

Love Me Gender: Normative Homosexuality and “Ex-gay” Performativity in Reparative Therapy Narratives

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*Advocates of “reparative therapy” employ a modified version of Judith Butler’s “normative heterosexuality” discourse to “cure” gays and lesbians. Coupling Butler with a “coming out of homosexuality” personal narrative, reorientation texts such as Love Won Out construct a ubiquitous foundation for sexual identity and collective experience. At the text’s conclusion, a tension is produced between a constitutive conception of identity and a more traditional notion of self, grounded in a secured ontological base. These conflicting constructs are ultimately productive for performance scholars, illustrating an attempt to refigure the location of sexual identity and forge new positions of performativity. **Keywords:** reparative therapy, narrative, performativity, Judith Butler, queer theory*

In the summer of 1998 a series of advertisements encouraging gays and lesbians to “come out of homosexuality” was published in national newspapers including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. Sponsored by Exodus International, a Christian-right organization dedicated to “curing” homosexuality, the ads ignited a national controversy over “reparative therapy.”¹ At the center of the campaign were John and Anne Paulk, a former drag queen and an ex-lesbian who abandoned “homosexuality” to pursue a “normal” life of marriage and children.

Catapulted into the media spotlight, the Paulks personified Exodus International’s mission statement. In the months following the campaign the couple gave nearly 200 interviews, appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *60 Minutes*, and was featured on the cover of *Newsweek*. However, despite their personal testimony and heart-felt accounts of struggle, the Paulks never could escape the question. As one reporter put it, “Are these people really gay, or is it Memorex?” (Carlson 16).

Capitalizing on their fame, the Paulks produced two autobiographies concerning their disavowed homosexuality through “Focus on the Family,” an affiliate of Exodus and, not coincidentally, John’s employer.² Publishing deals offered the Paulks an opportunity to present detailed narratives that would reaffirm the

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“authenticity” of their heterosexuality. Among those works is *Love Won Out*, a rhetorical text which is intriguing because it attempts to provide an account of both John’s and Anne’s lives to construct a universal testimony of redemption. By incorporating both a gay and lesbian narrative, *Love Won Out* seeks to establish a collective homosexual experience. In laying a ubiquitous foundation for sexuality, the authors establish a universal “cure” that encompasses both men and women.

Through a system of mimetic repetition, which encourages behavior modification, the Paulks attempt to reconstitute the discourses that shape and stabilize abstract notions of the self. *Love Won Out* relegates identity and authenticity to a system of anticipatory *acts* that can be modified by altering the conduct of the actors. If Anne can learn to wear make-up, and John to throw a football, they are taking the necessary measures to redefine and stabilize their heterosexuality by employing an illusory ontological identification.³ Reflecting on the complex materialization of such identities, Judith Butler has asked, “to what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed the self-identical status of the person?” (*Gender* 23). Butler argues that heterosexuality becomes naturalized through “normative” performances, by “setting up certain illusions of continuity between sex, gender, and desire” (“Imitation” 27). Far from being a simple form of self-expression, the reiterative power of discourse is ambiguous in its production and regulation of subjects.⁴ For Butler, lesbian and gay identifications foster the potential for subverting this signifying process by exposing the limitations of mimesis. In divulging the imitation that performances attempt to approximate, a space is produced between intervals where normative and naturalized heterosexuality is exposed to subversion. In other words, “naturalized” performances are unstable sites of identity production, continually prone to subversion and insurrection.

Love Won Out offers significant implications concerning the attempted co-optation of these “regulatory,” “normative,” and “subversive” performances. The “ex-gay” movement manipulates conceptions of performance to reinforce, rather than interrupt, traditional notions of gender and sexuality, but do so by modifying Butler’s theory. In a novel fashion, the text reverses Butler’s thesis by subscribing to a rhetoric in which gay and lesbian identity becomes represented as a repeatedly reinforced norm, destabilized only through heterosexual identifications. That is, the Paulks portray a “normative homosexuality” as the chimera among sex, gender, and desire.

