented here (with emphasis provided through italics) comes from the first popular book to accompany the series (Johnson and Rommelmman, 1995: 4)

⁴ Openly gay participants in *The Real World* to date have been: Norman Korpi (New York - 1992) (identified as bisexual in the series), Beth Anthony (Los Angeles - 1993), Pedro Zamora (San Francisco - 1994), Dan Renzi (Miami - 1996), Genesis Moss (Boston - 1997), Ruthie Alcaide and Justin Deabler (Hawaii - 1999), Jason Daniel 'Danny' Roberts (New Orleans - 2000), Chris Beckman and Aneesa Ferreira (Chicago - 2002), Simon (Paris - 2003), Karamo and Willie (Philadelphia - 2004). Also, the fictional *The Real World* Lost Season (set in Vancouver) (2002) includes a gay character.

audiences prior to his appearance in *The Real World* (Brownworth, 1992). He had become an AIDS educator after discovering the disease in himself at the age of eighteen, soon after he embarked on an humanitarian mission to educate audiences concerning his personal experience as a gay youth with AIDS. Prior to participating in *The Real World* his work was not only reported on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* (Morgenthaler, 1991), he also testified before the American Congress (July 12th 1993) and spoke at a Capital Hill reception (November 1st 1993). Similarly, after appearing on *The Real World*, he had personal support from American president Bill Clinton.⁵

Consequently, the appearance of Pedro Zamora in *The Real World* may be seen less as an opportunity for the producers to find a cast member who would discover themselves in the show (providing entertainment), but moreover, the casting of Pedro engendered the producers to embark on a project supporting an individual who came with a powerful personal agenda (providing political discourse). The appearance of Pedro as a man with AIDS (and as a healthy-looking attractive non-Caucasian homosexual male) challenged cultural norms surrounding both the disease and gay cultural identity itself. Jose Munoz (1998) tells us:

The scene of two men of colour, both HIV positive [Sean, Pedro's partner was of black American descent], in bed together as they plan what is the equivalent of a marriage is like none that was then or now imaginable on television. (p. 189)

This ground-breaking representation of non-Caucasian gay men in love, who at the same time had to personally confront the issue of AIDS (and potentially homophobia and racial subjugation) became a highly politicised image. This suggested not only a knowingness in performance (Pedro came with an agenda), it also reveals a strategy in production (*The Real World* producers were aware of the contexts).

..... This chapter consequently discusses not only the discursive power of *The Real World* and its presentation of gay performers, it contextualises Pedro's appearance within the series as a defining moment, which has yet to be equalled. Although elsewhere I have discussed *The Real World* and Pedro Zamora in relation

⁵ See Appendix 2 which includes an official tribute from American President Bill Clinton, on hearing of the demise of Pedro Zamora. Also he recorded a video message in support of Pedro Zamora (as represented in *The Pedro Zamora Tribute*). Furthermore he communicated directly with Pedro by telephone shortly before his death, at which point although Pedro could not communicate when Bill Clinton asked if he could do anything to help, Pedro's friend Alex asked that he expedite visas for Pedro's remaining family in Cuba to visit him (Winnick, 2000: 145). Bill Clinton did this, allowing time for Pedro's family to pay their last respects to him.

to the idea of reality television and UK produced texts (Pullen, 2004), Pedro's outstanding contribution is further discussed here in relation to his performative potential. This chapter establishes Pedro's appearance as a highlight in an evolving canon of gay documentary performances.⁶ At the same time it evaluates other significant gay male performances in *The Real World*, alongside exploring inherent discursive and representational issues.

Whilst the series may not be considered as a documentary in the same context as the confessional documentaries discussed in the previous chapter (these have been discrete texts which ultimately display evidence of homogeneous performances/discourses), *The Real World* nevertheless provides a discursive space for social actors to perform within. Consequently, although the performances discussed here may not bear the same individual textual framing that confessional documentary may provide (appearing within a single text which possibly exhibits a particular political argument), gay performers within the series have nevertheless contributed to a 'potentially malleable' discursive arena (performers can attempt to mould the discourse). Although this arena is not fixed or organised in the same manner as a documentary (which may appear to provide a distinct point of view), it nevertheless provides 'incidences of opportunity' for the social actor to perform within a media frame. Furthermore as *The Real World* forms part of discursive space produced by MTV, it has the potential to reach world wide audiences which may extend far beyond the boundaries of audiences reached by traditional documentary. This suggests that the producers of *The Real World*, although seemingly involved in the production of a popular audience-stimulated text, in providing over twelve years of annual product recording the social performances of (mostly American) youths, may be seen as much as an anthropological project as a commodified product.⁷

The following discussion considers the potential of *The Real World* to generate anthropological and discursive arenas which may be considered to focus on the idea of gay performance/identity. Similarly, the storytelling processes involved will be discussed with relation to the idea of documentary. Furthermore,

⁶ It is important to note that Pedro Zamora also appeared in the educational documentary *In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS* (Jeanne Blake for Family Health Productions inc., 1995). This text foregrounds Pedro's commitment to educate teen audiences about AIDS. It also focuses on the work of David Kamens: a young gay man with AIDS equally committed to educating audiences (see Brownsworth (1992) for a discussion on Pedro and David's work prior to this documentary). Consequently in the context of discussing the canon of gay documentary performances, it seems apparent that the contribution of gay male youths affected by AIDS requires further examination. (*Danny* (Stashu Kybartas, 1987) should also be examined here).

⁷ This idea is also supported by Bunim-Murray producer Tracey Chaplin (See Chaplin, 2003).

performative instances will be examined in the form of case studies, most notably focusing on *Real World* performers: Pedro Zamora, San Francisco season (1994), Dan Renzi, Miami season (1996) and Danny Roberts, New Orleans season (2000). At the same time other performative contributions will be discussed in relation to the issues examined here.

The Anthropological and Discursive Potential of *The Real World*.

Discussing the anthropological potential of documentary film, Margaret Mead (1995) tells us:

[N]o film has ever been made without some co-operation from the people whose dance or ceremony was being filmed. ... [It's possible that] the filmmaker [will] impose ... his view of the culture and people that are [represented]. ... This cannot, I believe ever be entirely prevented. (p. 7)

Although we may not consider *The Real World* as a truly anthropological text (in that the performances of the participants occur within a constructed environment, rather than a natural habitat), Margaret Mead points out that even in instances where natural behaviour may be recorded, this always involves agreement to participate (by the subjects) and some mediation or framing (by the producers).

To some degree in all filmic anthropological analysis 'cognition of performance' is involved (the performers know they are being filmed), and 'interpretation of performance' is unavoidable (the producers inevitably generate their own textual meaning). Therefore whilst *The Real World* may appear as the antithesis to the idea of revealing some natural behaviour with its evident self referentiality (performers and producers unavoidably would be aware of performative expectations, as increasingly more and more series are produced and broadcast), no textual product can ever deliver the 'essence of human behaviour'. Producers can only ever attempt to do this, capitalising on some sort of relationship they form with the performers. Any relationship which might establish some connection between the idea of 'voluntary performance' and 'willing interpretation' will inevitably involve framing and mediation.

Consequently, although *The Real World* removes the social actor from their normal environment and supplants them within an 'un-natural reality' (the household), this may be seen less as 'laboratory conditions' (imposed contained

settings) but more as 'framing conditions' (the usual settings are reformed). Evidence of this may be seen in that the household setting takes the essence of the idea of the home but adapts it for ease of filming. This involves not only installing surveillance equipment (fixed cameras). The producers remove doors (replaced with curtains) so cameramen can be given free access to behaviour as it occurs (without hindrance). Obviously the presence of cameras and recording equipment stimulates the likelihood that performers will moderate their behaviour in the knowledge that they are likely to be filmed (this is true of all the performances discussed in this thesis).

However, the issues raised by this, such as those surrounding the idea of 'conditions which stimulate performative knowingness' and potential 'modification of normal behaviour', are beyond the remit of this study. In this way, should it be considered that a performer is 'acting differently' than he would were there no cameras present, or that should he be filmed in his natural environment and we may experience some other type of reading, for the purpose of this study these issues are not explored. Consequently, truthfulness to 'real' personality type is not examined, only 'the represented form of the performance' is discussed, in relation to 'relevant discursive contexts'. Hence although performances in *The Real World* are discussed here in relation to the context of their conditional setting, they are evaluated more in terms of their performative potential, than their truthfulness as unstimulated human behaviour. In this way, the discussion continues to consider evidence of social construction and identity ideals, inherent in the performances.

Consequently, although we may not initially consider *The Real World* as a truly anthropological text (in comparison to those issues discussed within the domain of anthropology as an academic field), it is evident that all 'anthropological' texts involve knowingness and interpretation (see Edward Said, 1995, regarding the interpretive context of academia). Consequently, the idea of discovering the 'essence' of human behaviour, as some anthropology discourses suggest, seems untenable. The anthropological performative value of *The Real World* may be seen less as 'evidence of unmediated behaviour' and more as 'reading the signs of identity and social construction'. This is possible not only with relation to evaluating the performances discussed below, but also in considering the world-wide broadcast potential of *The Real World*, and the discursive worlds which surround it.

MTV's significance is the essential building block in evaluating *The Real World's* standing as a powerful cultural text. Through the inter-relationship between MTV and the series producers Bunim-Murray, over twelve years have been devoted to the continual production of performances within *The Real World*.⁸ This has not only generated a substantial text which through MTV could be broadcast to almost 400 million homes world wide,⁹ a legacy has been produced which reflects the lifestyles and social activities of over 100 youths recorded between the years of 1992 and 2004. In this way the series may be viewed as a cumulative ongoing project, which possesses the ability to display a changing world regarding the habits and preferences of a particular section of society (youths of mostly a western origin, below the age of 25).

The social profiles included during the series reveal the power of MTV to express its ideas of acceptability regarding diversity and youth identity. Racial and sexual minorities are included regularly in the line-up, suggesting that rather than being located on the periphery of society, these should be included as part of the whole. Although some commentators such as Enns and Smit (1999) suggest that:

[*The Real World's*] attempt to foster diversity is not only transparently artificial but also undercuts itself by using and sometimes reinforcing racial and gender stereotypes in order to inspire conflict, which inspires ratings. (p.16)

This type of emotional analysis fails to investigate the performative potential of those involved in the series, and the significance that visibility may have for 'outside' minorities. Although the use of minority identities on *The Real World* undoubtedly involves commodification, and this process suggests a bias towards the commercial needs of the producers rather than the needs of the performers, a potentially political context is provided by the producers focussing attention on normally disenfranchised

⁸ Bunim-Murray is the production company which produces *The Real World* for MTV. Its co-founders are Jonathan Murray and Marry-Ellis Bunim. Although filming takes approximately five months for each series, I have described this as a continual production, as recording, editing, post production, site location and site refurbishment may be considered as an ongoing process which has not ceased since 1992.

⁹ MTV ('Music Television') as an organisation has not only become a prominent cultural provider in contemporary society, it offers numerous music channels on satellite and cable TV. It reaches world-wide audiences, potentially broadcasting to '396 million homes in 166 territories' (MTV, 2004). This is not to say that *The Real World* has been broadcast in every MTV region, however as an MTV produced text it forms the core of its cultural ideology, and has been broadcast worldwide (Murray, 2002)

social identities. Whilst this does indeed suggest 'use' (a commodity for MTV), it also involves 'opportunity' (a potential for the performer). Furthermore the idea of 'reconfiguration' may be apparent, in extending concepts of *included* social identities.

Evidence of this may be seen not only in MTV commissioning *The Real World* (and condoning the recurring appearance of homosexuals),¹⁰ but moreover MTV has involved itself in political strategies which promote gay lifestyles. This may be seen in the advertising campaign called "Do You Speak MTV?" which included an advert titled 'The Language of Love' which featured one heterosexual and two homosexual couples (gay male and lesbian) in amorous engagement. The 'Commercial Closet' (a website devoted to the analysis of adverts which feature homosexual discourse) tells us:

MTV's inclusion of lesbians and gays has been exemplary for years, [not only] in popular programs such as reality series *The Real World*, former dating game *Singled Out* and the late-night teen soap *Undressed*. ... MTV [above all other advertisers has produced] the most [advertisements] that refer to the [gay] community, more than 17 since 1996, in addition to [broadcasting] numerous gay [advertisements] from other companies and running its own supportive gay-inclusive programming. (Commercial Closet, 2004)

Consequently, whilst Enns and Smit (1999) may have a point that in essence *The Real World* may be a commodified product, MTV nevertheless has exhibited a commitment to include gay people in a way that is exemplary (even if it is associated with commodification). Similarly Bunim-Murray display evidence that they support the inclusion of gay people outside commercial priorities.

Jon Murray (co-founder of Bunim-Murray) establishes himself as a political agent with a personal agenda which involves stimulating the inclusion of gay participants in the series. This may be seen in his standing as an openly gay man, who along with co-producer Mary-Ellis Bunim often records interest in encouraging gay participants for the series (see Figure 14). If we consider the evidence of the popular books which have been published to accompany the series (Johnson and Rommelmann, 1995; Keyishian and Malarkey, 1996; Solomon and Carter, 1997; Solomon, 1998; Pollett, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002; Squires, 2003), these record not only important information regarding occurrences in the various households where

¹⁰ Tracey (2002) confirms MTV are involved in the casting process.

filming has been involved (including personal profiles on the different cast members), they usually include personal messages from the series producers. In the publication which accompanies *The Real World* Seattle (Solomon, 1998) Jon Murray discloses personal details concerning his sexuality:

I was my parent's only remaining child after my brother's death. So I felt it very important for me not to cause them any undue harm or sadness ... So, among other things, I chose not to deal with the fact that I was gay until after college. I knew I was a gay teenager. But concealing that kind of knowledge was the norm at the time. ... I was much happier when I was ultimately able to embrace and reveal my sexuality (quoted in Solomon, 1998: 4)

The tradition of Murray and Bunim commenting on the series in the popular books is a continuing feature which undoubtedly may be considered part of *The Real World's* inter-textual cultural value. Significantly Jon Murray's heartfelt and rewarding discourse occurs in the book which accompanies a series (Seattle) where no openly gay participant is part of the cast. However, it is notable that this instance (possibly the most personal message from Jon Murray regarding his sexuality) coincides with a series where gay discourse was generated with negative connotations. This was seen in an episode devoted to a suggestion that certain cast members may be assumed to be homosexual (even though they purport to be heterosexual), and an episode which focuses on conflict between cast members where actual physical harm is actioned as a response to alleged homosexuality. Consequently, a brief analysis of this from the Seattle season follows, in order to illuminate the continual discursive propensity of *The Real World* to focus on the idea of homosexuality (even when there is no openly gay performer in the series).

The Seattle Season and Gay Identity

The opening episode of *The Real World* Seattle involves the usual 'settling in' of the house members into the household. In this episode it is suggested that cast members David and Stephen are thought to be gay. This idea is unobtrusively posed as it is a regular occurrence for the household to include a gay cast member. Significantly in this episode, both David and Stephen reveal that they are not homosexual, and cast member Irene tells us "I don't think questions dealing with sexuality should be asked ever ... People want to share it with you or they don't". It

is significant that these three cast members comment on sexuality in this manner, as it foreshadows debate and conflict which arises in episodes six and fifteen (featuring these cast members).

Episode six circulates around the idea of associating gay identity with David and Stephen. David develops a new friendship with another male (Harry) who he encounters at the gym. After Harry invites David around to his house to watch movies (something which David believes that only intimate partners usually do), David realises that Harry is interested in developing a homosexual relationship with him. David confides with fellow housemates: "I am trying to be nice about things, and trying to be cool because he is such a nice guy. But I am starting to feel he thinks I am a *closet case*". Later David feels insecure, and questions both fellow housemate Janet, and female friend Kelly, enquiring if they consider that he may appear to be a gay man. Both respond (separately) that they considered this possibility. In the same episode, Stephen, who is recorded as saying in the opening episode "we want to find out for some odd reason [if there is a gay person in the household]" (and is thereby denoted as being interested in homosexuality), similarly is thought to be gay. This incident is linked to David's potential identification by Harry, in Harry's friend (also called) David who asks if Stephen might be gay. Stephen himself adds to the suggestion that he may be homosexual or at least bisexual by telling us in the 'personal' confessional "there are some things in life that can't be pre-determined. ... I am going to have to ... stay really ambiguous, and know that there are some surprises out there". This incident is further complicated with colleague Aubbie (the leader of *The Real World* project employment at a radio station) spreading the rumour that Stephen may be gay (something which Stephen confronts her with and she apologises). Consequently, episode one signals the likelihood that misinterpreted gay identification may be an issue, and this is consolidated in episode six which similarly foreshadows a further confrontational incident, which occurs in episode fifteen.

Episode fifteen includes a sequence where the producers suggest that Stephen experiences psychological panic at being identified (again) as homosexual. An incident occurs where housemate Irene has decided to leave the household after experiencing illness from Lymes disease (and along the way experiencing closeness to Stephen then prior to her departure, experiencing tension). Irene, on departing the household says her final words to Stephen (out of earshot of the accompanying cast): "a marriage between you and me would never work, because you are a homosexual".

Stephen's initial response is to laugh. Immediately following this, as Irene continues to depart, Stephen antagonises her by instantly returning to the house exhibiting a favourite possession of hers (a teddy bear that she had slept with, which Stephen had concealed in revenge for his earlier discontent), and he proceeds to throw this in the nearby waterway. Then he runs up to the car, where Irene is now seated, opens the door and slaps her face. Such disturbance is caused by this incident that the producers of *The Real World* in the following episode break with tradition and reveal to the remaining housemates (who are worried about Stephen's behaviour) the filmed sequence of Stephen's and Irene's encounter. Through revealing this, the housemates consider that Stephen was antagonised by Irene. This extraordinary incident (revealing filmed footage) occurred in order to pacify the housemates who were considering ejecting Stephen for such unsocial behaviour (in the end Stephen was not ejected) (see Figure 19).

Stephen's exhibition of 'psychological panic' at potential homosexual identification possibly engendered the issue of suppressing homosexual identity as a prioritised 'concern' for inclusion in the accompanying book. It is possible that Jon Murray explains personal issues surrounding suppressing or rejecting homosexual identity in the Seattle season book (discussed above) in order to alleviate this tension.¹¹ This strand of thought is extended in the commercially available *The Real World: Greatest Fights* (2000). The confrontation between Irene and Stephen is foregrounded, as a 'classic' (yet represented as misunderstood) *Real World* conflict. We are presented with an interview with Stephen recalling the event (on location where it originally happened), and additional unbroadcasted footage is supplied to try to explain how this conflict occurred. Most significantly, as if to alleviate the situation (possibly defending *The Real World's* stance as supporting gay identity) Stephen tells us (when stimulated by the interviewer concerning his likely standing as a homosexual) "I am currently in a 'little' relationship, but who knows maybe one day I'll go crazy, or maybe I'll just go right. ... I think that dating anyone is possible".

Whether Stephen was coached to provide a pro-gay stance, or whether he may be a homosexual who does not want to identify himself in such a way is not the issue. It is evident that through the example of the discourse provided by the series

¹¹ Whilst Jon Murray (2004) does not openly recognise this, he frankly tells us 'I don't really remember what I wrote in the book, though I've always felt it important to be honest about who I am in hopes that it will have a positive impact on young men struggling with their sexuality.' Also concerning Stephen he notes, 'I think most of the audience assumed Stephen was gay, and that his over-reaction to Irene's insults was confirmation of this'.

(questioning sexual identity): Jon Murray's personal testament which coincides with this, and the performance of Stephen in *The Greatest Fights* video, three separate yet connected texts involved themselves in providing discourse concerning gay sexuality. This is exceptional for a series which did not include a gay performer, yet not unexpected, bearing in mind the proclivity of the producers of *The Real World* to support the idea of generating discourse which focuses on gay identity. The most powerful discourse generated by *The Real World*, however, may be related to the life and death of Pedro Zamora. This example makes an interesting case study in order to explore ideas surrounding the narrative strategies involved in the series.

Storytelling Processes: Confessional Performance and Narrative Strategy

The Real World provides its storytelling through selecting diverse narrative components. It selects narratives in popular songs, and narratives in confessional performances, and brings them together in a manner that may be considered as postmodern. This emphasis on 'micronarratives', and an 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1979: xxiv) may be seen as typical of MTV and its postmodern potential (Goodwin, 2003; Grossberg, 1989; Kaplan, 1989). The foundation of MTV in 1981, with its dedication to twenty-four hour music/visual broadcast, stimulated the increasing prominence of the video sequence as an important, yet segmented, narrative component (Pullen, 2004c). The bringing together of music and visuals (locked together in the video segment) offers a diegetic (story world) of its own. This may involve the diegesis and visuals surrounding the performer and the performance. At the same time it may involve the narratives/myths/semiotics offered by its lyrics and music. These elements together may form an essence which contributes to a postmodern, fragmented method of storytelling. This avoids the imposition of metanarratives, and involves the collation of micronarratives. Hence the production values involved in *The Real World* may not only be seen to reflect the cultural heritage/influence of MTV, but also to display a postmodern ethic in its narrative strategy.

Although *The Real World* may be seen to adopt a collage-like process in its organisation of micronarratives, it also employs a hierarchy in selecting and contextualising its narrative sequences/components. The following example not only brings into context Pedro Zamora's political contribution to society and the closure of his life-story narrative as exhibited in *The Pedro Zamora Tribute* (Bunim Murray

for MTV, 1994, US), at the same time it may be seen as representational of the narrativisation employed in *The Real World*. Diverse narrative strands are brought together in the service of constructing (or complementing) documented performances.¹² This involves selection and prioritisation. Whilst 'confessional performances' may form the essence of narrative performativity in *The Real World*, and the context of the 'popular song' is of secondary importance, the discussion which follows initially deals with the 'component use' of 'contemporary music'. This is presented in order to establish a working model which may reveal evident narrative strategies involved in both the use of music and confessional performances.

The *Pedro Zamora Tribute* records Pedro Zamora's life as an AIDS activist, and at the same time it discusses his participation in *The Real World* San Francisco (1994) and the events that followed this (including his death). Towards the end of the text we are presented with an emotional sequence which leads up to and records the announcement of Pedro's demise.

[The image changes from internal then external images of the church, then we are presented with a 'closing in' image of Mercy Hospital in Miami (denoting a connection between the two locales). Non diegetic music in the form of a popular vocal song accompanies this sequence]¹³

Lyrics: I'll take your breath away, and after, wipe away your tears. Just close your eyes. ...

Dr Corklin Steinhart (of Mercy Hospital): As you probably know, Pedro Zamora died this morning at 4.40am. ... [Pedro] took it upon himself when he found he was HIV positive to educate the young people in this country. He never asked for anything, he did it very un-selfishly. And I think the best legacy he can leave will be for that message never to end.

Here the use of the popular song not only bears a poignant connotation (relating loosing breath, and experiencing sadness), but in terms of form it also acts as a signalling device which foreshadows the announcement of Pedro's demise.

In narrative terms we may relate this to Roland Barthes' (1977) ideas. He argues:

¹² *The Pedro Zamora Tribute* was produced by Bunim Murray (producers of *The Real World*)

¹³ Song: 'Possession' by Sarah McLachlan (1994). See Appendix 3

[Narrative] ... units are not all of the same 'importance': some constitute real hinge points in the narrative (or fragment of the narrative); others merely 'fill-in' the narrative space separating the hinge functions. Let us call the former *cardinal functions* (or nuclei) and the latter, having regard to their contemporary nature, *catalysers*.(p. 93)

Like ideas of Seymour Chatman (1978) of 'kernel' and 'satellite', this proposition allows us to consider the idea that there is a central narrative drive/essence (cardinal/kernel) and a peripheral narrative impetus (catalyser/satellite). Through this observation it is possible to analyse the use and hierarchy of narrative(s) which are present. The central 'cardinal/kernel' narrative drive is the story of Pedro and his impending death. The peripheral 'catalyser/satellite' narrative concerns the lyrics of the song which foreshadows Pedro's demise. This is a contrasting narrative which, while it is not directly connected to Pedro's story, is used by the producers as a 'breathing space' before the announcement of Pedro's demise (the cardinal narrative).

As Barthes argues 'cardinal functions are the risky moments of a narrative. Between these points of alternative, these 'dispatchers', the catalysers lay out areas of safety, rests, luxuries' (1977: 95). Therefore, whilst the use of the 'catalyser narrative' song predicts the 'cardinal narrative' turning point, its location as a peripheral 'catalyser' not only contrasts/compliments the 'cardinal' mood, it may also be seen as a premonition of actual events. The segmented use of songs (as described above) undoubtedly plays an important part in the diegetic construction of *The Real World*. Similarly, we may also consider that 'confessional performances' play a 'catalyser' role in developing and directing the narrative flow.

Personal confessional performances are made possible (and encouraged) in *The Real World*. This occurs with the requirement for cast members to be regularly available for personal interview (which is recorded), and the availability of a 'confession box' like room in the household (in which cast members record themselves).¹⁴ The significance of the 'confessional' room is that it allows the participants to freely record 'direct to camera' observations, feelings and desires regarding their experience. This material may not be stimulated by the producers (as they record themselves on their own). The personal interview encourages similar

¹⁴ See 'The Real Deal: Interview schedule' (Squires, 2003: 106) which confirms that cast members should be interviewed for two hours once a week. Also see 'The Real Deal: Confessional' which advises us that 'each roommate is required to record 15 minutes per week in the confessional' (Squires, 2003: 100)

confessional performative material to be produced. This may to some degree be stimulated by the interviewer (the interviewer may pose probing questions, aware of possible issues). The availability of opportunities like these suggests that there exists a therapeutic property (the participants may alleviate tension by recording discontent (or expressing happiness)), and at the same time it provides an opportunistic essence (it allows the producers to select commentary which may be seen as personal and intimate). Consequently, the benefit for the producers is that confessional footage may be seen to possess a certain validity which extends beyond the recording of conversation in the household: the voluntary performances to camera, or to interviewer (whose voice we never hear), are often intense and heartfelt. Such access to apparent personal disclosure unsurprisingly engenders the appeal of confessional performative footage as the preferred method of narrative delivery: confessional performances are used to 'hinge' and 'propel' the narrative strands selected by the producers.

The significance of confessional performances may be related to their use within *The Real World* text as 'catalyser' narratives. Whilst these discursive components may not necessarily always be directly related to the cardinal narrative (they may be complimentary or incidental) they have the potential to stimulate and direct the narrative flow and impetus. In doing so they are discursive textual components. Like the idea of the power of confession, as already discussed in relation to the ideas of Foucault (1972, 1984, 1998), they exhibit the discursive potential of the author. In order to examine this, an analysis of episode one of *The Real World* San Francisco season follows.

The Real World San Francisco season (1994) episode one represents the introduction of Pedro's narrative (whilst *The Pedro Zamora Tribute* represents the closure). In order to foreground the impending significance of Pedro Zamora, as the major (preferred) narrative provider, the producers use Pedro's confessional performances to construct the cardinal narrative of the episode: Pedro's identity as a person with HIV whose presence within the household is likely to stimulate concern. The storytelling is mostly provided by Pedro. Although all housemates at some point are depicted as providing confessional performances, if we consider a breakdown of storylines (attributed to different cast mates) we find that Pedro is used to drive the narrative (providing 41% of the confessional performance-driven sequences: see Appendix 4). Although there are instances where no confessional performance is used to direct the narrative (for example when Cory and Pedro arrive at the Golden

Gate Bridge in San Francisco) for the greater part, confessional performances hinge and direct the storytelling (66% of the total episode time). As discussed earlier, no voiceover is apparent other than the use of confessional performances as storytelling. The presence of the cast mates as performers directing the narrative bears a connotation of personal and intimate discursive delivery.

Pedro is immediately signalled as a potential lead performer and a central site of narrative connectedness in the opening episode. Evidence of this is presented by including a statement from Pedro suggesting that the room-mates' house is located on a street which symbolically represents the centre of Pedro's desire: "Lombard street is the crookedest [most winding] street in the USA, which I find interesting, because I pretty [well] don't much want anything 'straight' in my life". Similarly Puck is also identified in the opening episode as a possible lead storyteller, but in opposition to Pedro. He discusses his potential room-mates, saying "None of [them] are going to be like me!" and is then seen to let a dog eat from his plate. This statement and action clearly identifies him as oppositional in character to Pedro, who is concerned with identifying his similarity to other members of the household, and necessarily has strict hygiene requirements. Although the Pedro and Puck opposition would become one of the main narrative strands (discussed below), a performance by Rachel (in the opening episode) is not only seen to be the most intimate (in the opening episode), but it also reveals the cardinal narrative.

Rachel is identified early in the episode as a Republican (by herself, and Judd). These performative indictments locate her as a likely site of discontent regarding AIDS and homosexuality: it is suggested/implied that she may not be liberal, and therefore would be unlikely to understand issues which might surround Pedro. This premonition is further foregrounded in what might be termed as the 'performative sequence' which establishes the 'cardinal narrative'. This occurs where Rachel is depicted as providing a confession in the 'confessional' room. In aesthetic terms we are aware that this is not a stimulated (interview) performance as her image appears in black and white (indicating it is an image from the confessional). Furthermore, her stance, leaning into the camera view (with hands clasped), confirms that this is a recording made by herself with the aid of a static camera (also it reveals that she is concerned and eager). Prior to this, Pedro contextualises the event "Rachel just kind of kept away. She sat down with the group [whilst I was discussing my work as an AIDS activist] then just got up and left". Rachel then tells us (we may assume that she has instantly dispatched herself to the confessional room to record this

discontent):

I want to ask some 'hardcore' questions. About how [AIDS is] going to affect him, how its going to affect us, as his roommates. None of those things were discussed, everybody was just in so much admiration of his accomplishments [if I had asked] a question at that point [I would have appeared like] the 'bitch'.¹⁵

The intensified intimacy of Rachel's performance allows the audience to read the performance as an essential moment (revealing inner thoughts, and possibly reflecting something which was expected bearing in mind the significance of San Francisco (the importance of gay identity and the significance of AIDS)). Also this performance is the first instance in the episode where the 'confessional' has appeared, and more significantly it marks the coalescence of prior performances. These earlier catalyser performance sequences mostly focused on Pedro (or were delivered by him); up to this point the audience were not entirely aware what the 'cardinal narrative' (the predominant storyline) of the series would be. The appearance of Rachel in the 'confessional' both confirms the likely narrative development (which will extend throughout the series), and establishes Pedro as the central performative author of the text.

Through using Pedro as the lead storyteller, the producers of *The Real World* prioritise his storytelling. This places a focus on his role as an AIDS educator, and his standing as a non Caucasian male homosexual. This suggests that *The Real World* producers are promulgating discursive ideas which might not be considered as mainstream issues. Consequently, there may be a focus, to use John Corner's terms (2002), on 'documentary as journalistic inquiry and exposition' (p. 259), rather than 'documentary as diversion' (p. 259). In this way unlike 'post documentary' (p. 263), which John Corner associates with the 'diversion' of reality television shows like *Big Brother* (UK), a focus is made on 'examination', rather than 'play'. Evidence of this may be seen in the examination of Pedro dealing with AIDS, and house mates' relation to this. Furthermore, it is not only through the producer's selection of Pedro's narratives, but also it is the larger scale 'performative presence of social actors resisting subjugation' in *The Real World*, which engenders a 'documentary like' reading for the series.

¹⁵ The moment of discovering Pedro's condition may have been a surprise to roommates. And although Mary Ellis Bunim (co-producer) tells us that potential participants were not informed they would be living with a person who has AIDS 'during the interview process [they] were asked about views on AIDS and people who test positive for HIV' (quoted in Grubbs, 2002: 19).

MTV's original intention in commissioning *The Real World* was that the series would become a soap opera. This idea was later abandoned as the costs for such a product were too excessive for the budget imagined (Murray, 2002). However, the idea of soap opera remained. The producers of *The Real World* discuss the generic ambivalence of the show:

Mary-Ellis Bunim: I came out of soap operas. In all, I executive-produced 2,500 hours of soaps over thirteen years before Jon and I created [the] show. (quoted in Solomon, 1998: 6)

Jon Murray: I came out of broadcast journalism. ... As for *The Real World*, I think it's a documentary, but its constructed like a soap. What happens is real but we apply the dramatic standards of good storytelling to the material. If there is a flirtation between two people, well, we're going to play that up. We're going to use the right interviews to tell the story. (quoted in Solomon, 1998: 6)

Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jon Murray highlight the predominant generic influences inherent in the production of the show: soap opera and documentary. Murray's background in journalism and Bunim's in soap opera provided the previous experience which stimulated their interest in producing a series which would not only be considered as 'cost effective', it would also be considered ground breaking. Evidence of this may be seen in its approach to narrative construction, regarding the employment of popular narrative ideals (soap opera-like) to document the performance of social actors (documentary-like).

Like the soap opera, *The Real World* selects and prioritises certain narrative strands which may endure throughout the varying series, and at the same time it provides a familiar locale as a recurring context. Evidence of this may be seen in the selection of discursive issues which may be of interest to popular audiences (such as Pedro's unique story, or more generally potential romance/conflicts between participants). Furthermore, the 'familiarity of [the soap household] space' (Geraghty, 1991: 14) is evident in the recurring iconic presence of *The Real World* house (although the series is filmed in varying locations the idea of the household is a recurring context). Like soap opera it involves itself with multi-layered narratives (it presents many stories at a time – which may or may not be connected). However, although Robert C Allen (1985) tells us that 'one of the distinctive .. features of soap opera is the absence of ultimate narrative closure [and it is] one of the few narrative

forms predicated upon the impossibility of closure (p. 69), we are aware that this 'impossibility' has to be addressed in *The Real World* as the series is recorded for a specific duration. Consequently, the idea of narrative closure is foregrounded in a limit on recording time, involving available footage and an end date of the series.¹⁶ Therefore although we may detect similarities in the narrative construction of *The Real World* and soap opera, the idea of endlessness (not knowing when the series will conclude) is not apparent.¹⁷ Therefore it is suggested that although soap-like narrative strategies may be deployed, these may relate for the most part to the popularisation of diverse narrative strands which may be multi-layered, and the familiarity of the format and ideological locale. Despite *The Real World* displaying evidence of 'soap opera-like' narrative strategies regarding the 'use of material', if we consider the 'collection of material' we discover entirely different strategies employed which may be viewed as more 'documentary-like'.

The producers impose documentary ethics in the collection of material (footage is never 'deliberately' stimulated, or required to be re-staged (or re-performed) to contextualise issues (Chaplin, 2003)). Therefore in the collection of recorded material, an anthropological approach is adopted, in which the producers do not attempt to interfere with the performers. Whilst they are housed in *The Real World* household and are filmed using varying cameras (from fixed surveillance cameras to cameras held by cameramen), they are also given the liberty to do as they wish, and to go where they like.¹⁸ If their chosen venue agrees to the presence of the film crew, then the participants are filmed within the relevant location (Chaplin, 2003).¹⁹ This also involves the liberty to leave the urban locale (often resulting in participants being filmed on vacation or visiting friends/relatives). Although there is an expectation for all housemates to work together in some capacity (a seasonal task or employment is proposed by the producers),²⁰ and this may be seen as stimulating artificial scenarios, generally we may consider that performances are voluntary, rather than required. Evidence of this may be seen in that no dialogue is scripted in

¹⁶ Tracey Chaplin (2003) tells that the duration of series length may vary. He cites the incident of the Las Vegas season (2002) where a larger amount of episodes were produced due to the appealing nature of material available (the useable material was more than normal).

¹⁷ Its possible to suggest endlessness may be related to the idea of the continuing series, but these always involve different performers, and consequently different storylines.

¹⁸ *The Real World Paris: Culture Shock* (Squires, 2003) lists producer's rules and expectations under a recurring heading called 'The Real Deal' (pages: vi, 32, 80, 92, 100, 106, 110). Also outside producers' rules, cast members have been ejected by majority voting in the household (*The Real World* seasons: Los Angeles, 1993, and San Francisco, 1994).

¹⁹ Producers are informed by participants where they are likely to go then attempts are made by the production team to see if it is viable to film there (Chaplin, 2003)

²⁰ This was introduced in the Miami series.

any form (other than over the opening credit voiceover – provided by the housemates), neither is the form of their performance stipulated.

