

“Imagine a boy who is adopted by a pair of lesbians (poor little sod)...”

A membership categorisation analysis of online comments on same-gender adoption

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The traditional family has always been the preserve of heterosexual couples based on and reinforced by a series of (hetero)normative behaviours. The context of same-gender adoption allows for a reworking of the construct of the modern family and the negotiation of parenting identities moving beyond the traditional system based on gender binarism (Wagner 2014). However, despite legal equality in the areas of adoption and marriage, LGBT people continue to face moral judgement about whether they are suitable parents. Using the insights and methods of membership categorisation analysis (Sacks 1992, Stokoe 2003a, 2003b, 2012), this paper unpacks the ways in which the more conservative parts of the UK's society construct same-gender parenting as a transgression of the established norms while relying on heteronormative assumptions about categories within the membership categorisation device 'family' (Sacks 1992). The paper shows that the gendered meaning 'locked into place' (Baker 2000) in those categories is a source of prejudice and a tool to maintain the established heteronormative order.

Keywords: same-gender parenting, heteronormativity, membership categorisation analysis, family, gender, sexuality

1. Introduction

LGBT parenting is not a recent phenomenon and history is full of examples of LGBT people who became parents through surrogacy, donor insemination or had children from previous heterosexual relationships. However, the legal recognition of numerous pro-LGBT familial rights, including joint LGBT adoption in many

countries, has made great strides on what is a bumpy path towards legal and social equality. Notwithstanding these achievements societal acceptance has not been absolute. One of the spheres where such negative attitudes towards same-gender parenting can be accessed are online comments below news articles. In this paper, they are subject to a qualitative discourse analysis, which employs the methods of Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Sacks 1992, Stokoe 2003a, 2003b, 2012). In particular, the focus is on the discursive construction of same-gender parents and heterosexual parents while tracking the emergence of people's common sense knowledge about the construct of 'family.' The analysis presented below aims at exploring how, and for what reasons, people's common sense knowledge about gendered and sexual categories emerges within the situated context of the debate about same-gender adoption. The analysis seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Which categories within the membership category device 'family' are invoked, which activities and predicates are they ascribed, and what is their purpose?
2. Is the category 'LGBT parent' morally assessed and if so, then how and why?
3. How are the pro-same-gender adoption views oriented to by the opponents?
4. Is prejudice manifested in the invoked categories, and if so, then how?

Despite the fact that the focus of this article is on the attitudes towards LGBT adoption specifically in the UK, with the recognition of LGBT laws internationally similar issues concerning negative attitudes towards LGBT adoption can be observed as persisting or emerging among certain groups in other countries such as Canada (McCutcheon & Morrison 2015, Rye & Meaney 2010), the USA (Averett, Strong-Blakeney, Nalavany & Scott 2011) or Italy (Baiocco, Nardelli, Pezzuti & Lingiardi 2013). It should also be noted that although there are many social differences between Western countries (some countries like Poland or Italy are socially more conservative than others and the debate concerning LGBT rights has not even reached this stage), there is nevertheless a general trend towards being more socially liberal. Furthermore, there is a prevailing preoccupation with values based on individual rights. This study on the UK hopefully points to some potential viewpoints and membership categorisations that might be applicable in analyses of discourses in other national contexts.

2. Setting the scene: Same-gender families in the UK

The twenty-first century has already brought immense changes in the lives of sexual minorities in the UK. In order to understand the current situation of LGBT people and attitudes to same-gender parenting in the UK, it is important to consider

more closely some of the most important legal rights concerning same-gender families.

Firstly, 2002 can be seen as a breakthrough year because it was then that the British Parliament successfully passed the Adoption and Children Act in England and Wales. The act significantly changed adoption laws so that it was no longer only heterosexual couples that were allowed to adopt but also single people, thus single people who were homosexual were also allowed to adopt (Adoption and Children Act 2002). The stipulation that homosexuals were allowed to adopt provoked heated debates about the future of ‘the family’ in Britain (Hicks 2005). Opponents raised concerns about the welfare of children in same-gender, and therefore, non-traditional families. Proponents, however, refuted those concerns by claiming that the bill, which opened the way to a greater number of prospective adoptive parents, would actually benefit more children through providing them with more stable homes, notwithstanding the sexual orientation of the parents (Ellen 2009). The Adoption and Children Act in England and Wales was probably the first major step on the legal path towards equality: while it is possible that the act has greatly contributed to the gradual shift in attitudes towards LGBT people in Britain, it also sheds light on the need to implement more equal rights in the familial sphere of the lives of homosexuals.

Another significant law in the area of same-gender families, the Civil Partnership Act, was passed in 2004 (Civil Partnership Act 2004). It granted same-gender couples the right to form civil unions, which meant almost the same rights in the area of marriage for LGBT and heterosexual people. More importantly, for this paper, it allowed same-gender couples to jointly adopt children, which raised controversies among the more conservative section of the British society, i.e. the Roman Catholic Church (Rolfe & Peel 2011). Furthermore, the most recent changes in legislation include the passing of the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013, which came into force in March 2014. The act allows heterosexual couples to get married, therefore granting same sex couples equal relationship rights in every sphere.

It can be safely argued that there has been a gradual shift in more positive attitudes towards LGBT people after the recent introduction of pro-LGBT laws. A survey by Populus (2012) indicated that a majority of Brits (76%) disagreed with discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The attitudes towards same-gender parenting were, however, less one-sided with only 59% of people claiming that same-gender couples should have equal rights to adopt (Populus 2012). The results suggest that the issue of same-gender parenting is still far from being unanimously accepted. Same-gender parents still face social discrimination based on their sexuality, which, for example, can be inferred from a recent poll on same-gender parenting carried out by Barnardo’s. The results of the poll released in 2011, revealed

that more than one third of people see same-gender couples as worse parents than straight couples (Barnardo's 2011). The chief executive of the agency, Anne Marie Carrie, trying to fight discrimination against same-gender parenting, expressed her concern about current societal attitudes in Britain concerning this issue:

The poll not only highlights a disturbing and prevalent belief system, but also a deepening concern that children in the care system are continuing to lose out on potential parents. Society's attitude plays a pivotal role in discouraging people from considering adoption. The idea that gay parents are second best must be challenged. To suggest that a same sex couple is not as able to raise a child as a heterosexual couple is at once absurd and unsubstantiated. To continue to discourage potential adopters simply because of their sexual orientation is severely diminishing the chances of securing loving, stable homes for the children who are waiting. This debate needs to be urgently raised and myths surrounding how sexuality, race, marital status and gender can affect your parenting dispelled.

(Barnardo's 2011)

Carrie's concern suggests that full equality still remains an aspiration and the reality is such that there is still plenty of space for attitudes to be changed.

