

Whose Naming Whom

Using Independent Video to Teach about the Politics of Representation

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In this essay, we address how independent video can be used to help students recognize and contest the dominant culture's presumed right to represent the world. We examine how such videos provide alternative views, allow students to see how others contest dominant meanings, and help students to envision themselves and society with a sense of agency. From among the dozens of quality independently produced documentaries available for teaching about the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, we select four documentaries on the basis of their usefulness and applicability in a range of classroom contexts and subject areas. The videos we analyze are *Tongues Untied* (1989); *Girls Like Us* (1996); *The Color of Fear* (1994); and *It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in Schools* (1997).

We selected these videos based on our pedagogical experiences of using them in a variety of graduate and undergraduate courses in our respective departments, the Department of Teaching and Learning and the Department of Human Development and in our mutual affiliation with the Department of Women's Studies. Undergraduate courses in which we have used these films include Race, Class, and Gender; Schooling and American Society; Gender and Family Diversity; and Introduction to Women's Studies. Graduate courses include Feminist Social Theory; Schooling and Diversity; Perspectives on Human Sexuality; and Advanced Issues in Women's Studies. We have solicited feedback from students regarding their reactions to each of the videos for a variety of pedagogical purposes, including the assessment of how well students are learning to make connections among personal identities and political structures and assisting students in developing an informed reflexive consciousness (Allen; Boler).

Each of the videos we analyze enables educators to engage students in the following questions reflective of the politics of representation: Who has the power to name and construct social identities? How do the people depicted in the film challenge dominant representations

of gender, sexuality, race, and class and thereby transform social identities? How does the film, as an independent representation not authored by Hollywood or other mass media, portray an alternative vision of social identities and political relations? Having watched this film, how do students engage in the contestation of dominant meanings and represent themselves with agency?

The four videos we analyze highlight these questions regarding the politics of representation in two central ways. First, simply by making independently produced documentaries available to students, the educator exposes students to images that have been marginalized from the mainstream of media and popular culture. Through exposure to independent video, students can begin to recognize the political importance of producing as well as witnessing alternative representations of identities and communities. Second, the documentary content of videos we examine highlights "who has the power to name," a question central to the politics of representation. Students are able to see the people represented in the documentaries struggle with the ways in which the dominant culture has named them or others. The experience of witnessing characters in the videos struggle with the politics of representation brings these issues to life and opens the possibility of engaging one's own students in similar direct struggles with the politics of representation.

Our theoretical understanding of the politics of representation is informed by the work of such theorists as Stuart Hall, Michel Foucault, and bell hooks. As Foucault states, "There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy" (101-02). While we may hope that by showing our students alternative representations of the world they will learn to recognize and resist painful and oppressive discourses, sometimes the opposite happens: they see the people represented in the videos only through the familiar "white supremacist patriarchal capitalist" gaze and quickly blame the victim (hooks 16). We find that our goals of social justice are often powerfully supported by using independently produced videos to expand our collective understanding of the power of naming, and how naming can be a source of oppression as well as a source of resistance to repression.

The discussions of the videos which follow are intended to illustrate how each documentary reflects the ways in which individuals and

communities are named by the dominant culture, and, in turn, how individuals and communities resist the namings and stereotypes imposed by the dominant culture. Second, we hope to provide sufficient synopses of the films so that educators can decide if these documentaries are suitable to their own teaching context. Third, we integrate comments from our students to show the kinds of student engagement and critical reflection elicited by these documentaries.¹