In terms of performative bias, this equates with 'liminoid' (Schechner, 2002; Turner, 1982) and 'carnavalesque' (Bakhtin, 1965, 1994) potential. Therefore the participants are able to exhibit personal performances which may not conform to expectations. If participants perform within the household (or in an environment agreed for filming) they will be recorded, and this may end up in the eventual textual product. Consequently, whilst these performances would be contextualised (in the eventual product) within the liminal (hierarchical) context of the household, nevertheless at the time of filming there exists a freedom for the performer to potentially mould the textual product (by supplying ingredients which may be used). In order to examine this performative potential, this discussion will continue to focus on the performance of Pedro Zamora.

Pedro and the Performative Body

In *The Real World* San Francisco, discourse surrounding the physical presence of Pedro Zamora focuses on his relationship to AIDS, whilst narratives concerning Puck are oppositional to Pedro. Puck is represented as unhygienic, and consequently is seen as a physical threat to Pedro (disease can be more easily spread to Pedro through his HIV compromised immune system). Evidence of this is seen in the opening episode where Puck reveals a lack of hygiene (as discussed: letting the dog eat off his plate). Similarly, Puck discusses his pride relating to physical injuries gained from having accidents on his bike (he reveals his scars and scabs to the housemates): these have mostly been gained through irresponsible behaviour whilst cycling (we see him hold on to cars, as if being towed). The threat to Pedro is graphically exhibited when Puck is shown to put his (presumed unclean and recently cut) finger in a jar of peanut butter. In the opening episode trailer for the series we see this representation with Pedro commenting "this is exactly who I do not want to live with". Consequently the bodily performance of Puck is represented as threatening to Pedro (through thoughtlessly gaining injuries, and potentially spreading disease). If we compare Pedro's bodily presence/performance, we can see the emergence of a discursive power which supports Pedro and criticises Puck.

Whilst Puck is seen to perform irresponsibly: willingly making his body vulnerable to damage (his cyclist antics), and then carelessly revealing his lack of

concern for spreading infection (the finger in the jar), Pedro uses his body as an object of performance connecting with issues surrounding AIDS, and promoting his political cause. The producers in representing Pedro, juxtapose his good looks against his declining health. This may be seen in Pedro proffering his physical presence as an object of both 'desire' (his natural good looks and charm) and 'disorder' (a metaphor for the tragedy of AIDS (Sontag, 1989)). This performative potential may be seen in the objectification of his body in a very political and moving sequence (this scene occurs while Pedro visits his family in Miami, where he falls ill). Telephone conversations are made by Pedro trying to obtain medical advice:

[Pedro is depicted on a bed, partly clothed and sweating] ...

Pedro: "Basically when I breathe my chest hurts. I am just concerned that it could be pneumonia."

Healthcare voice on phone: "You know, we're a kind of corporation right now. Patients have to have insurance." ...

Pedro: "I want x-rays, so I could know ... I'll hold. ... And I'll pay for it." ...

Healthcare voice: "One second caller."

[sound as if phone cut off – Pedro looks up as if in disbelief]

Pedro: [to camera] "If I am dying, I would be [****] dead by now" (episode 13)

Following this, we are party to his medical examination. The healthy looking Pedro removes his shirt and turns his back to the camera. While placing his chest within the body of the x-ray machine, he holds his body taut against the machinery, vividly revealing the extent of his emaciation from AIDS, displaying the seriousness of his illness by proffering his body as an object for examination. This scene, through creative editing and dramatic juxtaposition, not only comments on the lack of state medical care available to people like Pedro, and entreats the audience to sympathise, it counterpoints the bodily performance of Puck.

Hence it is possible to read Pedro (in bodily performative terms) as 'organised', 'responsible' and 'politically aware' and Puck as 'out of control', 'irresponsible' and 'threatening'. This opposition locates Pedro as the site of productive discursive power, relating powerful physical presence and control, and Puck as fragmented and reactionary, conveying self imposed damage and intent to be

irresponsible. Consequently, the performative reading of Pedro compared to Puck, reveals Pedro to be productive and selfless (he uses his body as discursive site of power supporting AIDS education, yet does not consider the cost to himself), and Puck to be destructive and selfish (he exposes his body to danger without reason other than to impress, and consequently is self obsessed). Therefore through the opposition between Pedro and Puck, it is possible to see how such a contrast empowers Pedro's discursive presence,²¹ and counters Puck's textual potential.

This oppositional contrast shows the potential of the producers (and Pedro) to overturn stereotypical ideas surrounding AIDS. It reveals not the person with AIDS as the threat, but the uneducated person, who is deliberately disrespectful of the disease, as the cause for concern. The analysis which follows extends the idea that 'respect' of dominant values is a priori requirement for social acceptance within *The Real World*. Pedro's elevated position was possible through exhibiting his profound humanitarian ethos. Later case studies reveal that respect for the idea of morals and commitment, engenders the possibility that stereotypes (which suggest that gay people cannot form meaningful relationships) can be overturned. Consequently, the following analysis explores the emergence of gay identity in *The Real World*, and connects the idea of homosexual partnerships with the idea of romantic love. This suggests that the domain of romantic engagement might not be exclusively heterosexual. Furthermore, in terms of acquiring the acceptance of mainstream audiences (for same sex couples), this may be related to a respect for moral codes and a conformity to gender ideals. However, before we are able to discuss this we must first look at the emergence of gay identity in *The Real World* with regard to its visibility and performative potential.

Documenting Coming Out, and Maintaining Relationships

Norman Korpi's role as the first non-heterosexual performer in *The Real World* New York (first series 1992) may be seen as symbolic: it identifies a starting point in the series (the first non-heterosexual performer). At the same time it is symptomatic of issues surrounding 'coming out': he identifies himself as bisexual in the series, but he later reveals himself as gay (Epstein, 2001).

²¹ Judd Winnick, a close friend to Pedro in *The Real World*, also makes this connection (despite disliking Puck for the way he treated Pedro) in *The Real World Greatest Fights*.

Jim Grubbs (2002) say that 'it seems significant that Korpi was presented as bisexual and not homosexual' (p. 14), suggesting that either Korpi or the producers were unsure whether they were comfortable to present a distinct gay identity (rather than the more ambiguous bisexual). If we consider the evidence of Norman Korpi's account at the time, we are told in *The Real World Diaries* (1996):

I was accused of being gay very early on in school, which was a very damaging experience. ... The older kids would come up, knock me down on the ground, and say 'you faggot, you fag'. ... I was scared by this. I think I developed a certain homophobia. (quoted in Keyishian and Malarkey, 1996: 22)

It is possible to suggest that uncertainty existed within Norman as to whether he felt comfortable in identifying himself as exclusively gay. Although during the series, roommate Julie identified him as bisexual, Norman admits he felt uncomfortable describing himself as gay at that point (Epstein, 2001). Consequently, as Norman did not supply the necessary textual ingredients for his self identification as gay, we are unable to evaluate the likely intentions of Bunim-Murray regarding any potential resistance to gay identification at this stage. However, if we consider Julie's account (cited in Johnson and Rommelmann, 1995) 'I think the producers were a little disappointed that Norman wasn't a gay activist. I think they wanted someone who was like , "Here I am I'm gay, by God!"' (p. 24).

The issue of 'coming out' as a homosexual or bisexual may be seen to form a major part of the discourse produced by *The Real World*: most seasons involve issues surrounding discovering if there is a gay cast member, which includes individuals announcing their sexual preference (as we have seen, this can be contentious if we consider the Seattle case study). Whilst the New York season did not devote time to discovering the failure of Norman Korpi to reveal his 'true' sexuality within the show, Norman's appearance became a major catalyst which no doubt encouraged later openly gay cast members to apply to be on the show. The following Los Angeles series (1993) blatantly confronted the issue with openly gay female cast member 'Beth A' famously sporting a T shirt saying 'I am not gay but my girlfriend is',²² and consequently, narrative strands within further *Real World* series would increasingly focus on issues surrounding hiding, or revealing, the sexual identity of

²² Interestingly Beth A was brought into the series mid season, when cast member Irene left the household (after marrying). Her addition to the show was instigated by the producers, rather than the housemates (as had occurred in other instances). This suggests that the producers were interested in casting an openly gay female. Evidence of this may be seen in that when cast member David left the show (prior to Irene) a replacement was voted for by the house mates, while Beth A was imposed.

participants. However, the issue of disclosing such intimate details can be problematic.

Ritch C. Savin-Williams (1998) tells us:

Disclosing a sexual identity to others poses a number of developmental hurdles. A sexual-minority youth often feels most vulnerable and out of control when he 'comes out' or has his sexuality discovered by others. ... [However] disclosure may result in a greater sense of personal freedom and of being oneself, of not living to lie, and of experiencing genuine acceptance from those who know the deepest, darkest secrets of one's life. (p. 141-2)

The issue of 'coming out' may not only be seen as a social ritual which may offer the liminoid potential (Schechner, 2002, 2003; Turner, 1982) to transform gay identity from disenfranchised and suppressed, to revealed and empowered (as we have suggested in chapter 3), the psychological process for the individual often causes the performer to feel exposed and isolated (not fully aware of their likelihood of acceptability). This may result in individuals concealing their identity ideals in favour of avoiding the potential for rejection. However, at the same time the issue of disclosing personal details presents potential rewards: these include a sense of freedom, inner strength, and confidence.

Such strength is evident in the gay performances in *The Real World*, not only in Pedro Zamora, but also in all appearances by gay performers in the series (extending to the most recent appearance of Karamo and Willie in the Philadelphia season (2004)). Through the recurring presence of gay performers, a precedent has been set where there exists an expectation that there is likely to be a gay cast member. Furthermore we may consider that to disclose your homosexuality is a powerful transgressive 'appealing' performance, and consequently such performers who are involved in this are likely to be focused on in the eventual *Real World* text. This is evident in the likelihood that to reveal or discuss issues surrounding 'coming out' presents to the producers potential material which may exhibit not only evidence of strength of character but also the availability of dramatic tension (coming out stories; likely responses from other housemates). Consequently, whilst Norman's standing as the first open non-heterosexual to be examined in *The Real World* is formidable, as he did not address his discontent with being labelled a bisexual at the time (Epstein 2001), not only did he fail to project his 'true' identity, moreover, the producers were not presented with textual material which would reveal his 'possible'

inner turmoil, and a need to overcome identity subjugation. Stories which surrounded Dan Renzi of *The Real World* Miami (1996), and Danny Roberts of New Orleans (2000) however, did focus on such tension.

Dan and Arnie in Miami, and Danny and Paul in New Orleans

Dan and Danny in their respective series were content in revealing their sexual identity (both made no efforts to hide this). Most notably, Danny, in the opening episode of the New Orleans season, displays pride at announcing his sexuality (involving the episode practically devoted to Danny 'teasing' his housemates that he has a 'secret' – which he reveals is that he is the 'gay' housemate). However, whilst Dan and Danny were happy to display their sexuality, stories which concerned 'coming out' focused mostly on their sexual partners, rather than themselves. These stories concerned a discomfort at being openly recognised as gay. Danny (just two weeks before joining the cast) had begun a relationship with a man named Paul; and Dan whilst involved in the series begins a romance with Arnie. Although in terms of relationship desires Danny and Paul are presented as a romantic 'monogamous couple' (see Figure 17), and Dan and Arnie are presented as a 'holiday romance' (they meet whilst Dan is in Miami) (see Figure 18), they are discussed here together for discourse which was generated concerning the issue of revealing your sexuality. Also we must note that issues surrounding coming out are contextualised differently in these comparisons. Through restrictions in his employment in the Army at the time, Paul could not allow his identity to be known to the larger television audience; while through feelings of likely personal rejection, Arnie expresses psychological discomfort at being identified as homosexual to his family and friends, yet is content to be identified as gay to *The Real World* audience (which is ironic as we imagine his parents would find out he was gay through viewing his participation in the series).

When Dan discovers that Arnie is uncomfortable with the idea of revealing his sexuality (to friends and family), Dan expresses difficulty in dealing with the situation. Dan in his usual 'flamboyant' style makes light of the situation:

Never in my wildest dreams would I have ever guessed that I would have moved to Miami ([which has] one of the highest populations of gay men in the world), and end up dating some guy in the closet. (episode 10)

Later an argument occurs when Arnie indicates that he does not wish Dan to stay over at his apartment in case his roommates discover he is gay. This scenario is stimulated by the impending arrival of Dan's parents (a lack of sleeping quarters in the household leads Dan to ask Arnie if he can stay with him). The connection of this discourse with Dan's parents is relevant, as it is Dan's mother who stimulates debate concerning coming out issues.

Although Dan and Arnie become less romantically involved (Dan discovers another partner due to unhappiness with Arnie's attitude, although they do stay friends), issues surrounding Arnie's acceptance of his own sexuality are continually seen to play on Dan's mind. In a sequence when he visits his family in Kansas, Dan discusses Arnie's 'problems' with his mother, and at the same time reveals the closeness that may exist between mother and son. Dan tells his mother that Arnie had just come out to his mother; she had responded that she thought he was a 'freak'. In a brief sequence that follows, Dan and his mother engage in conversation which reflects not only Arnie's situation (concerning his lack of confidence in coming out, and his rejection by his mother), but also records a 'coming to terms' between themselves (earlier Dan had expressed a lack of harmony between himself and his parents).

Dan: Would you perceive [being gay] as something that wrong?

Dan's Mother: I have blond hair, blue eyes, big calves, and I am straight. That's my genes. It's the same for you. You have brown hair, blue eyes. You were born gay.

Later Dan tells us: You can't even explain how wonderful it is for her to say that, when for years she couldn't even say the word gay, at all!

These intimate exchanges, and Dan's thoughts expressed to camera, reveal a discourse which supports the idea that it is beneficial to accept a gay person's sexual identity. By juxtaposing Arnie's dilemma, a comparison is made which suggests that families are the most important when looking for acceptance in coming out.

Although gay people may mostly look to their family for acceptance, Savin-Williams (1998) tells us not only that coming out usually occurs in the first instance 'to close friends who are most likely to understand and support' (p. 142), but also that the 'most popular time of initial disclosure [is] during freshman year of college'

(p. 142).²³ Hence although family acceptance is thought to be most important, acceptance by peers may be easier to accomplish, especially in circumstances where individuals embark on new stages of life where they may reinvent, or reveal their identity. Savin-Williams has observed (through numerous interviews) the value of coming out at college. We could equate a similarity between college and participating in *The Real World*. This may be seen in the 'life experience' which may be gained from participating in the show (Chaplin, 2003), and the idea of 'coming of age' by progressing from one stage of life to another. This may be particularly true of Dan Renzi and Danny Roberts who after participating in the show both became involved in public speaking on gay issues.²⁴

Most notably, Danny became the central focus regarding the idea of disclosing your sexuality. This may be seen in the fact that he tells us that just two weeks prior to his participation in the show he came out to his parents (Roberts, 2003). Furthermore, his relationship with Paul would become a central theme of the series. Paul was unable to reveal his identity publicly, as he was a member of the American armed forces.²⁵ His face appears as 'blurred out' in the series in order to conceal his identity (although his voice, his other physical characteristics and his first name, are not concealed). This provided a highly political context which would stimulate debate. Such debate included a high profile depiction of Danny and Paul on the front cover of the international gay and lesbian magazine *The Advocate* (July 18th 2000) (see Figure 17). The visual representation depicts Danny facing the camera with finger poised to his mouth (suggesting keeping a secret), facing a male (suggested to be Paul) in army uniform with his back to the camera (the face is not identifiable). This powerful image connected with debates which considered political discontent by gay activists with the American government for not awarding equality to homosexuals in the armed forces. Danny's poised finger parodies the idea of 'don't ask don't tell', a colloquial synonym for a policy instigated as a compromise to equality, which would allow gay people to remain in the services

²³ See Figure 15 in which the producers of *The Real World* suggest a connection to the idea of college.

²⁴ Following training as public speakers by Bunim Murray (Tracey, 2003) Dan Renzi and Danny Roberts became involved as spokesmen on gay issues. Dan produced 'The (Un)ordinary Story of a Gay Guy' (see Wolman Productions, 2002). Danny Roberts, besides being involved in public speaking, produced media products: web sites aimed at helping gay people come to terms with their sexuality (see Countrytoconcrete 2004; and, Dannyandpaul, 2004), and also hosted a video called *Boy's Briefs 2* (Picture This, 2002) which features short stories about gay first time love (see Picture This, 2004).

²⁵ It is interesting to note that *Boy Meets Boy* (discussed in Chapter 5) also included a member of the armed forces, Michael Jason Tiner, who despite having eight years' experience in the navy, after appearing in the show was discharged from service. (Zap2it, 2004)

provided they did not become known as homosexual. Consequently, *The Advocate* article (Barrett, 2000) accompanying the iconic front page discusses gay politics and the armed forces, as much as Danny's appearance in *The Real World*.

The imposed concealment of Paul's identity in *The Real World* New Orleans reflects political and personal tension. It is evident that both Danny and Paul were both concerned that should Paul's identity be revealed, he would have to depart his long-term employment in the army. Consequently, in order to encourage Paul to participate in the series, whilst protecting his status in the army, *The Real World* producers made a prior agreement with Paul that his identity would be concealed. Tracey Chaplin (2003) defines the experience of witnessing the moment of Paul's cautious first arrival at the household (involving uncertainty and vulnerability) as one of the most impacting moments he had witnessed in eight years of production: "to see [Paul forced] to be in the shadows ... facing the risk of loss [was very emotional]". Knowing that Paul would not only be putting his continued employment in the Army at risk through agreeing to participate in the series, but also that this had personal and political ramifications for gay people in the larger community, Chaplin observes Paul's vulnerable yet transgressive position. While Paul's identity is concealed throughout the series, such media attention was brought upon the issue of Paul's imposed concealment (people were intrigued to discover his real appearance), that four years after the series had concluded the issue was deemed worthy as the subject of an MTV news special.

MTV News Now: Out in the Real World (MTV, 2004), although a product not produced by Bunim-Murray, focuses on Danny and Paul's lives since completing the series. The programme reveals for the first time Paul's facial appearance (Paul has just left the army, allowing this freedom for the first time). Tension is created by Danny building up to Paul's unveiling, which occurs in the second part of the show. Further drama is created with Paul discussing his discontent at having to leave the army (for him, a rewarding lifetime career), and the issue of homophobia is foregrounded, including Paul recounting the murder of a fellow soldier (alleged to be gay) at the same barracks where he was stationed. While Danny and Paul both record the threat of homophobia, and general difficulties they had experienced since the filming of the series ceased (involving maintaining Paul's concealed identity, and instances of high tension where they believe the press will uncover his identity), essentially this text presents the story of a same-sex couple devoted to each other, who have become involved in politics. Consequently, of all performers in *The Real*

World, Danny Roberts and his enduring romance with Paul may be seen as one of the most remarkable. This story not only involves the idea of forbidden love (the knowledge that the relationship is forbidden in the context of Paul's role in the army), it also involves a dedication and commitment which was evident in the series itself.

Although at one point in the New Orleans series, Danny deliberates whether he can remain faithful to Paul (involving a sequence where he is seen to have an ardent admirer who is hard to reject), the recurring iconic message connected between Danny and Paul is that of devotion and commitment. This may be seen in the instance when Paul first visits Danny (already mentioned above). This occurs as a surprise to Danny on Valentine's day. The representation of Danny and Paul as romantic partners is juxtaposed with a relationship that fellow housemate Kelley has with Peter. Prior to the arrival of Paul we see images of Kelley and Peter similarly celebrating Valentine's day. The sequence with Paul and Danny occurs at the end of the episode, representing the closing narrative.

When Paul arrives he brings with him a special 'take away' meal from Danny's favourite restaurant in Atlanta (Danny's hometown). They then both proceed to have an impromptu meal whilst seated on the living room floor, the food laid out before them like a picnic (the atmosphere is casual, intimate and natural). In this sequence, both Danny and Paul display physical affection towards each other. This involves Danny caressing Paul's face, and both holding and gently rubbing each other's hands slowly and sensually. Danny tell us (in interview footage) "My valentine is obviously Paul, and I have to say this is the first time I have ever had a valentine. ... This guy is everything that I have ever been trying for". This sequence consolidates the connection between Danny and Paul, and may be considered as contrasting with the prior sequence which includes fellow house mate Kelley with Peter. It is noteworthy that Kelley is presented as saying (in the closing sequence before Danny and Paul, thereby engendering this for direct comparison) "[Peter and his girlfriend] have decided to go ahead and allow [each other] to see other people". This statement is significant as we were aware that Peter already had a girlfriend, despite involving himself with Kelley. Therefore its meaning here is that Kelley and Peter are involved in a sexually open relationship, while Danny and Paul are represented as devoted and committed to each other, exclusively.

The contrast between the two potential relationships clearly prioritises Danny and Paul, over Kelley and Peter. This may be seen not only in narrative terms (the

closing romantic image (of the episode) is of Danny and Paul), but moreover in moral terms. Evidence of this may be seen in that Danny and Paul express an exclusive commitment to each, while Kelley and Peter are not exclusive. Although Danny acknowledges that he needs to make sure he is not tempted away from Paul (thereby indicating potential moral failing, but rejecting this as unsuitable behaviour), Kelley and Peter make no such moral commitment. This comparison leads us to relate Danny and Paul as more compatible than Kelley and Peter with the idea of romantic love. This leads us to consider that comparisons can be made between same-sex and heterosexual couples, which on occasions elevate and prioritise same-sex couples.

Joshua Gamson (1998) discusses issues surrounding the acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex couples with relation to talk shows (this may similarly apply to documentary):

The treatment of same-sex relationships as morally acceptable in fact takes place on the condition that two ... norms remain conserved and supported: of gender conformity (men should look and act like 'men' and women like 'women') and monogamy (people should only couple in exclusive pairs). (p. 132)

Gamson identifies certain contexts where acceptance has become possible. Should same-sex couples exhibit evidence of moral commitment, and they are seen to appear/perform as conforming to stereotypical gender norms (masculine for male, and feminine for female), the foundation exists for same-sex couples to be compared to heterosexual couples, as evidence of dedicated relationships.

Clearly in the case of Danny and Paul, both do conform to such requirements. Paul is instantly recognised as masculine in his occupation within the army. Danny, although not expressly masculine in behaviour, never appears to act in a 'camp-like' or feminine manner. Furthermore Danny's deliberation over necessary fidelity, while on the one hand seeming to indicate potential failing, at the same time prioritises necessary rules for 'meaningful' relationships. Consequently, as Danny and Paul appear monogamous, and they do not transgress gender boundaries (they both are deemed masculine) they appear to conform to conditions necessary for acceptance by mainstream audiences.

If we bear in mind the four years which have elapsed since Danny and Paul appeared in *The Real World*, and the continued interest expressed in the media as

seen in *MTV News Now: Out in the Real World*, it may appear that this same-sex coupling has been the most enduring and captivating in the series. However, although predominant discourse surrounding Pedro Zamora is necessarily seen to concern his role as an AIDS activist, the coupling of Pedro and Sean (briefly discussed at the start of this chapter) provides the most vivid and memorable textual performance. Therefore whilst Danny and Paul still stimulate interest post *The Real World*, and their appearance in the show was captivating and stimulating, the appearance of Pedro and Sean may be considered the most ground breaking. Evidence of this mostly focuses on the representation of their romance, and an episode devoted to a celebration of their partnership. The producers use the idea of a same-sex wedding to focus on the only enduring romance of the San Francisco season, which is between Pedro and Sean.

The Romance of Pedro and Sean in San Francisco

Pedro's potential to find romantic love comes as no surprise as it is foregrounded in the opening episode. Consequently, not only do we discover that Pedro will become the central subject of the narrative with regards to his relationship to AIDS (discussed above), we also discover his potential as a romantic character. Evidence of this is seen in the closing sequence of the opening episode which includes a trailer for the series. We see an edited scene between Pedro and Sean, with Pedro saying to Sean "Do I plan on getting married?". Consequently, the idea both of AIDS and of homosexual romantic fulfilment are exhibited in relationship to Pedro from the outset. This narrative overture predicts a journey which Pedro will take, which concerning romance, will lead him to the marriage ceremony (see Figure 16).

With regard to relationship development, this narrative progression exhibits the classical form of desire, courtship and romance. They are brought together by a third party (the AIDS educator group in San Francisco) with Pedro commenting that he had briefly met Sean (before San Francisco) and he thought he was very desirable. Later the relationship develops with them involved in courtship (romantic dinner dates, walks together holding hands). Then Sean asks Pedro to marry him, and later they are both involved in planning the ceremony. Eventually the celebration takes place where they are supported by friends. Through this process of organisation and development, a structure is presented which reveals Pedro and Sean as responsible

and committed partners. The ceremony may be the highlight of the romantic narrative, but the narrative builds up to it in a manner like that in which heterosexual romances are discussed, in terms of 'finding the right partner' and 'celebrating devotion' through marriage.

The same-sex marriage ceremony between Pedro and Sean is treated sympathetically, generating the idea that it is equivalent to a heterosexual marriage. Like the ideas of Joshua Gamson (1998), evidence of commitment between Pedro and Sean (and also their masculine demeanour) engenders their likely acceptance by mainstream audiences. Furthermore, the textual placement of the Pedro and Sean marriage ceremony juxtaposes a comparative heterosexual relationship between Puck (who was earlier voted out of the house after untenable conflict between himself and Pedro) and Toni, who are depicted attending and participating in a popular event: a soap box rally. Sentimental speeches are made at Pedro and Sean's wedding, the partners kiss and hold hands and rings are exchanged, all of which is complemented with the usual applause and praise from the guests. The climax is a speech from a guest, Eric:

In your love you remind us that life is about now, and love is about being there for another. I think that it is with real bravery that you open your hearts to each other and I think that it is with real hope that you promise your lives to each other, and we stand defiantly and bravely, and with real hope. (episode 19)

Although there is a dramatic emphasis on time 'as it exists in the present', and 'bravery' (connecting with the dramatic context of Pedro's illness), the representation of Pedro and Sean is clearly elevated and celebrated, while the representation of the oppositional romance between Puck and Toni is only related in the most arbitrary way (casual terms, no serious commitment to life partnership). Although Munoz argues that this comparison was made by the producers as they could not 'let a queer coupling, especially one as radical as [this] stand as the show's actual romance' (Munoz, 1998: 190), it is apparent that the comparison between these two sites of potential love clearly elevates the homosexual above the heterosexual.

Therefore just as Danny and Paul are compared to Kelley and Peter in the New Orleans season (discussed above), Pedro and Sean are contrasted with Toni and Puck (although it's important to note that the San Francisco Season predates the New Orleans season). In both instances the romantic potential of homosexuals and

heterosexual relationships is compared. It is significant that same-sex couplings are favourably illuminated (both Danny and Paul, and Sean and Pedro, in their respective series, obtain the elevated status of the 'series romance' (the predominant romantic narrative)). This is significant not only on the level of raising the profile of gay identity, furthermore, it illuminates the potential of male homosexuals to form romantic, committed and enduring romantic relationships, something which seems far removed from historical representations in drama and theatre (see Clum, 2000; Dyer, 2000, and others). Furthermore, it connects with the potential of romance narratives in society. As Anthony Giddens (1995) tells us: romantic love 'provides for a long term life trajectory, orientated to an anticipated yet malleable future; and it creates a 'shared history'' (p. 45). In this way, romance provides the context and setting for stability, continuance and connectivity. At the same time romance connected to the homosexual experience may be transgressive in the arena of progressing gay identity. This reveals the potential of *The Real World* not only to question the predominant stereotype that romance can only be valued when it occurs between opposite sexes, but also to provide a discursive arena which furthers such gay affirmative ideas.

Conclusion:

The Real World has evolved from diverse, possibly competing, generic influences (documentary, soap opera, and possibly talk show if we consider its discursive power). At the same time it provides a platform for real people to entertain, and also to educate. Producers and performers both possess some (ambivalent) power to suggest the definition of the 'normal', the 'extraordinary', the 'entertaining' and the envelope of 'everyday' existence. While it may not be possible for *The Real World*, or even 'classic' documentary, to represent 'reality' for 'the closer one gets to the document itself, the more aware one becomes of the artifice and the impossibility of a satisfactory relationship between the image and the real' (Bruzzi, 2000: 21), it is nevertheless usually desirable to produce images which may provide positive messages for those living in the social group represented.

However, the estimation of what form 'positive realistic images' should take is subjective. In the case of the producers of *The Real World* 'positive imagery' may be producing gay identity as commercially rewarding entertainment; for Stephen of *The Real World* Seattle, it may be not revealing your true sexual identity, while for

Pedro Zamora, it may be political contexts and emphasising the nature of human relationships. We must accept that gay identity within documentary (and reality television) may appear in varying form, which may or may not match the expectations of the producers or the audience. As Charlotte Brunsdon points out discussing the issue of the 'realistic' in the soap opera, the representation of the 'real world' is contentious, as 'arguing for more realistic images is always an argument for the representation of 'your' version of reality' (Brunsdon, 1997: 28). Consequently, it is evident that contemporary documentary texts should 'be evaluated [more] in terms of how well they express a diversity of public voices and challenge the established power to recognise the complexities of everyday life' (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 35), rather than how much they produce good entertainment, or provide 'realistic' representations.

The Real World, with its twelve year history of presenting gay identities within the reality 'household', has offered diversity. The casting of Pedro Zamora, a household member who had a terminal disease, in its third series, was a progressive move. This suggested that *The Real World* producers may not only have a political agenda (Grubbs, 2002), but their show may also live up to their claim that 'drama [and growth] would come from diversity' (Solomon and Carter, 1997: 4). This diversity has been particularly powerful not only in terms of offering gay identity a place in the household; through the analysis in this chapter we have seen how such positioning enables both producers and performers to be involved in powerful discursive contexts. This has enabled not only the 'quasi anthropological' examination of gay social existence, and the discussion of important gay social issues such as 'coming out', 'potential for romance' and 'integration with the larger world', but also profoundly political contexts have been focussed on.

These contexts relate not only to the acceptance of gay identity and gay social performances: moreover, beyond a recognition that discussions surrounding AIDS have been exceptional in relation to Pedro, a recurring political issue which has been foregrounded is the expectation that same-sex partnership rights might be equated to the institution of marriage. Pedro and Sean's marriage ceremony as a powerful discursive arena, and Danny and Paul's romance as an enduring and intriguing media event, directly connect to and counter ideology which might prohibit ideas surrounding same-sex marriage. As Judd Winnick comments after witnessing Pedro and Sean's wedding ceremony "this is not something that I have ever encountered before, but it felt strangely right. This is an ordinary occurrence, or rather it should

be” (episode 19, *The Real World* San Francisco).

The willingness to perform (exhibited by gay performers), and an interest in recording gay performances (exhibited by producers) have been a recurring feature of *The Real World*. This translates not only in terms of *The Real World* providing a platform for gay performances with equality to other performances, but there is also a distinct bias towards the inclusion of gay people. Evidence of this may be seen in casting statistics provided by Jon Murray. He tells us that ‘while roughly 35,000 people audition for *The Real World* and *Road Rules* (another Bunim Murray show) each year, only about 200 are openly gay’ (quoted in Epstein, 2001: 50). Such bias towards including gay people may be stimulated partially by the imagined quality of gay performances (discussed above - suggesting that gay performers may be seen to offer more complex personal stories than regular cast members) which may be stimulating and appealing in terms of narrative ingredients. These narrative components might supply the appealing ‘catalyser narratives’ which are needed to stimulate meaningful ‘cardinal narrative’ drives (without really knowing how the cast will perform, they may feel that the ‘gay experience’ provides more points of narrative interest). However, despite this observation it is evident that the bias recounted by Jon Murray is substantial; openly gay people represent 0.5% of the potential cast availability, yet form 12% of the eventual cast.²⁶ This reveals a clear and deliberate preference for the inclusion of gay people. Such motivation for inclusion no doubt outstrips the possible narrative appeal of gay people. The impetus to include gay people may more likely be related to Jon Murray’s standing as a gay man who is interested in broadcasting a pro-gay message (as much as the opportunities provided by gay people for entertainment or narrative delivery).

This bias towards including gay people as part of the cast in *The Real World* would extend beyond the periphery of the ‘quasi documentary’ stance provided by the producers. As a ‘proto reality television’ show it no doubt influenced later more ‘game orientated’ reality television texts to include the gay performer as a recurring social profile. The next chapter focuses on this movement, at the same time revealing the progression of gay identity from ‘component part to be accepted’, to ‘integral independent stimuli engendering change’. This may be seen both in the area of hierarchical control (gay people are exhibited as leaders) and arenas concerning procreation and family (gay people become parents, and form families).

²⁶ This equates to the percentage mix of gay characters in the cast breakdown of all 15 series up to 2004.

Also this involved an increasing impetus towards alliances. This may be considered not only between producers and performers (such as exhibited between Jon Murray and gay cast members), but also between gay and straight cast members (forming alliances of resistance).

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Chapter 5: Gay Performers and Discursive Performativity: Alliances, Community and Competition¹

Introduction

James Getzlaff, leading man of the televisual gay male dating show *Boy Meets Boy* (Evolution for Bravo, 2003) tells his fellow (straight) cast member (and best friend) Andra:

If I can get one person to understand there is no difference between [gay and straight people] except for who we love, we should be able to marry, ... we should be able to do what everybody else does.

James, like many other gay individuals, involved himself in performance in reality television for the purpose (amongst other reasons) of reforming dominant ideas concerning sexual identity. A format twist in the program (discussed below) engendered James to respond in defiance and to strengthen his alliance with Andra to resolve his search for romance, and to promote his political moves to inform mainstream audiences. This revealed a developing relationship between James and Andra which may be indicative of a recurring feature in contemporary reality television: the alliance between gay and straight cast members. This chapter consequently considers the idea of collaboration and strategies of alliance. This is discussed relating to internal alliances within the cast (as foreshadowed above), and alliances between producers and performers.

The idea of alliances is nothing new with regard to gay identity and factual television. The appearance of Lance Loud in *An American Family* (discussed in Chapter 1) may not only be considered as a defining moment in TV history and gay representation, also it involved a degree of trust and collaboration between Lance and producers/filmmakers Craig Gilbert, and Susan and Alan Raymond. Although Lance became disheartened when he saw the represented version of himself (see Chapter 1), it has been the willingness of gay citizens to freely commit aspects of their personal lives to camera which has been the central drive of gay performativity and its

¹ This chapter includes material focusing on *Boy Meets Boy* and *Survivor* which appears in an edited form in a forthcoming publication (Pullen, 2004d)

powerful presence in contemporary reality television. Alliances and aspects of collaboration have been the building materials which gay performers have engaged with in order to gain the status of 'visibility'.

However, when discussing gay identity and contemporary reality television (or documentary), aspects of commodity must necessarily be considered: gay people may offer appealing narratives for producers to capitalize on, and gay people may involve themselves with the aim of personal gain rather than the education of society. The inherent 'signature' of contemporary reality television (and documentary) regarding gay identity must be an evaluation of the commodity 'potential' that gay performers may offer, and the commodity 'use' that producers may capitalize on. Therefore, although we may read the textual arena of reality television, and documentary, as a commercial enterprise of commodity and exchange, such interest in gay identities has provided both a platform for presentation, and an arena for disclosure and debate. Gay performers have contributed to (or generated) discourses which may reflect ideologies surrounding gay social existence. This may extend beyond the idea of commercial gain or celebrity status which can be attained by taking part.

This chapter consequently discusses potential discourses relating to gay identity generated by the voluntary appearance of gay performers in reality television, and documentary. At the same time it considers the involvement of those who form alliances (with gay performers) who may be seen as collaborators. In order to explore this idea, this chapter discusses the significance of *Gay USA* (Arthur Bresson, 1977) as early evidence of an emerging (large-scale) collaborative alliance involving numerous gay social actors: and it contextualises the significance of *Experiment: Gay and Straight* (Mark Saxenmeyer, Fox Chicago, 2003)² as an important alliance-orientated text. It then explores the heightened presence of gay performance in *Survivor* (Survivor Productions for CBS, 2000) with relation to the idea of performers' alliances within the text, and also examines (as already intimated) performances of alliance, and importantly resistance, in *Boy Meets Boy*. This chapter discusses collaborative strategies connected with performing gay identity, relating both the significance of alliances, and the context of representing the idea of a gay community.