3. Heteronormativity and the (hetero-)performative aspect of family

Social categories, such as gender or sexuality, are conceived of as constructed through discourse (Schneider 2013). They are not seen as natural, *a priori* givens, but rather are constructed through the use of language (in action and interaction) and are reified through their repeated performance (Butler 1990).¹ Both of these social categories are closely linked and are constructed through, for example, reference to a socially agreed and well-developed heterosexual lexicon that includes concepts such as "boyfriend, girlfriend, marriage, wedding, engagement, hen/stag party, divorce, couple, in-laws" (Coates 2013: 537). Western societies generally recognise only a two-gender system based on binary understandings of gender and sexuality. This means that heterosexual men and women are believed to be of mutually exclusive genders, which is often explained and justified via biological differences between the sexes. This system of categorising people in just two exclusive groups based on their gender and (hetero)sexuality is referred to as heteronormativity (Motschenbacher 2011, Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013). In explaining this, Butler speaks of a heterosexual matrix:

1. Butler (1990) also talks about the construction of sex.

The institution of a compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire. (Butler 1990: 22–23)

Accordingly, some forms of masculinity and femininity are preferred and seen as ‘proper,’ and these are conceptually connected with being heterosexual. Rather than a matrix, Cameron and Kulick (2006: 165) speak of a heterosexual hierarchy where some heterosexualities are more favoured than others, and the ideal “form of sexuality is monogamous... reproductive... and conventional in terms of gender roles.” The heterosexual hierarchy, then, seems to be based on two main tenets: heteronormativity (whereby certain forms of heterosexuality are seen as the norm) and gender binarism (differences between the sexes are conceived of as natural) (Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013). Following from this, any difference falling outside the perceived heteronormative norms (which includes even non-normative heterosexual parents such as single heterosexual parents or intergenerational heterosexual relationships) can be seen as a deviation and might entail social cost (see Mullany 2007).

From this position then, heteronormativity and gender binarism have become key ways in which social power and dominance are performed and maintained. Heteronormative reality, where some can be ‘dominated’ and others perform power, persists thanks to people’s heteronormative beliefs (or ideologies) and their re-enactment and naturalisation in everyday interaction. As Kitzinger (2000: 171) writes, “an unquestioned set of mundane heterosexual assumptions regularly surface in talk in which participants do not notice (or orient to) their own heterosexual privilege” and the failure to do so serves to “constitute and reconstitute heterosexist reality.” Heteronormative beliefs, which are based on the assumed shared background knowledge that becomes ‘common sense’ in hegemonic discourses, are maintained through, for example, reference to social categories, which are used to position self and others in a certain way (e.g. as a heterosexual person) (Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013). Furthermore, linguists investigating the performance of heterosexual identities show that positioning oneself as an incumbent of the category ‘heterosexual’ also takes a lot of linguistic effort (Kitzinger 2005). This, on one hand de-naturalises heterosexual identities, and on the other shows that non-homosexuals also become victims of heteronormativity, because they have to position themselves as ‘proper heterosexuals’ in order to avoid social cost (e.g. in strictly heteronormative contexts like relationships or family).

One of many spheres where heteronormativity and gender binarism are performed extensively is a traditional family construct, as it relies on a scope

of (hetero-)normative behaviours whereby heterosexual families are assigned, or expected to adhere to, family identities of the mother, father and children. Furthermore, mothers and fathers are usually assigned unequal parenting roles and face different social expectations (Sunderland 2000: 249–274). Mothers, as key figures in most families, are not only taken for granted in the family setting, but they also face numerous expectations related to their roles (Johnson 2007). Women are expected to be ‘good mothers’ or ‘real mothers,’ which is linked to the feeling of responsibility for their children’s bad behaviour and, in particular, their failures (Schlenker 1980). They are also usually the primary carers for their children, as opposed to men, who are merely supposed to assist with bringing up their offspring. As such, fathers, in comparison, are usually assigned three roles: Firstly, of a baby entertainer, whose primary responsibility is to play with the child; a mother’s assistant, who is less capable than the female parent in looking after their baby; and a ‘line manager,’ who functions in a protective role and who is, what is socially understood as, ‘the head of the family’ (Sunderland 2000: 313).

The concept of a performative gender identity can also be extended to performances of other identities, i.e. the identity of a parent.² Just as we are not born with gender (but with biological sex), we are also not born with a set of ‘correct’ biologically determined parenting identities. These are acquired through social interactions, learnt and reproduced. Butler (1990: 43–44) stresses the importance of repeated character of acts while performing an identity: “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.” This means that the supposed naturalness of an identity comes with repeating certain acts that are already established as socially correct and acceptable. Put another way, the repetition of the action reifies the naturalness of the action. Thus, extending the concept of gender performativity to performing parenthood, or any other performed identity, implies a set of characteristics tightly associated with it, which will gain naturalness when they are repeated over time. Repeated learned acts are carried out in the context of traditional parenthood (Nentwisch 2008), where clear guidelines for mothers and fathers are ubiquitous in heteronormative societies. They can, however, be problematic for same-gender couples because of their relative rarity and the lack of social guidelines regarding family formation. Sooner or later they have to face the decision of how to organise their family on their own. They can either follow or resist (hetero)normative behaviours of traditional families or possibly borrow some of their elements. Deciding on

2. For the concept of performative motherhood see Hill (2011).

either, however, always leads to reworking and negotiation of different forms of intimacies and actions.

Negotiating a family construct existing outside the normative traditional model might often be inseparable from experiencing certain challenges. One such difficulty is the formation of parental identities, which can be complex on multiple levels. It can be particularly visible, for example, in the case of lesbian families who underwent fertility treatment and in which one of them is the biological mother. Kranz and Daniluk (2006:26) have observed that the biological mother usually takes over and her partner usually remains invisible as a mother (in the normative binary sense). This might contribute to negative emotions, such as jealousy, which in turn affect the relationship (Ben-Ari & Livini 2006: 529). Gabb (2005) has looked at how lesbian parents with children negotiate their parenting roles as well as their gendered selves. A general pattern of identification of the ‘birth mother’ and ‘the other mother,’ notwithstanding sharing certain responsibilities, has been observed. The status of ‘the other mother’ is negotiated by both parents and their offspring. Children see the ‘other mother’ as an indispensable part of the family, as someone who complements it. She is not perceived through a heteronormative family model and she is neither a father nor a mother in the socially agreed sense (Gabb 2005). Gabb describes how the linguistic complexity of the ‘other mother’ is negotiated by children in lesbian families. They can refer to her in a number of ways, i.e. as their friend, by using her first name or possibly the term ‘the second mother’ (Gabb 2005). This points both to the complexity of parenting roles that exist beyond the heteronormative family model and to the fact that such families rework and review new categories of parents. Parenthood then is not a stable concept and involves the creation of multiple parenting identities, which are in a constant state of flux. New categories of parents negotiated in lesbian families point to the concept of ‘gender as performance’ and question the naturalness of the implications for parenting based on the male/female binary.

4. Membership categorisation analysis and the category of gender

Given the reliance of the construction and performance of the family setting on socially negotiated understandings of different categories of actors (mother/father/child), MCA seems particularly suited to examining the ways in which speakers utilise and interpret categorisations of themselves and others in a given context and, moreover, how those categorisations emerge within their situated cultural knowledge (Stokoe 2003a, 2003b). They do not appear from and in a vacuum, but are made relevant by being located in the local context. Following Baker (2004), talk is a social action through which speakers construct and negotiate

their identities, the relationships they have with others or even the world they live in; and when engaging in any kind of social situation, speakers face a number of linguistic and pragmatic choices they have to make using the resources they have. One of those discursive resources, which enables a positioning of oneself and others in a certain way, is categorisation work. Categorisations are something more than mere displays of beliefs about certain groups; they are formulated with the view of accomplishing certain tasks such as “making inferences, judging, contrasting and assessing, displays of understanding of prior talk, disagreeing, persuading” (Jayyusi 1984: 150) etc. One of the key benefits of MCA is that it allows for a more rigorous categorical analysis without relying on pre-determined categories, and in the context of the article, without pre-assuming the importance of gender and sexual categories. MCA allows for the identification of which categories are made relevant in a given context and which are occasioned by local sense making needs (Freiberg & Freebody 2009), with the stress on the occasioned rather than fixed nature of categorisations. Identifying categories in a local context allows for locating members’ accomplishment of ‘doing’ society, or what Hester and Eglin (1997) describe as ‘culture-in-action.’