Tongues Untied

Beginning with its apt title, this remarkable documentary highlights the politics of naming. The video addresses how dominant voices are internalized, resulting in Black gay men's silence. "Silence is a way to grin and bear it," says a voice-over, while a Black man's grimace at homophobic and racist comments is shown. Naming is visually illustrated in the video when different voices are juxtaposed with very quick cuts, each voice shouting out a different name used to marginalize and silence Black gay men. *Tongues Untied* foregrounds the ways in which Black masculinities are constructed through contradictory cultural intersections. It reveals Black gay men as caught between the warring tensions of allegiance to the "Black community" (depicted in Riggs's autobiographical coming-of-age story that threads through the video, a story in which he learns that his forays with other young boys of his age warranted his being called "punk/faggot/homo"), religious values (depicted by the voice of the Black preacher quoting from the Bible and mouthing "Sinner!"), and racism (detailed in the story of Riggs's experience as the victim of a gay bashing and how a white man comes to his rescue, an event to which he attributes his "immersion in vanilla," his taste for "snow"—for white male lovers). The impact of this racism is foregrounded again when Riggs critiques gay porn for its hypereroticization and objectification of Black men. Then, in a very poignant scene, Riggs shows himself walking down Castro Street in San Francisco and passing another Black gay man, the two of them unable to look one another in the eye: "What are we afraid to see? One another's hurt and pain?"

One student offers a nice summary of the aesthetic structure of *Tongues Untied*: "Marlon Riggs's film is part testimonial, part spoken word/poetry, and part interview. The film is unconventional and non-linear, but it is held together by the beauty of the poetry and spoken-word pieces that lace together the different parts to form a holistic view of gay Black life." Her summary foregrounds an aspect of Riggs's powerful social documentary that profoundly affects many viewers: the

extensive intermingling of voice-over, rhythmic chants, poetry, and music with diverse images of Black gay men. The use of poetry—ranging from the work of Essex Hemphill to mantras in Riggs's own voice—creatively conveys the inner conflicts, humor, and vulnerability of Black gay men. Poetry eloquently voices the theme of the power of silence:

Silence is my shield/it crushes
Silences is my cloak/it smothers
Silence is my sword/it cuts both ways

Other examples of the use of poetry include the film's opening and closing with a chorus of men's voices chanting "brother to brother/brother to brother." Arguably, one of the most powerful culminating moments in the film is delivered through the chanted poetic lines: "anger unvented becomes/pain unspoken becomes/rage released becomes /violence cha cha cha . . ." Students invariably comment on their strong emotional reaction to this segment.

Tongues Untied is distinguishable from the other documentaries we examine in this essay by its unique aesthetic representations. In the distributor's review, Vito Russo, author of *The Celluloid Closet*, an excellent critical analysis of the representation of gay and lesbian characters in the history of Hollywood cinema, is quoted as saying, "Usually, politically and socially admirable films fall short of the mark in the aesthetics department. They are praised more for their good intentions. . . . Marlon Riggs has created that rarest of birds—a brilliant, innovative work of art that delivers a knock-out political punch." In part because of its unique beauty as a poetic film, *Tongues Untied* clearly offers an alternative to representations in mainstream film and documentary.

The subject matter of the video represents a taboo topic for many students (and indeed, its airing on the PBS program *P.O.V.* caused great controversy, as did Patrick Buchanan's use of this documentary to lambaste the National Endowment for the Arts). Educators—especially in the context of encouraging in-service or pre-service teachers to adopt lesbian-gay inclusive curricula—must work hard to counter the myth that to teach about lesbian and gay experience is to talk about sex. Riggs's film—produced, significantly, in 1989, and thus reflecting the AIDS crisis and its impact on gay men's experience of sexuality—invites such comments as the following, voiced by one of our students: "Why is this film so much about sex? Why doesn't it normalize black gay men by showing them with families and children?" Such a question allows discussion of how *Tongues Untied* represents a

radical intervention in mainstream representation of Black male sexuality and of gay male sexuality. The documentary allows Black gay men the power of *self-representation* regarding their sexuality. It is about countering "silence = death."

The style of straightforward documentary combined with artistic license allows for unique exploration of the intersections of race and sexuality within different Black gay male cultures. Humor is used in the depiction of how some Black gay men use "finger snapping" to punctuate their speech. In another scene, Riggs talks about how dancing was historically a ticket for his assimilation into white culture, and is "now my passage back home." Another scene illustrates the "performance" of gender with men "voguing," doing dance/performance that "imitates" and incorporates "feminine" movements into engaging, slick, and polished artistic movement.