Although reparative therapy has been widely criticized by the popular press, queer activists, and the psychiatric community, few critical studies have explored the complicated narrative developed by those attempting to be “cured.”⁵ Whereas psychological treatments have been criticized for manipulating widely circulated social knowledges, and religious texts for stressing absolute moral imperatives, narrative accounts engender performative elements absent in varying forms of reparative therapy. Narratives facilitate “a way of knowing, a search for meaning, that privileges experience, process, action, and peril” (Conquergood 337). This knowledge emphasizes the relationship between performance and experience to substantiate abstract claims, as narrative “knowing is not something one has but something one does, makes, and feels. It is an elusive, ephemeral property of stories told” (Pollock 90). As such, intangible variables in reparative therapy discourses

ranging from the unconscious to explicit expressions of religious faith can be demystified and re-presented as a methodical “cure” for homosexuality. Because narratives highlight personal experience outside the reach of linear rationalities, it is important to engage their production of knowledge and identity (Peterson and Langellier 136).

In October of 2003 noted sexuality scholar Robert Spitzer employed a barrage of personal narratives as evidence that reparative therapy could be effective for gays and lesbians hoping to alter the “core features of sexual orientation” (413). Spitzer invited 200 volunteers from organizations such as Exodus International to share their experiences with aversion therapy. He discovered that by avoiding tempting same-sex situations and by fraternizing with heterosexuals in particular social settings, many of the self-proclaimed “ex-gays” were able to marginalize their homosexual desires. The study has been applauded by advocates of reparative therapy in part because Spitzer “played a pivotal role in 1973 in removing homosexuality from the psychiatric manual of mental disorders” (Waller and Nicolosi). However, preeminent sexuality scholars such as John Bancroft of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction remain skeptical of these personal accounts. He emphasizes that “the sample consists of men and women who principally sought treatment because of their religious beliefs and who were presenting themselves as evidence that such change was both possible and desirable for others” (420). The debate over reparative therapy is more vigorous than ever, with personal narratives taking center stage.

The Paulks’ story offers an interesting case study for the exploration of performativity and its relationship to narrative form. Performativity, according to Butler, is not a singular act, but “a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” (*Bodies* 12–13).⁶ If one takes seriously the claim that there is no “being” behind the doing, that “the doer” is “merely a fiction added to the deed” and the deed is everything, the Paulks present an intriguing supplement to the conceptual development of performativity (*Gender* 33). Despite cogent reiterations of their identity, the Paulks resist traditional understandings of performativity by evading those cultural performances enabling and limiting their conflicted identities as “ex-gays.”⁷ Unlike Butler’s example of drag, which draws attention to the resignification of binary gender performances, the Paulks simultaneously embody *both* heterosexuality and homosexuality. Scholars of performance studies have suggested that “performativity articulates and situates personal narrative within the forces of discourse, the institutionalized networks of power relations ... which constitute subject positions and order context” (Langellier 129). The Paulks evade such positioning. Their bodies operate not as two divergent cultural forms coming together for clear exposure of normativity, but represent an identity dependent on its own self-exclusion for perpetuation. The Paulks embody not the progressive constitution of “I am” in an evolving state of becoming, but a nostalgically constituted notion of identity perpetuated by the reiterations of “I used to be” or “I am an ex-gay” in their personal narratives.

At the text’s conclusion this convoluted conception of identity ultimately undermines the Paulks’ larger political goals. While promising transcendence and salvation, the book never resolves its most daunting question: are they

really “cured?” *Love Won Out* subtly deconstructs itself by embracing the one thing it asks readers to eschew—“homosexuality.” As this analysis will illustrate, John and Anne embody the “gay lifestyle” to such an extent they become “trapped” by their own words, metaphors, and stereotypes. While they attempt to articulate performative utterances to enact and reproduce heterosexuality, the Paulks’ discourse signals an inability to reformulate their supposedly vitiated identities. This culminates in an unusual tension between a constitutive conception of identity, in which all sexuality is marked by instability, and a more traditional notion of identity grounded in a secure ontological foundation.⁸ At the text’s conclusion, “homosexuality” is seemingly unaltered by the actions undertaken by reparative therapy advocates. *Love Won Out* adopts the instability granted by the languages of performance studies to denigrate homosexuality, yet simultaneously undermines the privilege extended to heterosexuality.⁹ At the same time, this new positioning of sexuality opens up possibilities for revisiting notions of performativity, as the Paulks occupy a space that is unique in its conception of identity by embracing a discourse that stresses their lives as “ex-gays.”

Narrating “Personal Choice”

The history of modern reparative therapy is both odd and disturbing. Suggested “cures” have included frequenting prostitutes, electrical shock, sniffing substances, exorcisms, fasting, hypnosis, lobotomies, and even castration (Bury and Sawyer; Cruz). After the American Psychological Association (APA) dismissed the treatment of homosexuality as a disorder in 1973, “remedies” were relegated to the religious sphere, specifically Christianity.¹⁰ In doing so, questions concerning duress and cruelty were circumvented because individual choice alone became “the justification for the legitimacy of reorientation therapy” (Murphy “Redirecting” 502).