In order to perform categorisation work, speakers link and imbibe a given category with certain expectable and required activities, characteristics (called predicates) (Hester 1998), features, obligations, expectations that are both constitutive of categories (often referred to as category-bound or category-linked) and generated by those categories (Jayyusi 1984). Moreover, they are descriptive and also ascriptive: Jayyusi (1984: 28) has demonstrated that categorisations “can work as umbrellas for the ascription of other features and actions” and that they are of a highly normative and moral character.

Of course, speakers’ choices of certain categories over others and linking them with such and such activities or obligations would not make much sense if their choices were not understood or if they were impossible to interpret by their interlocutors. Sacks (1992) introduced an analytical resource explaining how members of a certain culture are able to understand the use and meaning of categories, known as membership categorisation device (MCD). It allows for a filtering of the invoked categories from the membership category systems and locating the ‘meaning categories’ within the situated context (Tracy 2002).

It is important to note here that in analysing membership categories, MCA researchers face a challenge regarding the fact that MCA favours the speaker’s, rather than the analyst’s, perspective and understanding of the categories. Stokoe (2012: 282) comments on this issue stating that: “the appeal (and danger) of MCA is to try to unpack what is apparently unsaid by members and produce an analysis of their subtle categorisation work” (Stokoe 2012: 282). Sacks (1992: 40–41) explains that categorisations are ‘inference rich,’ which refers to the claim that

categories store “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society,” and which means that certain aspects of a given category are might be highlighted while others can be downplayed. Such a channelling of inferences is a powerful tool in directing the meaning about categories, and also serves as a source of knowledge about the social organization of the world located in those categories, which is shared/understood by members of the same culture. This means that categorisations can be used as powerful tools for the local accomplishment of normative formulations of judgment and obligations. Any failure to adhere to the established norms can potentially generate a situation when one is morally and normatively assessed, which in turn can result in prejudice and/or criticism with the view of failing to fulfil societal expectations regarding certain categorisations.

The relatively recent revival of MCA studies in the past years and the varied work done shows how this methodology can be applied as a useful tool to analysing gender (Stokoe 2003a, 2003b, 2012) and sexuality (Hall & Gough 2011) and what linguistic means are used by members to “maintain the common sense ‘discourses’ or ‘repertoires’ that shape our gendered world” (Stokoe 2003a). The paradox of the strength and perseverance of common sense assumptions about gender and sexuality lies in their ordinariness (Nilan 1995) and invisibility: “the more natural, taken for granted and therefore invisible the categorisation work, the more powerful it is” (Baker 2000: 111). Schegloff (2007: 469) also comments on the mechanism of perpetuating assumptions about categories, and reveals that they are ‘protected against induction’:

The common-sense knowledge organized by reference to membership categories is protected against induction. If an ostensible member of a category appears to contravene what is ‘known’ about members of the category, then people do not revise that knowledge, but see the person as ‘an exception,’ ‘different,’ or even a defective member of the category. (Schegloff 2007: 469)

The gendered and sexual categorisations invoked by the commentators in the analysed data, such as the category of parent (including straight and same-gender parents), are judged through the authors’ understanding of the organisation of the social world as they know it and are ascribed a highly moral and normative character. By applying MCA to analysing the data set, it is possible to unpack the ways in which the authors’ common sense assumptions serve to maintain the gendered status quo of the family as a construct based on gender binary distinctions. It is also possible to observe how the ‘durable and institutionalised’ (Stokoe 2003a) gendered categories of parents are negotiated and how they constitute a potential site for the performance of ‘flexibility of categories’ (Speer 2005). Applying MCA also allows to investigate a possible ‘revolutionisation’ of the categories together with

activities and predicates normatively tied to them (Stokoe 2003a) or possibly for the creation of other acceptable categories the meaning of which can be extended beyond the normative one.

5. Data

The corpus of data that was analysed consists of 1,000 comments posted underneath two online news articles (which amounted to 65,931 words). The articles were both published online on 27th November 2012 and concerned a UK Independence Party (UKIP) parliamentary candidate, Winston McKenzie, who stated that same-gender adoption was a form of child abuse.³ The articles were both published on the online versions of two major centre-right, socially conservative newspapers in the UK: The Daily Telegraph (broadsheet) and the Daily Mail (mid-market tabloid).

The Telegraph's title was: "Ukip's Winston McKenzie is factually wrong to say that adoption by same-gender couples is 'child abuse'", and both the title and the content was not only a mere description of what had happened, but the focus was on disproving McKenzie's words by quoting various studies concerning same-gender adoption. The article in the Daily Mail was entitled "Allowing gay couples to adopt is a form of child abuse, says UKIP election candidate." The article foregrounded McKenzie's claim in the title and the content mainly reported what had happened. Articles concerning this issue were also published by other news outlets such as The Guardian (the leading centre-left newspaper in the UK) and the BBC, but neither of them opened the article for public comments below the line, which might point to the topicalisation of same-gender adoption by more conservative media outlets.⁴ The Telegraph article amassed 984 comments and the Daily Mail article received 727 comments. Given the scale of responses it was decided that the first 500 comments from each article would be analysed. The comments were kept in their original form (including grammatical/spelling errors) and they were coded (e.g. comments from the Daily Mail were coded as DM and from the Telegraph as TT). It is unclear whether the differences between the content of the

3. UK Independence Party (UKIP) is a right-wing populist political party in the United Kingdom, which was initially a single-issue anti-EU party, but which has now broadened its policy reach to other issues.

4. The initial plan for the article was to compare comments on this topic posted in one major conservative and one liberal newspaper only. However, due to the inability to find a liberal major newspaper that opened the issue to comment, it was decided instead to choose the two right wing newspapers.

articles influenced the responses of the commentators and it cannot be directly stated who and whether they even read the articles.

At this point, it is necessary to mention the process of moderating and removing the content of the online comments to articles below the line, since it can have some significance for the results of the analysis. The Telegraph does not vet comments before they are posted, but instead rely on readers' reporting of possible inappropriate or offensive content of the comments, through pressing the 'report' button. Telegraph moderators claim to remove the following types of content:

- a. Personal abuse. Criticising an argument is fine, attacking the person making it is not. In other words, you can say a person's argument is idiotic but don't call them an idiot.
- b. Legal. Libellous comments, that is those that make defamatory claims about people, will be removed as soon as we become aware of them.
- c. Racist, sexist and homophobic material and comments likely to incite religious hatred. This should be self-explanatory. Generalisations about entire groups of people are never sensible and, in some cases, may be illegal.

Furthermore, they state that if a comment is not removed despite being reported, it can be because they do not always agree that it should be removed: they refer to moderating as a 'subjective business' (Telegraph 2010). Only registered and logged in users are allowed to comment.