Students described the significance of the final refrain of the video: "Black men loving Black men is *the* revolutionary act." One student emphasized that Riggs is pointing out the "taboo" of this love of one Black man for another. "We are worth wanting each other," Riggs reiterates. The fact that the video ends with this revolutionary claim means that there is a positive conclusion to what has been depicted as a painful journey. This film encourages discussion of how an individual, or a marginalized community, can begin to reclaim a positive self-identity in the face of myriad attacks both from the dominant culture as well as, in this case, from within the African American community, as one student observed:

One intersection of racism and homophobia is when the young men are asked to choose between their blackness and their homosexuality. This is not possible. As the poet says in the video, "choose between your left or right nut." This . . . is a mindless question. One cannot choose between two parts of themselves.

Girls Like Us

Girls Like Us illustrates the intricate ways in which discourses of religion, education, families, and peers construct and define norms of femininity and sexuality. This documentary—which won both an Emmy Award as well as Best Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival—shows the tremendous power of intersecting social structures as they shape four young women's lives. The four girls are interviewed in a variety of settings across a span of four years during their high school experience. In teaching the documentary, we asked students to identify "what people and institutions define what it means to be

female for these girls." An undergraduate student captures this observation, saying: "In the movie, there was a strong notion that being female meant sexuality. In each girl's story, the topic of sex and pregnancy seemed to be the biggest issue. To me, it seemed that being female had to do with 'How are you going to deal with getting pregnant?'"

The experience of the adolescent girls in this video illustrates what Michele Fine calls the missing discourse of desire. In most cultures, and certainly within the culture of sex education in public schools, women are not given the language or the space to talk about their own desire. Rather, Fine identifies the three dominant discourses as victimization, violence, and individual morality. In the case of Raelene, a poor white woman, her notion of femininity privileges young motherhood over any other life choices. She became pregnant for the first time at age fourteen, had a child at fifteen, became pregnant again a year later, and did not consider abortion an option for her. A graduate student observes:

The story about Raelene was very touching and made me want to reach out to her. She seems to want the right thing but she is not getting it and no one seems to tell her anything about life or show her where to learn. She seems like she is experimenting and failing.

Raelene's descriptions of sexual activity with male partners reveal a lack of knowledge about sexual agency, pleasure, and functioning. In one scene, she and her girlfriends confess to each other that they have never had an orgasm, despite having been sexually active for several years. Yet they all prefer sex with a man without a condom, as it allegedly feels less like a "dildo." In another scene, with her boyfriend, she describes requiring K-Y jelly in order to have intercourse with her previous boyfriend, because she had no passion for him, and sex with him gave her "sores."

Religious, societal, and family messages constrain the girls' ability to exercise a genuine sense of agency regarding their own sexuality and reproductive rights. Of the four girls, only De'Yona had been given accurate information about family planning, contraceptive choices, female sexuality, and the impact of teenage pregnancy on future life chances. Anna, a Vietnamese girl and the one presumed most-destined for college and medical school, admitted to having unprotected sex. Her friend chastised her, saying, "You know so much better than that."

The documentary contains many examples of contradictions within dominant discourses that the girls try to unravel. In terms of religion,

there is a scene in which Lisa, an Italian working-class girl, and her friends are hanging out in a bedroom and talking about the contradictions they see between their Catholic education about the Virgin Mary and the reality of sexual intercourse and conception.

There is a particular incident of resistance to the dominant culture's silence about female sexuality that stands out for nearly all of our students. This "counternarrative" arises with the one African American girl, De'Yona, and her grandmother, who is raising her. At the beginning, De'Yona is attending a high school for the performing arts, with plans to attend college and become a musical director. Her grandmother strongly supports De'Yona's creative aspirations. She explicitly instructs De'Yona to use birth control, provides condoms, and urges her to get monthly birth control shots. Our students consistently express a kind of surprised delight at the grandmother's frankness.