² *The Experiment: Gay and Straight* was originally transmitted in eight-minute segments over the course of a week in November 2002, as part of WFLD-TV FOX Chicago's evening news reports. The text discussed here, however, is a showcase documentary version which is 90 mins in length (including 45 minutes of previously unseen and unaired material). Most notably, it has won numerous media and documentary/film festival awards (see: *The Experiment*, 2004)

Gay USA: Public Testimonials and Performing the Imagined Community

Produced in the same year as *Word is Out* (discussed in Chapter 3), *Gay USA* may be seen as an equally powerful (if somewhat forgotten) discursive text.³ Whilst *Word is Out* took many months in preparation (planning, selecting, recording and editing the confessional performances of twenty six gay performers), *Gay USA* may be seen as an intimate snapshot of numerous gay performers, and commentators on gay identity, involved in gay protest marches (see Figure 8). As Lee Atwell (1988) tells us (comparing the two texts):

Rather than being assembled by democratic communal decisions over a five year period [as with *Word is Out*], *Gay USA* was largely filmed on one day: June 26, 1977; and apart from actual materials, it was created with donated talent and labour from a vast number of individuals. (p. 575)

Gay USA may be considered as a large-scale collaborative, if somewhat free flowing, project brought together by filmmaker Arthur Bresson, Jr. (using footage filmed at protest marches from San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York). This focused on a particular point in political time, and public comments on gay identity: responses to discourse of anti gay performers such as Anita Bryant (discussed briefly in Chapter 2) and public outrage at the murder of gay youth Robert Hillsborough in San Francisco.⁴ Therefore unlike *Word is Out*, which may be seen to possess a cinematic/documentary and developed anthropological/psychological quality (grand narratives, in depth interviews, developed themes exploring social behaviour and intimate feelings), *Gay USA* may be seen as generally possessing a snapshot/vox pop and ephemeral 'passing glimpse' of public commentary (brief bites of dialogue, abstract narrative flow and emotional responses).⁵

The most significant difference between *Word is Out* and *Gay USA* is not only in the distinctly different production narratives/forms/timescales/strategies, it is in the inclusion of heterosexual performers commenting on gay identity. Although

³ *Word is Out* is still available to a mainstream market as an inexpensive documentary on VHS, while *Gay USA* is only available through a specialist documentary distributor (Frameline – San Francisco).

⁴ Arthur Bresson dedicated *Gay USA* in memory of Robert Hillsborough.

⁵ *Gay USA* does include footage from elsewhere including some material relating to the Stonewall protests and issues surrounding the treatment of homosexuals in the second world war (concentration camps). However these sequences are not centrally foregrounded, and my discussion relates to contemporary performers.

positive support by heterosexual performers is discussed below, a recurring motif in the text is a balance of negative commentary on gay identity. This generally occurs in the form of recorded voices without images, or very brief 'reactionary' responses of discontent (rather than developed arguments). One particular instance in *Gay USA* where commentary against gay identity is included (in order to illuminate the brave and progressive stance adopted by those supporting gay rights, and signifying those opposed as ill-informed) occurs in a brief sequence (among many) where an interviewer walks among the crowd asking for personal comments on how individuals feel. Against a backdrop of loud voices in the crowd (and a jostling of people to say something to the interviewer), the microphone is briefly passed to a male member of the crowd who tells us:

Man: For a gay man, 50 years old, who spent 30 days in jail (one time), for no reason [other] than I way gay, to see this day I want to cry. Its beautiful, its fantastic; to see our kids free, it's beautiful.

[Woman aggressively beckons to have the microphone to respond to interviewer]

Woman: Thank God [unintelligible] ... they all need shrinks!

[Man looks at woman in disbelief]⁶

Here a juxtaposition is made which illuminates a developed and evocative performance by a gay male supporter, and a disorganised and emotive repost by a female (presumably heterosexual) dissenter. Consequently although anti-gay dialogue is included, it is generally contextualised as inappropriate, overtly emotional or ill informed.

Where heterosexual performers are supportive, they are focused on to contextualise the connection between heterosexuals and homosexuals. Near the start of *Gay USA* an elderly woman tells us:

I believe in human rights. Every mother has a child, ... she does not know if that child is going to be homosexual or heterosexual. She shouldn't disavow that child. She should love it from the moment she gives it birth to the moment that she, or the child, dies.

⁶ See Figure 8 for a visual representation of this.

The woman (dressed formally) appears unlike the general flow of protesters/supporters (who mostly appear youthful, and casually dressed – some with outrageous costumes). Furthermore, as an elder citizen she represents the ‘old order’, but aligns herself with the idea of reform and understanding. This sequence is further heightened with a brief close up of a badge she is wearing which says ‘We’re in this all together’. Consequently it is likely that this contribution has been included to suggest the potential similarities between heterosexual and homosexual audiences, old and young.

The connection between elder and younger citizens is further related with the inclusion of an elder gay male who is presented mid way through the documentary, and later is brought back (towards the end) to summarise the events. His performance is used to relate a history of gay social presence in San Francisco, and at the same time reinforces the idea that there is a gay community on a larger scale. We first encounter this participant responding to the question ‘Are you gay?’ (a question which is frequently posed to numerous members of the crowd throughout the documentary):

Man: Yes I have been a homosexual for as far as I can remember, which is a long way back as I am almost 60.

Interviewer: How long have you been in San Francisco?

Man: I have been in San Francisco since World War II.

[later at the end of the text]

Man: The spectacle today with all of the thousands, and thousands, and thousands of people in San Francisco and other major cities is a statement to everyone in the world that we are gay people, and that there is a gay life. [Also] that there is a gay community for the young person somewhere feeling very much alone. This kind of statement does away with a terrible sense of isolation and loneliness.

The evocative power of this performance connects with the idea of the ‘imagined community’ (discussed in Chapter 1), where an inter identification between individuals engenders a sense of community, and a feeling of belonging. Moreover, not only through ‘discussion’ but also through the ‘presentation’ of masses of gay individuals (who affirm their status as identified gay), a sense of powerful

coalescence becomes apparent.

The San Francisco parade, attended by 'almost 250,000 participants from many parts of California and the United States' (Atwell, 1988: 576), provides not only a powerful discursive presence in *Gay USA*: it is also significant that the city is presented as the location of a 'real' gay community. This is discussed with relation to those who had come to the city to find freedom of expression. Also the idea of security regarding openly gay people who live in San Francisco becomes a topic of debate (the recent murder of Robert Hillsborough (mentioned above) which stimulated the parade is consequently in the minds of many performers).

Evidence of the impetus towards the potential of the city may be seen not only in the elder gay male (discussed above) who came to San Francisco after the second world war. Performers also discuss the need to become part of the gay community there, and feelings of ostracisation found elsewhere.⁷ One female gay performer tells us in response to the question 'Did you ever lose your job for being gay?':

Woman: Yes I did [many times]. [The employers] didn't come out and say 'you're gay and we don't want you', they would ask [me] if I was gay, and I would say yes, and they would make the work so miserable that I would have to quit. [So] we decided we needed to have more freedom to be ourselves, and we came to San Francisco.

Interviewer: Did you [and your partner] come together?

Woman: [We] sold everything we owned. [We] came out here with just \$18 in our pockets and two suitcases.

San Francisco is consequently presented as the location of 'freedom of expression', and 'possibility' for gay people. Whilst those presented elsewhere in parades are also connected to this ideal (the footage in other cities), San Francisco is presented as the embodiment of the 'imagined' community expressed to the audience.

However, such potential security is contextualised in light of stories concerning vulnerability. A male performer and citizen of San Francisco tells us:

⁷ San Francisco particularly became an appealing place for homosexuals in the 1970s. Most notably, '[i]n March 1978, after years of effort, a comprehensive gay rights ordinance was passed by the board of supervisors' (D'Emilio, 1990: 469). D'Emilio (1990) provides a developed context of San Francisco's position as political community.

Last week I got on a bus one day with a friend of mine, and I went to sit down, and there was four ... teenage youths yelling 'faggot' and haranguing us, and I just froze, because I was torn between fear and anger.

Contextualising the city as a potentially dangerous place, despite the apparent benefits of living in San Francisco for gay people, this discourse summarises feelings of isolation which may still be felt in the city at that time. As D'Emilio (1990) tells us:

The political momentum generated among lesbians and gay men in San Francisco by the antigay backlash, and the [political] gains made in the city during 1977-1978, had tended to obscure the extent of homophobia in San Francisco' (p. 470).

Consequently, although the predominant textual bias of *Gay USA* is to present a large-scale testimony to the greater existence of gay people who are willing to name themselves to camera (thereby reinforcing the idea of the imagined community), such testimony is grounded in the sense of vulnerability experienced by gay people.

Therefore *Gay USA* may be seen both as presenting a united front (revealing gay people in numbers, connecting to the idea of the 'imagined' gay community), and at the same time it expresses concern (revealing feelings of isolation, and issues needing to be addressed). *Gay USA* also acts as quasi-embodiment which transcends the idea of the 'imagined community', by presenting a 'real community'. Whilst it necessarily contextualises San Francisco as the ideal location where gay people may live (in a less inhibited manner), by using diverse producers brought together, presenting different citizens from across the United States, and contextualising the inter relation, and support offered by heterosexuals, it presents a large-scale community ideal focussing on gay identity at its centre. Such attention had not been afforded to gay citizens before in documentary on this scale. While (gay rights) parades had been reported before (such as the Stonewall footage included in *Gay USA*) these were reported as isolated or spontaneous events.

The 'free to speak' and 'carnival like' atmosphere in *Gay USA* which was reported across the United States related to mostly one day (26th June 1977). This revealed a new kind of resistance and presence, which may be seen to record a new confidence in those who considered they may belong to the 'imagined' gay community. As one female participant tells us:

I like this parade a lot. It didn't feel [like a minority event], you could pick out different kinds of people: teachers, and nurses, and all kinds of contingents, and it made me feel real proud. They were standing up and saying what I believe in, which is that you have to come out of the closet, and you have to stand up and fight, as [there is no other choice]. This feels a lot better [than] just cowering away, hiding, and you don't even know who your friends are.

The sense of enormity and community presence provided by *Gay USA* is significant. Furthermore the sense of unity provided by *Gay USA* reveals not only a large scale coalescence of diverse individuals brought together for this project, it at the same time reveals the emerging alliance of those who were interested in supporting gay rights. This documentary vision would provide evidence that homosexual identities no longer existed in isolation: the idea of a connected and supported gay community became increasingly apparent.

Community Alliances: *Experiment: Gay and Straight*

Experiment: Gay and Straight may be seen as a contemporary reality television text which relates a similar ideology to *Gay USA*: it presents members of gay and straight communities, but, instead of a 'vox pop' form casually approaching people on the street, it presents selected individuals in a contained 'reality' household (see Figure 22). In a manner which exhibits the textual and discursive influence of *The Real World* (discussed in Chapter 4), *Experiment: Gay and Straight* is a meeting of documentary and reality television like forms. It is discussed here as it contemporises debates relating to the alliance like nature suggested between gay and straight performers.

Producer Mark Saxenmeyer and co-presenter Darlene Hill introduce the documentary in a manner which reveals the utopian ideology 'they [gays and straights] are coming together in the hopes of bridging the gap between what many believe are two very distinct lifestyles, two distinct cultures, that in many ways remain divided'. Although Saxenmeyer and Hill do not identify themselves as gay or straight (in the text),⁸ the separate (and allegedly confrontational) nature of these identities becomes a recurring feature which must be resolved. Echoing a prior production *Experiment: Black and White* produced by the same team, the producers

⁸ In a personal communication Mark Saxenmeyer identifies himself as gay, and tells us that Darlene Hill is straight (Saxenmeyer, 2004)

not only connect already established racial conflict issues with sexual identity, the emphasis of the documentary is also to engender harmony between two seemingly disparate groups. A focus on the rights of the gay community is foregrounded. Consequently *Experiment: Gay and Straight* may seem to present the fruition of ideas regarding the gay community and social groups seen in *Gay USA*. Whilst *Gay USA* had presented for the first time in documentary masses of ‘seemingly’ interconnected gay people protesting in union, the idea of a community was viewed as a ‘proto reality’ which was to be attained, or to be fought for (as seen in San Francisco), *Experiment: Gay and Straight* presents the gay community as a ‘physical reality’: gay people are shown living together (in the household) alluding to their uninhibited sense of identity, and the ‘relative freedom’ that they have achieved.

In order to mediate the needs of a gay community, the producers selected ten documentary participants, of which five are identified as gay, and five are identified as straight (this exceeds *The Real World’s* bias towards gay participants - where only one or two out of seven are gay). The equal balance is consequently produced to suggest a democracy in debate. *Experiment: Gay and Straight* also prioritises the issue at hand as the education of the straight participants concerning encouraging the acceptance of gay people. Therefore not only is there a ‘weighted’ presence of gay participants (well exceeding the typical-quoted percentage in society), the prioritised agenda is also focused on changing the straight mindset.

In order to work towards this, the producers have a specific agenda for the cast members which involves facing up to prejudices, and attempting to voice concerns. *Experiment: Gay and Straight* consequently stimulates debate by setting discussion topics, asking house members to watch specific media, arranging tasks and holding interviews. Therefore unlike *The Real World* (which may be the inspiration for the series in form and sentiment) the producers actively engage with the textual potential, encouraging discussion on particular themes, and they attempt to achieve desired outcomes. As part of this process the producers arrange for the cast members to view a video concerning the murder of Matthew Shepard (discussed in Chapter 1) which they hope will encourage debate concerning a need for gay equality in society.⁹ However, the responses of some straight cast members to the video upsets gay cast members. Evidence of this may be seen in that Kyla, Brandon and Frank (all straight) fell asleep during the viewing, and gay cast members cite this

⁹ Saxenmeyer (2004) tells us that the video presented to the housemates was *The Laramie Project* (Moises Kaufman, 2002) (discussed in Chapter 1)

as disrespect. Consequently, these straight cast members are established as the most resistant to persuasion.

Kyla is represented as opposed to gay equality because of her religious beliefs, Brandon is connected with similar concerns (also his motives are related to discontent with his wife, who left him for a woman) and Frank is represented as a young father who from a young age has been encouraged to dislike homosexuals. The remaining straight cast (Jennifer and Darlene), are generally represented as pro gay (the former for her familiarity with gay men, and the latter who has a gay son). Consequently, the central narrative mostly focuses on persuading Kyla, Brandon and Frank, who are seen as the outsiders. In order to engage with this, straight cast member Darlene, and gay cast member Greg (who has HIV) become central forces. An edited extract follows which discusses the acceptance of gay people and religion:

Kyla: I call it a sin, you call it your lifestyle. ...

Brandon: The act of one man having sex with another, that is a sin. Period, no 'sugar-cone'.

Darlene: I ain't into religion at all. ... You do not change them, there is nothing you can do. You have to either accept it, or you don't. I chose to [accept it] because I don't want to alienate my son.

Brandon: It's a sin, period, point blank.

Greg: I was in an 'ex gay ministry' for three years. ... I can't tell you how many times I prayed out to God and cried 'change me, change me'. God loves me regardless.

Here Darlene (straight) and Greg (gay) connect with those opposed to homosexuality, and counter the argument. Darlene as the mother of a gay son (and the most senior member of the group) not only counters the idea that religion is a relevant reason for subjugation, she indicates that her role as a caring mother is a more important reason to find acceptance. Similarly although Greg spent time questioning his sexuality with regard to religion, he reveals that despite this journey he has gained enlightenment and finds a feeling of acceptance in religious terms. Therefore both Darlene and Greg (both pro gay) invert a stereotype which suggests that religion is the exclusive domain of heterosexuals: Darlene (straight) suggests there is no need for religion, Greg (gay) has embarked on a difficult journey

concerning religion which has led him to console himself that he is religious, and is accepted. Conversely Kyla and Brandon are seen as using religion in an arbitrary way: Kyla admits she is 'living in sin' and therefore may not be adhering to the religious discourse she is advocating, while Brandon has personal issues (his lesbian wife) which suggest that he may be using religion as an excuse to subjugate. Whilst discourse surrounding Kyla and Brandon mostly focuses on religion, and on inconsistencies in their defence of an exclusively heterosexual positioning, Frank is represented as concerned for the vulnerability of his son. This reveals a connection which prioritises the relationship between parents and children as a central aspect in finding acceptance.

Consequently the relationship between Frank (straight) and his son, Darlene (straight) and her son, and Larry (gay) and his parents, become the most provocative narrative strands employed. This is presented with respect to how parents view their children, and what children may desire regarding acceptance. Most provocatively, Frank is subject to a hypothetical moral dilemma, concerning his son, as part of the programme's strategy. The producers pose a question to Frank (aware that he has a baby boy who he is already missing whilst he is in the house) 'You are having a son but he is going to be gay. Would you abort it?'. This topic of discussion puts intense emotional stress not only on Frank, but also on other cast members:

Mark Saxenmeyer (host): What would your thought processes have been?

Frank: (breaks down and cries; this is edited with a picture of his son).

Deo: (female gay participant - comments after the event) Once he pictured his own son, man, if that doesn't slam you in the face, what does?

Mark Saxenmeyer: (to Frank) You could look into the future and see the son you had now, but you knew you had aborted [him].

Frank: I hope to God that I would accept it.

Whilst this strategy obviously provides an emotional moral conundrum, in which it is unlikely that any parent would answer otherwise, it was used by the producers to highlight not only their pro-gay stance, but also it contextualised the idea that 'acceptance' is a central prerequisite in the desires of gay performers. Furthermore, 'equality' is also foregrounded concerning the relationship between parent and child.

Darlene plays a central role in progressing the idea that children not only

deserve 'acceptance', but that 'equality' should be also relevant. Evidence of this may be seen in the engagement between Darlene and Larry. Darlene (as discussed) expresses acceptance for her gay son, Larry and Darlene discuss the refusal of Larry's parents to accept his relationship, seen in their unwillingness to attend his same-sex partnership celebration. This results in Darlene inciting Larry to stand up to his parents, indicating their failings.

Larry: My mom is homophobic. ...

Darlene: I'm a mom, I'll be a mom until I die. I don't care if I have a gay child, a straight child, a bad child. I'm his mom. I thought about that before I brought kids into this world. I am going to be a mom for the rest of my life. OK 'So I don't like you because you're so bad ... get out of my life'. You take that? You do that to your trash, not your blood. I don't know how some people can be like that. Then you don't deserve to have that title.

Larry: I didn't think a mom like you was possible! ... Am I asking too much? I will never have what I want from them. I feel like a wimp too [for not standing up to my parents]

Darlene: What because you are crazy?

Larry: It feels like I am letting them get to me, and giving them the ability to get to me. ... It should not hurt, I am 31 years old.

Darlene: What! You're a [****] human. You have a heart.

This sequence is followed with a number of the participants (both gay and straight) coalescing in support of Larry, with Deo affirming to Larry that all cast members will attend his ceremony, and most significantly the producers show Frank embracing Larry. Consequently this sequence highlights the significance that the discourses of acceptance and equality have for gay people as they are growing up. This may be seen not only in Darlene's support for Larry, advising him to stand up to his parents and demand respect (and equality), it also signals Frank as a potential accepting father of a gay son. This is discursively powerful as it showcases Darlene as a supporting heterosexual mother (who already has a gay son), and also reveals Frank as a heterosexual father who has become understanding of the issues which might surround being the parent of a gay person. Frank's 'conversion' is particularly significant as earlier he discussed growing up as a child in a culture which condoned

the persecution of homosexuals, and he participated in this (Frank discusses how he witnessed his peers as a youth 'shoot BB guns' (a lightweight gun which fires pellets) at the genitals of gay men (for amusement), and he did not protest).

Consequently, *Experiment: Gay and Straight* positions the relationship between parent and child as the essential building block in attempting to reform dominant ideas concerning the acceptance of homosexuality. Whilst religion is foregrounded as a 'sensitive' topic of concern for those opposed to gay rights, the text reveals that those who use such debates as a tool of subjugation (Kyla and Brandon) do so in a simplistic manner, and consequently ideas surrounding opposition to gay integration cannot be built on such 'emotional' and 'contested' ideology. Nevertheless, the relationship between parent and child becomes the central arena of debate, and provides the most powerful discursive instances. This involves displaying the 'conversion' of Frank. This is powerful, as he is 'transposed' from being 'part of the problem' (his actions as a homophobic youth) to becoming 'part of the solution' (a heterosexual parent who could accept a gay son or daughter). Furthermore, it reveals him to become open minded (including a scene where he is mistaken for being gay in a gay bar and is kissed on the lips by a gay male). However, Kyla and Brandon to some degree remain sceptical. Whilst Brandon admits he may understand his ex-wife (who is a lesbian) better, and Kyla reveals that at least 'homosexuality now has a face', she also prophetically asserts that 'outside these walls the majority of mainstream America' has similar concerns to her (there is still resistance).

Therefore whilst *Experiment: Gay and Straight* provides the opportunity to extend the discursive ideas of *The Real World* (by presenting social profiles which consist equally of gay and straight cast members, and directly stimulating debate) it nevertheless has to similarly contextualise this textual power in the light of the individual performer. Whilst Frank is encouraged to develop his opinions, Kyla and Brandon still seem to resist the idea of equality and full acceptance. These are instances of individual performance, which as much present questions as they do answers. Just as Foucault discusses the capillary nature of power, *Experiment: Gay and Straight* presents a range of disparate individuals who engage in discursive exchanges which do not necessarily result in any conclusion; it is a free flowing exchange. Despite the increased presence of gay people in the text, ultimately it is the unique performance of each individual which proves crucial. Therefore, whilst a discursive exchange occurs which may sensitise the viewer to a pro gay stance, it is

nevertheless not conclusive. Consequently, even though debate contextualises the idea of the community and the larger group, it is the role of the individual which promulgates this. The 'foregrounded individual' as bearer of 'their own discursive ideas' is the significant concept in evaluating the emergence and progress of the gay performer.

Individual Performance, Competition and *The Real World*

Both *Gay USA* and *Experiment: Gay and Straight* have been discussed here for their potential to foreground the gay performer (or social actor) as connecting themselves with the idea of community, and social rights. Whilst in terms of chronology *The Real World* (1992) predates *Experiment: Gay and Straight* (2003) and follows on from *Gay USA* (1977), it is discussed here again as it has been significant in contributing to the journey from one to the other, and relates to the idea of alliances. Hence while *Gay USA* shows the 'promise of gay identity and the community', these ideas are foregrounded and explored in *The Real World* with the casting of gay participants as a recurring 'minority social profile', and *Experiment: Gay and Straight* follows on from this in presenting a democratic balance of gay and straight cast members, 'suggesting equality for the gay community'. Similarly this impetus towards alliance, as discussed below and with relation to Jon Murray's involvement as the producer of *The Real World*, is foregrounded in our final two case studies in this chapter: *Survivor* and *Boy Meets Boy*.

This is pertinent as the emerging role of the individual performer, connecting with and performing the idea of the community, has gone through a complex journey. Whilst earlier texts discussed elsewhere (*Some of Your Best Friends*, *Word is Out*, *Gay USA*, and AIDS documentaries discussed in Chapter 3) stimulated the emergence of the gay performer as a powerful discursive component, it was through *The Real World* that gay performance 'within the larger community' emerged as a force. In *The Real World* the gay performer was presented as part of a regular cast, which included a majority of heterosexuals. This set into action a movement which in reality television acknowledged gay people as forming part of a media represented version of 'regular society'. Hence the gay cast member became part of a mechanism not only of representation, but also of performance: gay performers are depicted with other performers, and they interact with each other.

Whilst this idea has been discussed with relation to *Experiment: Gay and*

Straight, the focus was on discursive arenas designed to stimulate debate. This involved various individual performers, to some degree represented as component parts of social groups. What I would like to discuss now is contemporary reality television texts which focus more strongly on 'central' individual performers, where the 'personality and performance of the performer' is a more dominant sign than 'membership of a social group'. These individuals, instead of being charged by the producers to convey debate, are expected to compete within the format constraints/opportunities of the contemporary reality television text. These texts may be considered, in John Corner's (2002) terms, as part of 'post documentary culture' and 'documentary as diversion' (briefly discussed in Chapter 4). At the same time they could be called 'gamedocs' (Hill, 2002). This is a blending of the generic forms of 'game show', and 'documentary'. Annette Hill (2002) tells us that:

Viewers prefer informative, behind the scenes factual entertainment, preferably concerning law and order, or homes and gardens, and are more sceptical of the more 'performative' entertainment about real people. (p.234)

Despite audience preference to more readily accept (as connected to reality) 'behind the scenes' than 'performative' reality television texts, 'gamedocs' provide 'heightened incidents of opportunity' for the participant/performer. This may include not only the opportunity to compete, but also the opportunity to connect with, or promote, 'personal discourse'. 'Gamedocs', like documentary, provide the individual with the potential to project powerful discursive ideals, which may involve connecting with the social group they represent. Hence the texts discussed below extend the ideology of *The Real World* with regard to promoting gay identity, and introduce the idea of 'competition performance'. A discussion follows which examines *Survivor* and *Boy Meets Boy* in this context.

Competition and Narrative Tension in *Survivor* and *Boy Meets Boy*

Survivor and *Boy Meets Boy* may be seen as progressions from the 'reality like' format of *The Real World*. This may be seen not only in the antecedent position of *The Real World* as a cultural text which established an impetus to record social actors for the purpose of television drama, it may be seen in the extension of *The Real World* format from 'mostly anthropological' (observing behaviour, even if it is within a fabricated environment with certain rules) to 'competition orientated'.

Consequently, *Survivor* and *Boy Meets Boy* are reality television format progressions from *The Real World* which not only take the idea of including gay identity (as part of the social line-up) but place it in competitive circumstances. This equates to a further examination of gay identity in competition (putting it under stress and testing its quality), and potential elevation, should success be gained (allowing the circumstances for the heightened profile of gay people, should they win or succeed). Therefore whilst *The Real World* mostly involves the producers selecting narratives which may be taken from material recorded over a five month period (suggesting 'emerging narratives'), there is a degree of 'narrative immediacy' in 'gamedocs': these are usually produced under time constraints relating to 'challenge' and 'endurance'. Evidence of this may be seen in that *Survivor* was filmed in 40 days, and *Boy Meets Boy* in 7 days; and both expected 'narrative performance' relating to time constraints and immediacy. Consequently, gay performers in 'gamedocs' are given more potential (than in *The Real World*) to 'compete' within the narrative format. If they 'succeed' in tasks or competition, it is likely that *their* 'narratives and discursive potential' will be included in the eventual televisual text. Whilst this does not equate to an assurance that the narratives (used by the producers) will be beneficial to the competition winner (the gay performer may still not appear as they would like), the opportunity of competition allows the gay individual to project their own discursive ideals, and test their competition and alliance skills.

Therefore, whilst Jon Murray and *The Real World* make alliances with preferred gay performers to promulgate a joint narrative venture (selecting and using: Pedro in San Francisco and Danny in New Orleans), Richard Hatch in *Survivor* and James Getzlaff in *Boy Meets Boy* become more prominent through engagement with the idea of competition. Although the potential circumstances were in place for them to fail, by winning they progressed through a narrative journey which revealed them to be successful agents within the text. This revealed not only the oppositional potential that competition can provide, it also suggested a competence that gay people may have in engaging with and making alliances with other cast members. Through internal (cast orientated rather than production orientated) alliances, the gay performers in *Survivor* and *Boy Meets Boy* succeeded in an environment where there existed the possibility of failure. The potential for failure may also be connected to homosexual identification in the narrative.

Whilst we are aware that *Boy Meets Boy* necessarily focuses on the representation of homosexual desire (as it is a gay dating show, it represents gay

men), and *Survivor* focuses on various social groups and identities (as it is a survival game, it presents an imagined microcosm of society), an opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality is set up from the outset of both series. Evidence of this is seen in the opening episode of *Boy Meets Boy* where we are told that that Getzlaff (the central object of desire, and date selector) does not know that some of his potential dates are not gay. On day one in *Survivor*, elder cast member Rudy comments that he is neither aware of what 'MTV' is, nor does he like homosexuals. Consequently, both of these textual sites foreshadow the idea of conflict with regard to homosexuality. We are aware that Getzlaff may not achieve his goal of selecting a suitable romantic date (as cast members have been brought in who are pretending to be gay), and should a homosexual reveal themselves in *Survivor*, they are likely to be rejected (at least by Rudy). Therefore, although it may be imagined that *Boy Meets Boy* would be simply a matching of homosexual desire resulting in romance, we find out that an undisclosed format twist (not revealed to Getzlaff until episode four) engenders the series as a precarious journey, attempting to discover the authentic gay man. Similarly, although the focus on homosexuality so early in *Survivor* suggests that Richard Hatch may be a strong contender in the series, it at the same time suggests that there will be conflict. In order to discuss the tension surrounding homosexuality in both series, the analysis which follows contextualises *Survivor* as an influential text, then examines *Boy Meets Boy* as a case study.

Survivor: The Gay/Straight Alliance and Bodily Performance

Whilst Richard Hatch's motives for competing in *Survivor* may be solely related to money (the prize was a million dollars, and a car), it is evident that Hatch nevertheless wanted to make a stand regarding his gay sexual identity. He tells us, after certain cast members complain that he should remain dressed (he appears naked for his birthday) "If I lived my life based on what made other people uncomfortable, I wouldn't be living my life". Such 'unashamed' direct confrontation was the style of delivery which Hatch capitalised on to become a central narrative provider in the first *Survivor* series. Whilst Hatch became the overall winner (voted for by other cast members), and his performance may have led to the inclusion of gay people in later series,¹⁰ he is remembered as much for his cunning, guile and productivity

¹⁰ Other openly gay male participants in *Survivor* (CBS, US) have been: Brandon Quinton, *Survivor Africa* (US, 2001) and John Carroll *Survivor Marquesas* (US, 2002).

which enabled him to win, as his standing as a gay man (see: Hatch, 2000; Burnett and Duggard, 2000; Meers, 2002). This was mostly attributed to his ability to win trust from other cast members (the voting alliance), and his potential to defeat his opponents (his standing as the winner) (see Figure 20).

Richard Hatch formed and led an alliance from an early stage in the game, which resulted in opposing cast members being voted off almost to his order. Part of this alliance most notably included Rudy (who, as discussed above, expressed dislike for homosexuals), Sue (a heterosexual 'redneck' lorry driver) and Kelly (a younger female). Consequently, his alliance skills included gaining support from people who might have appeared as unlikely 'heterosexual' allies. Similarly, Richard Hatch established himself as major food provider (he caught more fish/provisions from the sea than anyone else). Consequently his role was functional: he organized a voting strategy which would support a selected group (a dominant group which he led), and he provided nutrition to the cast in an environment where it was difficult to obtain food. This strategy (providing security to some, and food to all) ensured that he would be required to remain by other cast members, and would not be rejected early in the game. In order to examine Hatch's durability, a discussion follows which focuses on two specific episodes.

During episodes eight and nine, Hatch's central role came under attack, firstly from potential leader contender Greg, and later from Jenna who formed an opposing alliance aimed at dispatching Hatch. In both these episodes Hatch used his psychological presence and performative potential to engage with opposing cast members to signify their weakness and vulnerability. During episode eight (in which Greg was to be voted off) Hatch admitted he was attracted to Greg, and instigated a conversation which revealed that Greg may be interested in sexual experimentation. This connected both contenders, yet established Hatch as being in control, implying that he is sexually aware and fulfilled while Greg may be vulnerable to sexual deviation.¹¹ Similarly in episode nine (in which Jenna was to be voted off), Hatch appeared naked (allegedly celebrating his birthday in this way). This was seen to upset a number of cast members (as discussed above). Most notably Jenna was the only cast member to comment on Hatch's sexuality saying "It felt awkward sitting next to a naked gay man". In a manner reminiscent of Bakhtin's idea of the carnival, Hatch used his body as a site of performative resistance, where 'status degradation

¹¹ See Chapter 2 for an evaluation of this in the context of 'displaced abjection' (see note 15 below also). Hatch punished Greg, yet hypothetically this action may be displaced as Greg may have been a possible homosexual peer (his bisexual identification) rather than a subjugating opponent.

through exposure of the grotesque aspects of the body ... [is presented] over the rational and spiritual control of the head'. (Stallybrass and White, 1995: 183).

Through Hatch displaying his naked overweight and hirsute body, a carnivalesque/grotesque performance was executed which was considered as an affront to Jenna. Her response suggested that she was vulnerable and disempowered compared to him. Hatch mobilized his alliance to vote against Greg and Jenna respectively. However, in order to justify this he first disempowered them. He did this with Greg by using 'sexual misidentification' and with Jenna by subjecting her to a 'grotesque bodily performance'. These eliminations were not only helpful in maintaining his alliance, but ensured his pathway to the finale.

The presence of Richard Hatch in representational terms was also seen to break down the stereotypical image of the gay male on mainstream television.¹² The appearance of an overweight, overbearing, masculine gay man, seemed distanced from the stereotypical ideas normally associated with gay dramatic identity suggesting 'effeminacy, sensitivity ... [and] isolation' (Clum, 2000: 77). The presence of Richard Hatch challenged dominant ideas in drama of what gay men may be like. This extended beyond the idea of stereotypical traits, and suggested that gay people may be productive in social engagement, and in forming bonds which would enable them to succeed.

The popular presence of Richard Hatch must be seen as a building block in reality television texts which may have led to *Boy Meets Boy*. Here the gay performer may not only be seen to break ideas surrounding stereotypification (as in *The Real World*: we are also presented with the potential for romantic love). At the same time, building on the idea of the active gay performer, the issue of alliance is foregrounded (as in *Survivor*, the agency of gay and straight performers contributes to a text ultimately supporting a gay leading man).

Boy Meets Boy and the heterosexual as the hidden other

Boy Meets Boy introduces its central performer, and unashamedly tantalizes the audience with a format twist:

Dani Behr (host): One exceptional man.

¹² Although the representations discussed concerning *The Real World* are equally if not more progressive, this appears on cable and satellite television, while *Survivor* was produced by CBS and transmitted on network television, thereby reaching a larger audience.

James: I want to make a huge attempt at finding a connection [with a male partner].

Dani Behr: Fifteen extraordinary suitors all vying for his affection ... But appearances aren't always what they seem. What neither the gay suitors, nor the leading man know, is that some of the suitors are straight men – pretending to be gay, competing to win a cash prize. In a world where gay is the norm and straight men must stay in the closet. ... Can stereotypes be shattered? Will romance prevail?

These opening statements from the producers not only reveal the format twist aimed at achieving a larger audience (Durdale, 2004), but from the outset we are provided with the idea that the text may also be seen as a psychological, sociological and cultural experiment. Although the twist provides tension, the format ruse also allows for a reversal of roles. Alluding to the idea that gay people have been forced to live covert lives where their identity must be concealed in order to protect themselves (from abuse, segregation, devaluation and confinement), the format twist here at least superficially places the heterosexual male in the role of 'hidden other'. As openly gay series producer Douglas Ross tells us as 'its impossible to tell who's gay and who's straight' (quoted in Sigesmund, 2003: 52) the programme becomes an exercise in evaluating the appropriateness of the stereotypes often applied to gay and straight men.

Although we are aware that the gay contestants may have agreed to be participants in the show for the purpose of breaking stereotypes (and possibly finding romance, or achieving personal fame), it is unlikely that the straight contestants have the same ideological goals (as they are able to win a cash prize should they be selected by James). This element makes the text hard to evaluate in terms of 'reversing the outsider role' as discourse provided by straight contestants may be intended to excuse themselves for deceiving the openly gay people who have 'genuinely' participated in the show. If we consider the evidence of statements provided by straight contestants post-elimination (who reveal their sexual identity and comment on their experience), we can discover the producers capitalizing on the 'pro-gay' discourse provided.

Episode two concludes with the elimination of straight contestant Jim, who succinctly relates a connection between his experience in the household and 'normal' experiences of 'closeted' homosexuals, telling us: "My [covert] experience here has

been a mirrored image of how people *in the closet* are still experiencing daily life” (my emphasis). Although anticipation surrounding the likely sexuality of Jim may have led the audience to be undecided as to his sexual identification, the same cannot be said of contestants Dan and Michael. These straight participants became strong candidates to be interpreted as gay (both are represented as sexually aware and physically desirable in the estimation of James). Consequently, when both are eliminated in episode three, tension is revealed which resolves, but disqualifies, their alleged homosexual identity.

Michael: What I will definitely take into my life from this experience is that generally gay people are of a higher calibre ... they are more in touch with their emotions.

Dan: I think [my experience here] parallels a transition that a lot of these guys had to go through during their [lifetime]. [i.e.] ‘You know what, I can’t do this anymore, everyone needs to know exactly who I am, I am a gay man’.