The Daily Mail also has a moderating policy and claim not to allow any content that is "offensive, racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory against any religions or other groups" and they also encourage readers to report such content through using the 'report abuse' button (Daily Mail 2014). Unlike the Telegraph, they have two types of comments: unmoderated, which are not investigated in advance, and moderated comments, which are checked for suitable content in advance before being posted. The policy is to generally remove whole comments or threads rather than edit them. All readers have to register in order to comment and there is a limit of ten comments per day.

Possible problems for the research arising from the moderating policy are as follows: possibly not all content can be subject to analysis, so the most offensive statements about same-gender parents are removed, hence the whole picture is not available. Hughey and Daniels (2013:336) refer to this issue claiming that: "While such moderation strategies may be good for either newspaper business or civil public discourse, they represent a challenge for potential discourse analysis because they construct an ideal image of participation in the public sphere," which in turn hides frequently emerging social issues (they provide the issue of racism as an example). It is difficult to verify this claim for a number of reasons: e.g. as

the removed comments are not available for analysis, the number of removed comments is unknown, and the decision of what is considered offensive is always a subjective decision of moderators. Moreover, perhaps the most obvious cases of covert abusive content are removed, but still there are many instances of 'less' offensive comments or covert abuse that can be, nonetheless, considered offensive. Even if moderated comments indeed pose a challenge to researchers, which they probably do to some extent, then rather than constructing an ideal image of participation between users in the online sphere and hiding social issues, they show social issues as perhaps occurring less frequently and taking more subtle forms, which only means that the picture is visible, but not the complete one, as the scope of opinions is controlled by the moderators.

6. Data analysis

A process of multiple readings of the collected data (Barton, Aldridge, Trimble & Vidovic 2005, Pawelczyk 2013) allowed for tracking the emergence of recurrent macro-topics, within which a number of recurrent gendered and sexual categories were invoked. In order to ensure greater objectivity and rigour in identifying patterns in the selected data, a six-phase guide to doing thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied.⁵ The most common macro-topics in the context in question were: 'Denaturalising' same-gender families, emphasising the importance of feminine and masculine role models and criticising pro-LGBT attitudes. The macro-topics will be analysed with a particular focus on the emerging categories and their function in de-legitimizing same-gender parenting.

6.1 'Denaturalising' same-gender families

This macro-topic contains the idea of nature, naturalness and unnaturalness in the context of parenting. In the data, heterosexual parenting is projected as the only fully legitimate 'natural' family construct, and is therefore constructed as the preferred, and often the only acceptable family formation. Furthermore, natural procreation is constructed as one of the credentials of membership of the category of 'parent.' In the two examples below, the authors refer to the laws of nature and link them to the inability to procreate in a natural way by a same-gender couple:

5. The stages suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006: 16–23) are: (1) "familiarising yourself with your data," (2) "generating initial codes," (3) "searching for themes," (4) "reviewing themes," (5) "defining and naming themes," and (6) "producing the report."

- (1) *Liberals are always trying to make human beings evolve quicker than nature will allow, ie gay adoption, multiculturalism etc. That is morally wrong. (...) Forcing any creature, humans or antelopes, do to something that is against their instinct is wrong, regardless of how much reasoning is involved. It causes stress, anger and conflict.* (The Telegraph)
- (2) *Dolphins who have debased, non-complementary sex with each other are not procreators, i.e. beings who generate and nurture offspring as nature intended. That they do have such sex is nature's way of ensuring they are excluded from procreative roles for which they are not constitutionally suited.* (The Telegraph)

In both examples, parenting is reduced to the level of biology so that it primarily entails a biological ability in the form of procreation. In other words, any links of parenting with a set of expectable corpus of skills pertaining to the individual's suitability, willingness or competences alone, beyond a biological one, to be a parent, are neglected and ignored. What follows is that through the lack of a category constitutive feature of being able to procreate, the category of a LGBT adoptive parent is denied the very status of being a parent. In the first example, those who oppose this line of thinking are ascribed a morally wrong behaviour of attempting to force quick changes impacting society, such as same-gender adoption. Same-gender parenting is seen as being against nature, and as something that is against biological instincts.

The second excerpt is a response to a comment about the naturalness of homosexuality in the animal kingdom and that it is not limited to humans (“You don’t see any homosexual partners raising offspring in the rest of the animal kingdom. In fact you don’t see any homosexual partners at all in nature.”). In this example the category of procreators is made relevant. Although the category of same-gender parents it is not explicitly made relevant here and the comment is about dolphins, the category of homosexual beings is not synonymous with the category of procreators. As it is accessible through the description of normative practices by different-sex species such as generating and nurturing offspring, which are invoked as a disjunctive category-activity pair (Stokoe 2003b) for homosexuals, hence also homosexual humans who fall outside the category of procreators. In both examples placing homosexuals outside the category ‘parents’ is justified and strengthened by referring to nature, which is personified and given agency. By projecting nature as the highest authority who has the power of giving permission (“nature will allow”), having certain intentions (“as nature intended”) and ensuring exclusion of those unsuitable from procreative roles (“nature’s way of ensuring they [homosexuals] are excluded from procreative roles”), both authors distance themselves from their claims and construct their comments not as beliefs but as natural truths that are undisputable.

In the context of adoption, both comments point to the fact that producing children, which is transformed from being a category-bound feature into a category-constitutive feature warranting the right to be parents, is in itself the source of prejudice located in the very category 'homosexual.' This category is projected here not as mere description of the biological facts, but it primarily serves the purpose of a moral-judgemental work on who should be granted, and who should be denied, the status of the category 'parent' (see Jayyusi 1984).

Similar to the excerpts presented above, in Excerpt 3, the author denaturalises same-gender parenting through referring to the physical inability of procreating. In order to do so, they rely on the contrast between heterosexual and homosexual intimate practices:

- (3) *LOOK! this is ridiculous, lets forget this politically correct world we live in for a second and get back to basics, unless you have all forgotten, to have a child, a MALE must have sex with a FEMALE, now unless you skipped biology lessons at school (which 90% of you must have) you will know that as mammals, this is the only way to reproduce, if a man has sex with a man, the man IS NOT going to get pregnant, hench it IS NOT natural for 2 men to have a child in ANY case. If you choose to be gay then you choose to forfeit having children because you CANNOT have a child with your gay partner. Now lets get onto a CHILDS needs, not the gay mans. Unless you didnt notice, a child needs a mother AND a father to grow into a normal human being, this is how we have functioned since the beginning of time, so why do the minority think they have the right to change this?*

(Daily Mail)

The analytical focus of this comment is on homosexual and heterosexual activities, practices and rights in the context of nature, in constructing normative practices for procreation. The author makes relevant the categories of homosexuals and heterosexuals and places them on the opposite spectrum for contrastive purposes. The author invokes the category of a (homosexual) man and links it to the inability of bearing a child, which is a feature normatively associated with women and which is a disjunctive category-activity (Stokoe 2003b)/quality pair pertaining to the unnaturalness of same-gender parenting. The category of a 'homosexual' is invoked through the description of category-bound activities such as two men engaging in a sexual act together or choosing to be homosexual. Claiming that one chooses their sexual identity implies a conscious choice of sexual preferences that perhaps could be different, rather than an innate quality. As such, homosexuality goes against and challenges 'the natural order of things.' What is also implied is that becoming homosexual is synonymous with losing the (biological) right to have children. In constructing normative-category activities for heterosexuals, the author refers to a sexual activity between two people of the opposite sex as a warrant

for procreating and towards the end of the comment invokes the category of a child linked to the normative passive activity of being looked after by a different-sex couple. The building of categories of heterosexuals and their children by explicitly mentioning their normative activities and characteristics, and then juxtaposing it with normative and non-normative activities of homosexuals, functions to put homosexuals as a category existing outside the membership categorisation device (MCD) ‘family.’ As such, they are discursively inhibited from being morally or socially suitable to adopt.