One effect this has on reparative therapy discourse is the tendency to rely on personal narratives for support. The APA has long asserted that there is no evidence that therapy is effective and that such practices may worsen depression and anxiety for people already struggling with their sexual identity (Karr). Exodus International, which claims to have “touched” 200,000 lives, cannot verify its figures because they have no method for longitudinal studies after people leave its programs (Leland and Miller 47). Lacking empirical data to support their claims, such organizations depend on testimony to persuade audiences that therapies are effective and ethical. In doing so, reasoning can transpire outside the “prescribed rules of calculation and inference making” (Fisher 280).

Love Won Out embraces this narrative approach in a rhetorically intriguing manner. The book alternates between John and Anne as narrators, each directly addressing the audience, telling their own life stories. The narratives are composed chronologically, following them from childhood and adolescence, through the “Love in Action” program and concluding with their entrance into “heterosexuality.”¹¹ Generally the segments run approximately two pages in length, and neither author ever speaks for more than five pages at a time.

Appropriating personal narratives in contemporary reparative therapy discourse has significant political implications.¹² Since the dawn of the gay liberation

movement, the personal narrative, or “coming out” story, has acted as one of the most potent catalysts for inspiring political action. Cindy Patton reminds us that the new right “must cope with these claims to empirical self-understanding; homosexual self-knowledge is reconstructed as a kind of delusion that, in ‘coming out’ ... forms positive evidence of perversion for the nonhomosexual” (145). By attempting to “reverse the discourse” of “coming out” rhetoric, reparative therapy advocates hope to exploit the commonly accepted misnomer of “delusion” and invoke their own methods as libratory. Moreover, narrative testimony supports unverifiable assertions that gay and lesbian identities are more unstable than those secured by heterosexuals. Consistent with traditional conceptions of performance theory, such discourse purports to interrogate “the production of identity and experience” associated with sexuality (Peterson and Langellier 146).

The Paulks are quite forward in their embracing of the “coming out” narrative that has gained wide circulation in American culture over the last thirty-five years. Described by Eve Sedgwick as the breaking of a “representational contract,” coming out is often positioned as both a speech act and a process, a necessity and a matter of free will (57). Kenneth Plummer has furthered these understandings, suggesting that coming out refers to “the central narrative of the positive gay experience” (84). These tales carry with them a form that has sustained a particular familiarity in Western culture. The coming out story:

... stumble[s] around childhood longings and youthful secrets; it interrogates itself, seeking “causes” and “histories” that might bring “motives” and “memories” into focus; it finds a crisis, a turning point, an epiphany; and then it enters a new world—a new identity, born again, metamorphosis, coming out. (Plummer 52)

According to Plummer, those who come out usually do so on a level that is personal, private, public, and ultimately political. The Paulks embrace a similar narrative form to counter the intimate self-knowledge that sexual minorities have used against conservative factions, but also to achieve the effect of establishing an “authenticity” for presenting their experiences.

The notion of “authenticity” emerges as one of the major metaphorical themes pervading this text. Much like coming out stories that stress a crisis of identity and a desire to break free of “the closet,” reparative therapy narratives incorporate the trope of “authenticity” to argue for a replacing of the unnatural homosexual self with the “true” heterosexual identity. In the opening paragraph of the Foreword, for example, reparative therapy advocate Stephen Arterburn explains that coming to grips with his own brother’s sexuality made him understand there are “*real* people *behind* this baffling thing called homosexuality,” establishing the figure of the mask or disguise that surfaces continually in the text (xi, emphasis added).¹³ His argument runs parallel to the experiences of John and Anne who are determined to expose “the *real* nature of gay life,” which they define as not being “real” at all (137, emphasis added). Throughout the text all forms of gay or lesbian thought and behavior are constructed as *inauthentic* human expressions. Of a former partner, John writes, “It became apparent that he didn’t love me with the kind of unconditional love I’d always dreamed about, a love I’d imagined a gay lover would offer me” (58). The “authentic” affection he desired from men was something that existed only in his mind. Two men loving one another is constructed as conditional,

less than authentic, and certainly not “true love” as it is defined by Western culture.¹⁴