Although both performances are complimentary to the idea that gay social existence is something which must be commended, and that the trials of concealed identity reveal a need to expose your true self, it is unlikely that the participants would have discussed their failure at ‘seducing’ James. Consequently, although these participants are rejected and they are seen to fail in their task of winning the prize, discourse is not provided which ‘meaningfully’ examines their reasons for taking part in the show, and how they felt at rejection (something which is presented with regard to ejected gay participants).¹³ In place of this, the producers support a pro-gay stance by suggesting that rejected straight contestants only became involved through interest in breaking stereotypes. This type of ‘production determinism’ is most centrally foregrounded in the final episode when the remaining straight guy (Franklin) is eliminated and rebuked by James. In order to lead up to this finale, aspects of alliance and coalition are foregrounded in the service of closing an emerging ‘homosexual-centric’ narrative.

Although the series commences with a heterocentric narrative, suggesting that James is an object of entertainment to heterosexual audiences as he is not aware of the twist, the balance changes after episode four (when James is informed of the

¹³ Darren (gay) expressed disappointment at rejection by James. Mark and Matt (both gay) suggested that although they participated in the show hoping to find romance respectively, rejection by James was inconsequential as they were not attracted to him.

format development). At this point in the series the narrative context changes from 'James is likely to be fooled into dating a straight man' to 'How will James detect the remaining straight man?' Consequently, the discourse changes from 'potential desire which may be rejected' to 'ability to discover the outsider'. Although for gay identity this development takes the focus off 'romance and fulfilment', it does at the same time stimulate the 'potential for resistance and empowerment', through providing the opportunity for James to 'subjugate the heterosexual outsider'. This leads us to consider that should the 'infiltrator' be discovered, he can be punished and ejected.

The remaining three contestants for the finale were Wes (gay), Brian H (gay) and Franklin (straight). Although the audience are not party to their sexual identification until the end of the series, it is easy to perceive that Franklin is the straight outsider due to the selection/rejection process. This involved cast members brought together in small groups for James to reject only one of them.¹⁴ Consequently, in episode four when James selects Franklin, he rejects Sean, who the audience discover immediately is straight. Therefore common sense suggests that Franklin is also straight,¹⁵ and that he is the target for James and Andra to find.

James and Andra go on the offensive.¹⁶ James had suggested earlier that Franklin may be the straight guy. Furthermore, in order to test this he arranges a date with Franklin which may be seen to test Franklin's imagined heterosexual discomfort (they go to a sauna, and are seen in close physical proximity). Although James does not conclude (before the finale) if this revealed Franklin to be the outsider, Andra further confronts Franklin (although she is not able to reveal the twist to any of the cast members). In a scene where Andra suggests that she would be unhappy if anyone were lying to her best friend (James), the finalists discuss sexual stereotypes which surround gay sexuality. Franklin recalls his history of identification as a sexual rather than a social object, and tells us "there is nothing more I wanted to hear [from gay men] than about a person's day, not about how pretty I am!", Andra

¹⁴ James is not aware of anyone's sexual identity: he believes they are all gay until the last three remain in episode four when he is told one of the remaining three is straight. Although in episode one James can freely choose who he wishes to reject (from the initial fifteen 'suitors' which includes seven straight guys), from episode two he is presented with limited choices of rejection. This equates to the cast members brought together in groups of four, three then two (as the episodes progress to episode four) of which he can only reject one from each group (making him keep a mixture of gay and straight contestants).

¹⁵ The audience can easily work this out as it would be a logical strategy for the producers to put two straight guys together, therefore making it impossible for James to reject both.

¹⁶ See Figure 21, this includes a visual representation of Andra responding to news of the format twist.

responds “You’re pretty?”. Andra’s aggressive repost manifests her close, protective alliance to James and her possible identification of Franklin as the outsider.¹⁷

While James and Andra coalesce and move in on Franklin, the former testing his physical comfort with gay men, and the latter verbally challenging him, the other remaining gay contestants are seen as a group separate from Franklin, but they focus on him as object of desire/difference. This may be seen in a sequence where on the final night before the selection ceremony, Wes, Brian H and Franklin involve themselves in ‘carnavalesque’ play (Bakhtin). Wes prompts the group to take a production camera and film themselves. However, whilst all three are involved in this sequence, the focus of attention is drawn towards Franklin.

[Wes takes the camera, we see unsteady camera footage as the camera is taken to another room and all are in pursuit]

Brian H: So Franklin, are we going to have sex right now?

Wes: Should we make out, all three of us, right now?

[shot of Franklin taking shirt off]

Wes: Franklin, show it off baby. Give me nipples.

Wes and Brian H identify Franklin as an object of sexual desire, and at the same time in the manner of carnival play, an inversion occurs where the gay men are in pursuit of the heterosexual male. This parodies the predominant heterocentric idea of the heterosexual male seeking the female as an object of desire and fulfilment, and the homosexual as the peripheral, disempowered outsider. Through inversion, the homosexual is placed in a position of power. In a manner reminiscent of the observations of Stallybrass and White (1995) concerning carnival culture and iconography, we are presented with a ‘world upside down’ which inverts the everyday hierarchies, structures, rules and customs of its social formation’ (p. 183). The traditional idea of male/female romance is inverted, with a playful performance which suggest male/male sexual engagement. This is particularly relevant in terms of parody, as the pursued individual (Franklin) is heterosexual. We imagine that he

¹⁷ Also this sequence foreshadows Franklin’s admission (at the end of the finale) of why he engaged in the show: he had been wrongly identified as gay before (because of his cultural interests). Franklin later goes on to tell James (after being outed) that this misidentification was the reason he did the show (saying he wanted to break down stereotypes).

would not welcome such advances, and therefore he is robustly identified as the 'other' (Hall, 1997).

The identification of the straight male as the 'other' leads us to read this as an oppositional text. Not only do James and Andra work together in order to discover/pursue the 'infiltrator', but also the remaining gay (now dominant group) participants are seen to bond together and (possibly unknowingly) identify the straight outsider. This consequently leads the audience to read the episodes from the discovery of the twist (the end of episode four until the finale), as a project/representation of resistance. This involved the remaining cast members posed in opposition to the straight outsider. The culmination of this sequence is the narrative closure. This understandably becomes more focused on the confrontation between James and Franklin (the outsider), rather than the eventual imagined romance between James and Wes (the selected suitor).

James and Franklin engage in debate, as James identifies him as the outsider.¹⁸ This reveals a sense of closure, and at the same time irony and displeasure (see Figure 21).

James: From the bombshell of the twist, I assumed you were the straight guy. Because of that I didn't choose you.

Franklin: I am sorry, you are correct. I am relieved, I have been scared all day.

James: [tilts his head and looks unimpressed]

Franklin: I got involved in this to discontinue stereotypes, but this became personal.

James: There is so much that we as gay men have to fight against already, to just have a glimmer of acceptance. The fear that we could be infiltrated for *another* goal in something that we thought it was just about love, uh, hurts!

Here James poses his oppositional performative stance against the straight outsider. Whilst the straight guy suggests that he participated in the show to break stereotypes, this is rejected by James as inappropriate, and possibly unbelievable. Consequently, although we may read *Boy Meets Boy* as a heterocentric text, supplying the format

¹⁸ In Chapter 2 I discuss James' identification of Franklin as an outsider as potentially 'displaced abjection' (see note 9 above also). This is possible as Franklin's heterosexuality may be questioned (in acting as a gay man), and suggests James may be punishing a sympathiser, or peer, rather than a subjugating force.

twist in order to gain mainstream audiences, its textual resolution conveys a performative stance of resistance and expulsion, rather than capitulation to mainstream dominant sexual ideology.

Conclusion

Anthony Giddens (1992) tells us, discussing the ‘reflexive project of the self’: “In conditions of modernity, in sum, the media does not mirror realities but in some part forms them” (p. 27). Consequently, the texts discussed here (and those elsewhere in this work) have the potential to contribute to contemporary ideas of audience identification: audiences may identify themselves with the media product. Similarly they may identify ‘others’, and make connections regarding their ‘identity status’. For the homosexual (or any minority group), powerful performances undoubtedly have the potential not only to challenge dominant ideas concerning ‘identification’, and ‘identity status’, they also present incidences of resistance. Consequently, the texts discussed in this chapter may be seen as ‘revealing signs of resistance’, and engaging in ideas of transgression, which for the homosexual focuses on narratives which may be central in progressing the idea of homosexual liberty. These narratives may be the recognition of the idea of a gay community, equal rights for homosexual partnerships, and achieving ‘acceptance’ and ‘equality’ in terms of citizenship and personal relationships.

Whilst this work does not intend to explore the depth of homosexual social aspirations which may be reflected in performances of resistance, this chapter has focused on examining the strategies of gay performers, and the context of their representation. This may be seen in alliances which may be formed within the media (the support of producers) and alliances which may be formed within media texts (the support of fellow performers). Through early texts such as *Gay USA*, revealing gay people appearing together and seemingly connected (affirming their status as gay citizens, and finding support from straight citizens), the idea of alliance has been central in examining the potential of ‘structures of resistance’. We may trace the idea of gay performative alliances in documentary as emerging in texts such as *Some of Your Best Friends*, *Word is Out* (discussed in Chapter 3) and *Gay USA*, not only from the perspective of the performers (for willingly appearing as themselves) but equally from the support and dedication of the producers (with pro gay agendas). This established an environment of co-operation in performance and production

which connected the gay performer with the producer as working in alliance. Later, Jon Murray's alliance as a gay producer supporting the inclusion of gay cast members in *The Real World* not only encouraged 'contemporary' texts such *Experiment: Gay and Straight* to advance discursive ideas supporting gay people, but competition orientated reality texts also included gay performers as part of the preferred social profile.¹⁹ At this point the performers became agents of resistance, working in a competitive environment often with non-gay performers.

Consequently, Richard Hatch's success in *Survivor* may be deemed to have been possible though his alliance with non gay performers, and James Getzlaff's success in *Boy Meets Boy* may have been possible through his closeness to his female heterosexual friend. These strategies involved a new confidence in the gay performer, who outside his status as gay man gained support from co-performers as much as from producers.

Boy Meets Boy is undoubtedly a landmark. It took on the development of representational forms seen in *The Real World* regarding gay male identity, and the potential for homosexual romance. Similarly, it extended ideas seen in *Survivor* which suggested that gays can break through representational stereotypical norms, and although James Getzlaff may be nothing like Richard Hatch, both may be seen to represent emerging gay power bases within reality texts, who countered subjugation. Individuals like Richard Hatch and James Getzlaff, plus Lance Loud and Pedro Zamora (discussed Chapters 1 and 4 respectively) may be considered as 'performative agents' appearing as themselves and engaging in the discursive potential of documentary and reality television. The focus on the individual is significant, for it is through this context, as a 'singular iconic presence', that discursive power bases (which are thought to be relevant in promulgating gay liberty) are engaged with. Consequently our story so far has mostly focused on the potential of the individual, their ability to relate to the idea of gay identity, and the potential political desires which may be apparent.

However, the powerful presence of individuals as performers in reality television (and documentary), is only part of the contemporary story. The next chapter examines the emergence of gay performance in connection with the idea of the family. Here the family is connected to 'productive' terms rather than solely

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that not only is Jon Murray openly gay, and considered to be a media producer forming an alliance with gay cast members, but the same could be said of; Charlie Parsons producer of *Survivor*, Douglas Ross producer of *Boy Meets Boy*, and Mark Saxenmeyer producer of *Experiment Gay and Straight*.

‘emotional’ terms. The focus changes from promoting the idea that gay individuals and gay couples should be accepted (to live their lives as they wish, able to find a partner and be accepted) to becoming politically/actively involved in aspects which surround the idea of partnership rights, gay marriage, procreation and adoption. Similarly, we will see that there is an impetus for gay identity to be connected with cultural and social service. These strategies extend beyond the idea of alliance, and engage more fully with the idea of moving beyond stereotypes. The ability to procreate, adopt children and get married, becomes not only a desirable proposition for many gay citizens; equally, resistance to this extends beyond the challenge of reality television formats. It reaches out to the heart of ‘middle America’ and the power of mainstream political agents opposed to such liberty.

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Chapter 6: Reproduction and Commodity: Family, Marriage and Service

Introduction:

Joan Garry, executive director of GLAAD (Gays & Lesbians Against Defamation), told an audience of media professionals at the GLAAD 15th Annual Media Event in 2003:

All of us gathered in this room tonight have one thing in common, we have power. And in a year when the enemies of equality want to define the American family by how many people they can exclude from it, the stakes are high. But each of you has the power, and I would argue the opportunity, to make a difference. By using the power of your stories to build a vision for America where equality, fairness and love are values that all Americans share, we have the power and responsibility to build a more perfect 'union'. (cited in 'Overview from GLAAD' as part of extra features from *Gay Weddings* DVD)

Here Joan Garry comments not only on the opportunities possibly available to media producers who may use their position to support the idea of homosexual equality, she connects with current debates concerning the United States constitution, and its relationship to the idea of gay marriage. In response to the opposition of U.S. President George W Bush to same-sex marriages, which extends to his desire to amend the American Constitution (to limit the idea of marriage to only between male and female), Garry connects the idea of the 'perfect union' as relative not only to 'constitutional union', but also 'marital union'. Here a correlation is made which suggests that the United States constitution should be defended, not solely from those who would want to change it to prohibit same-sex marriages, but moreover the United States constitution idealistically offers liberty for all, which should equate to the provision of legislation which would endorse same-sex marriage.

Joan Garry's testimony reflects contemporary issues relevant to many gay and lesbian citizens: the desire to achieve social and political equality. This is related to the politics of citizenship, and the connection that may be made between gay identity and its role in a productive working American constitution. This chapter

consequently discusses recent documentary and reality television texts which examine the idea of achieving citizenship liberty, focusing not only on the idea of gay marriage, but also the context of gay people creating families (either by adopting children or, through surrogacy, producing their own offspring). Similarly, the context of 'production and service' is examined in reality television performances where the homosexual is foregrounded as an essential service provider. This I propose is a role assigned to homosexuals by media producers, where homosexuals are represented as providing cultural and social services (mostly for heterosexuals).

This impetus toward 'marriage', 'children' and 'service provider' may be seen as a progressive development concerning gay identity: it expands the idea that homosexual identity is mostly 'socially constructed' (as discussed in Chapter 1, where homosexual identity may be centred on social potential), and introduces the context of 'reproduction'. As Anthony Giddens (1992) succinctly notes 'the term 'reproduction' can be used to refer both to social continuity and to the biological continuance of the species' (p. 219), and it may be connected to service provision. Therefore reproduction concerns marriage, children and service, and these issues are at the heart of a 'working' dominant society. This potential reconfiguration suggests that homosexual 'social identity' has evolved from mostly a 'socially constructed context' (gay people evaluated in terms of social interaction) to include 'production' (gay people seen as producers within society).¹

John D'Emilio (1990) remarks concerning the conditions which allowed for the emergence of a homosexual identity:

The decisive shift in the nineteenth century to industrial capitalism provided the conditions for a homosexual identity to emerge. As a free labor system, capitalism pulled men and women out of the home and into the marketplace. ... Free labor and the expansion of commodity production created the context in which an autonomous personal life could develop. Affection, personal relationships, and sexuality increasingly entered the realm of 'choice', seemingly independent and disconnected from how one organised the production of goods necessary for survival. (p.457)

This emergence of homosexual identity, freed from the constraints of 'material production in society', would focus on 'autonomous personal life' and 'social

¹ This is not to say that homosexuals have not been involved in sexual reproduction before. I am suggesting here that for the first time the idea of the homosexual social role has incorporated the concept of 'production' as a potential option.

choice'. Hence the dominant signature of homosexual social identity prevailing from its emergence at the end of the nineteenth century concerned social, and also moral contexts (how homosexuals would live, and what threat they were to moral codes), rather than productive issues (how they would relate to a working society). Whilst homosexual identity may have been related as a threat to reproduction at this time (through failing to encourage procreation), it is significant that a contemporary inversion has occurred which places the homosexual at the centre of this debate.

As Kath Weston (1991), and Jeffrey Weeks et al (2001) have noted, this may be related in the impetus in gay people to form, amongst themselves, family like units and friendship networks. Gerald P. Mallon (2004) notes that a 'quiet revolution' occurred in the gay community in the last twenty years:

More and more gay men from all walks of life are becoming parents. Gay men have had to be creative and overcome many obstacles to become parents. ... Some may have become donor dads, donating their sperm to lesbian friends and then entering into complex co parenting agreements with them. Others managed to navigate the heterocentric adoption and foster care system and become parents that way. (p. xi)

Similarly, gay men have become involved with surrogate mothers who have produced children fathered by themselves.² This emergence has provided the conditions not only for what Anthony Giddens (1992) may term 'experiments in living', it at the same time reconfigured gay identity as something positively reconnected to 'reproduction'. This has allowed for a revaluation of the positioning of the homosexual with relation to dominant society. Although still controversial, this transforms the homosexual from 'peripheral other' (always on the outside) to 'productive other' (able to connect to 'social production'). This may be seen as both 'contentious' and 'useful'. Homosexuals are challenging the hierarchy of heterosexuals to care for and produce children, and similarly they are reinventing themselves as agents of production and service. This new found confidence in homosexuals to produce families, I would argue, has energised an impetus to search for equality regarding partnership rights (the equality that legal marriage may offer).

This move towards 'production' and 'service', is central in the analysis which follows. It reveals an increased confidence in 'gay performers', who present

² I am using the term 'surrogate mother' for women who give birth to children fathered by gay men. The term can also apply to women who act as 'the host' for fertilised eggs with which they have no biological connection.

themselves as contented couples (connecting to the idea of marriage); individuals in charge of families (connecting to the idea of parenthood); and service providers (able to compete with equality in various productive arenas). In order to examine this, case studies have been selected, relating to marriage, child care, parenthood and social/cultural service. *Gay Weddings* (Evolution for Bravo, 2002) and *Tying The Knot* (Jim De Sève, 2004) both concern the issue of gay marriage. The former is a reality television series which involves gay people performing the ritual of marriage, and the latter is an in-depth discussion about same-sex marriage, calling for equality for gay men and women. *Primetime Thursday: Rosie's Story, for the Sake of the Children* (ABC, 2002) is a documentary exposé which focuses on same sex couple Steve Lofton and Roger Croteau who have five foster children, and their legal campaign to be allowed to adopt one of them.³ *Paternal Instinct* (Murray Nossel, 2002) is an evocative documentary which follows a male same-sex couple and their eventual surrogacy of two children. *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy* (Bravo/NBC, 2003-, US) is a reality television 'make-over show' which presents five gay males as central narrative forces who are highly competent in providing service (to heterosexual males) concerning culture, society and romance. In order to consider the contexts which may enable an analysis, I intend to explore Robert K Merton's ideas (1996) on 'individual adaptation', and Anthony Giddens' (1992) ideas on 'life politics' and 'self reflexivity'.

Adaptation, Ritual and Innovation

Robert K Merton (1996 [originally 1938]) uses the term 'individual adaptation' to discuss different ways in which disenfranchised individuals or groups may be able to engender change or improvement in society. He considers the relationship between desired 'culture goals' and the 'institutional means' through which individual social action may be possible. In the case of homosexuals, we may consider the 'cultural goals' to be cultural and social equality, and the institutional means may be the recognised processes which are necessary in order to achieve adaptation (or the transformation of values). In the case of gay marriage, a positive

³ It is important to note that this text, as indicated in the title (*Primetime Thursday: Rosie's Story, for the Sake of the Children*), does also discuss Rosie O'Donnell as a lesbian with a family. However, this edition of *Primetime Thursday* was produced as a political mission to support the Lofton-Croteau family, with O'Donnell presenting her own story in order to influence audiences to accept same-sex families.

engagement between cultural goals and institutionalised means may result in the enfranchisement of same-sex marriage. Merton (1996) considers that there are five modes of 'individual adaptation' which might enable cultural change in relation to institutional means. These are: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion (p. 139) (also see Appendix 5).

Whilst it is possible to consider the cultural actions of homosexuals as a form of rebellion (rebellious against heterosexual supremacy), the case studies examined here focus on the ability to make connections between homosexual and heterosexual existence, rather than disparities. Furthermore Merton (1996) has noted that rebellion may not always be productive, as:

... this leads men outside the environing social structure to envisage and seek to bring a new, that is to say greatly modified, social structure. It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards. (p. 149)

Consequently, rebellion encourages alienation from pre-existing norms, and accepted methods of achieving change such as engagement with recognised institutional means (or ideals). As our discussion considers marriage, parenthood and social/cultural service, and these ideas in society are grounded in institutional contexts (society protects the idea of marriage and raising children as a central method of reproduction, also service implies maintenance not reinvention), conformity, innovation and ritual are more relevant than rebellion. These actions allow more of a 'possibility' for an 'improvement in social positioning' in their positive engagement with institutional ideals, rather than a rejection of these.

Although 'conformity' is seen by Merton as the most productive method of achieving cultural goals, and this is discussed later in my discussion on *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy*, my initial focus here is on 'innovation' and 'ritualism'. This may be seen in the innovation that homosexuals may make in the idea of marriage and raising children, and the context of ritual within this. Although Merton (1996) tells us that ritualism 'involves the abandoning or scaling down of the lofty cultural goals of pecuniary success and social mobility to the point where one's aspirations can be satisfied' (p. 146) rather than executed - it is more 'ritualistic' than 'transformative' - the issue of the ritual of marriage is particularly powerful in the context of discursive representation. Hence *Gay Weddings* and *Tying the Knot* essentially represent the ritual of the wedding as therapeutic, as much as the rebellion of changing society. Although in terms of power, the ritualistic representation of

same-sex marriage may seem secondary to the heterosexual in this context, presenting the relationship aspirations of homosexuals as contiguous to heterosexuals is useful. In this way, the engagement of gay men and women revealing that they are able to connect to heterosexual rituals, hold similar ceremonies, make similar vows and show similar dedication. Suggests that similar ideals are shared by homosexuals and heterosexuals. Placing the relationships of homosexuals within the 'ritualistic institutional framework' of heterosexuals, is both powerful and provocative. Gay men and women can perform as equivalents.

Similarly, innovation is central in the methods employed by homosexuals attempting to form partnerships, or families. As Jeffrey Weeks et al (2001) argue:

Non-heterosexuals feel they have more possibilities for two reasons: greater choice and openness in their relationships, and second, the belief that they can escape many of the structural differences, especially those of heterosexuality, which limit traditional relationships. (2001: 50)

Through this analysis Weeks et al suggests that same-sex partners who construct families ultimately have the propensity to influence the contemporary concept of the family, considering that it should be seen more in terms of 'practice' rather than purely of 'institution'. Whilst the representation of homosexual relationships/families connects with the idea of institution (emulating the heterosexual equivalent), it reveals the 'workings of family' as central. This removes the idea that families must be seen as fixed institutional ideals, and suggests that families must be seen in terms of how they work, and how they perform. Therefore the representations discussed here more centrally focus on 'performing the ideal family' than 'presenting the family institution'.

Life Politics, Self Reflexivity and Identity Constructs

The move from 'presentation of family' to 'performance of family', reveals not only a shift from 'institution' towards 'practice', it reveals the performative potential of the self. Anthony Giddens (1992) uses the term 'life politics' in relation to the potential of the self and the idea of 'self reflexivity' in modern society. He tells us:

Life politics is the politics of the reflexively mobilised order – the system of late

modernity – which, on an individual and collective level, has radically altered the existential parameters of social activity. It is the politics of self actualisation in a reflexively ordered environment, where that reflexivity links self and body to systems of global scope. (p. 214)

Here Giddens observes that the individual is potentially a political agent operating in a complex modern society which extends to global ramifications. Through the potential that modern society has to offer what Giddens (1992) calls ‘disembedding mechanisms’ (modern social contexts which release the individual from hierarchical control), these ‘prize social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide space-time distances’ (p.2). Consequently in ‘late modernity’ (compared to the traditional past) the individual performative body is enabled as ‘productive agent’ rather than a ‘subjective servant’. Through the enabling of ‘disembedded agency’, the individual may be able to perform their own identity ideals (how they want to be seen), rather than necessarily relate already established identity archetypes (how they may be expected to appear). This may be connected to Anthony Giddens’ (1992) idea of ‘self reflexivity’ (see also Chapter 1) where rather than being influenced by historical traditions, the self is a work in progress, formed as much by how we interrelate and our evaluation of this. Giddens (1992) tells us ‘The self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible ... We are not what we are, but we are what we make ourselves’ (1992: 75).

Consequently, ‘ideas of family and marriage’ presented by our performers connect to personal experience, as much as to hierarchical expectations and traditions. Gay men and women are telling their own stories, in the process of presenting the ‘reflexive project of the self’ as ‘life politics’. As Weeks et al (2001) suggest ‘the reflexive nature of storytelling means that these narratives are both influenced by, and influence, the localities they come from and are told to’ (p. 89). Consequently, the idea of reflexivity relates both to the idea of presenting the self, connecting to personal and meaningful narratives, and at the same time an interpretation occurs whereby points of reference are contextualised, and other areas may become influenced. The reflexive self is as much about presenting the ‘performative self’, as commenting on and re-contextualising the ‘historical past’. The representations of same-sex families have a performative potential by presenting new modes of family life. At the same time they connect to its historical and

institutional settings, reinventing and reconfiguring the idea of family. This reinforces Giddens' (1995) idea that non-heterosexuals can be progressively seen as 'the prime everyday experimenters' (p. 135) in their adaptation and reinterpretation of concepts of family.

Consequently, 'the reflexivity of the self extends to the body, where the body ... is part of an action system rather than a passive object' (Giddens, 1992: 77). Through the performative body being mobilised as an instrument of practice, existing identity constructs are connected with and potentially reinvented. Hence the appearance of two homosexual males fathering children and performing the role of ideal parents (as occurs in *Paternal Instinct*), connects with, and relates to, but challenges the 'stereotypical identity construct' of the homosexual male as an isolated individual who rejects procreative family life. Through the generation of multifarious identity possibilities (homosexual as father, as parent, as child carer and as married person), stereotypical ideas surrounding homosexual identity are challenged and questioned. This leads to the generation of more possibilities of identity choice (for the audience to relate to). Similarly, through performing 'the reflexive project of the self', a potential for invention and interpretation occurs. This questions the hierarchy of 'archetypes of identities' (discussed in Chapter 1 - how we are likely to be seen by outsiders) and offers the opportunity for the individual to 'perform identity' (how we would like to be seen).

Here we may relate the idea of dominant society producing 'archetypes of identities' to labelling processes, and the labelling of homosexuality as deviant (see discussion on the 'sad young man' in Chapter 1, as an example). Similarly, the idea of stereotyping, and the production of the 'other' is equally relevant (also see Chapter 1). Both the 'labelling of deviancy' and the 'signification of the other' are processes whereby dominant groups manufacture 'identity ideals' as suitable for subjected groups. Whilst it is not possible to evaluate objectively the suitability of these identity ideals/constructs (identification processes are relative to individual personal evaluation), it is possible to discuss dominant identity processes and resistance to these. Consequently, the 'performances of resistance' discussed in this thesis may be equated to resisting unsatisfactory 'identity processes' (labelling/stereotyping/othering), as much as opposition to the identities produced within this (deviant/stereotype/outsider). The opportunity of 'self reflexivity' connected to performing identity, is that it provides the circumstances to challenge and reform identity constructs.

Identification constructs form the essence of the case studies examined here: the texts reveal subjugation and negative archetypes of homosexual identity as much as possibilities to reinvent these. Consequently through revealing constraints and possibilities, a way forward is suggested through the presentation of 'life politics'. This is particularly evident in *Primetime Thursday* and *Tying the Knot* where a central argument is foregrounded, the former revealing that the state of Florida deems two gay men as unsuitable to adopt a child even though they have fostered this child for many years, the latter arguing that gay marriage should be a legislative reality. Similarly, if we consider *Gay Weddings* and *Paternal Instinct*, whilst they explore negative aspects of gay identification (how some people see the gay performers as outsiders), they are mostly concerned with reinventing rituals, and innovation. Hence the former discusses the ritualistic therapeutic benefit of holding gay marriage ceremonies, more than the failure of these events to actually connect with legislation surrounding marriage; while the latter provides an emotional journey (more than a political journey) concerning the surrogacy of children for gay men. *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy* is discussed later not so much for its ability to present the qualities of gay men who are involved with service provision, but moreover for aspects of 'conformity', and 'commodity value' inherent in the performative product. This reveals not only a heightened visibility of gay performance allegedly seen in service of a heterosexual dominant society, it at the same time may be powerfully subversive in overturning heterosexual control. Consequently, the discussion that follows initially examines *Primetime Thursday* and *Tying the Knot* for their propensity to provide a focused discursive strategy, while subsequently *Gay Weddings* and *Paternal Instinct* are discussed in relation to the potential of ritual identification, and *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy* is contextualised as an ambivalent text which has the potential to be productive on the one hand, or to reinforce stereotypes on the other.

Primetime Thursday and *Tying the Knot*: Action and Ethics

Whilst gay marriage (in legal terms) is forbidden almost worldwide,⁴ and the potential for gay people to adopt exists in many countries/states, these issues are brought together here more for their relation to the idea of the family and the connection that gay identity is making with social production, than for congruence

⁴ See GLAD (2004) for information on the legal availability of same-sex marriage worldwide.

between these issues or the likelihood of some social utopia. Similarly, although *Primetime Thursday* and *Tying the Knot* are discussed here together, it's important to note that the former is a special edition of a serial current affairs television programme, and the latter is a cinematic documentary. Consequently, they are discussed here more for their ability to showcase gay social actors, than their similarity in generic form. The main connection between the two texts is not only their representation of gay citizens and the presentation of strong arguments supporting liberty, but also that both texts connect with the idea of the producer/performer alliance (discussed in Chapter 5). The openly gay director of *Tying the Knot*, Jim de Sève, tells us 'I started this project with a personal discovery in mind. ... My point of view is that this is a civil rights issue. I don't particularly want to give a voice to bigots or to discrimination' (de Sève, 2004) (see Figure 26). Similarly television celebrity Rosie O'Donnell, as a participant in *Primetime Thursday*, tells us 'I don't think America knows what a gay parent looks like. I am the gay parent'. Both de Sève and O'Donnell are involved in the texts from a personal perspective: both are openly gay producers/celebrities within the media, using their position to further discuss and connect to the actual performances presented in their texts. Whilst Jim de Sève produced *Tying the Knot* for political purposes, and Rosie O'Donnell participates in *Primetime Thursday* as a performer and a commentator on the Lofton-Croteau family, both use their position as media professionals to call for action. Such 'call for action' is understandably focused on the arguments raised, and the personal stories recounted in the texts. This involves challenging archetypes of homosexual identity. This may be seen in both texts as questioning the propositions that homosexuals are either unsuitable to marry (*Tying the Knot*), or to adopt children (*Primetime Thursday*).

Tying the Knot makes a central point that little has changed over the years regarding the imagined suitability of gay people to be allowed to be married. In illuminating this point, *Tying the Knot* focuses on an incident where in 1971 the Gay Activists Alliance made a demonstration at a Manhattan marriage bureau challenging the state legislative system. *Tying the Knot* tells us that despite the demonstration over 30 years ago 'the same office [still] turns away same-sex couples [now] demanding marriage licences'. Whilst the original demonstration in 1971 had a humorous content, such use of humour at parodying the idea that gay men and women should be allowed to marry has now turned to frustration, and discontent (the increased desire of homosexuals to achieve marital equality). Similar to Alan

Whicker in the documentary *Whicker Way out West* (1973), where an early gay marriage (between two men) is reported a sign of 'Californian eccentricity' rather than oppositional potential, the idea that gay marriage is anything more than an 'idealistic pipedream' still remains a predominant issue to be addressed. *Tying the Knot* not only reflects the political ideology of gay people who want to see legislation to accommodate the idea of gay marriage, it also connects to social issues surrounding the rights of same-sex partners. As the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders report, 'marriage is a workers issue' (GLAD, 2004b), and restricting the rights of same sex partners results in second class citizenship in the work environment.

In illuminating the context of work benefits and its relationship to same-sex partnerships, *Tying the Knot* focuses on Mickie Mashburn who married her lesbian partner, Lois Marrero (a police officer) in 1991 (see Figure 26). After ten years, Lois was killed in the line of duty by an armed robber. Whilst Mickie received support from Lois's family at the time of her demise, the situation changed significantly after Mickie applied to gain benefit from her spouse's pension (from the police force). Although this would be a legal right for any heterosexual marital partner, as their marriage had no legal significance, this was rejected. 'Lois's sister Brenda intervened and the Tampa Police Pension Board granted Lois's benefits to her family' (*Tying the Knot*, 2004). As we also see in the discussion of Danny in *Fighting in South West Louisiana* (Chapter 3) when his partner died and there was uncertainty regarding property, this situation often encourages the deceased partner's relatives to become involved and to attempt to obtain assets. These cases raise the issue not only of attitudes of spouse's families, but more significantly the fact that protection is not afforded to same-sex couples to prevent this. Consequently, the aim of *Tying the Knot* is to argue for the provision of equal rights for same-sex couples. In this way, the documentary focuses on homosexual rights as an issue of workplace equality, and potentially the benefits that should be accorded to those involved in a functioning (work/production orientated) society.

Similarly in *Primetime Thursday* a focus is drawn towards social function, only this time relating to the performance of children at school. Evidence of this may be seen in the testament provided by Roger Croteau relating his dedication to

his foster children.⁵ The following quote relates to Roger's contact with his children's teachers at school

I see someone's teacher every day, so I know from the teacher how they are doing also. I am at school every day. They are not with friends I don't know, they are never with an adult that I don't know. If they are going to somewhere new, I go with them to check it out.

Here Roger performs the role of the caring parent. Whilst he may be seen as over protective, his prime concern appears to be the safety of the children. He focuses not just on the sentiments of caring for children but he draws his focus on ensuring they receive a good education by attending school. Consequently, this discourse is foregrounded in service of arguing that gay carers of children are not just interested in the idea of having children (in some way continuing their family line): it focuses on the idea of 'contribution to society'. By Roger ensuring that his foster children attend school, and ensuring their safety, we are presented with a powerful representation which connects gay identity to a functioning reproductive society, and the ethics of care.

This focus on reproduction and care may be related to Michel Foucault's (1994) [originally 1984]) idea of 'the ethic of care of the self'. Foucault suggested that this may be working on the 'project of the self' for the benefit of others, which at the same time reveals an engagement with the idea of citizenship. He tells us that:

Care of the self is ethical in itself, but it implies complex relations with others, in the measure where this *ethos* of freedom is also a way of caring for others. ... *Ethos* implies also a relation with others to the extent that care for self renders one competent to occupy a place in the city, in the community or in interindividual relationships which are proper – whether to exercise a magistracy or to have friendly relationships. (p. 7)

Those involved in child care may reveal evidence of the 'ethics of the self', through following 'ethical' ideologies in society to make oneself competent for qualified citizenship. In this way, through giving of themselves in the service of taking care of sick children in society, they follow the imagined ethical authoritative voice of what might be expected by the ideal citizen. The statements of the Lofton-Croteau family

⁵ See Figure 23 for a visual representation of the Lofton Croteau family.

reveal such adherence through forming 'proper relationships', which reveals ethical standing.

However, despite this potential, the authorities were less sympathetic to gay men wanting to adopt. Having fostered six children with AIDS, and one of them (Frank) experiencing 'sero reversion' (a reversal of AIDS status),⁶ they were advised that because of this change in status the child should be adopted. Despite Roger Croteau attempting to adopt the child, the Florida state adoption system refused his application to do this on the grounds he was a homosexual. Although Lofton and Croteau had cared for a number of children with AIDS, and the state of Florida considered this as a suitable role for homosexuals, the adoption of children was (and still is) prohibited.

Consequently the purpose of the documentary had been to reveal this inadequacy, at the same time foregrounding the homosexual carers as highly suitable parents. This involved caring for children, and the personal ethics of taking on children with AIDS. Steven Lofton tells us that 'typically then [the early 1990s] most children didn't live beyond two years'. Roger Croteau tells us, considering the care they afforded one of their foster children (discussing an HIV positive and 'crack addicted' baby):

Tracey had twelve hospitalisations before we took her home. She wasn't rolling over in her crib. She wasn't sitting up. She had severe sinus problems. So we had to 'suction her' for almost two years straight three or four times a night just so she could breathe.