6.2 Emphasising the importance of feminine and masculine role models

In contrast to the denaturalisation of homosexual parents, another finding that arose in the analysed data was the simultaneous foregrounding of the importance of feminine and masculine role models and, in particular, the significance of both sexes and the input they have during the process of childrearing. As mentioned in the methodological section above, the idea of feminine and masculine role models is strongly related to the correct development of children and therefore heterosexual families are discursively projected as the only type of family set-up which has a positive impact upon the development of their offspring. In Excerpt 4 the author elaborates on different parenting qualities while contrasting heterosexuals and homosexuals:

- (4) *Where a child is unfortunate enough not to have a mum and dad (or one natural parent) the best solution is to place him or her with a man and woman who hopefully can replicate the role of mum and dad. Apart from anything else, a child (of either gender) ideally needs both a male and female adult in the parental role. Anything short of this is less than ideal, but adoption by a homosexual couple would be especially unsuitable, especially if they are in a physical relationship and so setting a bad example morally to the child. Such a placing where better alternatives are available would indeed be abuse.* (The Telegraph)

In this excerpt, the author employs a contrastive strategy for the asymmetric category sets of a ‘homosexual parent’ and a ‘heterosexual parent’ with the focus on different qualities central to their roles. The category ‘heterosexual parent’ is not specified explicitly, but it emerges through the discursive categories of a ‘man’ and ‘woman’ who are in a relationship and are ascribed the role of a ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ to an adopted child. Indeed, their heterosexuality does not need to be mentioned as it is part of common sense, normative, knowledge about the social world (Jayyusi 1984). The homosexuality of prospective parents is, however, central to the debate over the suitability of persons to adopt and raise offspring. The

categories of a heterosexual ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ of an adoptive child are linked to the category-bound activity and category-generated obligation of replicating the role of biological mum and dad with a particular focus on different gendered roles that those positions involve. Both of those categories are inference rich as they entail a set of unmentioned activities and characteristics (in this context it is e.g. good heterosexual parents will follow the established gendered patterns of behaviour socially acceptable for their sex) understood by the members of a given culture because they are normatively tied to those categories.

Unlike heterosexual parents, in this comment homosexuals aspiring to have children are morally scrutinised. The sole mention of the world ‘homosexual’ constructs them through the lens of a sexual relationship they engage in with their partner which is non-normative, and in the author’s eyes is a breach of acceptable conduct. The category ‘homosexual parent’ is reduced to an activity of homosexual sex, which in this case is formulated as a category-exclusive and constitutive activity, and hence setting a bad moral example to a child. Such a positioning of a homosexual parent measured through their sexual activity and constructed as illegitimate and non-normative, functions not only as a condemnation of homosexual activities, but it is primarily a judgment of deficiency, which aims to downgrade the suitability of same-gender parents to raise children.

Excerpt 5 shows how the category of ‘lesbian’ is invoked to construct them as unsuitable for parenting a boy:

- (5) *Imagine a boy who is adopted by a pair of lesbians (poor little sod). They will probably dress him in skirts and tell him how horrible men are, the whole female supremacist thing.* (The Telegraph)

The argumentative focus of this extract is on the construction of a category of a ‘lesbian mother.’ Although it is only the category ‘lesbian’ directly invoked in this passage, the category ‘mother’ is locatable through the membership category device ‘family,’ to which the “poor little” hypothetical adopted child taken care of by lesbians belongs as well. The category ‘lesbian mother’ undergoes a moral scrutiny, which is visible in the description of morally unacceptable activities that could be stereotypically associated with lesbians such as cross-dressing the boy inappropriately according to the rules of the gendered world or saying unflattering things about men. The description of activities bound with the category ‘lesbian’ are at the same time a disjunctive category-activity pair for the category ‘mother.’ The category ‘mother’ is never morally neutral, but it is always morally loaded with expectable obligations, qualities, responsibilities or activities and can be categorised as either a good or a bad mother. By invoking anomalous category-activity pairs for ‘lesbian mothers,’ the author wants to establish a negative moral identity resulting from linking both of those categories. Such discursive practices as constructing

anomalous category-activity pairs, Stokoe (2003b) links to the maintenance of the normatively gendered status of the social world as we know it.

In Excerpt 6 below, the author recollects her own experiences as someone who grew up in a homosexual household and draws on the lack of female a role model in her life:

- (6) *Whilst I wouldn't go as far as to brand it child abuse, I don't think a homosexual couple should be able to adopt. Having grown up in a homosexual household – albeit with my biological father (he's bi) – I can honestly say that I wouldn't wish it on anybody. I will be the first to admit that my opinions are coloured by my experiences, but having been isolated and bullied throughout my formative years as a result of the 'out and proud' nature of the adults in my family I would not wish to see another child put in that position. Learning how to interact socially and learning how to be a woman have been very difficult for me, without a suitable role model in my life (my mother is dead) I had no-one to turn to. Children need a mother and a father where possible and where there are already issues (as in adoption) it makes sense to place children in an ideal situation as possible.*
(Daily Mail)

In the excerpt above, the author produces an account from the perspective of somebody who grew up in a homosexual household. By personalising her account, she adds authority to her claims (via lived experience), hence constructing it not as an opinion, but as a fact. She makes relevant the category 'child,' positions herself as a former incumbent of this category and pairs it in a standardised relational pair (SRP) with the category 'father.' The SRP child-father is “such that the relation between them constitutes a locus for rights and obligations” (Lepper 2000: 196). This is a hierarchically organized relationship, in the sense that the child is subordinated to the parent and the parent has to look after them. Although the author describes her father as being bisexual, she equates this with homosexuality, and positions him as being openly homosexual, with the category-bound predicate “out and proud,” which is described as the source of her distress during her formative years. Although isolation and bullying is generally a problem of many children at school, she links the category 'child' with bullying and isolation, the responsibility for which was located in the father's actions. She not only constructs the category 'father' as not fulfilling his obligations resulting from incumbency to this category, but, crucially here, as unable to fulfil them because of his non-heterosexual identity.

In the second part of the text, the author invokes the category 'child' not as an age category, but as a gendered category. The evocation of category 'women' polarises it as being separate from 'men.' The author recognises that the category 'women' is normatively associated with certain category-bound activities or

skills, and sees it as a role that has to be learnt rather than something we are born with, and therefore stresses the importance of a female role model; in this case the category 'mother.' Sacks (1992: 585) points out that "the fact that activities are category-bound also allows us to praise or complain about 'absent activities.' The 'absent' activities in question that could be inferred would pertain to a normatively understood feminine behaviour, such as looking after one's appearance, learning how to look after a female body or how to engage in an all-female conversation. The author's father, who falls outside the category 'woman' or 'mother' (and outside of a normative 'father') can therefore be established a negative moral identity as a result of his inability to fulfil his child's needs. This could be extended to a category of a 'homosexual family,' which in the author's eyes lacks something vital for the child's wellbeing and is inferior to the heterosexual household.