The division between “authentic” and “inauthentic” identities produces a strong attempt to define homosexuality as a condition that can be detached from the individual. It is the classic disease metaphor or the oft-recited “hate the sin, love the sinner” mentality. A young and confused Anne explains to readers that she had much to learn “about myself and homosexual attractions” (46). In doing so, she reinforces the narrative power of experience and positions herself as an authority who can make overt generalizations concerning the origins and effects of sexuality. Her personal testimony acts as a strategy for textualizing and contextualizing her lesbian identity (Peterson and Langellier 141). Homosexuality is treated as an “it” that can be separated and contained apart from the person that “it” afflicts. This process furthers the ability to maintain the dichotomy between gay and straight sex, for example, from “sex as [a] depersonalizing force versus sex as the fulfillment of human relationships” (Nugent and Gramick 13). Simultaneously, homosexuality is an obsession, constructed as “everywhere present” and at the root of all actions (Foucault 43). Being gay or lesbian is repeatedly defined as an obstacle that prevents the attainment of a more complete realization of the self.

No doubt, this discussion of “authenticity” digresses from Butler’s notion of identity. Certainly, she would not concede that an “authentic” sense of self can, or even should, be something for which one strives. Concurrently, however, she posits her definition of identity in the following manner: it is a “process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, *fixity*, and surface we call matter” (*Bodies* 9, emphasis added). From a discursive perspective, the Paulks capitalize on both ends of Butler’s theory. They simultaneously advocate that their identities have been “fixed” by a vague set of regulatory discursive performances, but that the boundary securing that space is unstable and prone to radical alterations. Unlike Butler’s assertions of heterosexual performativity, however, quite the opposite is argued. Being gay and lesbian is established through normative acts, and heterosexuality is articulated as the subversive “cure.” Theoretically, if we subscribe to Butler’s thesis, it is difficult to discern the degree to which we must comply with the Paulks’ narrative. Butler contends that performativity is not merely the “act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names,” but an undetermined reiterative power of discourse to produce and regulate subjects (*Bodies* 2). However, the Paulks are positioned in a perpetual state of liminality, never quite achieving an identity that insinuates performativity because they locate themselves not as “homosexual” or “heterosexual,” but as a rearticulation of the two. They speak as “ex-gays,” a term that highlights homosexuality, but suggests heterosexuality. How might we account for the languages employed by the Paulks under a theory of performance and performativity? Is it possible for the authors to initiate a novel vernacular for articulating their identities and reformulate the iterations that would reposition the boundaries sustaining their identities and “fix” themselves?

Performing “Inauthentic” Desire

As crusaders seeking to unmask their “inauthentic” identities, the authors must first resolve that they had indeed experienced the “inauthentic” gay “lifestyle.” The

Paulks use approximately two-thirds of the book to discuss factors that culminated in their decision to join *Love in Action* and resurrect their displaced heterosexuality. Capitalizing on their disavowed sexuality, the authors reinforce common stereotypes of gays and lesbians to promote traditional notions of gender performance and inscribe a normative homosexuality.

As with traditional coming out stories, the Paulks “stumble around childhood longings and youthful secrets” (Plummer 52). Although the majority of the text portrays two very different stories from two strikingly dissimilar experiences, the authors insist that their “young lives ran on parallel tracks in a number of different ways” (9). Each of these stories begins at the age of four, when they were “normal as could be,” but when an imperative need went unfulfilled (9). Like many reparative therapy discourses, the Paulks posit that once the unmet need has been determined, patients can work to alleviate the “homosexuality” stemming from the emotional void (Nicolosi *Reparative* 5). In this way, the Paulks attempt to define a point of origin for homosexuality that transcends individual experience and encompasses all gay men and lesbians. By focusing attention on a specific age in the developmental process, the authors are able to identify singular events that supposedly ignited their homosexuality, without the hassle of confronting the complicated factors inherent in psychological analysis. People may be homosexually “inclined” according to this theory, but genuinely heterosexual.