Yet De'Yona's narrative evokes significant pain and even despair for viewers, who, like her grandmother, invest great hope in De'Yona's musical talent. Early in her journey, De'Yona comments that she does not want to become a mother because there are so many little children already around her. After her favorite cousin, Man Man, is shot and killed, she becomes despondent, fails her senior year in high school, and gets pregnant. Her grandmother is hurt by De'Yona's pregnancy but does not take long to embrace the reality that a new baby is coming. She never wavers in her support for De'Yona, despite dashed hopes and dreams for the future.

We ask our students in what ways these girls have and use the power to shape their own lives. Almost without exception, the students parroted liberal individualism: they see the girls as having opportunities and choices. The students tend to blame the victim, accusing the girls in the video of failing to exercise free choice. They also blame them for the depressing circumstances in which they find themselves, but at the same time, some students could recognize the power of social structures in shaping girls' lives, as in the following student reflection:

Watching the film, I felt like the girls did not have much power. Even though they had free will, they seemed to be caught in their surroundings. De'Yona was surrounded by her mother's children and her grandmother telling her to use birth control. De'Yona herself said she did not want children, yet she did not pass high school and ended up pregnant. They all have free will and exercise it. Several of them do this by having sex. However, none of the girls seriously branch out from what is expected of them.

Of all the videos we are examining, this one reflects the least hopeful portrait of possibilities of resistance to the dominant culture. Our students repeatedly commented on the sadness and hopelessness they found in the girls' lives. Clearly, early pregnancy and motherhood, school failure, postponement of college plans, and having to deal with death and other losses were realities that many of the more privileged white students watching this video found hard to swallow. They would prefer a more hopeful ending with De'Yona attending college and not having to face unplanned pregnancy, or Raelene stopping at only one child, or Anna being able to have a boyfriend and go to college. Despite a few hints of resistance that the students could relate to, including De'Yona's grandmother's direct support of responsible sexual behavior and Anna's homoerotic flirtation with her best girlfriend, only Lisa seemed acceptable to our students in that her life was turning out as expected. That is, compared to those of the others, her life most closely matched the normative heteropatriarchal ideal bought into by many of the students in our classes (hooks).

Despite the fact that many students tend to blame the girls for their so-called choices, they also acknowledge the power of social structures to shape life experiences. The ability to recognize how society and biography intersect and specifically how society constrains women's real choices is our shared pedagogical goal, and this video delivers that goal, as student comments reveal: "Society is a powerful machine that drives who we are and what we become. It's virtually inescapable and is almost always unpredictable"; "Especially in De'Yona's case, sometimes people and most definitely children don't have opportunities to change their own lives. The social structures shape it for them and they are left to survive under those conditions."

As teachers our goal includes helping students identify how the girls acted as agents, despite the social structures working against them. Many were able to pinpoint agency in the videos, even among the most poignant of stories, as one student observed: "These girls challenged the idea that girls should do as they're told and just sit and look pretty. These girls are all tough and regardless of how hard their situations got, they kept going (sometimes in the wrong direction, but nonetheless, they never gave up)." Another student noted that Anna was able to make her own choices, in spite of pressures from family and society:

Anna definitely revolted against her parents and realized the inequalities in her life that she was experiencing by being female. Her father told her not to date but she did it anyway. She also down the road made the decision herself not to be sexually active which challenged the societal expectations for females to "put out."

In summary, *Girls Like Us* reveals the contradictory messages young women encounter as they struggle to find a sense of agency in the face of powerful social forces, as one of our students concludes:

I believe the message that I can take from this film is how powerful *expectations* are. Expectations from society, from friends, from family members, and from ourselves all act to determine the choices we make (or are made for us). Resisting the expectations of others can be very powerful as well and can free us to do whatever we choose to do.