As has been shown above, certain categories, such as 'parent,' are especially morally loaded and are therefore accompanied by a set of normative obligations. Jayyusi (1984: 44) gives an example of a morally loaded category 'doctor'; she notes: "what is seen to make a good doctor is often taken to be synonymous with what makes a doctor, although not with respect to competences alone, but clearly also with regards to the moral features of the category (duties, commitments)." If a category 'doctor' is replaced with the category 'parent,' then what constitutes a 'good parent,' also constitutes a 'parent.' Therefore, when the construction of the category 'homosexual parents' is tied to a list of non-normative activities and qualities, and when it is juxtaposed with a list of normative and expectable activities, qualities and obligations resulting from the incumbency of this category, it dissociates the category 'homosexual' from the category 'parent,' and the fusion of those categories establishes a negative moral identity.

The two sections above detailed the invocation of various categorisations existing within the category 'family' and using them as a tool to position LGBT people as transgressing it. The next section, however, presents how various categorisations of people who display positive attitudes towards same-gender parenting are utilised by the authors of comments to criticise pro-LGBT views.

6.3 Criticising pro-LGBT attitudes

In the comments analysed, it was found that legal changes in the UK providing same-gender families with equal parenting rights are the source of discursive struggle between those representing 'progressive' and those with 'anti-modernist' mindsets. In particular, the data revealed that there is an ongoing debate over what the good and bad values of twenty-first century are and whether the current world should or should not follow the already established social norms built over

centuries by past generations. The opponents of same-gender parenting construct it as a departure from cultural norms, which are of utmost importance to them. In the excerpts below, the authors criticise liberal attitudes to same-gender parenting:

(7) *I wish the liberals would stop trying to control human instinct, they just end up provoking it. Children at school bully – it is a fact of life. You cannot stop it, but you can certainly stop making it even worse than it already is. Gay people are perfectly fine human beings, but this goes beyond that. So come on liberals, bully the ‘bigotted’ people who think gay adoption is not such a good thing, but even if just one child commits suicide due to being bullied at school as a result of liberal policies, it is on your conscience.* (The Telegraph)

(8) *Liberals, however, think that nearly all traditional social norms are bad and should be torn down. They see a day when we can all live as we please and don’t think there will be any adverse consequences. They are arrogant to believe that past generations were just misguided bigots, rather than accepting that our values are based on generations of wisdom and experience.* (The Telegraph)

Both Excerpts 7 and 8 provide a judgmental and moral description of the collective category ‘liberals,’ and with the use of different discursive practices, the constructions serve to ascribe a negative moral character to this category. In Excerpt 7 liberals are projected as someone whose actions run contrary to the natural instincts of humans, and are ascribed such ‘illegitimate’ activities as attempting to control and provoke biology. But the ascription of category-generated activities goes further than biology, and activities related to the social relationships and life are morally scrutinised as well. The category ‘liberals’ is linked to possibly directly impacting upon the adopted children’s wellbeing, in the form of the adopted child being bullied at school and even committing suicide.

In Excerpt 8, liberals are constructed through the evocation of category-constitutive features of being opposed to traditional social norms and being negligent in respect to the established social values shared by, and based on, the old values of past generations. The moral character of this categorisation stems from the fact that those category-constitutive features have the potential of influencing the wellbeing of the world/nation by having unknown adverse consequences. In constructing liberals, the category-generated predicate “arrogant” is used. It is not produced as a normative category-tied predicate, but it is rather a situatedly produced feature, which works towards accomplishing a description of the category of immoral identity.

Another category, which is being situatedly established in this comment, is the enigmatic, broad ‘us.’ Although the author does not specify what this category exactly comprises, it is constructed as a normative one. It could be read as somebody

in opposition to liberals, and whose category liberals do not share incumbency of, for example, a nation, conservatives or the majority of people. By such discursive work, the author produces an oppositional asymmetry (Jayyusi 1984) between the two categorisations, the 'us' can be therefore seen as, what Jayyusi (1984) referred to as, an 'asymmetric category pair,' which she uses as an extension of what Sacks called standardised relational pair; which, on the other hand, was always symmetric. The author, unsurprisingly, shares the incumbency of the category 'us' and the positive construction of 'us' is done through ascribing category-generated feature such as having normative values 'based on generations of wisdom and experience.' The relevant asymmetric category pair allows for judgmental contrastive work and the moral assessment of the category, which stands in opposition to the category 'us,' the incumbency of which is shared also by the author.

In Excerpt 9, the category 'politicians' who support LGBT rights are morally assessed:

- (9) *So who says that 21st century rules are better than those applied during the 19th. It would seem that our liberalism has no bounds, due predominantly to our politically correct elite having very low morals of their own. Courting of any minority is seen to be acceptable these days just to gain their votes. I have a minority view: Get rid of all these scrounging and caniving career politicians and replace them with people of a higher moral standing that represent the majority and their constituents instead of these cow toweing survile nobodys who are only prepared to follow party so that they can continue to rake in the benefits that they have voted for themselves. With only a few exceptions: Scroungers, wasters and morally deficient the lot of them. But hey, in this modern 21st century liberalistic any thing goes and ignore the majority society – my opinion doesn't count!!* (Daily Mail)

The comment above is a response to a passage in the article in Daily Mail, referring to the words of Ben Summerskill, the Chief Executive of the LGBT rights charity Stonewall, who said: "These 19th-century views are not acceptable in the 21st century," who, in turn, was commenting on the UKIP election candidate Winston McKenzie's claim that same-gender adoption is a form of child abuse. In this excerpt, the focus is on the description of the category 'politicians' in constructing them as supporting non-normative rights of minorities i.e. the right for LGBT people to adopt children. Although same-gender adoption is not stated explicitly here, it can be "*arrived at contextually*" (Hester & Eglin 1997: 27, original italics). The category 'politicians' are constructed with the evocation of numerous category-generated activities and predicates explicitly articulating a low moral status of this category. The activities that are made relevant by the author relate to politicians as a category oriented towards gaining votes of minorities, such as they "court minority," "scrounge," "connive," "kowtow" and "rake in benefits," all of which imply that they

are somewhat subjected and weak and are involved in wrongful actions. That they are morally scrutinised, is also projected with the use of category-generated predicates, such as immoral, “career” or “politically correct” used ironically in a negative and judgmental way to point out low morals. What is more, the author constructs the category ‘politicians’ as an umbrella category under which other condemnable categories such as “scroungers” and “wasters” can also fall. Such a discursive move can be seen a disjunctive operation where the more avowable categorisation ‘politicians’ is replaced with more disavowable locally occasioned categorisations (Jayyusi 1984: 134) in order to attribute a negative moral identity.

The category ‘politician’ is, like other categories within the same membership categorisation device that are acting towards the benefit of a country or occupying a position at a national level, imbued with expectable category obligations stemming from the sole character of their position. As they are involved in influencing public policy and decision making, any decision or view that is not in line with a citizen’s one, can be subject to moral judgment, as it is in this case. Jayyusi (1984: 149) writes: “where we encounter an X, the being or doing of Y is grammatically relevant, so that where it is not found, an explanation or redescription is required” (original italics). The author then, by providing a list of disjunctive category-activity and category-predicate pairs, positions the category in question as not fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities towards the majority who, according to their views, oppose empowering minorities e.g. in the form of same-gender adoption laws. Jayyusi (1984: 149) continues the above mentioned point of what happens, when an X does not fulfil a Y, by claiming that “(o)ften judgment follows hard on the heels of explanation or redescription.” What it means in this case, is that the author, by describing the category ‘politicians’ as being an ‘X’ and doing a ‘Y,’ judges them and sees their actions and qualities as resulting from their immoral and selfish motives of wanting to gain more votes.