The emphasis presented here, again, not only consolidates the idea of the well being of the child (ensuring their health, similar to the earlier quote relating to education). The extent to which Lofton and Croteau give of themselves in dedication to help their children reveals their selfless nature. This may be seen in presenting themselves as ethically aware, working for the benefit of the community. As Rosie O'Donnell comments:

The state of Florida should thank the Loftons: they took four black HIV positive children one of whom died. They have cared for them relentlessly, to a great extent to the detriment of their own personal lives. They have been unbelievably giving. They should be heralded as the perfect family, not as one that needs to be pulled apart. (quoted in *Primetime Thursday*)

⁶ This can occur when infants are treated with AIDS drugs at an early stage.

Consequently, both *Tying the Knot* and *Primetime Thursday* connect to the idea of citizenship, production and social benefits. This strategy relates the benefits of gay identity in the context of a working, productive society. Whilst doing this, both texts highlight the idea that gay identity has been subjugated by discourse which has erroneously suggested that gay marriage should be only viewed as a humorous parody (rather than a political reality), and that gay foster parents are not worthy to legally adopt children. Through performers presenting themselves as productive and ethically aware (in service of the community), the 'homosexual other' is revealed not to be a 'peripheral other' but a 'central producer'. Consequently, both texts suggest homosexual identity as relative to social institutions, and social needs. This suggests not only that the institution of marriage is relevant to homosexuals, but moreover that the institution of healthcare, and the continuance of family life are possibly interests connected to homosexual identity.

As both texts argue, the current state of affairs does not afford liberty for such potential: gay men and women perform the roles but are not afforded the status. Despite the media supporting such progressive representations, which connects to how gay people form their own identity ideals outside hierarchies, the reality remains that already formed 'archetypes of identification' are still considered relevant. This may be seen not only in the rejection of applications by homosexuals, but also equally in the resistance towards partnership equality for gay couples. As the producers of *Tying the Knot* tell us:

Current domestic partnership regulations, offered by several municipalities, and the Vermont Civil Unions, provide protections only at the city or state level. No wills or beneficiary paperwork provide same-sex couples the 1,049 federal rights — such as social security benefits and immigration rights — afforded to married heterosexual couples. ... This sort of intolerance facing millions of citizens today echoes the discrimination of the 1958 civil rights case that questioned the legality of Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter's interracial marriage. (*Tying the Knot*, 2004)

Here it is presented that current advances in legislation in the United States are by no means anything like the distinct benefits awarded to heterosexuals. In equating the civil rights issue and society's historical resistance to assimilating races, it is suggested that whilst change may be possible, actual equality may only be possible in the distant future.

Tying the Knot and *Primetime Thursday* are both grounded in reality, and at the same time they productively amplify ideas of gay resistance. However, despite such powerful discursive potential, it may be argued that both texts too strongly rely on relating 'heterosexual' narratives (accepting the institution of marriage, having to surpass heterosexual parenting skills). Although they prove their point (homosexuals should be treated as the equals of heterosexuals) the texts are referential to the heterosexual experience, as much as to propel the homosexual equivalent. In the following case study which focuses on *Paternal Instinct* and *Gay Weddings*, although similar issues are foregrounded (gay men and children, and the idea of gay marriage) a focus is provided more on the potential for innovation and the significance of ritual, than on obvious political discourse arguing for equality.

Paternal Instinct and *Gay Weddings*: Innovation, Ritual and Intimacy

Paternal Instinct and *Gay Weddings* focus on the power of rituals. Whilst the former concerns the ritual of the wedding and its representation as a ceremony (outside legislation), the latter uses ritualistic ceremonies (related to religion and personal beliefs) to record surrogate procreation and parenthood. *Gay Weddings* and *Paternal Instinct* foreground the concept of ritual as a means to endorse, or enfranchise, the efforts of homosexuals to marry and raise children. At the same time, both texts involve innovation, in their ability to enfranchise forms of family and relationship outside the heterosexual domain. In order to examine this further, a discussion follows which examines *Paternal Instinct*, then discusses *Gay Weddings*.

Director of *Paternal Instinct* Murray Nossel tells us that surrogate mother Wen 'ritualises the steps throughout [the process of surrogacy]: she ritualises the insemination, she ritualises the miscarriage' (Nossel, 2004), and she performs a ritual to officially hand over the child to new (gay) parents Mark and Erik. From the outset in a letter signalling consent, Wen foreshadows this kind of support by telling the potential fathers 'a gift of a child to a gay couple is extremely important'. The surrogate mother (to sperm donated by Mark and Erik), consequently not only supports, but also records, and enfranchises the complex emotional, social and physical journey to childbirth through ritualistic acts. She describes herself as a 'white witch' and a follower of the Wicca religion, and performs ceremonies in

service of aiding the childbirth and the 'handing over' of the child.⁷ Using the Unitarian Universalist Church as the premises for the event, the child is ritually passed from herself to Mark and Erik. In the attendance of churchgoers, and facing the new parents, she performs a ceremony scripted by herself:

[Mark and Erik stand before the congregation holding the new child. They are tied together with a symbolic red ribbon of which one end is extended to Wen]

Wen: It's been an honour and a privilege to carry your daughter, and so now I spiritually sever my responsibility as mother and parent, and hand it over to you.

[Wen cuts ribbon, and wraps it further around them]

Wen: You are now her parents, it is you who will nurture and feed her, and grow her spiritually. And I wish you well.

This forms the highlight and culmination of the events that have preceded. The ceremony marks the point where she not only passes the child to Mark and Erik, but she also endorses their relationship, and their worthiness as parents to the child. We find out later that it is Mark who is the biological father to the child (sperm had been mixed together, and they were unaware of the father's identity until after the birth). Wen not only supports the idea of homosexual parenthood to the extent of personally contributing to the process, she also uses the idea of ritual to contextualise the event.⁸

Like the idea of liminal performance (discussed in Chapter 3), a process occurs where a transition is recorded: the homosexual couple are subject to 'framing within the context of ritual'. This enables those involved in the event to pass from one stage to another, in this case authorising the childbirth to homosexual fathers. At the same time a 'transgressive inversion' occurs which, in the manner of the 'carnival' and 'liminoid performance', inverts power bases (traditional religion, heterosexual procreation). This creates new contexts for identity to be produced in, and reveals the performers expressing their 'intimate selves' connecting with the idea of 'practice' and 'reflexive relationships'. In this way the practice of childbirth is foregrounded, more than the institution of child raising. Also a focus is made upon Mark, Erik and Wen involving themselves closely together, as 'reflexive

⁷ Wicca is a belief in a connection between spirituality and nature, and the idea of reincarnation. It is also connected to the idea of white witchcraft.

⁸ It's important to note that although such evident support is formidable, she is also represented as receiving a fee from Mark and Erik of \$13,000 as a surrogate mother.

relationships', in service of producing the child. This is evident not only in the gay couple being physically present when Wen is inseminated with their sperm, but also more centrally in the birth sequence this displays the 'reflexive interaction' of all those present, and is connected to the ritualistic theme adopted in the documentary: the presence of water.

Murray Nossel tells us that the birth sequence was recorded after twelve days of the production crew waiting for the event to happen (Murray, 2004). The intense emotion of waiting for the childbirth is built up through numerous sequences which reflect the close intimacy of the participants. This involves the support of Mark and Erik's family, alongside Wen's family, all waiting in anticipation together. The childbirth sequence foregrounds the intimacy between the families, and focuses on the 'ritualistic theme of water'. This is seen in images prior to the birth event: we see Wen as a passenger on a boat, fully pregnant with belly displayed. Also the birthing location connects to water: it is a child's bathing pool (a plastic swimming pool with decorations). At the same time the process of birth is contextualised with images of nature (Wen leans towards a tree trunk in the garden) and iconic representations from the Wicca tradition (a scene where ritualistic candles and stones are displayed). The birth event takes place with Wen, Mark and Erik all naked in the bathing pool, and ultimately with Mark delivering the child (with the help of the midwife). Through the intimacy displayed, Mark, Erik and Wen are seen to closely engage with each other. Similarly Curtis (Wen's husband), Drew (Wen's son) and the midwife contextualise the event, by being represented as waiting for the birth, and attending the scene (see Figure 24).

The context of water is highlighted here, as the medium through which the 'new child' emerges. Throughout the text, water is used as a signifier of family life, and an element which brings forth life. This connection may be seen in the recurring location of Canada Lake (the family home) as an iconic presence which, accompanied with home movie like footage, signifies the idea of family life, and the raising of children (relating to the children who have swam in the lake). The opening sequence features Mark's nephew in the lake, commenting on Mark and Erik's desire to have a child, and Erik is shown swimming in the lake, reflecting on his childhood holiday memories (as a child who swam in the lake). The birthing pool connects to this idea, with all three protagonists (and witnesses) in a ritual like event intimately engaging in the birth process (immersed in water). This connection with water is not only emblematic of 'giving new birth': the close relationship between all involved

also suggests that we are witnessing a new type of family, with both adults and children closely involved.

Evidence of this may be seen in the support given to Mark and Erik by Wen's son Drew. He tells us just prior to the birth, concerning the impending event:

'I don't know if I want it to come, or if I don't want it to come. I mean, I want it to come so Mark and Erik can be parents. But I kind of don't want it to come, as I am having a lot of fun while they are here'.

Also he tells us later he would like to be a 'influential' older brother to the child when it arrives. Drew supports not only Mark and Erik in their process of forming a new family, but at the same time he also engages with this as a member of the new family. This may be seen not only in the documentary itself, but moreover in the events which have occurred since the film. Murray Nossel (2004) tells us that Drew, along with Wen, Mark and Erik, has attended events where the documentary has been screened and made himself available to provide commentary on the positive experience of being part of this 'family project'. This may be considered not only with relation to the experience of the film, but moreover in the fact that Wen's family, and Erik and Mark's family, have produced a new type of 'interconnected family'. Similarly Murray Nossel tells us that Curtis (Wen's husband) has commented that he views Cecelia (the surrogate child) as a new generation of child, connected by both gay and straight parents and emblematic of new families which will be formed in the alliance of diverse sexual identities.

This reveals *Paternal Instinct* as focusing on recording the new types of innovative families formed by gay men and women, and the larger ramifications of this, including connections with surrogate parents and their families. Here gay men are extending Anthony Giddens' (1995) idea of 'pure relationship' and 'plastic sexuality' (see Chapter 1), which might normally be associated with gay men forming democratic relationships outside procreation. Through connecting with the idea of procreation, Mark and Erik in *Paternal Instinct* extend the possibilities for new gay families which might suggest further innovation, and regeneration. Consequently, like Roger Croteau and Steven Lofton in *Primetime Thursday* (although Lofton and Croteau are not directly involved in the act of procreation) these instances provide evidence of a new movement formed by gay men and women. This to a greater degree involves connecting with ideas of reproduction (producing new children, and caring for children) in a manner which might be

considered as competing within the 'exclusive' domain of heterosexuals (procreation, and child care). Whilst heterosexuals may view homosexual procreation as a 'contentious topic', homosexuals themselves may be seen as unsure of its benefit: (Murray Nossel (2004) admits that prior to making *Paternal Instinct* he did not know any gay men who had, or wanted to have, children). The issue of providing 'legislative marriage' for homosexuals appears equally controversial, as Alan Sinfield (1998) notes, concerning literature, 'gay readers often do feel excluded from heteronormative networks' (p. 112). However, heteronormative networks such as the domain of marriage, have come under the closer scrutiny of homosexuals who consider relating to these power bases as beneficial. This may be seen not only in *Tying the Knot* (discussed earlier) where a discursive strategy is presented arguing a case for marriage equality for homosexuals, but also in *Gay Weddings* where the ritualistic marriage ceremony itself is considered as an opportunity to transform identity ideals surrounding marriage.

Four same-sex couples participated in *Gay Weddings*.⁹ They are represented as planning wedding ceremonies, they engage with their families within this process, and they eventually hold the wedding event. Gregg and Dan hold their ceremony in the Park Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles (see Figure 25). Film industry company Merv Griffin Productions are hired to coordinate the event (Dan works in the media industry). *Gay Weddings* represents this relating the drama, the performance and the glamour of the event. Gregg tell us after the ceremony:

Its not that I felt like my relationship needed this to give it structure. But whether it's my family, or friends, or gay friends, but they see us more differently. Its just so much more important than I can have ever imagined.

Here Gregg notes the perceived benefit of holding the ceremony in front of family and friends. Whilst the wedding itself had no legal significance, through performing the ceremony itself, it is thought that an equation is made within friends and family which relates to a transformation in identity. This is not only therapeutic for the couple themselves, who may feel more identified as connected to each other, but also witnesses to the event consider a transformation in the partners, and consequently may see them as similar to a legally married couple.

⁹ Gay couples represented in *Gay Weddings* were: Gregg and Dan, Scott and Harley, Lupe and Sonja, and Dale and Eve.

The ritual of the wedding ceremony offered the same-sex couples not only the opportunity to perform the ritual of wedding itself (which in the case of Dan and Gregg involved a mixture of Jewish and Christian religious traditions), it also provided the opportunity to showcase their relationship as worthy for enfranchisement, and provided a platform for friends and family to support them. Reflecting the ritual event in the marriage ceremony when guests comment on the suitability of the partners to be perfectly matched, *Gay Weddings* records the testaments of families and friends. Most notably in Gregg and Dan's wedding and Scott and Harley's wedding, parents are represented as celebrating the union. Gregg's father makes a speech at the reception in the tradition of the 'father of the bride':

Hello, I am Gregg's dad. I am so proud of both of you today, and it's hard not to feel this love, and I have never been to a commitment ceremony, a wedding, or whatever you want to call this in which there has been so much love. And it's terrific! And Dan, I welcome you as my son, and I hope that you and Gregg are happy forever.

Similarly, Scott's father tells us after his son's wedding:

It all came off very nicely. Actually the ceremony was probably the most emotionally moving thing we have ever seen. And his friends, they are so 'unique', they are more warm, more caring as anything we've ever seen, it moved both of us.

Both Gregg's and Scott's fathers comment positively on same-sex weddings. Whilst Gregg's father follows the traditional route by testifying to the wedding guests regarding the evident connection between the couple, Scott's father expresses personal feelings concerning the ceremony itself. It is significant that Scott's father is represented this way, as earlier Scott's parents had been represented as unwilling to attend. Evidence of this is further seen when after agreeing to participate in the ceremony, they felt unable to tell friends (at home) that they were attending a gay wedding. Consequently, the producers present a transformation in Scott's father from someone who was resisting supporting gay marriage, to a man who found the experience moving, and expresses support. The ceremonies are presented providing opportunities for people to comment on them. They work towards expressing that gay people possess 'identification equality' to those able to legally marry, as much as

arguing for the legislative reality of same-sex marriage.

However, as Murray Nossel (2004) tell us: 'personal stories [often] reveal political scenes'. Consequently, the focus of discourse generated in *Gay Weddings* after the wedding events contextualises political inequalities, as much as the benefits of ritual. This is particularly evident in the interview footage of Dan and Gregg which forms a postscript on the DVD (which was produced almost two years after the series was broadcast):

Gregg: I am so proud of Massachusetts. Dan and I, this summer, are going to get the piece of paper in Massachusetts because I feel I want to have that statement. That's the way that would change the state we live in, is to get married in another state then request that right in our home state.

Through connecting to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's declaration (in November 2003) that 'same-sex couples have the constitutional right to marry' (Tying the Knot, 2004) in the state, Gregg reveals his political agenda. Whilst the advent of the ceremony had been beneficial and rewarding in transforming identity ideals, Gregg highlights the significance that legislative equality would mean. This is similarly reflected elsewhere in the DVD release of *Gay Weddings*: the text includes additional material (such as the introductory quote of this chapter) which updates and encourages political moves towards accepting gay marriage as a constitutional legislative right.

Consequently, although *Gay Weddings* displays the benefits of the ritual of marriage, it at the same time considers highly political contexts. This may have been more welcome on the DVD release of the series due to the intended likely audience: those who support the political idea of gay marriage. Hence the broadcast version coming two years before, may not only have resisted such overt politicisation because there was less interest in gay marriage at the time, but also the broadcasters may have considered the possible sensibilities of potential advertisers (wanting to sell to mainstream markets) and this may have led to resisting overtly political content. Evidence of this likely reality may be seen in an account from openly gay producer of *Gay Weddings*, Douglas Ross. He tells us that broadcaster Bravo would not commission a second series of *Gay Weddings* as they 'had trouble getting advertisers to sign up' (Ross, 2004) to the idea. As gay identity may lack a connection with dominant 'commercial driving forces' this reveals the grounding context of potential homosexual performative texts: in the arena of television, the

preferences of the 'mainstream consumer' dominate. Consequently, if gay marriage is deemed as a threat to heterosexual sensibility, it is likely that television producers will not commission 'subversive texts'. Particularly this is notable in America where a right wing movement has recently further coalesced against the idea of same-sex marriage, leading right up to the American president himself (as discussed in the introduction of this chapter).

However, mainstream television broadcasters are interested in (or at least want to exploit an idea of) gay identity, if not necessarily connected to same-sex marriage rights. The following case study focussing on *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy* is a prime example of this. Although gay marriage is not a theme adopted by the series, the move of gay identity towards commodity, cultural reproduction and service are central drives which stimulate interest in homosexual social forms. The discussion here continues to relate the theoretical ideas in this chapter. Whilst earlier texts may be related to Robert K Merton's (1996) ideas of 'innovation' and 'ritualism', *Queer Eye* may be connected to 'conformity'. This may be seen not in the expectation that homosexuals want to conform to heterosexual 'rituals' and 'goals'; rather, it involves conformity to 'heterosexual ideas' concerning 'homosexual identity'. This may relate to homosexuals conforming to dominant 'stereotypical' ideas surrounding their identity, in order to gain power within the media.

A *Queer Eye* for Commodity and Difference

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy is a new reality format which has been sold worldwide (TV Barn, 2004) and as an influential text, provides strong evidence of a shift in representations of homosexual identity.¹⁰ This reveals a move of homosexual identity from being mostly connected to homosexual social lives and 'possibly superfluous' to heterosexual production, to 'potentially useful' as cultural/social service providers (contributing to production). However, this does not translate to

¹⁰ *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* not only has been sold in 20 countries world wide (TV Barn, 2004), it has become a cultural icon. This may be seen in other countries developing their own format, such as in the United Kingdom (produced for Living TV) and in France, Australia and Spain (TV Barn, 2004). Also other texts have connected to it, such as *The Jay Leno Show* commissioning a *Queer Eye* makeover, and cult cartoon series *South Park* devoting an episode which focused on the *Queer Eye* phenomenon. Furthermore the format has been parodied in *Straight Plan for the Gay Man* (Comedy Central, 2004). The producers invert *Queer Eye*'s format. For example they tell us in one episode 'a gay Broadway dancer gets transformed into a lady-killer with an animal-inspired love shack to boot' (Straight Plan, 2004)

homosexuals being in control of production: it equates to providing service for production. Here production is related to the services provided by a cast of five gay males who focus their work in service of a heterosexual male. *Queer Eye* is a makeover reality television programme, centred around a particular mission usually involving the remodelling of a heterosexual male (including his environment) attempting to either impress his female partner, or to succeed in heterosexual social affairs. The format of the show focuses on the relationship between the homosexual service providers, and the heterosexual clients.¹¹ A division is maintained, which whilst it highlights the imagined superior skills of the homosexual experts and advisers (in fashion, culture, interior design, cuisine and grooming) (see Figure 27), makes distinctions concerning 'difference' between homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Queer Eye for The Straight Guy maintains the division between heterosexual and homosexual identities. This is achieved by focussing on the 'stereotypical traits' of the gay performers such as "effeminacy ... sensitivity [and] artistic talent or sensibility" (John M Clum, 2000: 77), rather than their potential as fully developed social beings. Evidence of this is seen in the failure of the text to offer the opportunity for the gay performers to discuss issues surrounding their personal sexual desire (meaningfully), whilst conversely the focus of the text is the fulfilment of heterosexual personal desire. This essentially makes the homosexual performers the 'other', whilst at the same time it uses them as subjects of service. Here 'other' may be seen as 'use', as much as 'difference'. The 'deviant behaviour' of the gay males in paying 'extra attention' (compared to heterosexual males) towards culture, cuisine, décor, grooming and fashion, is seen as 'useful'. These may be traits which could be adopted by heterosexual men which would enable them to be more successful in their own lives (in heterosexual social/romantic scenarios). However, there is no evidence of social reciprocity: heterosexuals neither enquire nor offer advice regarding homosexual social success and romantic desire. This stimulates a separation, which although it depicts the homosexual as more knowledgeable (in culture and social affairs), it usually presents the homosexual in service of the heterosexual. At the same time it highlights a division which involves not only subjugation, but also 'disavowal' (discussed in Chapter 1). Here, a powerful focus is made upon an identity, yet it is rejected rather than accepted. In Stuart Hall's (1997)

¹¹ Although the usual format involves homosexuals in service of heterosexuals, in the 2004 season (aired in June in the US) 'specials' have been produced which have involved gay men as the focus of desire (New York Daily News, 2004).

terms 'It is where what has been tabooed nevertheless manages to find a displaced form of representation' (p. 267). The taboo subject in this instance is the blurring of boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality. This provides an opportunity for the dominant audience to engage in the 'indulgent analysis' of the subject, at the same time distancing themselves from 'meaningful evaluation'. This allows the 'disavowed subject' to be seen more as a 'object of desire', rather than as an 'agent of intent'. In other words; they are a focus of interest, but their political ideas are ignored.

Such disavowal and distancing is evident in the opening credits of *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy*. The 'fab five' (the gay performers) are individually identified with synthesised visual images of the cast, and graphics (highlighting their roles). These images take the form of 'affected' stylised personal performances (for example *fashion expert* Carson Kressley is depicted as leaving a department store through a revolving door, laden with shopping bags; he spins around on his heels and strikes a dramatic pose). The aesthetic appearance and bodily performative stance of the gay performers highlights their extraordinary appearance and posing, generating a connotation as 'hyper real' or 'synthetic', rather than 'authentic' and 'natural'. Whilst this method of representation is commonplace in the iconography associated with pop stars and celebrities, the stylised representation of the cast not only signifies their dissimilarity to the heterosexual clients, it provides a divide which highlights 'difference' and 'incongruity' between homosexual and heterosexual identities. This is particularly evident in the closing stages of the title sequences where no pretence is made that homosexual and heterosexual lives are on the same trajectory. This is vividly evidenced with the depiction of street signs which indicate 'straight street' and 'gay street' as leading into different directions.¹² These visual representations may be considered as a metaphor for the series, which divides the pathways of homosexual and heterosexual lives.

However, this separation does not mean that the text does not possess oppositional potential: *Queer Eye* appears to fulfil the promise of the Bakhtinian carnival by inverting logical or alleged 'natural' order: the gay male is no longer a lone subject (of derision or entertainment), he plays a central role performing with partners and is augmented in the service of constructing and resolving the narrative. Similarly, the text reveals evidence that heterosexuals may be seen as submissive to

¹² These signs are depicted as joining at right angles. Hence a possible reading may be that they are not opposites (in direction - something which may be contentious), but are just different routes.

homosexual ethics of desire and commodity. This may be seen in the esteemed position offered to the homosexuals as disseminators of cultural and social knowledge, and as informers on cultural and social production. The superior level of knowledge offered by the homosexual experts may in some way provide evidence of sophistication (elevating them in some way above the heterosexual). Evidence of this could be argued in the way the experts in *Queer Eye* are represented as 'practically humiliating' the straight guy for failing to possess social, artistic, culinary, cultural and personal grooming skills (in which they are clearly presented as experts). This interpretation also involves the subjugation of the heterosexual male as ineffectual or incompetent. This is apparent not only in the formulaic opening sequences of *Queer Eye* where the 'gay makeover team' invade the client's house, and are seen to depersonalise the space (by investigating all evidence in the household environment and revealing 'poor standards' to the camera), it also forms part of the closing sequence when the gay makeover team comment on the heterosexual subject's (possible) failure to comply with their 'guidelines' for success.

However, although we may detect a partial subjugation of the 'straight' subject, seen both in the gay makeover team commenting on his (lack of) compliance and failure (and often comments executed by the makeover team on the lack of sophistication of the subject's family/friends), the central premise is the service of the heterosexual client. Consequently, although we may consider that there are aspects of subjugation on both sides (the homosexuals are servants and the heterosexuals may be seen to lack sophistication), the ultimate textual goal is the fulfilment of heterosexual desire, not the meaningful exploration of homosexual lives. This impetus towards heterosexual fulfilment, ultimately leads me to read the text as counter productive (in terms of pursuing gay equality). Whilst it progressively places the homosexual in a position of cultural power, able to contribute as an authoritative voice in the heterocentric arena of cultural and social production, it ultimately disavows homosexual desire. The programmes places the homosexual within the powerful world of production. However, this may be seen as displaying the gay male more as 'focal servant' than 'productive citizen'.

Nevertheless *Queer Eye* still offers an opportunity for gay identity to express cultural and social ideas within *powerful* mainstream environments. Consequently, my reading of this text remains ambivalent: whilst *Queer Eye* appears to disavow homosexual desire (and must be challenged for this), at the same time it constructs the gay male as an authority (and must be praised for providing textual space to

subcultural ideas within dominant arenas).

Conclusion

Through innovation and the performance of the reflective relationships, the profile of gay identity within documentary and reality television has changed. This has revealed the emergence of a new 'productive' version of gay identity, now moving towards reproduction. Although the texts discussed within this thesis may be considered as 'isolated performative spaces', I propose that these offer media evidence of the larger social evidence discussed by Kath Weston (1991), Jeffrey Weeks et al (2001), and Gerald P Mallon (2004), relating to same-sex families. This reveals that gay identity has become more associated with marriage, child care, procreation, and (in the case of *Queer Eye*) cultural/social service. This has revealed not only a change in identification possibilities (how gay people may see themselves, and how gay people may be seen), it is also symptomatic of an emerging political, productive and economic reconfiguration in gay social form which I argue connects to the idea of family, and service. While the idea of 'family' had emerged in the response to AIDS (through gay people coalescing, in family like groups, working together to cope with the disease – discussed in Chapter 3), later the advent of increased numbers of gay people being involved in child foster care, and surrogate procreation, heralded an interest in fighting for family and relationship equality. This regeneration has stimulated the confidence of gay people to search for equality which might be reflected in the provision of the United States constitution. This chapter has discussed the emergence of this new 'active identity' form, which challenges the hierarchy of heterosexual production, and knowledge.

As Anthony Giddens (1992) tells us 'the reflexivity of modernity actually undermines the certainty of knowledge, even in the core domains of natural science' (p. 21). This potential may be seen in gay people, who through the 'innovation' of constructing modern families (free from the domain of male/female heterosexuals), are challenging traditional forms of procreation, and child care. This extends not only to displacing the heterosexual male as the natural protective father, and the heterosexual female as the ideal mother, but also to making the point that male-female commitment is no longer a precursor to ideal parenthood. Consequently Roger Croteau and Steven Lofton (in *Primetime Thursday*) are represented as ideal foster/adoptive parents in a similar manner that Erik and Mark (*Paternal Instinct*) are

represented as caring fathers and joint parents: revealing equality with the heterosexual counterpart. This contributes to the deconstruction of heterosexual control in relation to childcare and procreation. Similarly, it challenges what may be called the 'natural world', and the components of this. Giddens (1992) calls this the 'end of nature'. He tells us that this equates to the point where:

the natural world has become in large part a 'created environment', consisting of humanly structured systems whose motive power and dynamics derive from socially organised knowledge claims rather than from influences exogenous to human activity. (p. 144)

Consequently, the idea of the family parented by gay adults is relative to experience and practice (how they experiment with new family forms), more than ideology and institution (how they connect with traditional ideas of family), and contributes to signalling the 'end of nature' (or procreation through heterosexual coupling). The evidence of the same sex family connects to the idea of reflexive relationships (where people interact with each other outside hierarchies), and at the same time it is indicative of innovation, and of Giddens' idea of 'life politics'.

Such innovation extends not only to reforming family ideals, it also attempts to reconfigure the institutions which surround the family, such as marriage. This may be seen in *Tying the Knot* and *Gay Weddings*, where through the 're-appropriation of ritual', gay men and women are re-contextualising the idea of marriage, and at the same time asking for equality. Reflecting Robert K Merton's (1996) ideas on the potential of ritualisation, the institution of heterosexual marriage is challenged through homosexuals connecting to the 'ritual event'. The benefit of ritualisation is that it provides a recognised discursive framework. Through the homosexual connecting to this idea, a liminal ritual transition occurs (to enfranchisement) which leads to a liminoid transgressive form (new identity type). Such generation of 'identity potential' necessarily leads to questioning the hierarchy of 'identity ideals'. Consequently the hierarchy of heterosexuals, as the only suitable identities to be connected with legal marriage, or child raising, is now being challenged.

Producers and performers are working in alliance, and they are revealing the emergence of new forms of gay identity. Through self reflexivity performers are defining new types of social, family and partnership roles. Although the performances in *Queer Eye for The Straight Guy* stand out as potentially

retrogressive, addressed for the consumption of mainstream audiences, the gay performers still compete with traditional power bases which suggest a hierarchy for heterosexuals alone. This allows us to consider that all texts discussed here (and elsewhere in this thesis) not only provide evidence of emerging new forms of identity potential, but also that the documentary focus afforded to the homosexual social role has expanded. This reveals gay people empowered through performance, connecting to the context of family and partnership ideas. At the same time it re-contextualises homosexual identity potential which connects to reproduction.

These new texts reveal not only the emergence of new family, and relationship forms, and also contribute to removing the contexts of sensualisation, isolation and rejection, which have historically surrounded gay identity, and archetypes of gay identity form. If we consider the work of Richard Dyer (2000) and his observation of the archetype of the 'sad young man' (discussed in Chapter 1), this as an isolated 'othered' character (mostly in fiction and pictorial iconography), which may be considered as an evocative homosexual identity archetype. This allowed 'for an expression of the experience of libidinal fluidity [of the gay male] while offering reassurance [to the heterosexual world] that it will not last' (p. 88). Similar to Stuart Hall's (1997) interpretation of 'disavowal' (discussed above), here an intensified focus is made on the 'desirable' sexuality of the gay man, while at the same time rejecting the idea of either sexual or social fulfilment. The revolution of the gay performers discussed in this thesis is that 'subjugated sexual identity' is rejected, and the potential of social lives is foregrounded. Furthermore, the hierarchy of heterosexuals is challenged in areas we may consider as exclusive: marriage, procreation and child care. Through creating discourse within the 'performative spaces' offered by confessional documentary and reality television, gay citizens are provided with sites of opportunity. These opportunities may to some degree be controlled and moulded by producers and production forces, yet we have seen that through the idea of alliance, producers and performers are often working towards similar goals. As producer Murray Nossel tells us, relating his experience of filming Mark and Erik in *Paternal Instinct*, 'they are not living in a dominant conversation about them having children [and the benefits of this], they are living in a dominant conversation' which considers them as outsiders to the idea. These producers and performers are not only involved in attempting to change the dominant conversation, they also speak for themselves, and contribute to reinventing an evolving productive social world where gay men and women can define their own place.

Conclusion: The Move to the Domestic

Challenging Myths

Gerald P. Mallon (2004), in *Gay Men Choosing Parenthood*, asserts:

The myth of gay men as child molesters remains ingrained in the psyche of most people, including social work professionals – so much so that the idea that gays would be allowed to parent seems, to some, incredible. (p. 10)¹

The representation of gay males as parents and procreative fathers not only challenges myths and mainstream sensibilities, but it also progressively inverts dominant family ideals, and may be a threat to the security of the traditional heterosexual family unit (see Chapter 1). In the manner of a Bakhtinian carnivalesque inversion, the documentary appearance of gay parents in *Daddy and Papa* (see Introduction), *Primetime Thursday* and *Paternal Instinct* (see Chapter 6) displaces the normal power base (the heterosexual ideal), and supplants the imagined threat (the homosexual contender). This, as a powerful inversion, reaches out and connects with a potential mainstream heterosexual fear: the ‘imagined child molesters’ are in charge of the children.

This powerful dynamic, involving dislocating the heterosexual parent and supplanting the ‘pathologised other’, challenges dominant ideas about suitability for parenthood. This may be seen not only in the ability of gay men to perform the role of the parent, but also in their willingness and competence to become procreative fathers. Hence gay males remove themselves from the position of the ‘subjugated other’, and prove their worthiness as ‘productive social component’.

This journey from ‘outside’ the mechanism to ‘component’ of the engine, reveals a new engagement for gay social identity. This suggests that the potential of gay identity has progressed, and in the context of my thesis, this involves a ‘move to the domestic’: gay men are now connected to household and to family ideas. This may be seen, in some performers, in a desire to connect to the idea of marriage, in the ability to form families, and in authority expressed in ‘everyday’ social and

¹ This stigmatised ‘virtual social identity’ (Goffman, 1986: 12) is confirmed by Jeffrey Weeks (1985): ‘[M]ale homosexuals have frequently been seen as the chief corruptors, to the extent that in some rhetoric ‘homosexual’ and ‘child molesters’ are coequal terms’ (p. 224).

cultural arenas. However, before we examine this, it is important to review the evidence so far.

Finding a Place, and Performing the Self

This thesis has explored the potential of the individual performer, appearing within the 'confines' and 'opportunity' of documentary and reality television. As 'ordinary people' commenting on, and contributing to discourses which surround gay identity, a connectedness has been examined which highlights the potential of the gay citizens. This potential may be related to the idea of claiming citizenship, and seeking enfranchisement. This may be seen in the emergence of the 'independent gay citizen' in documentary in the 1970s, where individuals involved themselves as gay social actors revealing the intimacy of their lives, and expressing their hopes and desires. At this point performances were often produced as responses to issues surrounding subjugation (such as oppressive legislation, or pathologisation). Hence the earlier documentary texts deal as much with the idea of rejection and suppression, as with aspirations. This may be seen in a focus on addressing dominant institutional ideology. Later contemporary texts, in comparison, focus less on responding to institutions, and are seen as exhibiting the potential of practice. In this sense while earlier texts reveal gay identity as concerned with finding a place, later texts are involved with performing the ideal self.

This move from 'finding a place' in society, to 'performing the self' through practice, reveals gay identity within documentary and reality television emerging in the twenty first century as connected to production. Consequently, this thesis reveals a transformation in gay identity from mostly connected to social potential (how gay people may construct their lives socially, or fit in to social contexts), to exhibiting the potential of production (how gay men have become producers, involved in procreation and cultural/social authority). This results in a transformation of the gay male, from social subject to productive agent. However, before we review the evidence of the texts, and explore the possible conclusions, it is first important to review the context of the theories, or framing mechanisms employed.

Framing Mechanisms

This thesis has employed various theories. However, these have extended from a focus on the ideas of Michel Foucault (1998 [originally 1976]) concerning power and discourse. Ultimately my focus has been on revealing the power of the individual. This has been possible through examining Foucault's ideas on 'modern' or 'capillary' power (discussed in Chapter 2). However, whilst this provides the means for expressing the individual's involvement with discursive power, ultimately these performances work within 'frames of action' (Giddens, 1995: 29 [originally 1992]). Consequently Anthony Giddens' (1995) idea of 'institutional reflexivity' (discussed in Chapter 2), might be the most appropriate theory to apply to the ideas expressed here with regard to the power of performance. This allows us to consider the potential of reflexivity, alongside the actions of individuals working together, and the context of institutions. Evidence of this may be seen in the alliance and connection between performer and producer, suggesting some reflexivity and exchange. This involves the institutional power of the media, alongside the agency and involvement of individuals working within this, which may enable change.

Although Foucaultian power may be everywhere and potentially touches everything, ultimately it *powerfully* flows in and out of organisational areas (such as the media). Power imbalances may be apparent. Hence other theorists were employed in this thesis to reveal the contexts of production, and the power of resistance. Consequently the idea of 'materialist feminism' (discussed in Chapter 2) is highly relevant: power has been traditionally held by white heterosexual males, yet this may be challenged through progressive action. This provides a gender dynamic which exposes the subjugated position of homosexuals in relation to the feminist cause, and provides a means for challenging dominant ideals. Similarly Victor Turner's (1982) ideas on 'liminal' and 'liminoid' performance (discussed in Chapter 3) and Mikhail Bakhtin's (1965) idea of the 'carnavalesque' (discussed in Chapter 2) reveals the potential to resist. These provide 'framing mechanisms' which relate the potential of performance (to invert, or challenge, or provide new space).