The Color of Fear

The Color of Fear documents a group of nine men of Anglo, Asian, Black, and Hispanic descent who, during a facilitated weekend retreat, confront issues of racism through an ongoing dialogue. The film portrays an unusually intimate and politically charged scenario, in which the viewer has the opportunity to witness emotionally harrowing and poignant conversations. As one student summarizes: "This was a compelling video about the devastating effects of racism on not only people of color, but whites as well. It was powerful, explosive, riveting." Another student observes: "This video was very beneficial for me to see. I had always heard of white privilege but never really was able to comprehend it. The video pointed that out as well as prejudices that other minorities have towards each other." While one might think that watching ninety minutes of men discussing racism would not be engaging, to the contrary, students find the film quite gripping. This is the one film most likely to be remembered by students when the semester is over. In fact, many of Megan's students show this documentary to their friends or teach it in their K-12 classrooms.

The video has some very heated moments, in particular, one in which the most articulate man in the film, Victor, who is African American, confronts David, the quintessential White Liberal. The heated exchange reveals David's privileged denial of racism. In effect, David's position can be characterized as follows: "I am not racist. I employ Mexicans. I am very friendly to them. I do not know why you colored people are so angry. You should not be angry. The white man does not want to stand in your way. If you are having trouble making progress in the world, you are standing in your own way." David's privileged liberal ignorance functions as a central focus of all of the men in the group. The group takes on the challenge of working to help David see his own racism, as one student remarks:

The white guy didn't have a clue to what he was talking about. It was so powerful, I thought Victor was going to get up and punch him out. The white man kept referring to the others as "you coloreds" apparently without thinking that that term itself is "racist." In the end he broke down and realized the feelings of hate and prejudice about persons of color that had been imposed upon him by a domineering and abusive father, and how today he is carrying that legacy.

The issue of whose naming practice carries authority, central to the conflict depicted in this documentary, is captured well by one student:

One of the major themes that caught my attention during the first half of the video was the idea of "being American." The young man of Japanese heritage commented that he strongly resisted applying for an American passport. According to Victor, being American means being white and privileged. The Mexican American man stated that he did not consider himself an American and that his ancestors were robbed of that title. The man of Chinese heritage commented that it is an insult to him to be called "American" because it denies him his Chinese heritage. The Black man with the short hair expressed his feelings about being an American by saying that he would "have to give up his ethnicity to become American." This theme especially interested me because of the rising feeling of nationalism expressed in the media since the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Currently there is a commercial on TV that includes many young men and women saying that they are "American." I wonder how many people see that commercial and are inspired by its message. I wonder how many watch it and are disgusted.

Another student's reflection on the invisibility of whiteness highlights the ways in which the film asks the viewer to contemplate how the dominant culture defines identity, and how the process of dominant cultural naming affects different people:

Victor, after having to explain to David that "being human" in the white person's mind requires people of color to "throw away" their identity and "to kill" themselves, asks David to define or name the White experience. David cannot, and instead replies, "we don't consider ourselves a part of an ethnic group." Victor goes on to tell David that "being white means you don't have to admit that being white is different from being a person of color. You step into a world that's already yours." Victor also goes on to say, "being white means you can blame minorities for their own victimization."

The video certainly offers a refreshing alternative to the stereotyped depictions of race and racism to which we are daily exposed by popular culture and the mainstream media. One student explicitly expressed her gratitude at seeing an alternative representation of racism:

Among the refreshing things about the video for me as an Asian American woman was seeing a diversity of Asian American men, all willing to dispel the model-minority myths. This is not the case when I watch most visual media, which is why I gave up watching most of it long ago.

This film is best used later in the semester after racism and the construction of difference are discussed at some length because it evokes strong emotions. Students acknowledge the power of this video to address race and racism in ways that allow both white people and people of color to identify, to feel represented, and to think critically about the construction of racism, as seen in the following quotes:

It was transforming for me to be a part of their experience. The camera work was spectacular. It came into things without being too intrusive. It showed the complexity of each man and the sameness of each man.

As I cried, cheered, and ranted and raved at the different men in the video, I couldn't help but be reminded of Du Bois and the double consciousness of the African American and Ralph Ellison and the invisibility of the Black man. The discussion in the film reflected many themes . . . such as the oppressed having to liberate themselves and their oppressors without becoming the oppressors themselves, and the dominant group not having to worry about their place in the world because it is seen through their lens. The emotional impact of racism is also apparent in the film.