In the next excerpt, the categories ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ are contrasted:

- (10) *So UKIP were outraged that members of their party couldn't foster yet they don't want gay couples to adopt? Hypocritical much? – Sid, South East England, United Kingdom, 27/11/2012 11:22 Sid! what you need to remember is that Britain is a Christian Country and we have had no choice on this matter to have our say groups like Stonewall & the Caretll we have in Government now have bent over backwards to allow the minority to become the biggest voice. Labour & Stonewall go on about 'equality' and then arrest a Christian couple for not curtailing to the beliefs of two gaymen, so who should be treated more equal here? also people get the sack for wearing a crucifix in case others are offended. The best of it nobody else is offended only the Marxist left who want to bring the country down to follow their dogma. The cartel of Lib/Lab/Con is over and watch UKIP get more bad press as they become more of a threat.* (Daily Mail)

In this excerpt, the author's situated knowledge about the social world concerning same-gender adoption can be inferred through the construction of the categories 'majority' and 'minority,' both locatable in the device 'nation' or 'citizens of a country.' Although 'majority' is not directly stated in the text, the author mentions the category 'minority,' and the relation pair is left implied. The author uses the pronoun 'we,' positions themselves as the incumbent of the category 'majority,' and speaks as a spokesperson for them. Both 'majority' and 'minority' function as umbrella categories under which other categories can be allocated. The category 'majority' is constructed as Christians, who were deprived of the right to decide on the matter of same-gender adoption in the UK and who should have had a say on this matter. They are projected as unjustly passive in the sense that they underwent an activity performed on them. The category 'majority' is ascribed the category-bound feature of being affected negatively by the current laws and being opposed to it. Furthermore, the author ascribes negative features to two groups supporting LGBT rights: Stonewall, a LGBT rights charity in the UK, and the government described as "the Cartel." What can be inferred from such a positioning of the government is that its members act together to influence some decisions in order to regulate or manipulate something; in this case to 'allow the minority to become the biggest voice' against the wishes of the 'majority.' Stonewall and the Cartel are linked to an activity of 'bending over backwards,' which perhaps implies being weak and subjected, and therefore unsuitable to make such important decisions.

Later in the passage, the category 'majority' is constructed as victims. Christians, who are incumbents of this category, are unfairly punished by "being arrested" or "being sacked" for the expression of their religious views that might offend 'the other.' Such an unfair treatment of the 'majority' is seen as contradictory to the 'majority's' category-generated activity of "going on about equality," and forms a set of disjunctive features describing this category in order to position the supporters of LGBT rights as not adhering to their claims, and discriminating against the incumbents of the majority.

7. Conclusion

On the basis of the comments posted underneath news articles concerning same-gender parenting, it can be observed that legal changes in the UK, at least in certain spheres such as parenting, have not been followed by immediate changes in social attitudes. Due to the current socio-political situation, a reworking of the meaning of the family in the UK is inevitable and it does not happen without tensions from both sides of the political spectrum. Same-gender parenting raises concerns and controversies among many people because it exists beyond the established social norms, especially in the area of family, which has always been

seen as the preserve of heterosexuals. The analysis conducted in this paper shows that the more conservative voices in British society (as found in the online context of centre-right newspaper websites) construct parenting as a sphere exclusive to heterosexuals strongly relying on the idea of heteronormativity and gender binarism (Nentwisch 2008). In British society it is less and less acceptable to be openly discriminatory, hence various moderating policies undertaken by different media outlets online serve to eradicate the most blatant forms of discriminatory content, which allows for the constructions of more subtle ways of discriminating against sexual minorities.⁶ What has been disclosed about this subtle type of sexism in the moderated online setting is that homosexuals are no longer discriminated on the basis of their sexual preferences per se, but it is rather their perceived difference in the familial sphere that is under attack.⁷

Membership Categorisation Analysis has been a useful tool in investigating common sense assumptions about categories within the membership categorisation device ‘family’ and allowed for observing how the gendered meanings “locked into place” (see Baker 2000) in those categories constitute the source of prejudice against non-heterosexuals. The family construct relies on a broad range of (hetero) normative behaviours based on gender binarism and different expectations regarding both sexes. Categorisations are used to justify moral and normative assessments of same-gender parents and to place them outside the social phenomenon of the ‘family’ and position them as unsuitable to be parents, both in the biological sense and in the sense of providing necessary input from both sexes. It has also been observed how people’s taken for granted assumptions about gender and sexuality are naturalized through invoking various expectable and required activities, characteristics and obligations that LGBT people cannot fulfil. The invoked categorisations have been deployed, so that the disparity between the majority and the minority seemed even greater. The category ‘homosexual’ in the context under investigation is inference rich and carries with it a cluster of attributed features, preferences, practices, obligations and duties of not only what one is, but primarily what one is not. It is, however, used for contrastive purposes and signifies a lack of something, e.g. certain vital competences or qualities of what makes a good parent and therefore a parent (Jayyusi 1984). This type of naturalization serves as a tool for the maintenance of the social order and the current shape of structures of society to fit the heteronormative framework. As categories, and ‘family’ categories in

6. Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) have observed differences between blatant and subtle prejudice, and defined subtle prejudice on the basis of three components: “the defence of traditional values,” “the exaggeration of cultural differences” and “the more covert denial of positive emotions,” which could be all applied to the context under investigation.

7. It is possible that blatant discrimination against gay people was present in the comments, but was deleted by moderators.

particular, are ascribed a moral and normative character, their maintenance is justified and perhaps less exposed to criticism of being discriminatory. The analysed data also shows how the applied categorisation work serves to group the majority and the minority of people on the basis of sexual preferences, and in particular how it attempts to enlarge the discrepancy between the two groups. Moreover, it shows how the ascription of highly negative predicates and activities to people with pro-same-gender parenting views people can be justified through moral scrutiny and their construction as accountable for prospective tragic consequences to the future of the human race.

The analytical focus of the presented data in this paper was only on one side of the debate: the more conservative and traditional part of the British society. In order to obtain a more robust picture of how the construct of 'family' is maintained, reworked and negotiated, further research could include looking at the other side(s) of the same-gender parenting debate, in both online and offline contexts. It would also be worthwhile analysing how same-gender parenting constitutes a potential site for the performance of 'flexibility of categories' (Speer 2005). That is, whether the non-normative context of same-gender parenting gives rise to new categories and how it allows for a possible 'revolutionisation' of the categories, together with activities and predicates normatively tied to them (Stokoe 2003a). This would show whether and how LGBT people could be included as incumbents of the category 'parents,' existing within a membership categorisation device, 'family.'