Consequently, whilst Foucault has been foregrounded for liberating the idea of power to the individual, we must remember that (as this thesis has shown) individuals are working together, and forming strategies which may enable change. In order to examine this further, it is important to focus on the performances as they have been *framed* within this thesis.

Themes and Strategies

This thesis has revealed the significance of the family. This context is continually referred to since both political and popular discourses so frequently position homosexuality in relation to this, often negatively, and yet there is the potential to challenge heterosexual authority within this. Consequently, the focus on Lance Loud in *An American Family*, and the presence of Matthew Shepard in the various texts examined (both discussed in Chapter 1), signify the importance of connecting to the family. The positioning of the American son within the American family is a powerful device which enables representations to achieve mainstream media attention. Whilst *An American Family* may mark an early step towards the idea of accepting the homosexual American son in 1973, the representation of Matthew Shepard as an accepted son in 1998 may be seen as a benchmark. Here commentators on Matthew's life connect this to themes which are important in American cultural and social worlds: the frontier landscape, the context of the pioneers and the value of the American family. Through an examination of the connection between Lance Loud and Matthew Shepard, this thesis has foregrounded the potential for media producers to integrate homosexual identity within the heart of the family.

This type of potential acceptance is also signalled in *Some of Your Best Friends* (1971) and *Word is Out* (1977) (discussed in Chapter 3), where performers begin to perform the self. However mostly these are concerned with finding a place and challenging institutional ideas. Largely these texts concern *rejecting* the past, and *indicating* a way forward. This becomes more evident in *Gay USA* (1977) (discussed in Chapter 5), where large numbers of gay citizens are seen to coalesce, representing the potential reality of the gay community. Here although past issues are significant, the physical presence of large numbers of gay people, appearing as 'community', signifies 'mass' performative potential and indicates a watershed. Consequently, ideas of community and the idea of 'performing the self' become more apparent. These early texts represent the potential of the 'imagined community' (as discussed in Chapter 1) by revealing a gay collective. At the same time they foreground the opportunity of performing community. Here the potential to reveal the intimacy of the self connects with Anthony Giddens (1995) idea of 'intimacy as democracy', through revealing and performing 'intimate citizenship'

(Plummer, 1995).

Later, the AIDS documentaries express an intimacy which extends beyond the idea of personal citizenship and the gay community. Here gay identity is presented as 'community responsive'. Hence *Common Threads*, *Absolutely Positive* and *Living Proof*, all connect gay identity as responsive to AIDS. This involves the benefits which may be offered through gay men testifying their HIV status, revealing personal strategies of resistance, and signalling a way forward to the community at large: to all those touched by the disease. While this connotation directly connects gay identity to AIDS (signalling gay men as potentially diseased), these texts not only reveal the opportunity for gay men to help the community, they also provide space for intensified personal performance. This may be seen in *Silverlake Life* and *Fighting in South West Louisiana*, where the idea of the gay couple, and partnership potential is foregrounded as much as issues surrounding AIDS. Consequently, the AIDS documentaries not only allow gay men to provide strategies of resistance to the disease (as beneficial to all), but also in doing so, they stimulate the potential for intimate performance which intensifies community, partnership and family ideals.

Following the early documentaries, and those later focused on AIDS, I have discussed the relevance of *The Real World* (see Chapter 4). As an early reality television show, this set a precedent regarding furthering the place of the gay citizen within television texts. While talk shows had focused on gay performers, such as those examined by Joshua Gamson (1998), *The Real World* changed the focus. Instead of providing textual space to explore the problem, dilemma or challenge of gay identity, *The Real World* simply included gay people as regular cast members (regularly since 1992). This allowed performative space for the unveiling of homosexual romance based narratives, connecting with Anthony Giddens' (1995) ideas on the power of romance, 'as a potential avenue for controlling the future, as well as a form of [expressing] psychological security' (p. 41). Hence the performance of homosexual romance within the context of mainstream youth orientated television (on MTV), became a powerful discursive tool. *The Real World* would stimulate 'institutional reflexivity', as many later television texts (particularly in the domain of reality television) began to reflect, and to be influenced by the appearance of gay men in reality television. This resulted in media producers

focusing on gay citizens, in various texts.² Essentially I argue that Jon Murray, co-producer of *The Real World*, may be responsible for this political potential. Here in alliance with willing cast members, producers were seen to attempt to change ideas regarding gay identity on television, and documentary.

The idea of alliance, and the influence of *The Real World* is undoubtedly evident in the texts discussed in Chapter 5. This is particularly apparent in the exploration of the reality television texts: *Survivor*, *Boy Meets Boy* and *Experiment: Gay and Straight*. Here producers and performers, both gay and straight, are seen working in alliance, in scenarios where gay identity is foregrounded. Therefore although the competition orientated formats of *Survivor* and *Boy Meets Boy* provide the circumstances for gay identity to fail, it is significant that these texts were not only produced under the aegis of openly gay producers (Charlie Parsons for *Survivor*, and Doug Ross for *Boy Meets Boy*), but also straight participants focus on the potential equality of gay identity. In this context these texts represent acceptance of gay social profiles. They also involve the idea of alliance towards this, and gay identity becomes centralised.

Consequently, the attention afforded to gay identity within *The Real World* (illuminating romantic narratives, and expressing frequency of appearance) may have been influential in providing the circumstances for later and more popular reality texts to include gay performers. However, the prominence of gay identity in the competition orientated reality television texts may suggest the idea of 'use'. Here gay men are placed 'centre-stage' and they are used within formats which involve a need to compete. Such a focus involves the stimuli of production: the gay performers must be productive in order to win. Here we see the emergence of production, which becomes more evident in the final texts examined in Chapter 6.

The contemporary documentary and reality television texts discussed in Chapter 6, reveal a new confidence in gay performance which foregrounds the idea of production. Hence *Primetime Thursday*, *Gay Weddings*, *Tying the Knot*, *Paternal Instinct*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, alongside *Daddy and Papa* (discussed in the Introduction), all connect with the idea of performing intimate citizenship, and at the same time connect with the concept of production. Consequently, these diverse texts may be linked not so much for some congruence to the idea of family, but more for pushing the gay performer 'centre-stage' as producer. Here political ideals are

² I argue that *The Real World* set a historic precedent in mainstream television which influenced other texts. This predates the coming out of lesbian Ellen Degeneres on network television in 1996, which was influential (Pullen, 2000)

presented which may be powerful in terms of stimulating ‘institutional reflexivity’ (ideas about child care, marriage, relationship rights, and cultural and social affairs), and at the same time they are transgressive. This is particularly evident in presenting gay men as controlling procreation in *Paternal Instinct* (outside heterosexual control), and in projecting gay males as cultural and social authorities in *Queer Eye* (overturning heterosexual hierarchy). Hence the most contemporary case studies reveal gay identity as ‘performative’, and ‘involved’ in production. Thus the contemporary texts are involved in practice (through exhibiting production), while the earlier texts debate institutional possibilities (reflecting on social ideals).

This balance between practice and institution, has been highlighted by Jeffrey Weeks et al (2001) concerning the inventiveness of the non-heterosexual family. Here practice compared to institution, is related to ‘meanings rather than structures’ (p. 49). This is not to say that gay identity has emerged outside structures and institutions, but what occurs is that it challenges structures and institutional ideals. This is evident as we see gay identity exhibiting new family forms, and engaging with the idea of authority. Consequently, the contemporary texts may represent a coming of age, and a new confidence in gay performers. Here we see the exhibition of practice and production over hierarchical structure, and institutional ideal. Through performance, ideas are changing. Dominant ideals are challenged, and new frames of reference are formed: the gay male as producer, appearing ‘centre-stage’.

Social Change, Citizenship, Community, Therapy and Production

This thesis has examined a movement and progression, of gay identity in documentary and reality television, as represented through performance. Whilst this suggests a limitation, that this is only part of a larger picture concerning gay identity, I would like to argue that the representations examined may be valued in terms of:

- reflecting social change through discussing/performing identity;
- working towards democratic citizenship;
- projecting community ideals;
- offering therapeutic benefits;

- exhibiting the productivity of gay people.

These are essential points which focus on the potential of the texts.

This thesis reflects evidence of social change. It is not based on large-scale quantitative evidence of gay social reality, but instead has drawn on other sources which reflect discourses provided by gay citizens. Evidence of this can be seen by contrasting the findings of Jack Babuscio in *We Speak for Ourselves* (1988 [originally, 1976]); Kath Weston in *Families we Choose* (1991); Rich C. Savin-Williams in *Then I Became Gay* (1998); Jeffrey Weeks et al in *Same Sex Intimacies* (2001), and Gerald P Mallon in *Gay Men Choosing Parenthood* (2004).³ Here we see a similar progression of gay identity, as discussed by gay citizens (mediated by researchers), which may be contiguous with my thesis: the gay male emerges in the 1970s as a cautious voice exhibiting resistance, later becomes more confident in expressing identity, and then potentially connects to the idea of reproduction and family. Consequently, a similar pattern may be observed which reinforces the context of the thesis: gay identity is progressing. This ultimately reveals the representations as connected to a wider movement in gay identity, and gay social life.

This movement not only reflects change, but also enables change, and may be connected with the idea of gay people working towards achieving democratic citizenship. Consequently, the term 'intimate citizenship' may not only be a discursive context employed to focus on the potential of individuals performing citizenship, it may also be the conduit which leads to the *achievement* of citizenship. In this way not only can we view intimate citizenship as a way to 'elaborate new languages to articulate the new possibilities and conditions in which we find ourselves' (Weeks, 1995: 121), it is also a performative idea which enables change. Consequently, this thesis has revealed a progression from claiming citizenship (the early texts where I propose that the independent gay citizen emerges), to later performing intimate citizenship (where intimacy is foregrounded in the context of community), to citizen as producer (where gay performers produce and operate independently – contributing to community).

Consequently, this ultimately connects with the idea of achieving citizenship equality, and connects with projecting new community ideals. Hence the performers in *Paternal Instinct* may represent an ultimate stage within this. Through engaging in procreation, and establishing their own citizenship ideals (outside male

³ Note that this comparison does not solely relate American contexts. (Babuscio's and Weeks' findings relate to British citizens),

heterosexual control), they extend the potential of the gay citizen, and signal the emergence of a new kind of community. This translates to producing a new pathway which is both 'productive', and 'reproductive'. Through forming a new 'hybrid family ideal' where homosexuals are the parents, and heterosexuals are involved (the surrogate mother and family – see Chapter 6), a new citizenship and community ideology is constructed which binds both gay and straight.

This coming together of homosexual and heterosexual identities may reveal evidence of resolving psychological tensions between gay and straight audiences. Consequently, I would like to argue that not only does this thesis reveal evidence of social change, and the emergence of new citizenship/community ideals, at the same time we may contextualise the performances in connection with the therapeutic benefits. This may be argued on two levels: from the perspective of those involved in performance and production, and concerning those who may identify with this. If we consider those willingly involved in production, who signify their homosexuality, we may consider that their actions may reflect a 'therapeutic culture'. Ken Plummer (1995) advises us that this is characterised in the USA by 'an intense individualism which has been linked to self reliance and self actualisation' (p. ix). Through projecting ideas of the intimate self, this extends the 'personal' towards the public domain. This may be connected to a desire in the individual to affirm their status, and in doing so it may be therapeutically beneficial. This ultimately may take the form of 'self-therapy', and awareness of the self. As Anthony Giddens (1992) observes, this 'does not lead to a chronic immersion in current experience ... it is the very condition of planning ahead' (p. 71). Consequently, openly gay producers and performers involved in performing intimate citizenship (self actualising their sexual identity), may be considered as involved in a self therapeutic project. This may be rewarding to themselves in helping them establish and construct their 'true' identity, and at the same time it may be therapeutic self actualisation.

Therapeutic contexts may also be connected to the audiences. This may be seen in Mimi White's (1992; 2002) idea of therapeutic discourse (discussed in Chapter 2) which connects to audience identification potential. As White (2002) tells us:

[T]elevision offers new formations of individual and social subjectivity, displacing the modernist therapeutic project, recasting conventions of social decorum, and transforming conventional distinctions between private and public

spheres. ... What emerges ... is a networked subjectivity with identity construed in mediated performative terms. (p. 314)

This may involve the audience connecting with a 'therapeutic power matrix'. Through witnessing and engaging with the presentation of intimate disclosure, they make identifications and connect with the confessional power project (discussed in Chapter 2). Consequently, the therapeutic potential exists for understanding, and coming to terms, for all those who wish to identify with the text.

For the producer or performer, the 'therapeutic' and 'change enabling' project directly connects with the idea of production. This idea is central in the contemporary texts. Here gay men exhibit their productivity in various areas. This includes not only child care, child birth and family maintenance, but also cultural and social authority/production. Hence through the exhibition of productivity, gay men reveal a competence and authority which may be influential to social and cultural ideals. Gay males may not only be considered as 'prime experimenters' engaging in production, but also they become 'new authorities' influencing production ideals. Such confidence with production enables gay identity to transgress boundary norms, which might keep gay identity outside family and household environments. This move to production and economy allows gay identity to be connected as a potential component in the everyday working of society: revealing a connection with the family and the domestic.

Conclusion: The move to the Domestic

Ken Plummer (1995) tells us 'The lives of lesbians and gays touch upon "family" in every direction, but stories of this diversity have rarely, until recently been told' (p. 154). Gay men and women have always been part of the family, yet the connotation of gay identity with subjugated stereotypes (such as those which suggest the ephemeral and unfulfilled nature of homosexual males), and with demonising myths (such as the gay male as child molester) have encouraged the separation of 'homosexual' and 'family'. The innovation of the texts discussed here is that gay males are not only related as valued family members, but also they appear as competent family leaders. This produces for gay identity a transformation in identification potential, which suggests a 'move to the domestic'. Evidence of this may be seen in the contemporary texts. Whether caring for children, working

towards marriage or involved as authorities on household and personal social and cultural space, gay performers are shown to be expressing interest and revealing potential in domestic arenas. This does not represent a capitulation to heterosexual ideals, but it is highly *political* in challenging concepts of the American family, and cultural norms.

However whilst we may recognise this 'new homosexual male' as a domestic, yet political, producer, this has only been examined within a discrete section of the media, and relates only to a moment in time. Consequently, whilst gay performers and audiences may be enthused by the potential this suggests, 'These are small changes created in some small spaces – possible signs of [real] futures, no more' (Plummer, 1995: 146). Therefore we must be wary of suggesting that social worlds have largely changed, and that homosexual domestic production may be the start of a new threshold for gay identity.

The potential expressed here is powerful, but resistance to progressions in gay identity is apparent. This is particularly evident with regard to rejecting the idea of gay marriage (as discussed regarding the American President's (George W Bush) standing against this (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 6)). In order to resist the subjugating forces of those who still perpetuate old myths about gay identity (as dangerous to family), only a mixture of homosexual agency, and a co-presence with mainstream community narratives is likely to work. Consequently, as Joan Garry advises pro gay media professionals (see Chapter 6) it is only through "the power of your stories" (as connecting to the lives of the mainstream) that American society may begin to accept the idea of gay marriage. This suggests an increased 'move to the domestic'. This not only involves revealing the narrative of 'intimate citizenship', but also it reflects the 'everydayness' of homosexual social existence, and how this may be empowering.

An emphasis should be placed on the potential of 'everyday domestic' and 'productive' narratives which may surround gay identity. This is not to suggest that gay identity should be assimilated, or that in Bruce Bawer's (1993) terms we should 'take our place at the [heterosexual] table'. What is required is an increased sense of confidence which expresses the co-presence of gay people within the domestic community. This may involve connecting with 'imagined' heterosexuals ideals, such as the idea of marriage, the potential of romance, and the reward of child raising. Alongside this we may also see 'a project of shared subcultural work' (Sinfield, 1998: 142), which might reflect on the productivity of a 'diverse yet connected' gay

community working to influence dominant arenas. Whilst this suggests a co-presence with heteronormative institutional forms (gays engaging with marriage and family), and aspects of service to society at large (gay cultural influence to dominant ideas), this does not necessarily mean that gay identity capitulates, or dissolves. This signals the productivity of gay men building their place in society, generating social and cultural potential which reaches out through coalescence and community. This productively engages and influences dominant ideas within the power matrix of institutional reflexivity, as gay identity, and society, takes on new forms.

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Appendicies

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Appendix 1

‘American Triangle’

(lyrics by Bernie Taupin, music by Elton John)

Seen him playing in his backyard
Young boy just starting out
So much history in this landscape
So much confusion, so much doubt

Been there drinking on that front porch
Angry kids, mean and dumb
Looks like a painting, that blue skyline
God hates fags where we come from

‘Western skies’ don’t make it right
‘Home of the brave’ don’t make no sense
I’ve seen a scarecrow wrapped in wire
Left to die on a high ridge fence
It’s a cold, cold wind
It’s a cold, cold wind
It’s a cold wind blowing, Wyoming

See two coyotes run down a deer
Hate what we don’t understand
You pioneers give us your children
But it’s your blood that stains their hands

Somewhere that road forks up ahead
To ignorance and innocence
Three lives drift on different winds
Two lives ruined, one life spent

From: *Songs From the West Coast* by Elton John (2001)
Rocket CD 586 330-2

Appendix 2

White House Press Release

November 11, 1994

Statement by The President.

Hillary and I are deeply saddened by the news of the death of Pedro Zamora.

In his short life, Pedro educated and enlightened our nation. He taught all of us that AIDS is a disease with a human face and one that affects every American, indeed every citizen of the world. And he taught people living with AIDS how to fight for their rights and live with dignity.

Pedro was particularly instrumental in reaching out to his own generation, where Aids is striking hard. Through his work with MTV, he taught young people that "The Real World" includes AIDS and that each of us has the responsibility to protect ourselves and our loved ones.

Today, one in four new HIV infections is among people under the age of 20. For Pedro, and for all Americans infected and affected by HIV, we must intensify our efforts to reduce the rate of HIV infection, provide treatment to those living with AIDS, and, ultimately, find a cure for AIDS.

Our hearts are with Pedro's family in this difficult time. In the months ahead, let us rededicate ourselves to continuing Pedro's brave fight.

President Bill Clinton

Appendix 3

‘Possession’

(by Sarah McLachlan)

Listen as the wind blows from across the great divide
voices trapped in yearning, memories trapped in time
the night is my companion, and solitude my guide
would I spend forever here and not be satisfied?
And I would be the one
to hold you down
kiss you so hard
I'll take your breath away
and after, I'd wipe away the tears
just close your eyes dear
Through this world I've stumbled so many times betrayed
trying to find an honest word to find the truth enslaved
oh you speak to me in riddles and you speak to me in rhymes
my body aches to breathe your breath your words keep me alive
And I would be the one
to hold you down
kiss you so hard
I'll take your breath away
and after, I'd wipe away the tears
just close your eyes dear
Into this night I wander it's morning that I dread
another day of knowing of the path I fear to tread
oh into the sea of waking dreams I follow without pride
nothing stands between us here and I won't be denied
And I would be the one
to hold you down
kiss you so hard
I'll take your breath away
and after, I'd wipe away the tears
just close your eyes...

From: *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy* by Sarah McLachlan (1994)
Arista CD 74321 19032 2

Appendix 4

The Real World San Francisco Episode Breakdown

Instances of Confessional lead	Performer	Time leading story	%	Narratives
12	Pedro	6:24	41%	Leaving family – Cuba – Against revolution – pro America – Mother – Religion – AIDS – AIDS Educator – Partnership potential
8	Cory	2:29	16%	Leaving Family – Religion
9	Judd	2:09	14%	Cartoonist – New York – Liberal -
4	Puck	1:42	11%	Bike Messenger – Unhygienic – Breaks Law
8	Rachel	1:26	9%	Graduate – Republican
5	Mohammed	0:52	6%	Musician
4	Pam	0:30	3%	Medical Student
TOTAL		15:32	100%	
% of Episode Confessional			66%	
% non confessional			44%	
TOTAL Episode Time		23:24	100%	

Time	Cast member	Narrative	I = Interview V = Voluntary (confessional)	Duration
0.12	Puck	On Bike	I - Confession	0.21
	Various	Credits	I - Confession	0.17
0.16	Cory	About to go on train to meet Pedro	I - Confession	0.59
2.20	Pedro	Leaving Family	I - Confession	1.20
3.36	Cory	Union station LA – Impressions of Pedro	I - Confession	0.33
4.12	Pedro	Impression of Cory	I - Confession	0.13
	Cory		I - Confession	0.08
4.43	Pedro	Discusses parents did not believe in	I - Confession	0.38

		the revolution. Opportunities in America. Against Cuba . I give thanks everyday that we live in America		
5.28	Puck	Discusses job – Bike messenger	I - Confession	0.58
6.30	Pedro	Discusses mother and significance of crucifix. Footage of family	I - Confession	0.38
7.15	Cory	What partner does Pedro have	I - Confession	0.20
7.44	Pedro	Pedro discusses he has AIDS with Cory. HIV positive. AIDS education	I - Confession	0.36
8.20	Cory	Discusses what a shame Pedro is HIV positive	I - Confession	0.15
8.47	Pedro	Going to meet 5 people. How are they going to respond to him being HIV positive	I - Confession	0.20
9.10	Puck	Arrest on bike	I - Confession	0.18
9.44	Judd	About to meet Rachel	I - Confession	0.15
9.59	Rachel	About to meet Judd	I - Confession	0.20
11.18		Cory Pedro		
	Judd	Discusses Rachel	I - Confession	0.46
		Cory and Pedro at the Golden Gate Bridge		
12.05	Judd	Judd and Rachel arrive	I - Confession	0.30
	Rachel		I - Confession	0.31
	Judd		I - Confession	0.15
	Rachel		I - Confession	0.03
	Judd		I - Confession	0.04
13.08	Pam	Pam arrives – discusses being an	I - Confession	0.14

		overachiever		
13.34	Mohammed	Arrives - Musician	I - Confession	0.30
	Pam		I Confession	0.03
	Mohammed		I Confession	0.03
	Cory		I Confession	0.02
14.36	Pedro	Cory and Pedro Arrive at Lombard Street – Describes the crookedest street in town	I - Confession	0.30
	Judd		I - Confession	0.10
15.36		Cory and Pedro Arrive		
15.26		Pedro helps introduce roommates. Where is Puck		
16.13'		Puck arrives – Music 'Life will never be the same'		
	Rachel		I - Confession	0.02
17.00	Pedro	Concerned about rooms	I - Confession	0.30
	Puck	Mohammed and Puck agree to share	I - Confession	0.05
	Mohammed		I - Confession	0.04
18.00	Pedro	Pedro worried about sharing rooms. Wants to feel at home	I - Confession	0.10
	Pam		I - Confession	0.08
	Rachel		I - Confession	0.06
	Pam		I - Confession	0.05
	Mohammed		I - Confession	0.12
18.53	Cory	Cory and Rachel have larger room. Pedro and Judd have smaller	I - Confession	0.03
	Judd		I - Confession	0.04
	Rachel		I - Confession	0.06

	Cory		I - Confession	0.09
		Cory kisses Pedro		
19.40		Puck shows pictures of injuries from bike accidents to Pedro and Rachel		
20.00		Cuban music – Pedro		
20.10	Pedro	Concerned about AIDS announcement and reaction	I - Confession	1.05
20.25		Cory discusses Pedro's AIDS. Not HIV		
20.43		Pedro discusses scrap book – Judd reaction I am living with AIDS		
21.00	Judd	Room share with Pedro OK	I - Confession	0.02
	Mohammed	Knows AIDS	I - Confession	0.03
	Pedro	Rachel concerned about AIDS	I - Confession	0.16
21.35	Rachel	Asking questions about how AIDS effects daily life. The Hardcore Questions I am going to be the complete Bitch	V - Confession	0.15
	Trailer for next episode	Romance is foreshadowed		
	Rachel	Discusses Puck	I - Confession	0.03
	Judd		I - Confession	0.03
		Pedro and Sean – Sean Do I plan on getting married?		
		Puck at soap box derby		
		Hawaii vacation		
	Pedro	Puck and the peanut butter ‘ ‘this is exactly who I did not want to live with’		0.03

		Bark - Puck		
		Closing episode sequence – Mohammed raps saying ‘boota man’ reaction shot from Pedro		

Appendix 5

A Typology of Modes of Individual Adaptation
By Robert K. Merton

Modes of Adaptation		Culture Goals	Institutionalized Means
I	Conformity	+	+
II	Innovation	+	-
III	Ritualism	-	+
IV	Retreatism	-	-
V	Rebellion *	+/-	+/-

* This fifth alternative is on a plane clearly different from that of the others. It represents a transitional response seeking to *institutionalize* new goals and new procedures to be shared by other members of society. It thus refers to efforts to *change* the existing cultural and social structures rather than to accommodate efforts *within* this structure

Taken from Robert K. Merton, *On Social Structure and Science* Edited by Piotr Sztompka (Chicago, 1996) page 139

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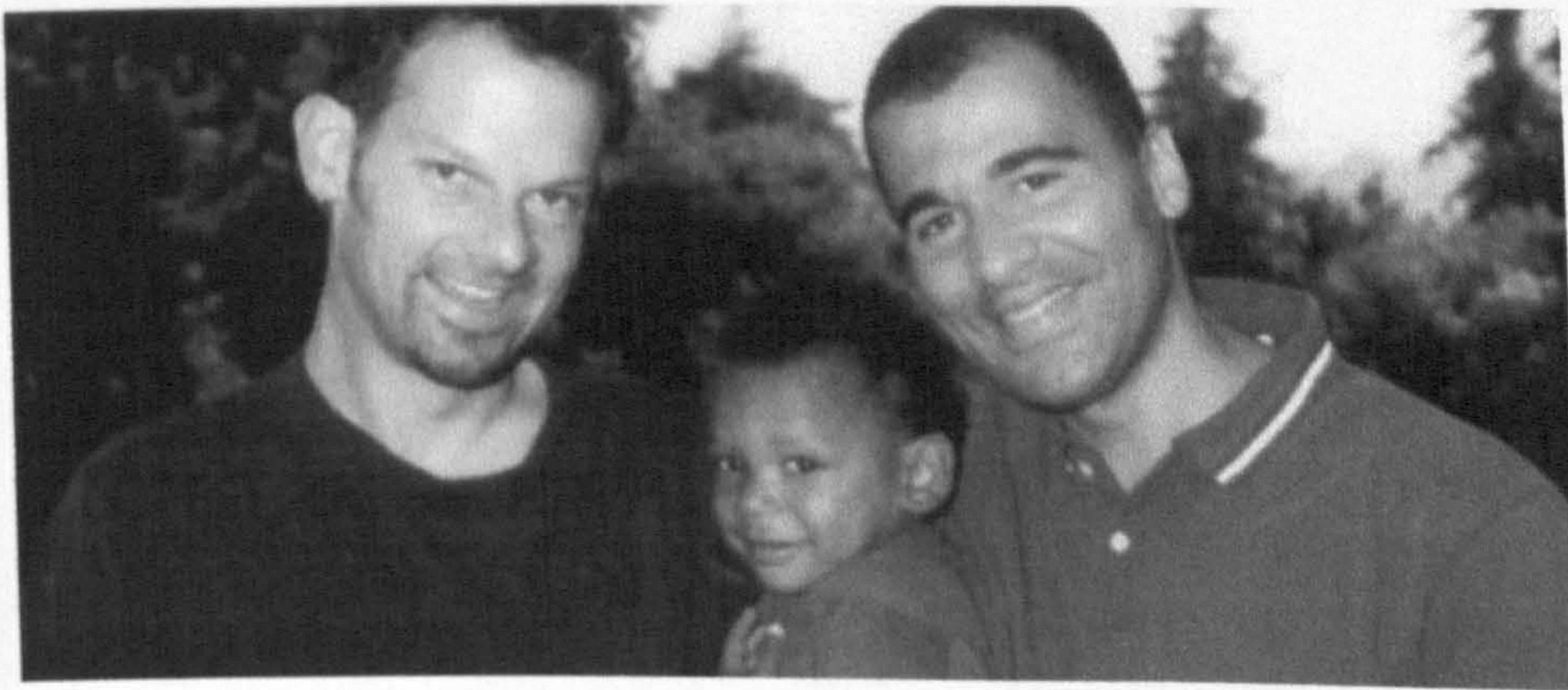
Illustrations

I

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Figure 1

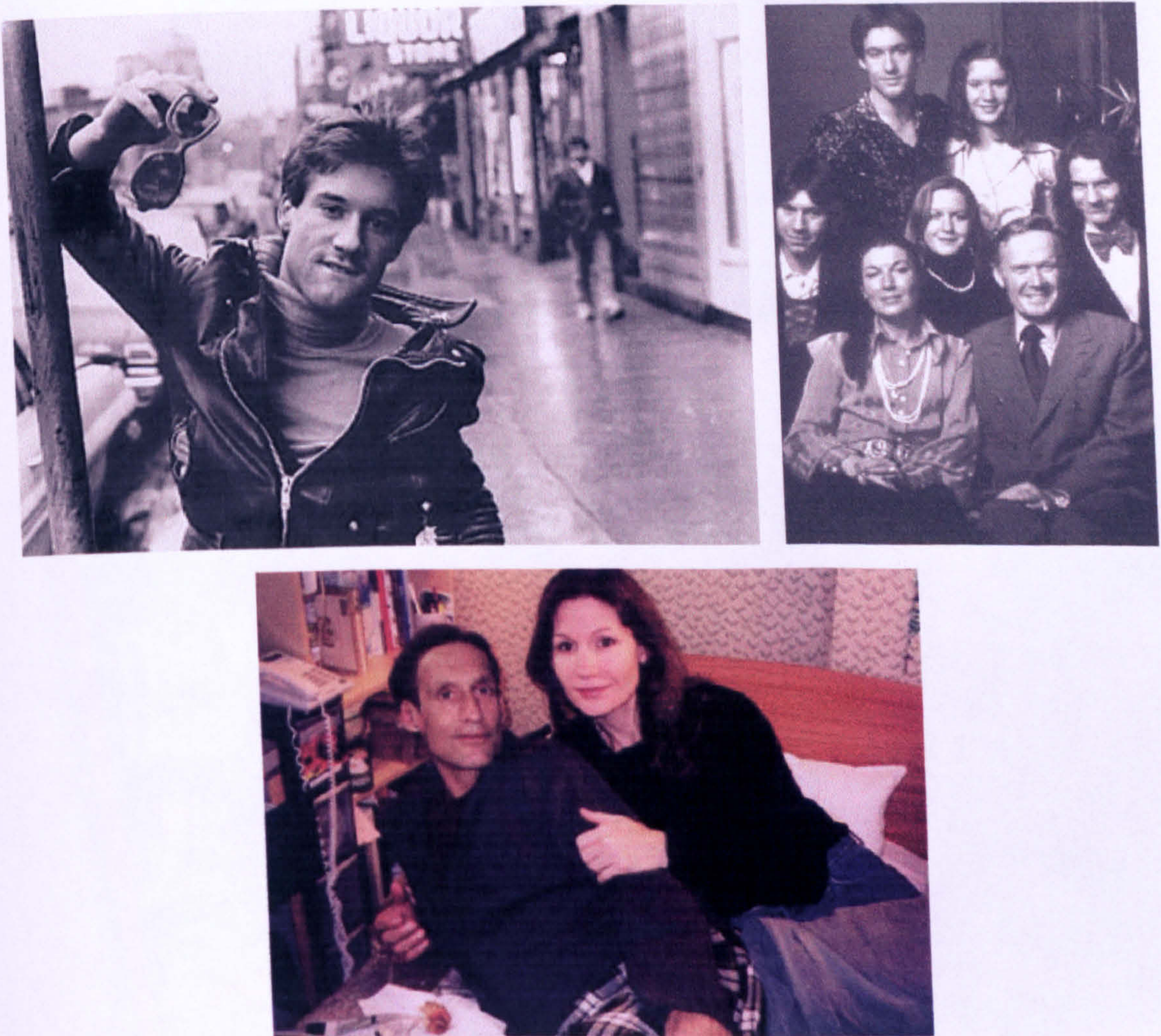
Daddy and Papa (2002)



John Symons and William Rogers with adopted child Zachary
(Source: *Daddy and Papa*, 2004)

Figure 2

Lance Loud and *An American Family* (1973)



Lance Loud in a publicity shot for *An American Family* (top left), the Loud family in 1973 (top right) and Lance with sister Michele at the time of *Death in An American Family* (2002) (below) (Source: P.B.S., 2004)

Figure 3

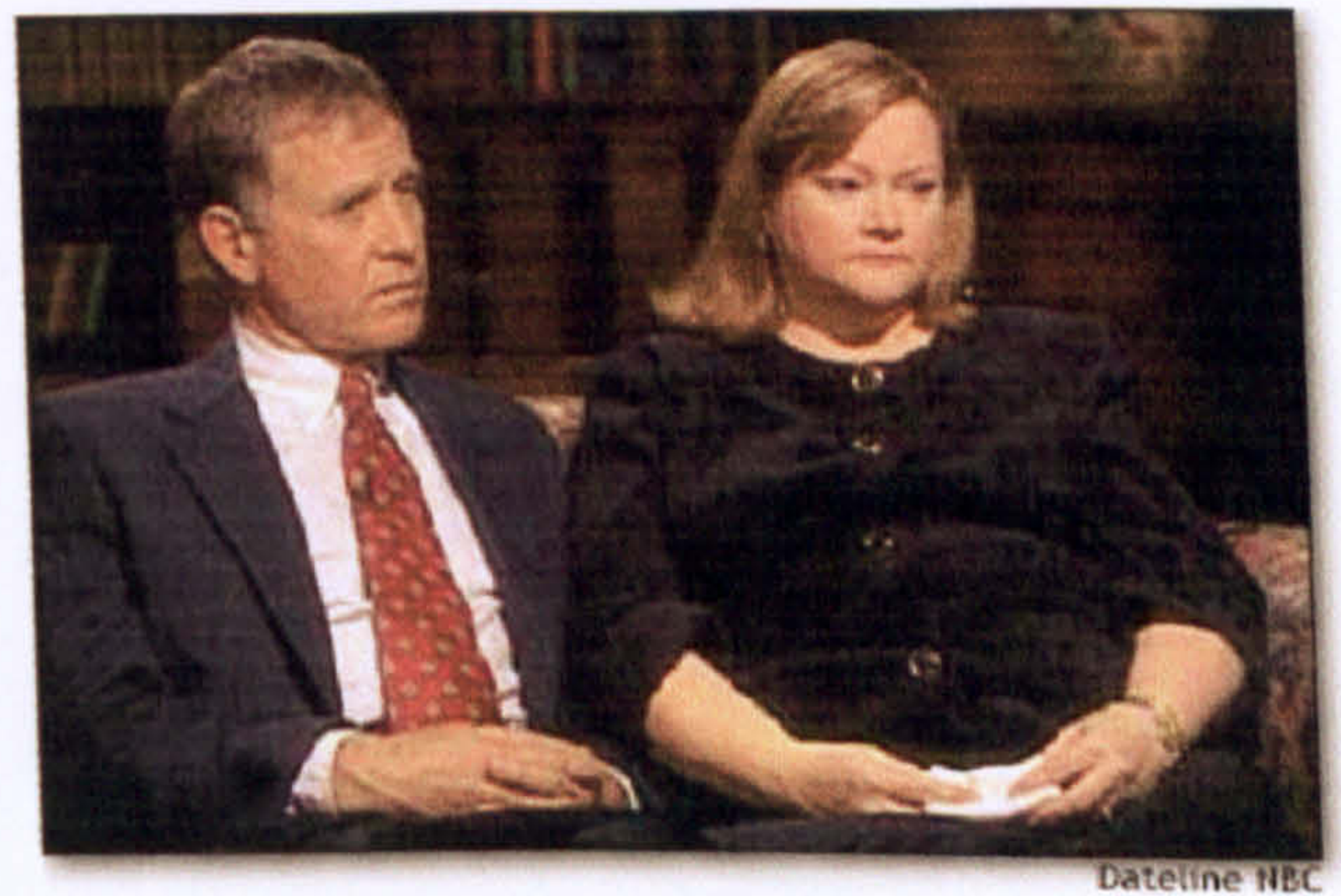
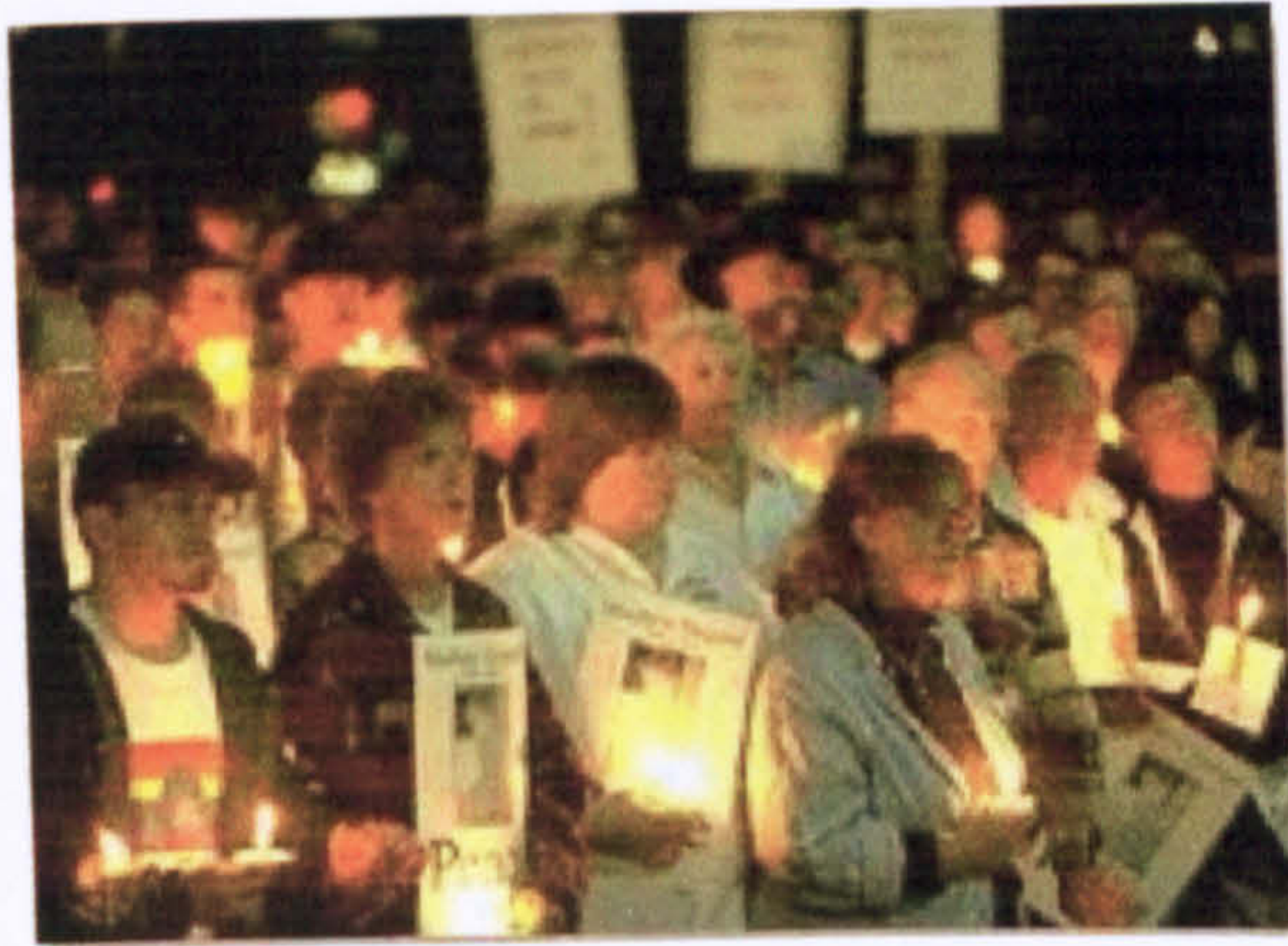
The iconic performance of Matthew Shepard



Advocate front covers (March 16th 1999 and October 11th 1999) discussing the tragedy of Matthew Shepard's murder, and contextualising the role of his mother (Judy Shepard) (above). *Time* front cover and press cuttings focusing on Matthew's murder and the issue of hate crimes against homosexuals (below) (Source: Barrett 1998).