The Paulks take great strides to establish the origins of their purported unfulfilled needs. Anne and John focus on numerous details of their young lives to lay the foundation for their later problems. Each, for example, was exposed to a man’s penis and introduced to pornography at an early age. Coupling these experiences becomes significant, as each of them serves as an antithesis to traditional gender and sexuality roles. Concurrently, the narrative offers an essentialized notion of identity creation—any exposure to sex is portrayed as developmentally damaging.¹⁵ For instance, viewing pornography horrified John who believed that the women were being tortured. However, such visuals aroused Anne, who never fully articulates her fascination. These passages are significant because they highlight the ways in which traditional notions of gender performance are reinforced. As a man John is supposed to be comfortable assuming the dominant position and seeing a woman being overpowered seemingly should not bother him. Conversely, the text suggests that as a woman Anne should be made timid by the sexual content. The fact that she is aroused and he is not violates conventional notions of gender and desire. These narratives serve the purpose of establishing a universal foundation for the origins of their deviant sexual orientations. Having been marked by exposure to genitalia, John and Anne utilize their experiences to justify their rebellion against society’s proscribed gender norms. In disassociating themselves from their “authentic” gender roles, the Paulks display another striking characteristic they have in common: the stereotypes they exemplified.

John’s life is rife with clichéd images of the “inauthentic gay lifestyle.” The Foreword explains that all gay men like John suffer “because they were more gentle, felt more deeply, or appreciated beauty more richly” and as such, “their fathers and friends didn’t really enjoy them” (Arterburn xi). *Time* magazine’s Margaret Carlson found John to be analogous to a “character out of a *Lifetime* mini-series” (16). Throughout the text readers are bombarded with the

various ways in which he embodied the stereotypical gay lifestyle. He had an absent father and a domineering mother. He hated sports, was physically inept, sang in musicals, and had bouts with alcoholism. Additionally, John won high profile awards as a drag queen, was a frequent drug abuser, and even had a career as a prostitute.

Symptomatic of his "gender confusion" was the absence of traditionally masculine activities such as sports. Of his little league baseball experience he writes, "not once did I ever hit a pitch" (23). This emasculated identity allows John to position himself as easily "alienated from other boys," who never thought he was "much of a male" (33–34). When John fails at his masculine role, he rejects it. He writes, "if boys had to play baseball, I didn't like being a boy" (24). Accordingly, John heightened his effeminate nature and began starring in musical theatre.

Failing to perform properly, John's allegedly unfulfilled masculine needs led him back to the object that he had once been "transfixed" by—men (11). This fascination escorted him into the "emptiness of one-night stands," promiscuity, prostitution, and eventually "submitting to his obsessive efforts" and becoming a drag queen (62, 98). "Candi," John's drag persona, represents a complete rejection of his "authentic" masculine norms. He has quite literally embraced a performance of femininity, completely inverting his "authentic" self. He "was no longer John Paulk. He was nowhere to be found" (98).

Anne's narrative also capitalizes on a number of stereotypes in order to establish the "inauthentic" lifestyle in which she was immersed. Her father was "emotionally absent," she was molested, played softball, majored in physical education, and her "butch" appearance gave her an emotional complex that lay the foundation for her sexual confusion. Like John, the "misguided" performance of gender is key to her sexual confusion. Again, the text's Foreword establishes an essentialized picture of lesbians to preview the narrative. Lesbians are defined as growing up attracted to women "because they didn't like what was defined as feminine or ladylike, they weren't accepted as *real* girls or refined young women" (Arterburn xii, emphasis added).¹⁶

Anne explains that her mother never told her how little girls "should (and shouldn't) look" (19). As a result, she started dressing like a boy because it gave her a sense of control (21). In performing masculinity she was "rejecting herself and pretending to become someone else" because her "true needs weren't being met at all" (21). Never straying far from the psychoanalytic model, she asserts that her "rejection of femininity was a subconscious decision that began at the age of four or five" (25). Stuck in this stage by unfulfilled emotional needs, Anne claims she would never have achieved a feminine sense of self as a lesbian. She explains, "I knew my role perfectly—I would have been the woman who looked like a man" (155). Like John's, Anne's story assumes that the categories of gender and sexuality are simple binaries. People are gay or straight, male or female, and any performance that confuses those categories is unspeakable.

The development of the easily defined and secured "gay male" or "lesbian" identities is a significant component of contemporary reparative therapy. The focus of reform is placed almost entirely on "properly" performing gender roles. Counseling is meant to help reclaim displaced notions of gender identity, and hence, sexuality as well. As such, men are encouraged to participate in competitive

sporting events such as baseball, while women are given makeovers. Often, there are whole classes devoted specifically to the proper manner of sitting, standing, and walking, as a *real* man or *real* woman should (Pietrzyk 33). By enforcing such roles, gender can supposedly be reconstituted for actors receiving treatment.