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Appendix

1. Daily Mail article

Allowing gay couples to adopt is a form of child abuse, says UKIP election candidate
By Matt Chorley, Mail Online Political Editor
Published: 09:47 GMT, 27 November 2012 | Updated: 15:39 GMT, 27 November 2012

A leading member of the UK Independence Party has likened allowing gay people to adopt to ‘child abuse’. Winston McKenzie, the party’s culture spokesman, said same sex couples should be banned from the adoption process, because it breached the human rights of children. It comes as UKIP defends itself in the row with Rotherham council, which removed three foster children from a couple because they were party members. Today it emerged the siblings have been separated from one another. The boy has been sent to live with one family, while his two sisters – a baby and an older girl – have gone to another home. The couple – who have already bought Christmas presents for the children – has now called on the leaders of Rotherham council to quit after they failed to apologise for what has happened. Mr McKenzie is the UKIP candidate in this week’s by-election in Croydon North. His remarks were condemned by campaigners and the party moved to distance itself from his comments. Mr McKenzie, a former boxer, said: “To say to a child, “I am having you adopted by two men who kiss regularly but don’t worry about it” – that is abuse. ‘It is a violation of a child’s human rights because that child has no opportunity to grow up under normal circumstances’ he told Metro. Mr McKenzie is a Christian and said gay adoption was against his religious beliefs. He added: “There are people out there who bring up their kids encouraging them to believe they are gay themselves.’ He also used the interview to attack celebrities who come out as gay ‘as a fashion.’ David Coburn, UKIP’s London chairman who is gay, insisted Mr McKenzie’s views were not party policy. ‘We entirely, wholeheartedly support equal rights for couples regardless of their sexuality,’ he said. Ben Summerskill, of gay rights charity Stonewall, said: ‘These 19th-century views are not acceptable in the 21st century.’ The comments will be especially embarrassing for UKIP as leader Nigel Farage seeks to prove it is a mainstream party able to compete with the Tories. He has this week attacked David Cameron over his 2006 claim that UKIP was made up of ‘fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists, mostly.’ The two parties have come to blows repeatedly, after Tory vice chairman Michael Fabricant suggested an electoral pact with UKIP, to stop the anti-EU party snatching votes from the Conservatives which could deprive Mr Cameron of a majority at the next election. Mr Farage rejected the idea, insisting ‘it’s war’ with the Tories, but he left open the possibility that he could do a deal with a different Conservative leader. ‘If Cameron went and somebody pragmatic, grown up and sensible like Michael Gove was leader, you might think then we could sit around the table

and have a proper discussion... open-minded, doesn't throw abuse around and thinks issues through – he would be the right kind of person,' he said. Today UKIP treasurer Stuart Wheeler, a former Tory donor, claimed to have held secret lunches with eight Tory MPs about defecting. 'I have had lunch, secretly if you like, in a completely confidential way with eight different Tory MPs,' he told the Daily Telegraph. While still early days, he predicted 'a few' could switch parties. 'I have had lunch, secretly if you like, in a completely confidential way with eight different Tory MPs,' he told the Daily Telegraph. While still early days, he predicted 'a few' could switch parties.

2. The Telegraph article

Ukip's Winston McKenzie is factually wrong to say that adoption by same-gender couples is 'child abuse'

By Tom Chivers Society Last updated: November 27th, 2012

Is it "child abuse" to allow same-gender couples to adopt?

A Ukip parliamentary candidate thinks so. Winston McKenzie, the party's culture, media and sport spokesman who is standing in the Croydon North by-election on Thursday, told the Metro newspaper: "To say to a child, 'I am having you adopted by two men who kiss regularly but don't worry about it' – that is abuse. It is a violation of a child's human rights because that child has no opportunity to grow up under normal circumstances. A caring loving home is a heterosexual or single family. I don't believe [a gay couple] is healthy for a child."

He expanded on the point in the Croydon Advertiser. "If you couldn't look after your child and you had to put them up for adoption, would you honestly want your child to be adopted by a gay couple?," he asked a reporter. "Would you seriously want that or a heterosexual family? Which would be more healthy for the child?"

This is a serious concern for a lot of people, and should be treated as such, not dismissed as knee-jerk homophobia. It is widely believed that children do best with a mother and a father, and – even if you have no *a priori* objection to same-gender couples adopting – if that is the case, then it is a reasonable argument for being wary about it. The rights of the child surely should outweigh the rights of any prospective adopter. (It's not a debate-ender, though: it might be that children do better with gay adoptive parents than with a single parent, or than in care, which might mean that it is still best to allow same-gender couples to adopt.)

But, as ever, it's an empirical question: do children do worse when brought up by two men, or two women, than they do when brought up by the more traditional one of each? We obviously have to define what "worse" means. Do they do worse in school? Are they less happy, are they less capable of forming social or loving relationships?

There is also a separate question of whether children raised by gay parents are likely themselves to be gay: Mr McKenzie is apparently worried about that, and it's, again, a common concern. Many people nowadays might not view that as a problem, but nonetheless it's worth addressing honestly.

There has been some research into all this. A review of the literature carried out in 2002 by the Scandinavian Journal of Psychology looked at 23 studies, examining a total of 615 children of same-gender parents and 387 controls. They looked at "emotional functioning, sexual preference, stigmatization, gender role behavior, behavioral adjustment, gender identity, and cognitive functioning" – exactly the sort of criteria we discussed above. They found that "Children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers did not systematically differ from other children on any of the

outcomes”; more specifically, the studies “indicate that children raised by lesbian women do not experience adverse outcomes compared with other children,” and the same appears to be true for gay men, although more research was needed given how small their sample was.

Another review, this time from 2010 in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, found that “Strengths typically associated with married mother-father families appear to the same extent in families with 2 mothers and potentially in those with 2 fathers,” and that while “Average differences favor women over men ... parenting skills are not dichotomous or exclusive.” They conclude “The gender of parents correlates in novel ways with parent-child relationships but has minor significance for children’s psychological adjustment and social success.”

A third review, published in 2008 in the journal *Child Development*, looked at “sexual identity, personal development, and social relationships” among children of same-gender parents, and found that “there is no evidence that the development of children with lesbian or gay parents is compromised in any significant respect relative to that among children of heterosexual parents in otherwise comparable circumstances”

I am aware that I would be uncomfortable with a finding that gay parents have a negative influence on adopted children, so in an attempt to confront my own confirmation bias I’ve been trying as best I can to find a review of the literature which disagrees with the above. So far, I haven’t been able to. Even the individual studies which I have (non-systematically) come across all seem to agree that there is no significant difference in outcomes between the adopted children of heterosexual couples and those of homosexual ones. [Update: someone in the comments, who admittedly somewhat undermined their point by talking about the “gay mafia,” did find this study, from July this year, which found systematic differences.]

So, in any meaningful sense, Mr McKenzie’s view that the adoption of children by gay couples is “abuse” seems to be factually wrong: it causes no trauma, has no negative outcomes beyond that of heterosexual adoption, and doesn’t even seem to make children more likely to be gay. This isn’t to belittle Mr McKenzie’s fears, or those of other people – it’s simply that they are misinformed. Hopefully, as more children grow up with gay parents and gay friends, these misunderstandings and their accompanying fears will melt away.

To that end, I’m going to end by linking to this wonderful letter from Sophia Bailey Klugh, a 10-year-old daughter of two gay men, to Barack Obama, in which she says: “I just wanted to tell you that I am so glad you agree that two men can love each other because I have two dads and they love each other. But at school kids think that it’s gross and weird but it really hurts my heart and feelings.” Maybe she could forward it to Mr McKenzie.

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