Although less explicitly, the film allows the viewers to witness embodied masculinity. Megan recalls a powerful experience one semester, when two male students were profoundly affected by witnessing men hug one another in what is a very emotional good-bye at the end of the film. Her young male students—who had, up until this point, not engaged in any critical discussion about issues of gender—now shared publicly that they were very moved by this simple embrace between men, and that they had never seen or experienced such intimacy between heterosexual men. Another student observed:

Each man was given the power and space to feel in this environment. David's progression from rational to feeling was a rare thing to see. The film provides a model for men, especially white men, to move out of their rational minds to feel how their power affects others and themselves.

Further highlighting the constraining norms of masculinity, *The Color of Fear* portrays men's emotional experience of racism, which contradicts the hegemonic depiction of men as nonemotional. It is instructive to ask students to consider this question: if *The Color of Fear* were depicting women's emotional confrontation of one another's racism, would the film have an equivalent impact? One could argue that it is precisely the vulnerability and emotional expressivity of the men in this video that conveys the powerful messages about how racism is internalized.

This video documents the unusual situation in which men of color have an opportunity to name and claim their own identity, and to express to members of the dominant white culture how it feels to be named. By the end of their weekend, David appears to go through a significant transformation. In a sense, he finally gets it. He recognizes to a limited extent how racism works; he manages to overcome his desire to deny these men the pain of their experience, and instead, begins to see what kind of work is involved in unlearning racism and identifying whiteness as a powerful yet frequently unnamed force.

It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in Schools

It's Elementary, a film directed by Academy Award-winner Debra Chasnoff and produced by Helen Cohen, deals explicitly with how educational institutions and family and community groups can teach accurate and relevant information about sexual-orientation diversity. Beginning with the assumption that children hear distortions and prejudicial information about gays and lesbians, the premise of the video is to portray realistic examples of parents, students, and teachers engaged in open conversations about the lives, struggles, and contributions of gay people themselves. A variety of educational settings are depicted, with elementary through high schools and private and public school settings included. Students invariably notice that younger children are more open-minded than older children, as the following undergraduate explains:

I was absolutely shocked at the sharp contrast of opinions between very young children and adolescents. Children at seven and eight are still open-minded when taught about gay and lesbian issues. But by

the time they are fourteen, and still haven't been exposed to serious discussions on gay and lesbian issues, they have very strong preconceived notions. I wish I had gone through an educational program that was inclusive. Some of my friends from high school are so homophobic that I won't even bring up the topic around them. It's like fighting a brick wall.

The question of naming and who gets to name is central in this documentary. Many of the educators engage their students in self- and group reflection to identify what kinds of names and stereotypes have been learned about lesbian and gay people. In a public third-grade classroom, a male teacher plays popular music and asks students to name the gay, lesbian, or bisexual singer/songwriter. Our students enjoy watching the children's excitement grow as they discover that famous pop stars such as Elton John and Melissa Etheridge are gay and lesbian. The same teacher uses the basic technique of constructing a "word web" to enlist students in his class to brainstorm gay-themed words, opening the door to discuss stereotypes associated with gay people, gay pride, prejudice, and homophobia.

Our students are also alert to the politics of representation in terms of whether or not gay and lesbian people are speaking for themselves, or whether heterosexual allies are speaking for them. The following student reflection is indicative of such insight:

I really liked the diversity that they found in looking for teachers to be involved in this film. Some were gay but most were not, which I think was very important. The idea behind teaching the kids about gays and lesbians is to expose them to this different lifestyle but also to teach them to be accepting of others, even though they might be different. When a gay teacher taught about gays and lesbians I felt that it made the issue seem smaller and that the teacher was only interested because it dealt directly with them. When a teacher taught about the issue that was not gay or lesbian it brought it out as more of a community issue.