Figure 4

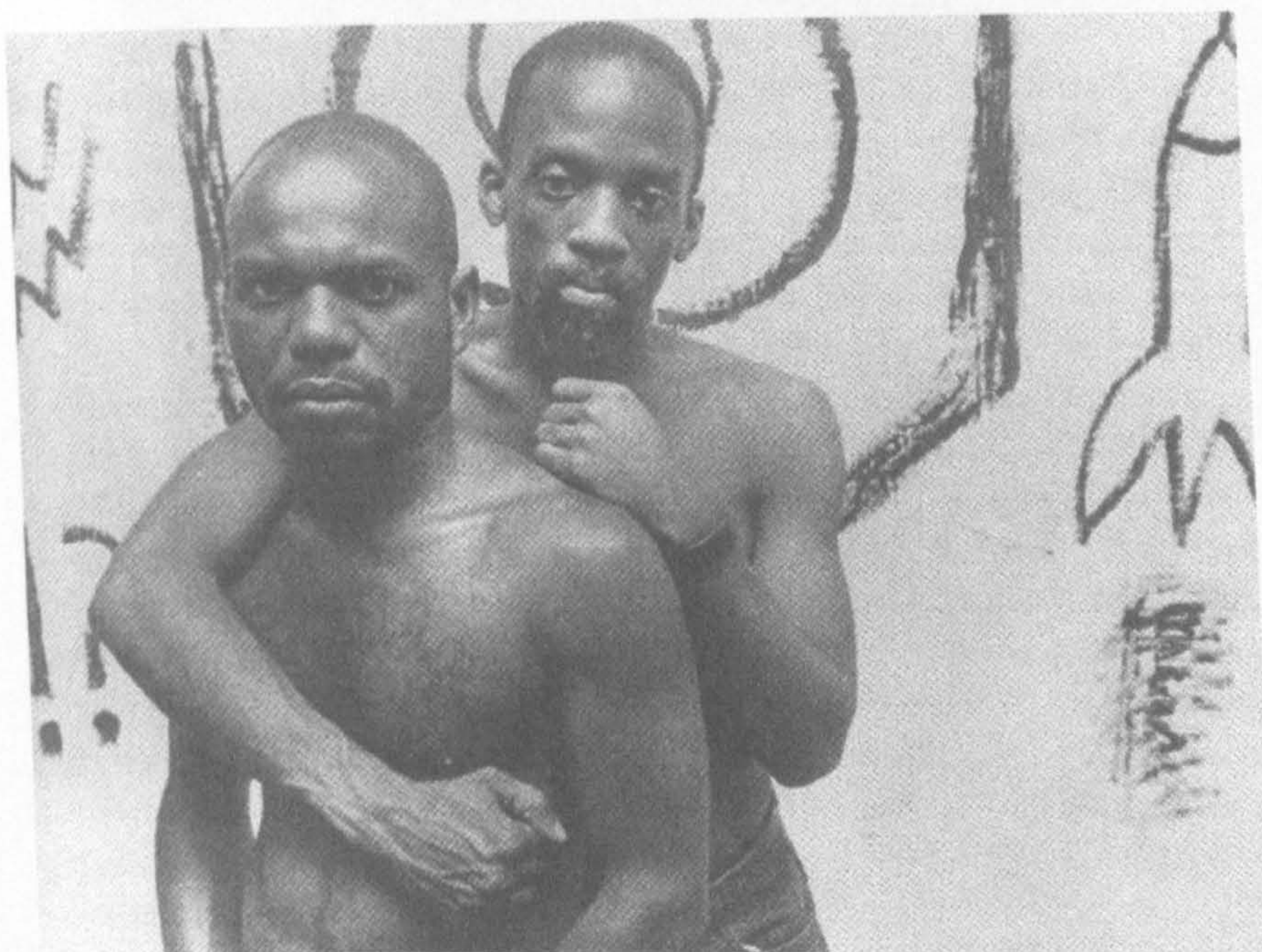
Personal and public support for Matthew Shepard



A candlelight vigil held in support of Matthew Shepard (top left); and, Dennis and Judy Shepard on *Dateline NBC* (1999) (top right) (Source: Hastings, 2004). The Angel Action performance, engineered by Romaine Paterson to counter Fred Phelps' hate campaign. (bottom left and right) (Source: Eat Romaine, 2004).

Figure 5

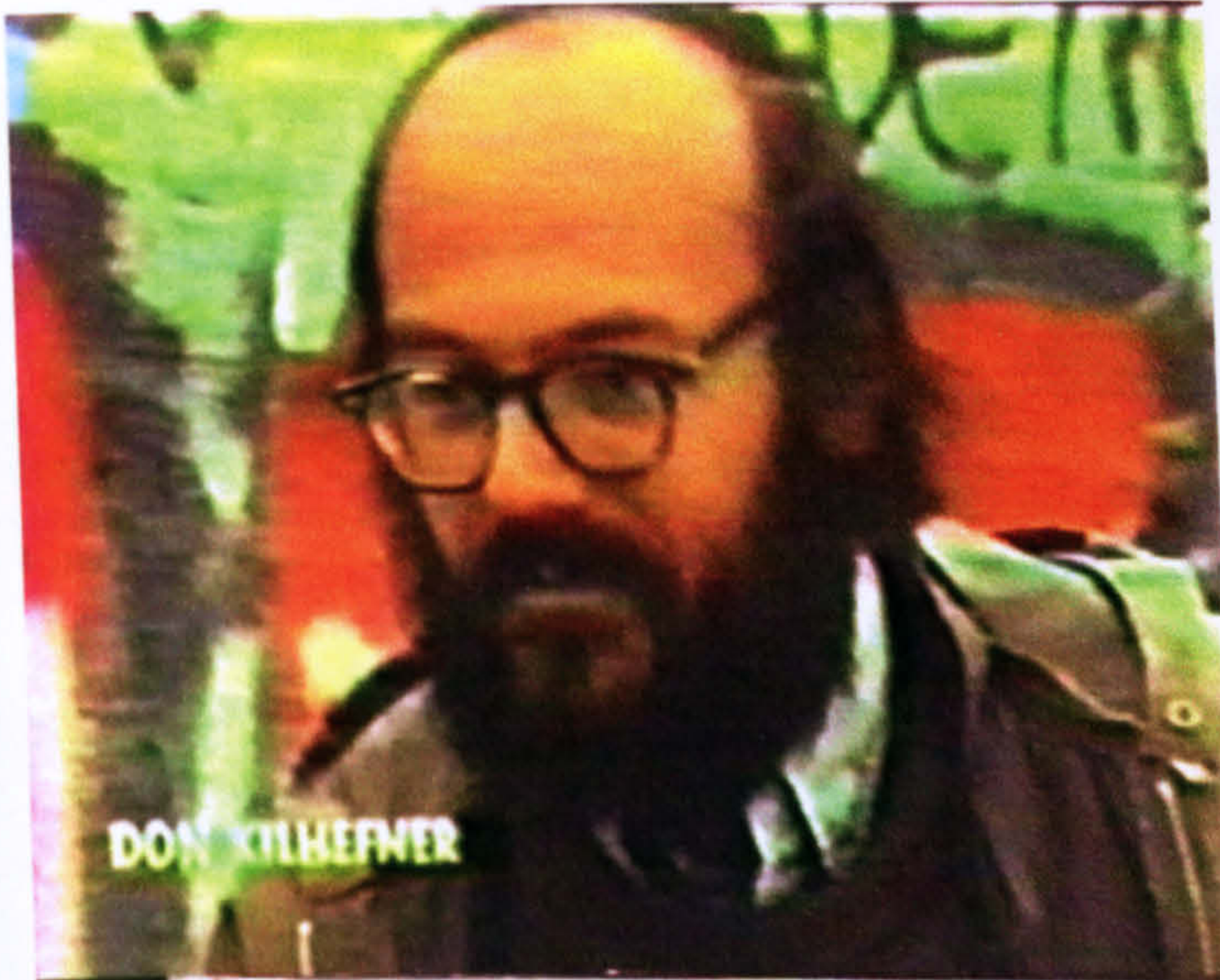
Tongues Untied (1989)



Marlon Riggs (left) with co-performer. (Source: Nichols, 2001)

Figure 6

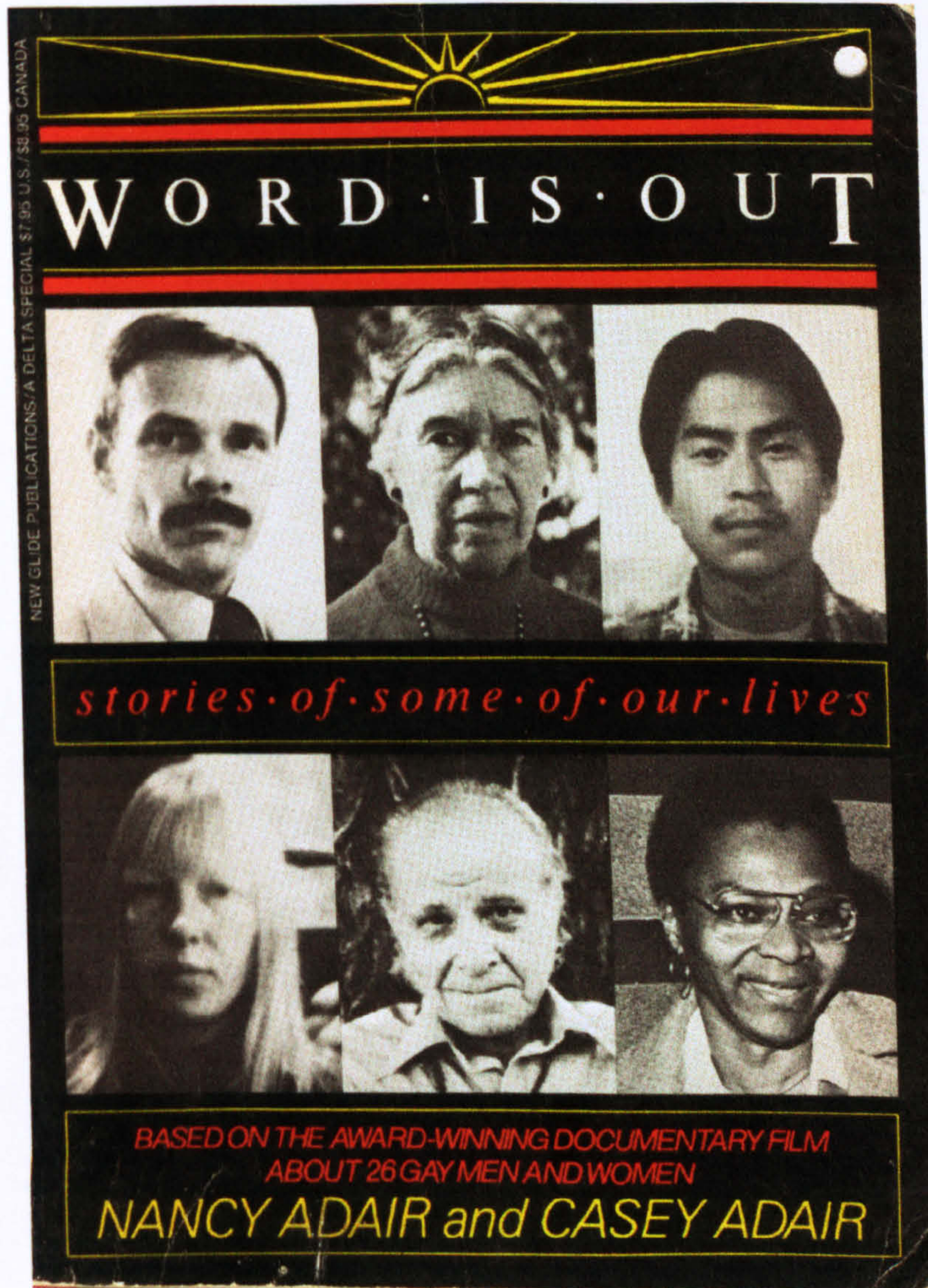
Some of your Best Friends (1971)



Don Kilhefner (above), and John Platania (below left) with Producer Ken Robinson (below right). (Source: images taken from *Some of Your Best Friends*)

Figure 7

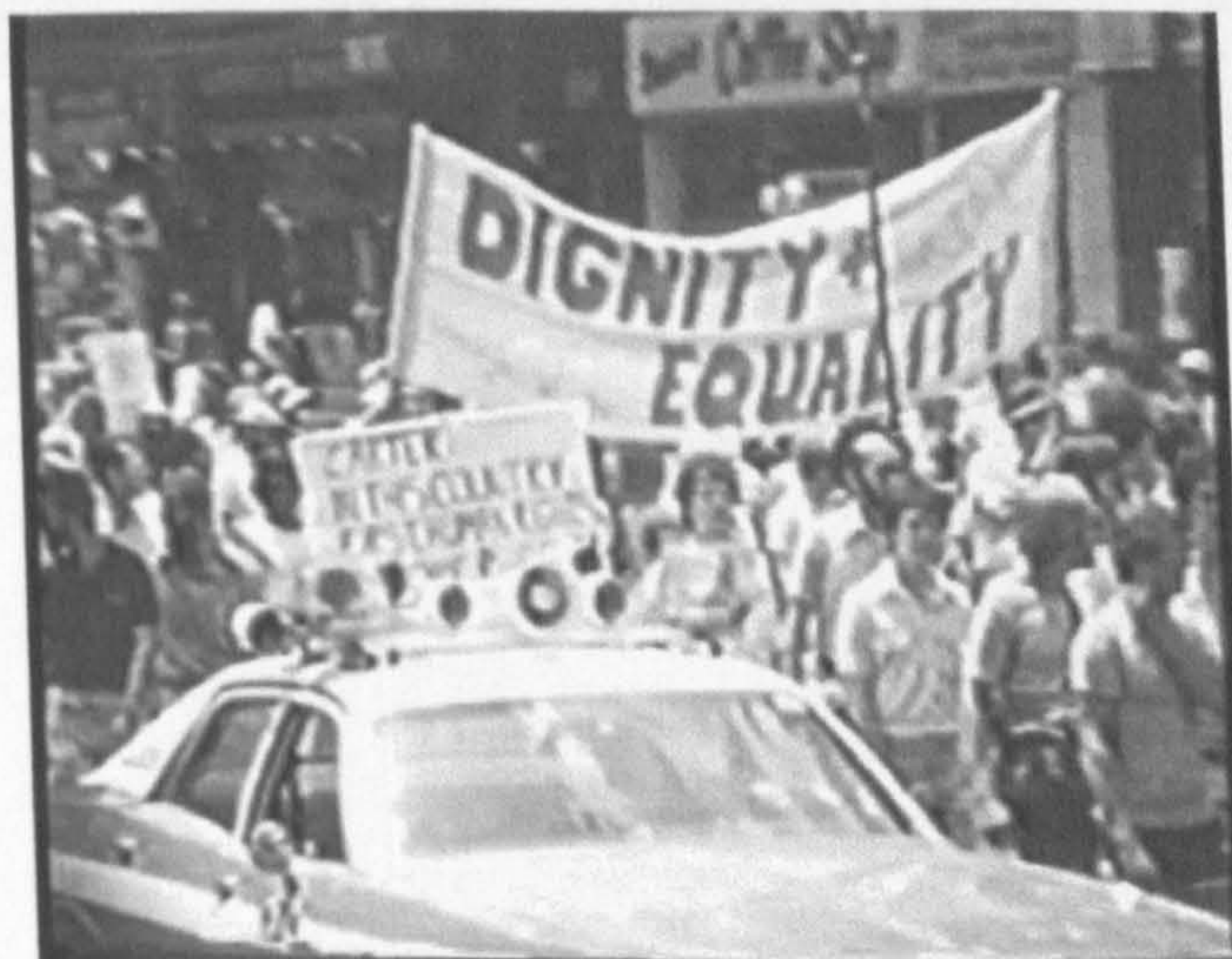
Word is Out: Stories of some of our lives (1977)



Word Is Out: Cover of the accompanying book (Adair and Adair, 1978) depicting various performers.

Figure 8

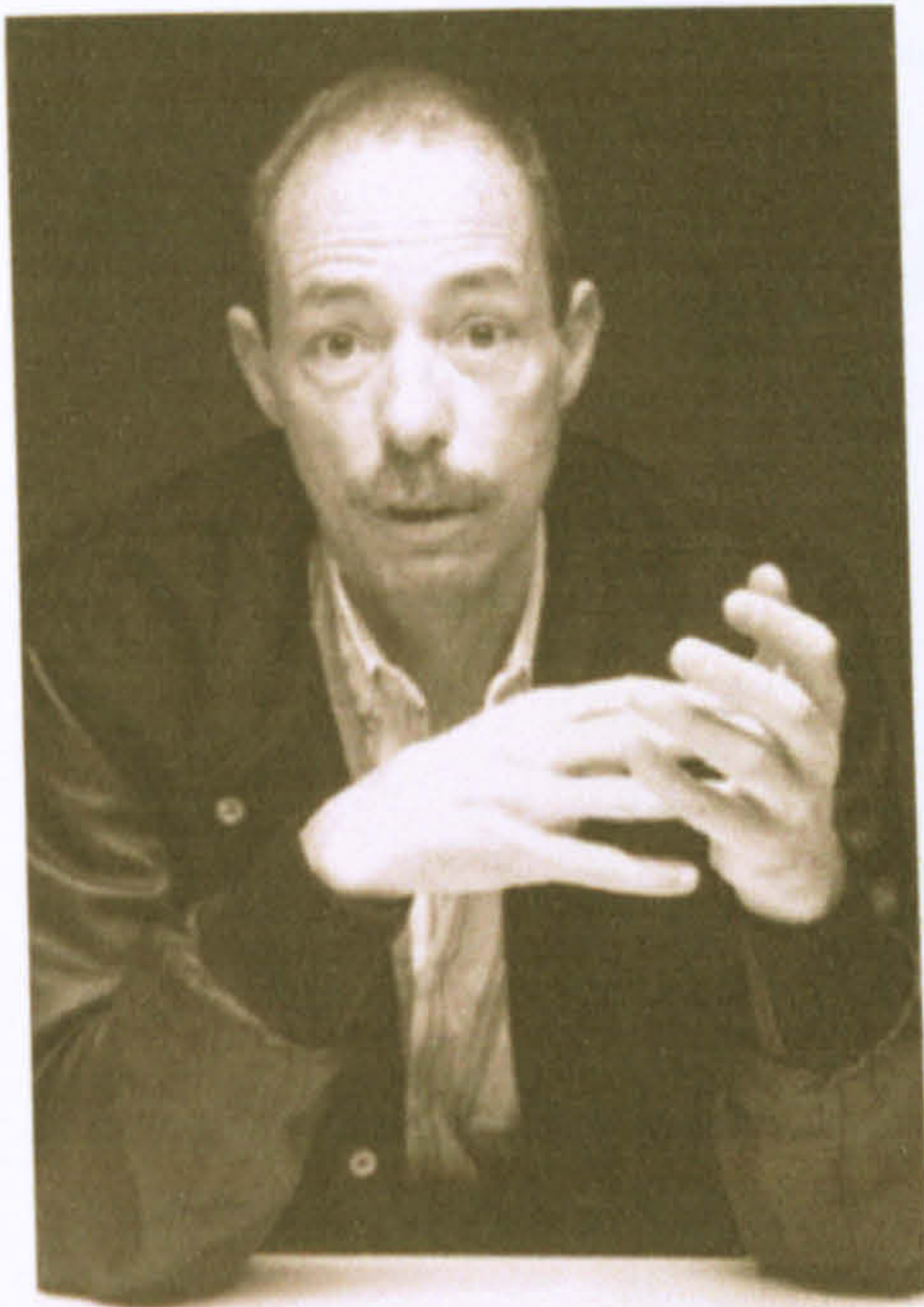
Gay USA (1977)



Gay male who discusses being put in prison for being gay (above, centre), female who rebukes his comment (above, left) (discussed in Chapter 6). Scene of crowd.
(Source: images taken from *Gay USA*)

Figure 9

Common Threads: Stories From The Quilt (1989)



Vito Russo at the time of his participation in *Common Threads* (Source: Metroactive, 2004), and a representation of the display of the Names Project (Source: Wikipedia, 2004).

Figure 10

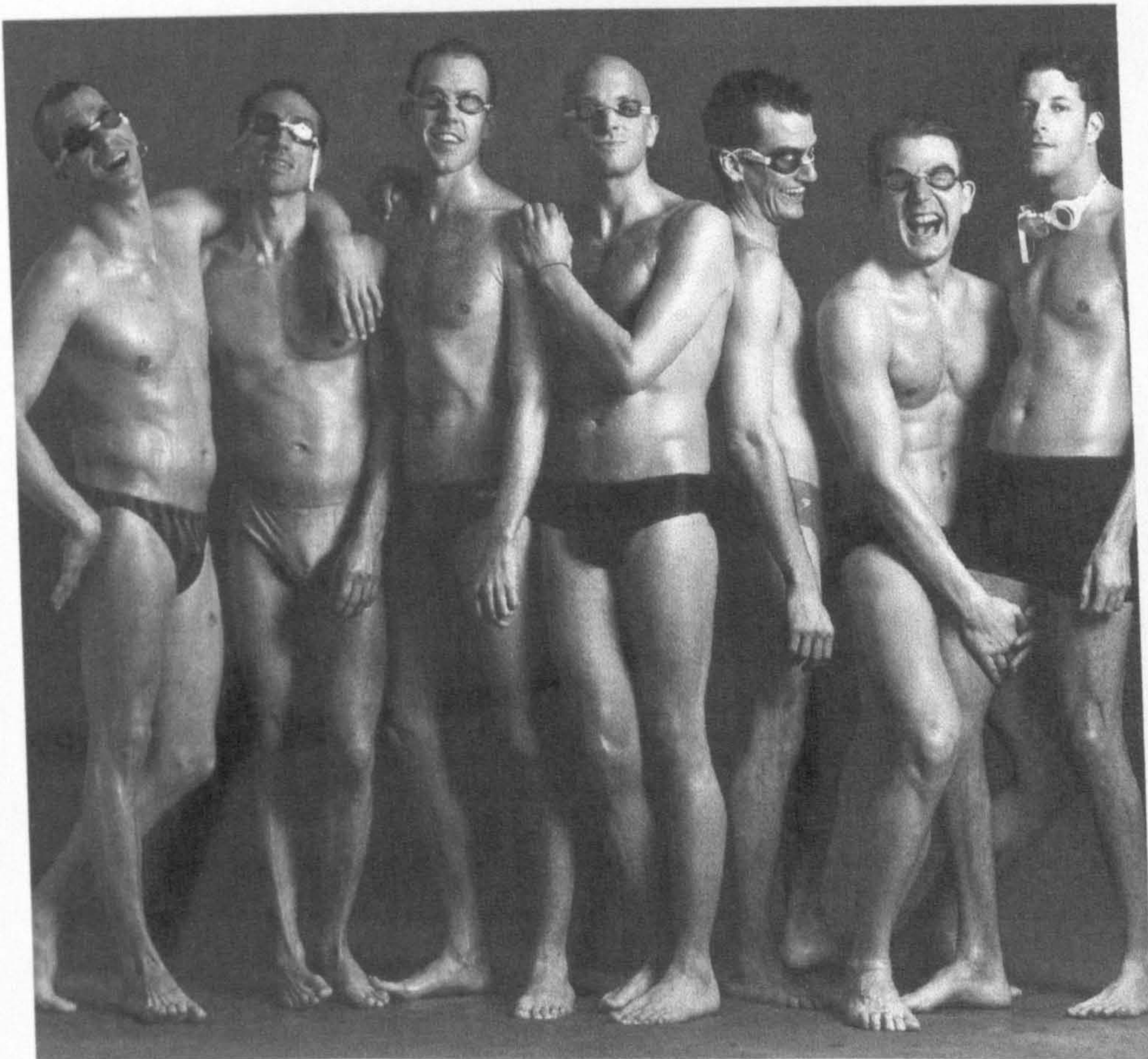
Absolutely Positive (1990)



Participants in *Absolutely Positive* (Source: Frameline, 2004)

Figure 11

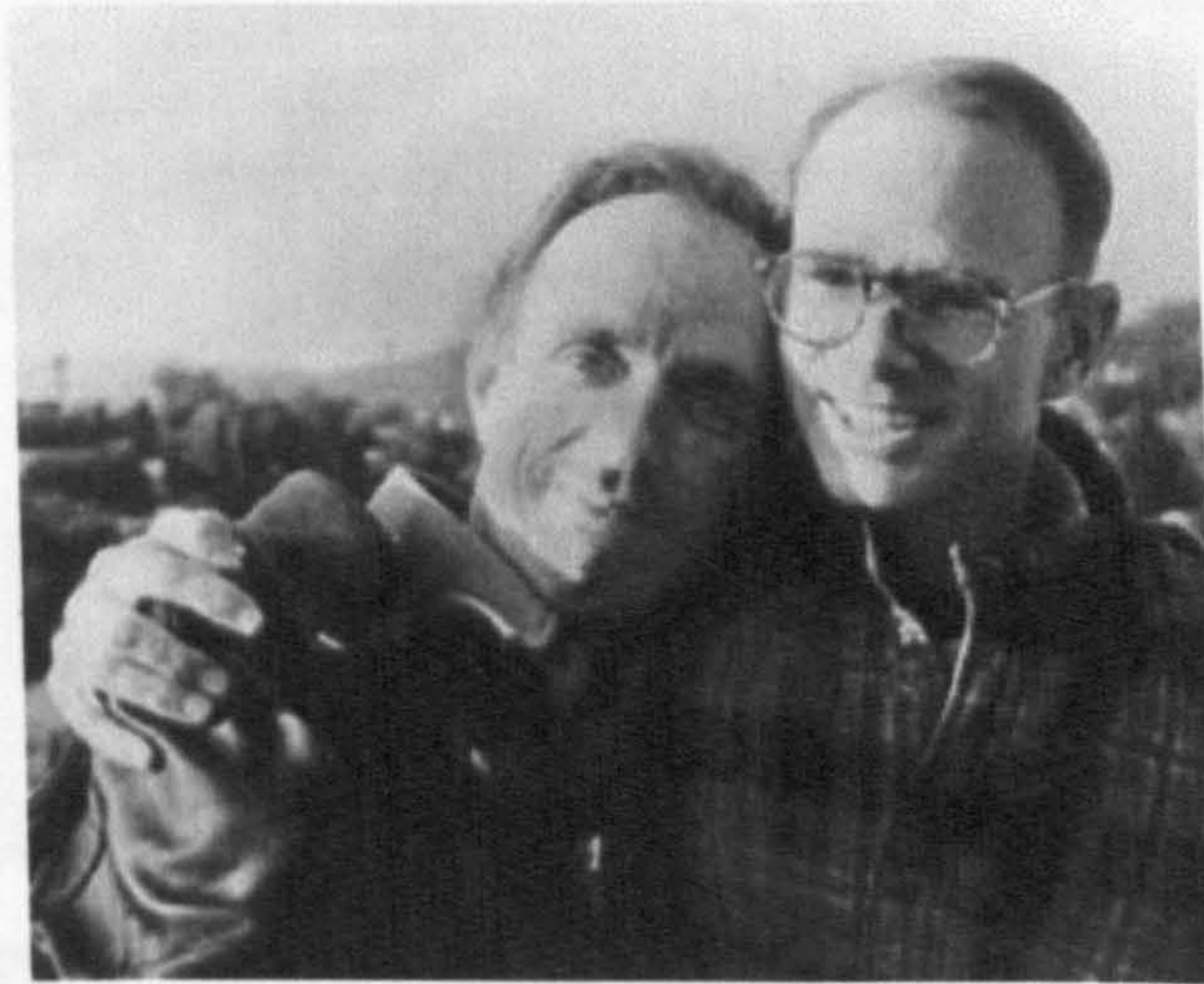
Living Proof: HIV and the Pursuit of Happiness (1993)



The 'Swim Team' (discussed in Chapter 3) (Source: Jones, 1994)

Figure 12

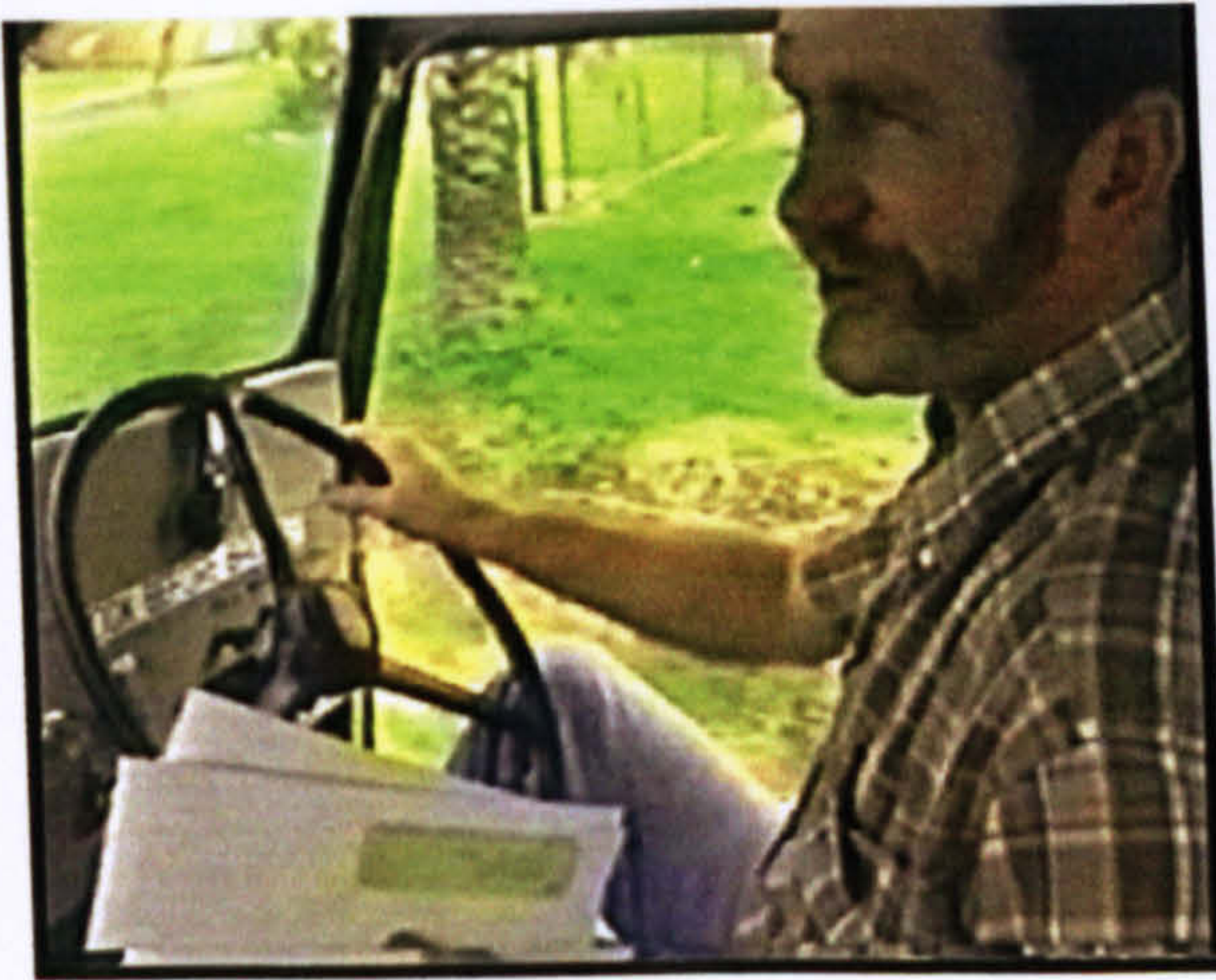
Silverlake Life: The View From Here (1993)



Mark Massi (left) and Tom Joslin (right) from *Silverlake Life*.
(Source: Strange Attractions, 2004)