Students are quick to notice that the locations are characteristically "liberal" cities: Manhattan; San Francisco; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Madison, Wisconsin. It is as if our students want to find a reason why curricular inclusiveness might be found in these environments, and not in their own southern or suburban backgrounds. There is a particular sensitivity on the part of religiously conservative students to the way such groups are portrayed in the video:

My reaction is that this video made Christians look horrible. I feel Christians can share their views in a loving way. For example, love the sinner, hate the sin. God has absolute love for us, yet we all sin. Who are we as sinners able to judge other sinners? Okay, I'll step off of my soapbox now and talk about the children.

It's Elementary offers an ideal avenue for students to grapple with the contradictions of their religious teachings and social justice goals. Students do not want to see themselves as homophobic, nor to identify with "hating homosexuals," yet they also do not want to "condone" homosexuality, as it goes against their religious teaching. Some students just lay out the contradiction without necessarily resolving it, as the following student reveals, but at least the video opens the door to further thought and discussion:

The video mentioned a book called *My Two Mommies* [correctly *Heather Has Two Mommies*], which is supposed to make homosexual living a normal and accepted thing in the eyes of people of all ages. However, I was raised in a Christian home and went to a private Christian school from age three through twelfth grade and we were taught straight out of the Bible which states very clearly that homosexuality is not the lifestyle God intended for intimate relationships. We obviously were not read *My Two Mommies* at my school, and I am not a homophobic person and I do not hate homosexual people, I simply do not agree with their lifestyle. I was not exposed to homosexuality in my school system the way people want it to be now, and that did not make me completely oblivious to it. I learned about it through television, news, and of course, out in the world day after day.

Another student, however, was able to think more carefully about the nuances of what the filmmakers were trying to accomplish:

I was surprised at how aware the children were about gay and lesbian issues. I found myself frowning on those children who held negative stereotypes about gay and lesbian couples and applauding children who seemed open-minded and accepting. It became clear to me that children are able to handle more than adults give them credit for, and that while they are still questioning life and figuring out what life is all about, is the time when teachers should be giving children the most information and the most options. This film separated sexuality from sexual orientation, which was great. It presented a way that sexual orientation is a part of development, hence, can be taught in a developmentally appropriate fashion. Why is it necessary for sexual orientation to be specifically addressed in schools, I wondered.

Is it truly in the academic arena where tolerance should be taught? I felt that the pretense for teaching sexual orientation behind the film was to educate children so that they might become more tolerant and accepting of diversity. I think that it really isn't tolerance that is being taught, or the issue about gay and lesbian lifestyles, it is about gaining knowledge about the world that children will be living in.

In the film, the politics of representation arise when a principal decides to put on exhibit a photography show called *Love Makes a Family*. At a parent-teacher meeting, some parents express their outrage at these images being publicly displayed in their school. A veteran teacher cautiously brings his class to view the exhibit and gains a more accepting attitude after he observes his young students attending to the photographs and family narratives with great interest.

In another discussion among teachers in a private Quaker school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a woman of color raises the issue of whether or not all the teachers must explicitly address lesbian and gay issues, and if they do, does that mean the teacher must "condone" this lifestyle. Educators and administrators from all walks of life discuss their differences, and multiple opinions are aired and respected. When Gay Pride Day is held, during an all-school assembly, an openly gay soccer coach uses an analogy that first graders as well as university students can comprehend. He poignantly demonstrates how "I *could* play soccer if I had to hide one leg." He hops on one foot trying to kick the ball. "But," he says, putting his other foot down, "I can play soccer much better when I am able to use both legs." Students then understand that by sharing all of who he is, he can be a more effective teacher and friend.

Conclusion

Our educational agenda is to make intersections visible by helping students uncover the complexities of who has the power to name and construct social identities. The explicit content in the documentaries we have presented enables educators to engage students in discussion of the processes of naming, and how dominant cultural representations and stereotypes are constructed. By utilizing alternative representations in teaching, educators can urge students to think critically about the cultural images that dominate our visual, social, and perceptual horizons. Our analysis has emphasized how educators can use these documentaries to engage dialogue, challenge student assumptions about intersecting categories, and encourage agency in students themselves.

NOTES

1. The comments quoted in this essay are drawn from students' in-class written responses to questions posed by the instructor. The students' writing is published here with their permission.

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