Figure 13

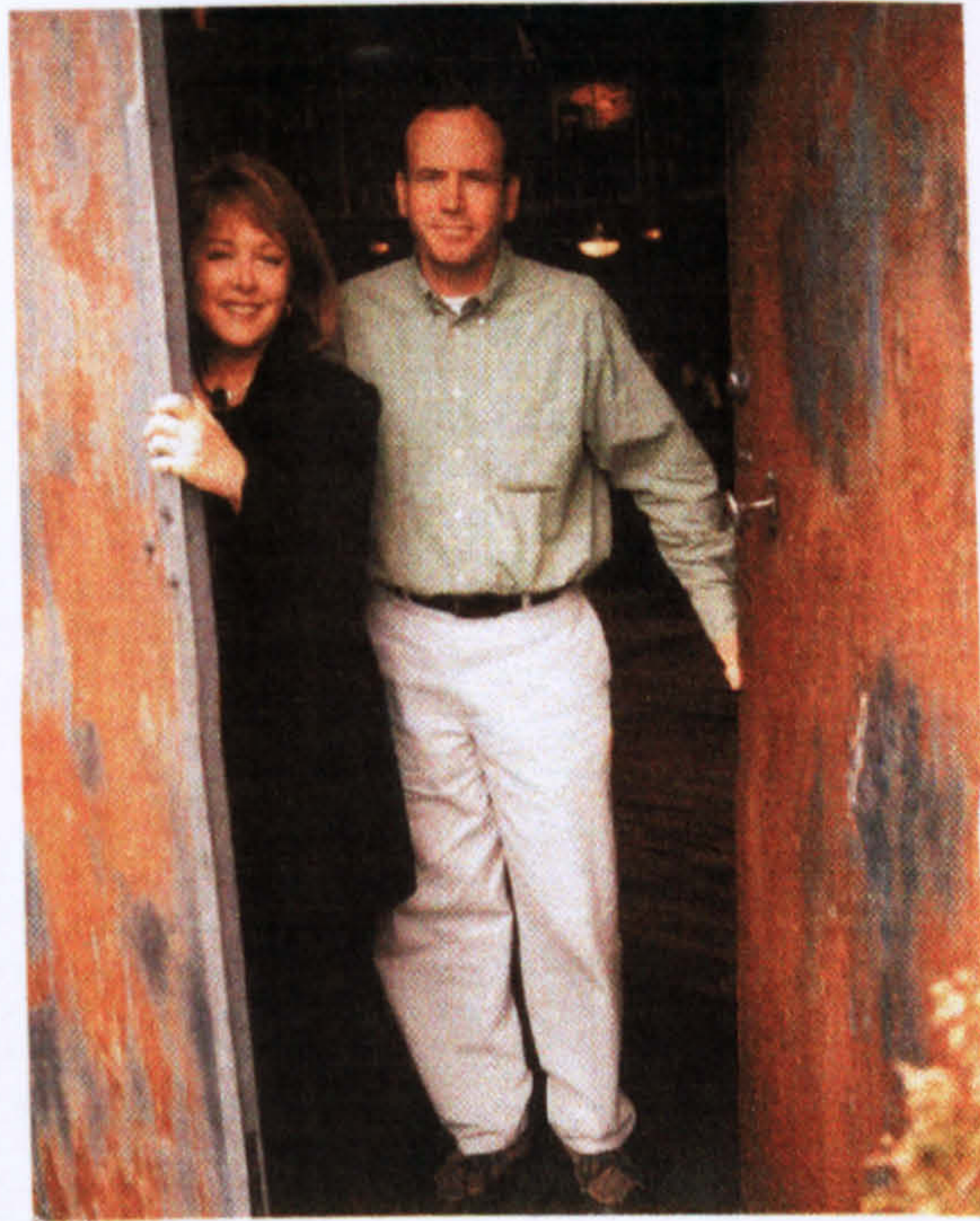
Fighting in Southwest Louisiana (1991)



Ben Royal (top left) with Danny Cooper (top right), Danny at work as a postman (below left) and Ben at the entrance of the 'gingerbread' house (below right).
(Source: images taken from *Fighting in South West Louisiana*)

Figure 14

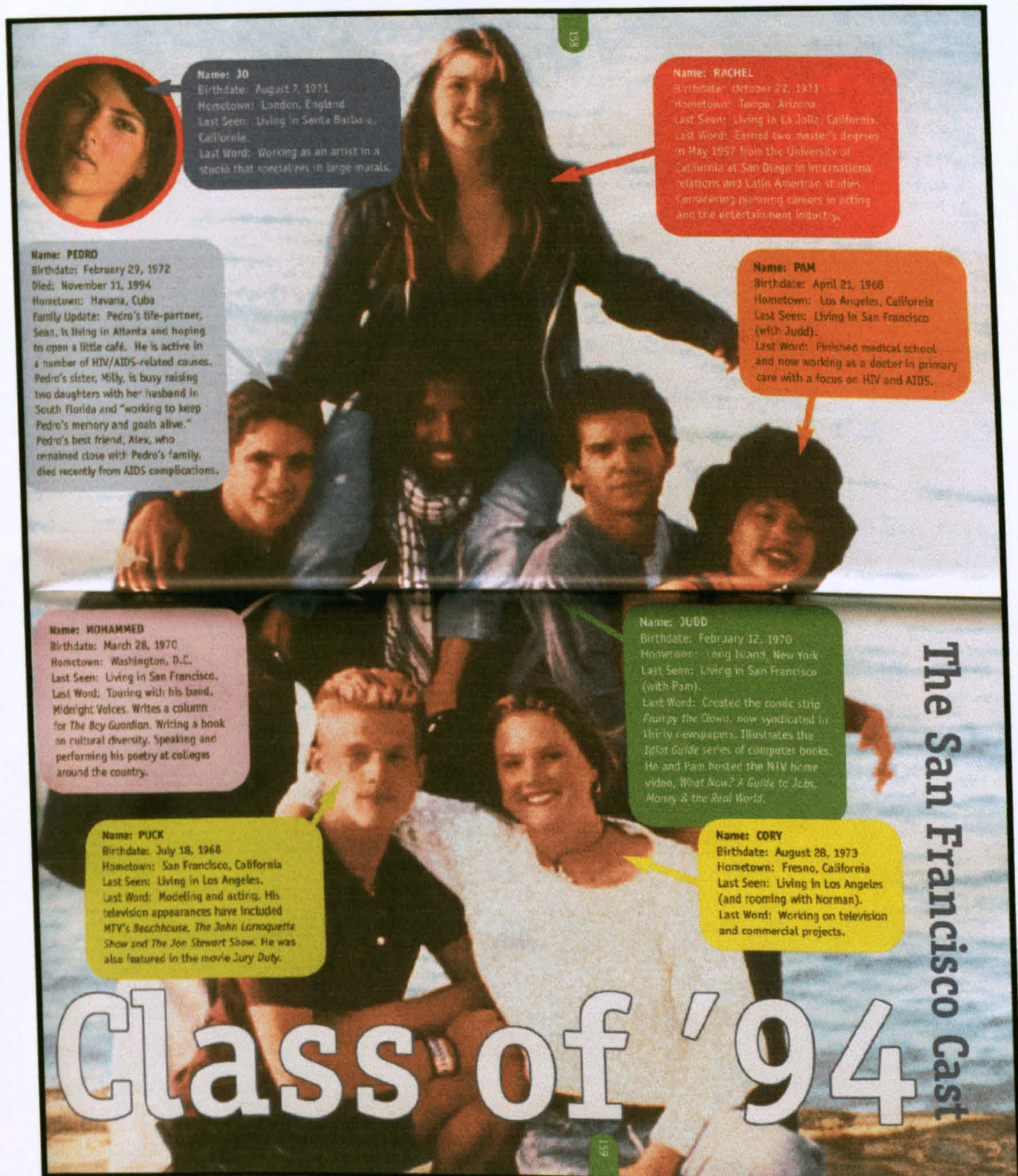
Producers of *The Real World* (1992-present)



Mary Ellis Bunim and Jon Murray. (Source: Solomon, 1998)

Figure 15

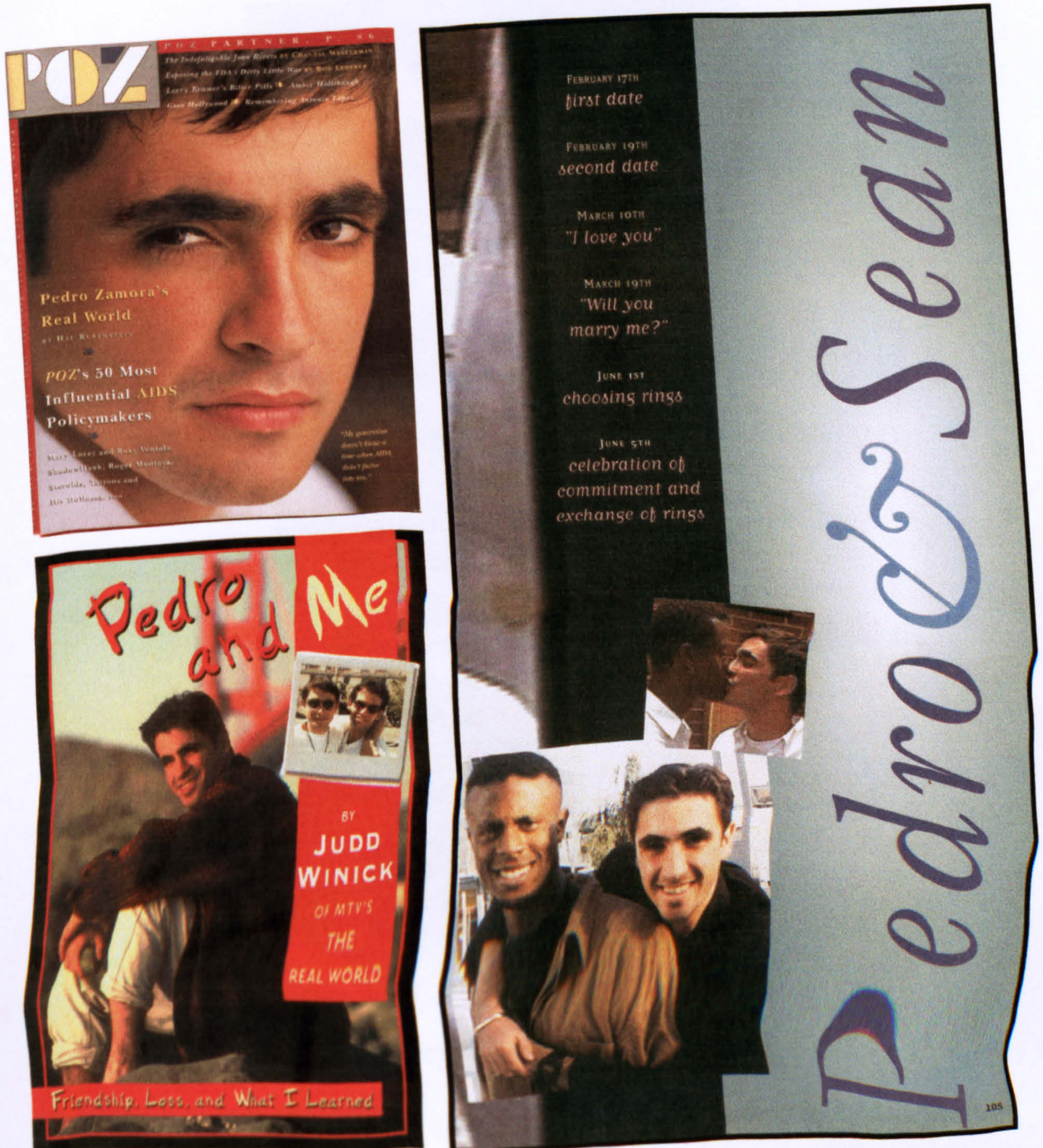
The Real World San Francisco (1994)



The cast, with the producers connecting the series to the idea of college life.
 (Source: Solomon and Carter, 1997)

Figure 16

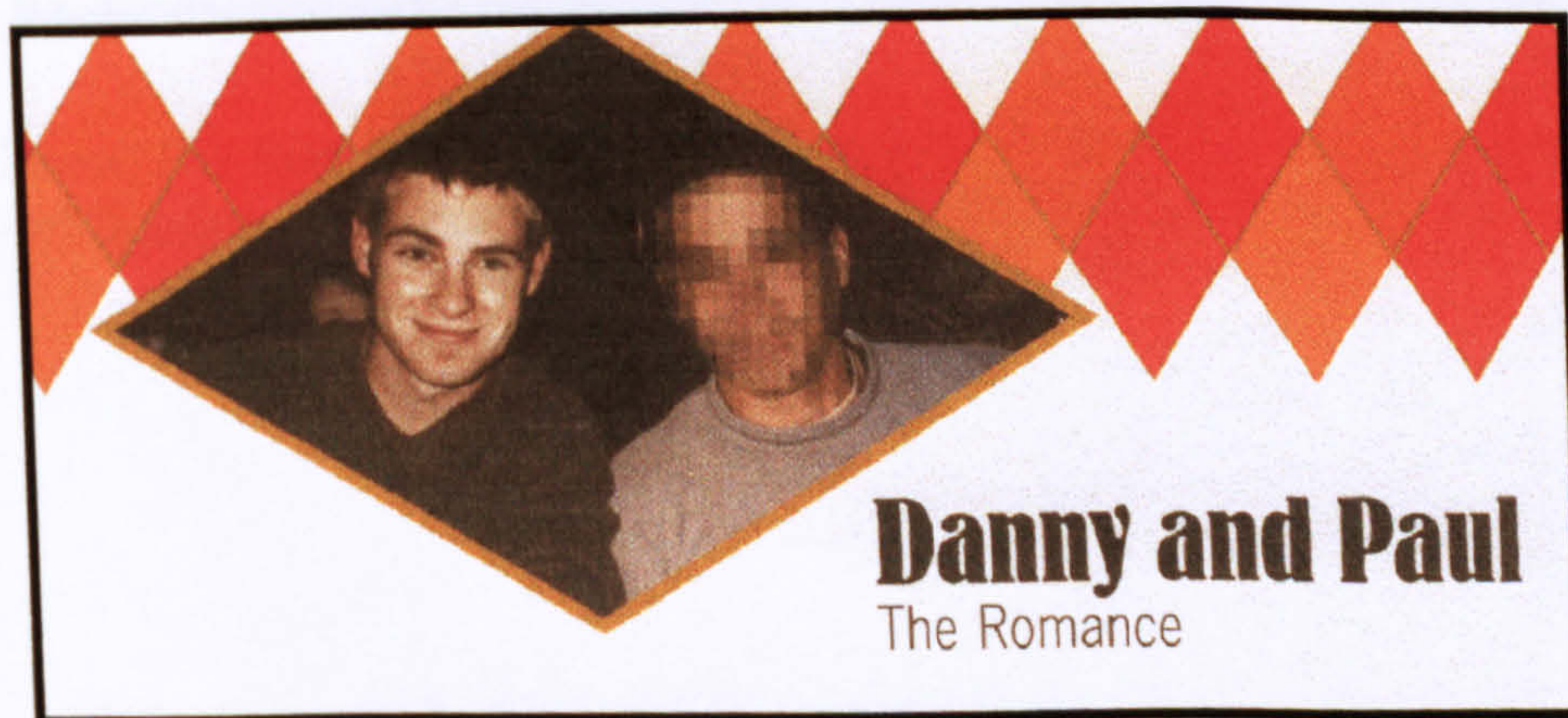
Pedro Zamora



Pedro Zamora on the front cover of *POZ* Magazine (August/September 1994) (above left). Pedro as depicted on Judd Winnick's book (Winnick, 1998) (below left). Pedro and Sean's romance as represented in a *The Real World* publication (Source: Johnson and Ronald Mann, 1998).

Figure 17

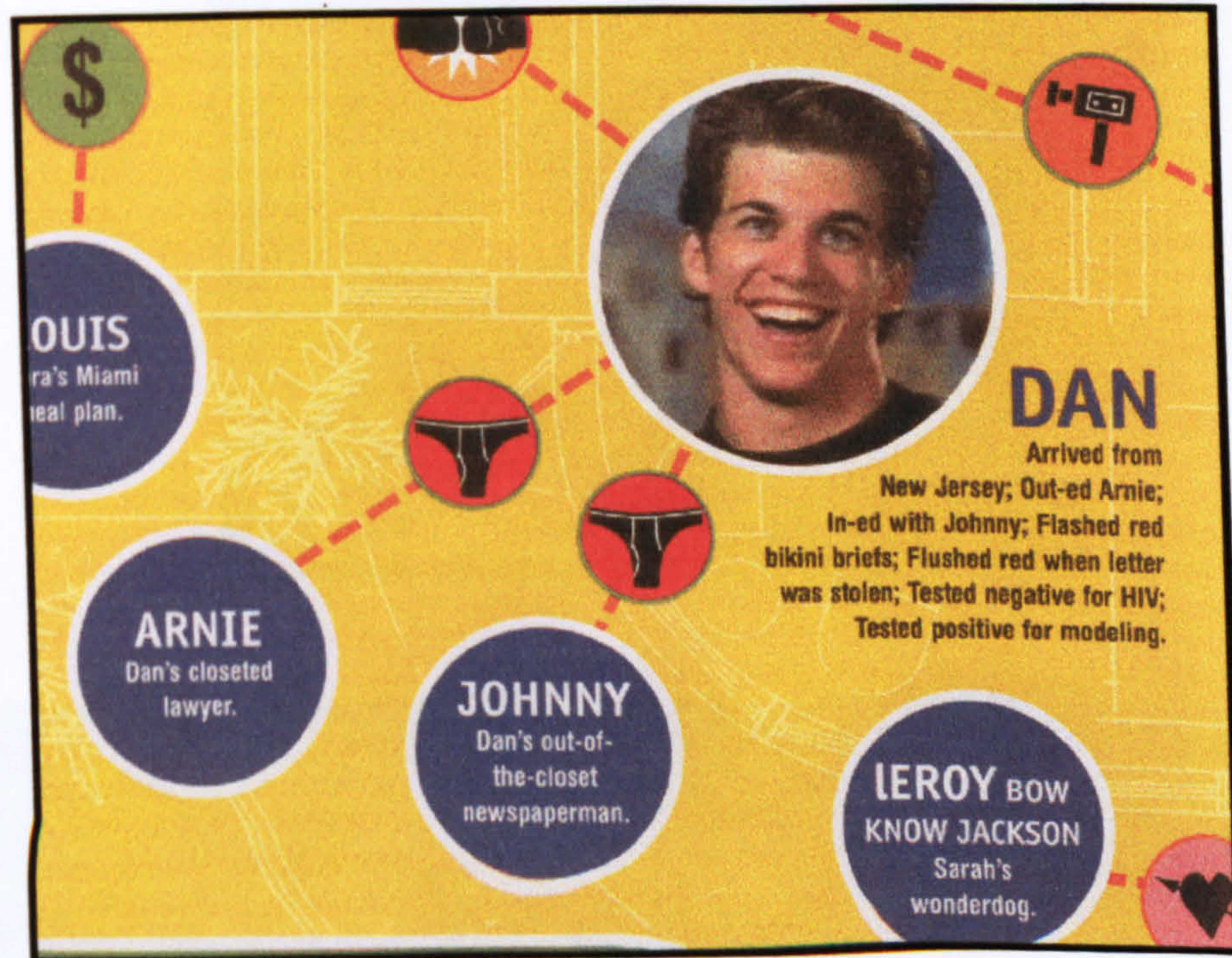
Danny Roberts of *The Real World* New Orleans (2000)



Front cover of *The Advocate* (18 July 2000) featuring Danny of *The Real World* New Orleans mimicking the idea covert identity in the military (above). Dany and Paul as represented in the accompanying series publication, highlighting their romance and Pauls concealed representation (below) (Source: Pollett, 2000)

Figure 18

Dan Renzi of *The Real World* Miami (1996)



Dan Renzi from *The Real World* Maimi as represented in the accompanying publication, highlighting his romantic/sexual connections with Arnie and Johnny.
(Source: Solomon and Carter, 1997)

Figure 19

Stephen of *The Real World* Seattle (1998)

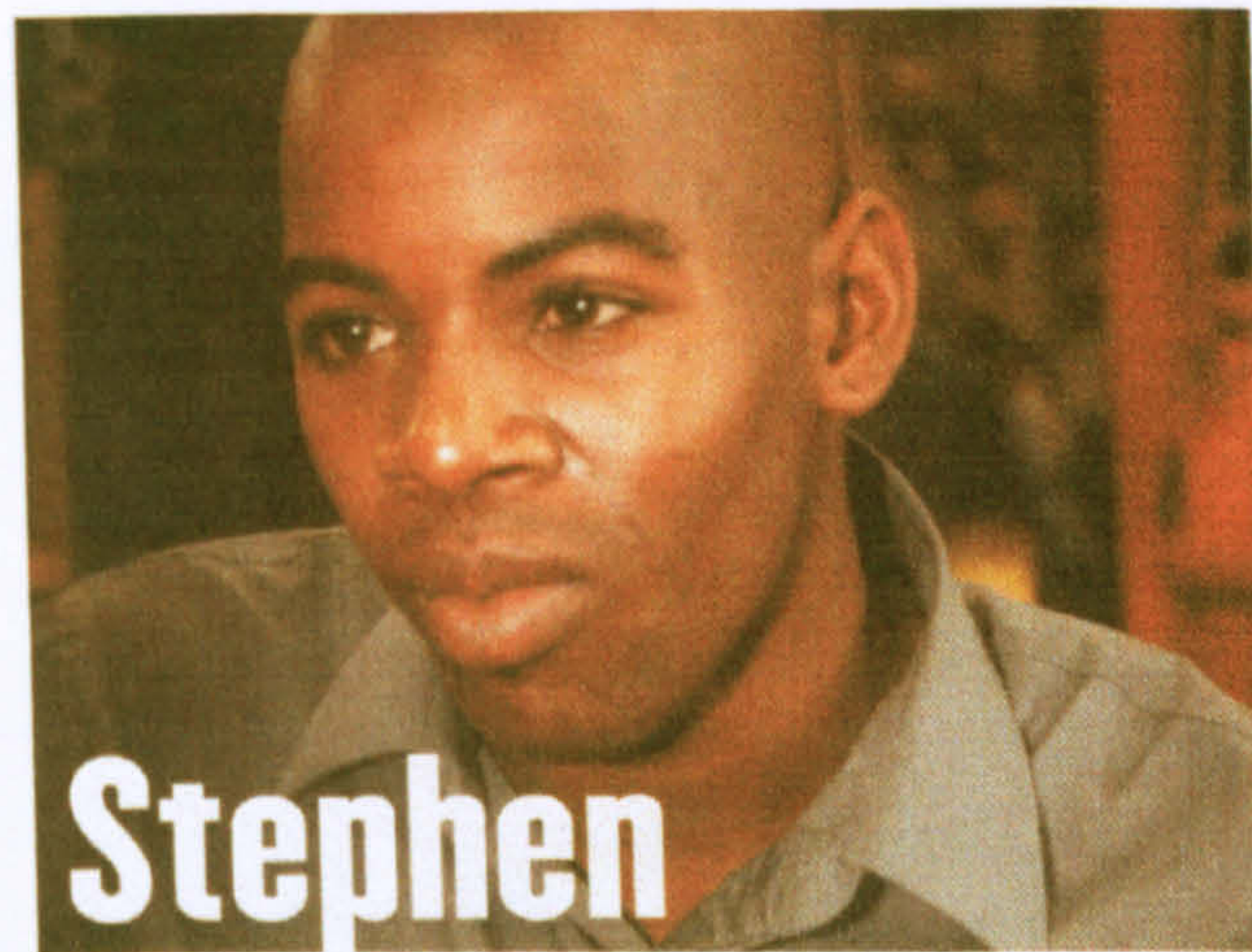


Image of Stephen, and a representation of the incident where he slapped fellow cast member Irene, in response to her suggestion that he was a homosexual (he pursues her in her car). (Source: Solomon, 1998)

Figure 20

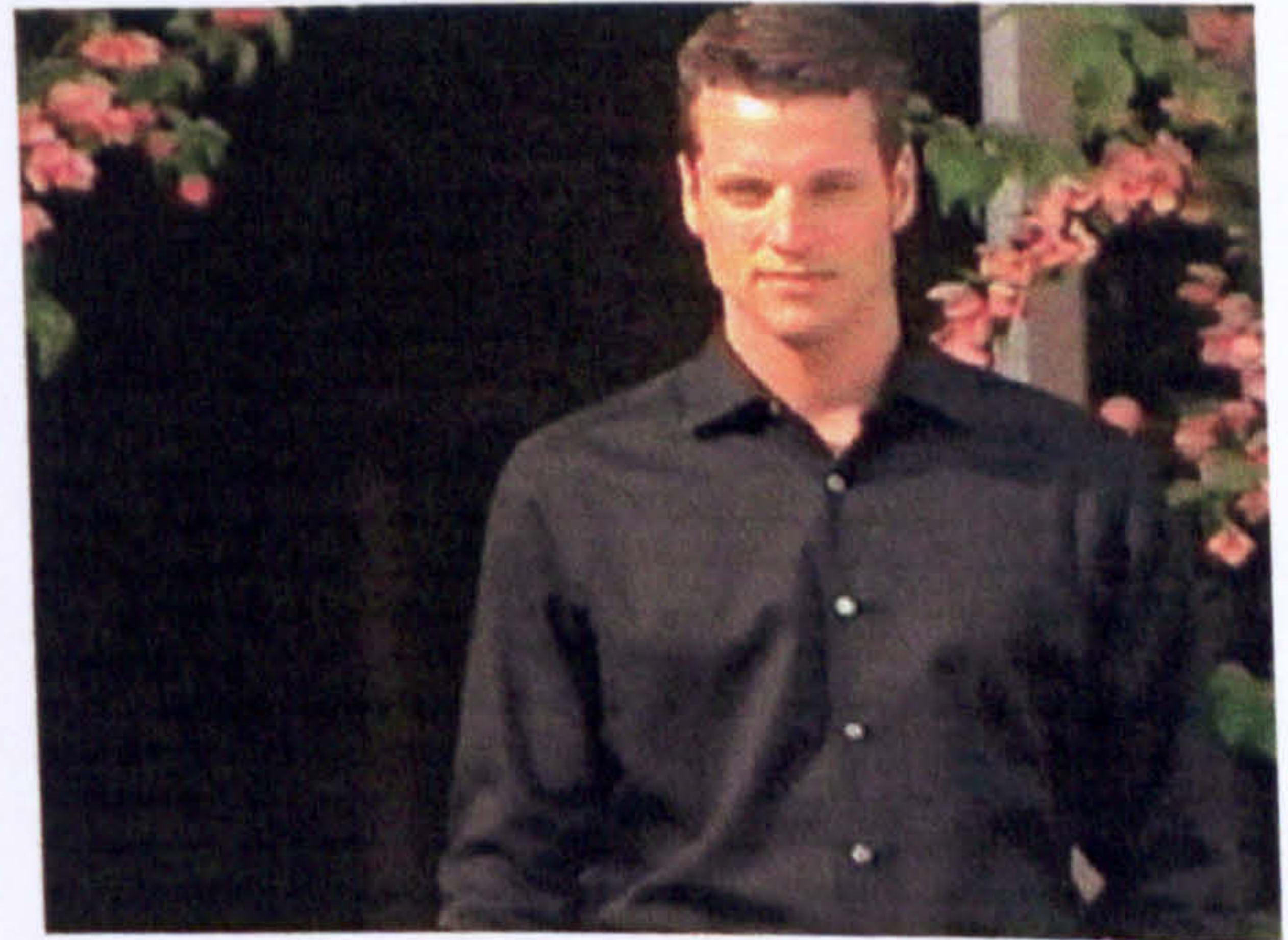
Richard Hatch of *Survivor* (2000)



Richard Hatch from *Survivor* (2000) (above) (Source: Enquirer, 2004).
His alliance which enabled him to win (below) (Source: CNN, 2004).

Figure 21

Boy Meets Boy (2003)



Cast of *Boy Meets Boy* (above left). Andra's reaction on hearing that some of James's suitors are not gay (below left). James prepares to expell Franklin (above right). Franklin's reaction on discovering James's discontent (below right) (Source: Bravo, 2004a).

Figure 22

The Experiment Gay and Straight (2003)



The cast:

Top row: Greg (G), Andrea (G), Larry (G)

Middle: Deo (G), Jennifer (S), Darlene (S)

Bottom: Frank (S), Brandon (S), Kyla (S), Chris (G)
(G)=Gay, (S)=Straight. (Source, Experiment, 2004)

Figure 23

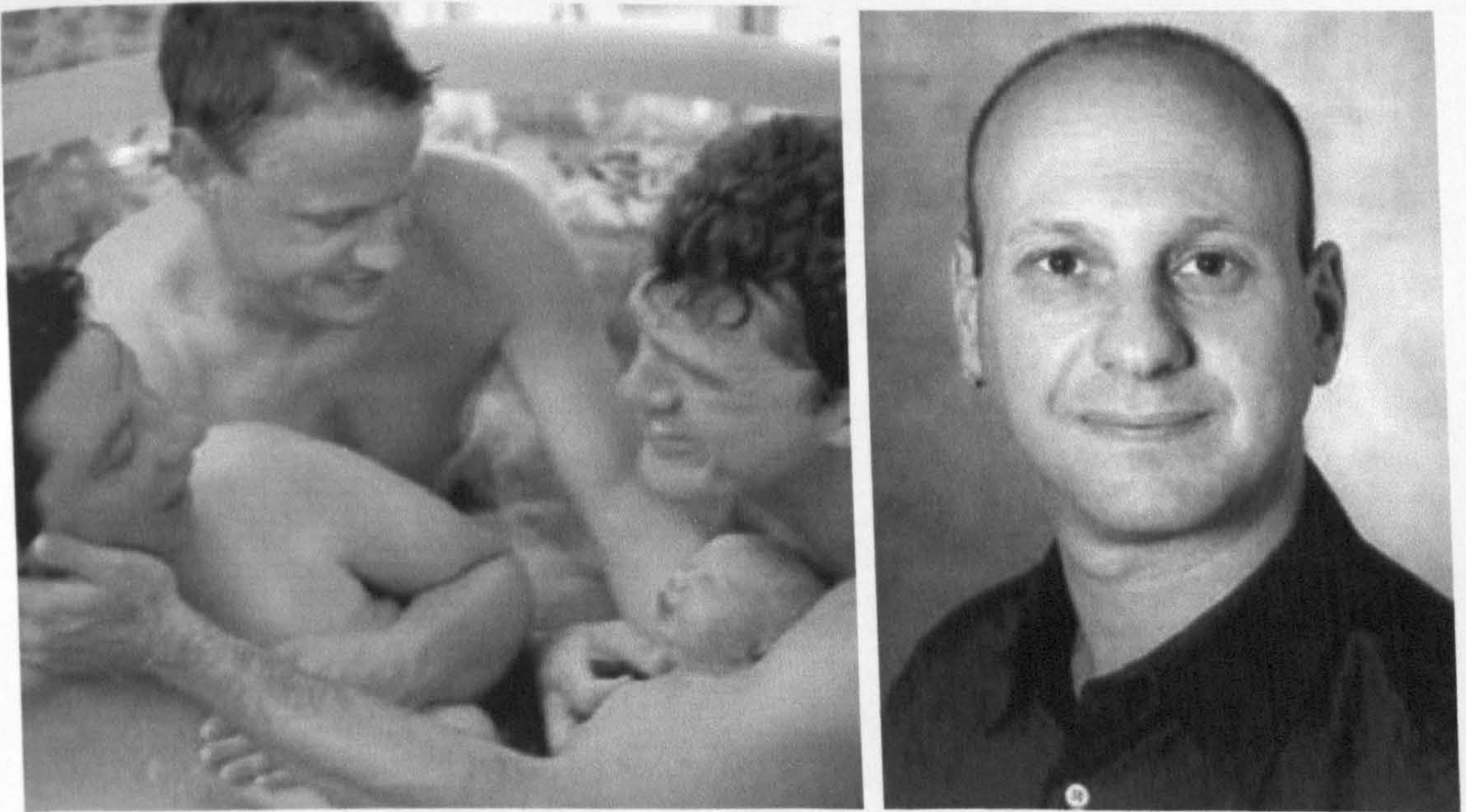
Primetime Thursday (2002)



The Lofton Croteau family.
(Source: *Let Him Stay*, 2004)

Figure 24

Paternal Instinct (2002) and Murray Nossel



The advent of birth in *Paternal Instinct*. Wen (left), with Erik (centre) and Mark (right) holding new born baby Ceceila (Source: Inside Out, 2004).
Producer Murray Nossel (right) (Source: Columbia, 2004).

Figure 25

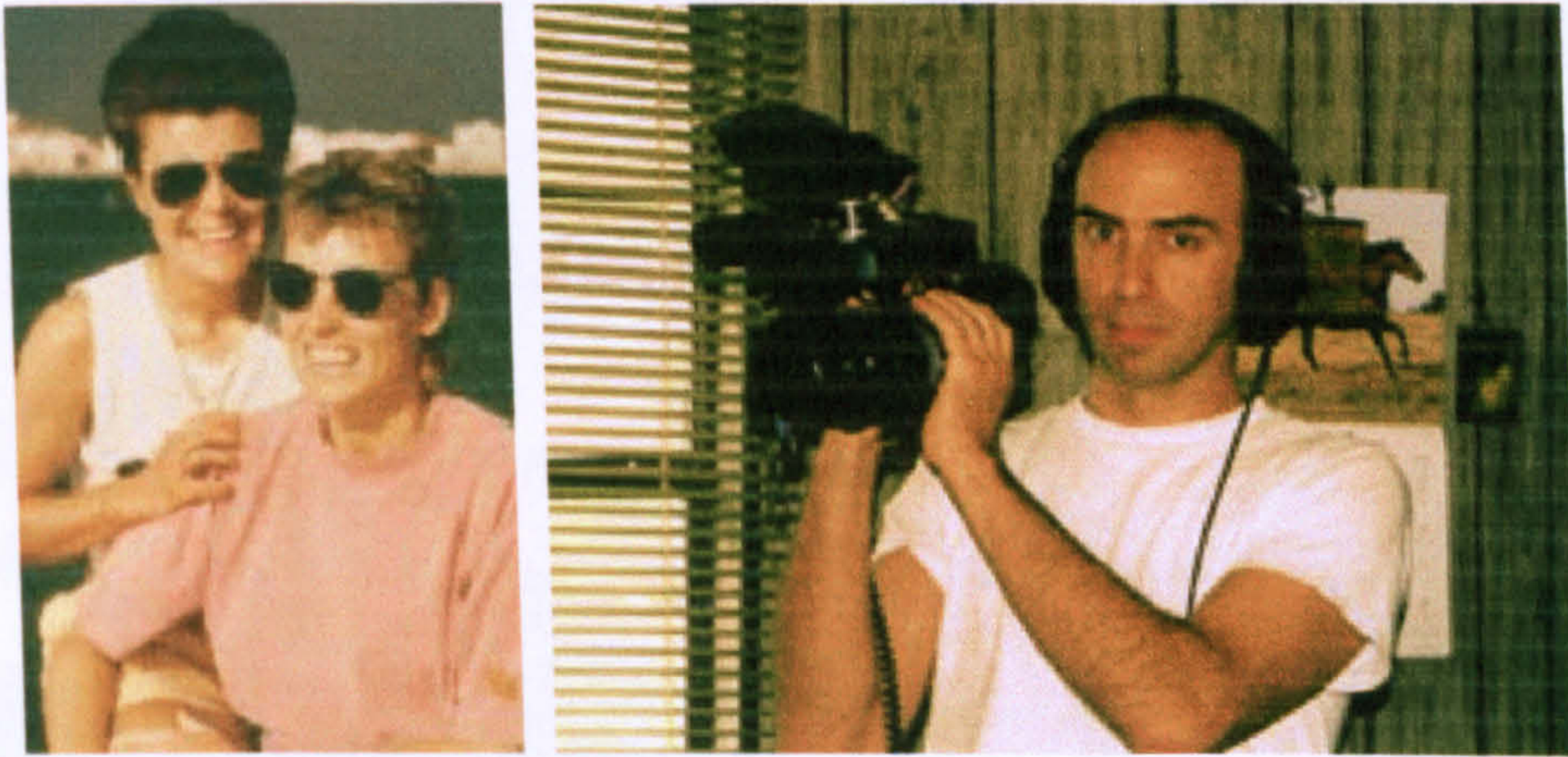
Gay Weddings (2002)



Dan and Gregg.
(Source: courtesy of producer Doug Ross)

Figure 26

Tying the Knot (2004) and Jim De Sève



Lois Marrero and Mickie Mashburn (left) and producer Jim De Sève (right)
(Source: *Tying the Knot*, 2004)

Figure 27

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (2003-present)



The cast.
(Source, Bravo, 2004b)