This repetition of traditional acts is especially significant when contemplating a final element of the Paulks' rhetoric. Both Anne and John portray themselves as obsessive when defined as "homosexual." Obsession, or addiction, becomes an important metaphor in the text and is often equated with "homosexuality." This imagery is especially significant as it is often utilized in popular culture by political figures such as Trent Lott, who has compared homosexuality to kleptomania (Rich 19).¹⁷ Positioning sexual identity as analogous to obsession is significant. It reinforces notions of repetition inherent in performance discourse. Not only did Anne and John repeat acts, they did so in a manner that was faster and more seemingly intense than heterosexuals. The common stereotypes of gay men being promiscuous drug users and lesbians being overly-committed in relationships are incessantly highlighted throughout the text. Nonetheless, these stereotypes serve a larger purpose, tying back to the Focus on the Family audience that is likely to accept being obsessive as a standard element of gay and lesbian identity.

In those portions of the text where their addictions play a role, John and Anne are able to overcome these problems only when they make a conscious choice to stop. During her teens Anne is caught smoking with a friend, and the pair is instructed to come up with three good reasons to smoke. They cannot. Likewise, John eventually joins a gay Alcoholics Anonymous group, asserting, "No one can decide whether you're an alcoholic but you" (110).¹⁸ In contrast, there are figures like Mary, a woman who had a crush on Anne and would repeatedly "take a Greyhound bus—even though she had practically no money—to come see me in Walnut Creek" (99). This repetition of acts—addiction—becomes an irrational extension of the irrational homosexual lifestyle. Being gay or lesbian is defined here as an "inauthentic" performance driven by compulsion, while heterosexuality is presented as stably ontological.

"Coming Out of Homosexuality"

By narrating personal accounts of suffering and remorse, the authors of *Love Won Out* seek to counter contemporary "coming out" stories with "coming out of homosexuality" narratives. The Paulks accomplish this by developing an account of identity that engenders an ambiguous psychological social knowledge to establish evidence of their former homosexual lifestyles. In doing so, they promote a normative homosexual identity that is clouded by deceit and compulsion. What remains necessary is the explication of a cure that can purify these "polluted" individuals. Butler asserts that mimetic repetition transpires in intervals that produce a space for resisting normative heterosexuality. In a striking parallel to her argument, the Paulks also assert this vague approach for identifying behavioral patterns and attempting to redefine the boundaries of their sexuality. Having developed their identities as inauthentic homosexuals, John and Anne are able to

begin their search for an “authentic” ontological sense of self, which places heterosexuality at its center.

A key metaphor employed for this end is that of *sight*. This device enables the authors to imply a newly found clarity that was absent during their years as a gay man and lesbian. This discovery of “authentic” vision is common amongst converts of reparative therapy, and, not surprisingly, is widely used in traditional religious discourse with “let there be light” being one of the ultimate examples of performative utterances (Darsey). Proof of this trope is scattered throughout reparative therapy texts, with one young man writing, “For me, the group has been like putting on a pair of glasses when you’re nearsighted. Before, I could only see vague images and patterns” (Nicolosi *Healing* 216).

Sight becomes an important factor relatively early in *Love Won Out* and is referenced repeatedly. For example, the first time God helps Anne, she has misplaced a contact lens. Concerned about the possible repercussions of this, Anne prays for God to help her locate the lost object. She is relieved to find it lodged unharmed in the pocket of her jeans. Convinced the contact had been lost, she concludes that God was responsible for its return. Utilizing the “contact” is interesting because of the subtle message it delivers to readers. The first time God helps her, he literally allows her to see. There is clarity where once there was confusion, resolution without consequence.

Anne’s restored sight is made even more explicit in the pages following her acceptance of the Christian faith. After being photographed, Anne notices that her eyes have changed. “I could see that my eyes were sparkling. The outward part of me hadn’t changed yet; I was still as athletic-looking as before. But my eyes revealed the new, unexplainable thing that was going on inside” (69). Her material appearance, her false sense of self had not yet been completely discarded, but a far more important change was transpiring. The contact lens was no longer the tool that allowed her to see, the clarity had breached her outward appearance and pierced her soul. This deep involvement with God as the source of her lucidity was made explicit at the end of the text when she recalls a name for God that brought her to tears during a group meeting. The name was “*El-Elyon*—the God who sees” (199).¹⁹

Adopting the identity of “ex-gays” that have achieved this insight positions the authors to speak authoritatively about performance to the reading audience. Didi Herman explains that this rhetorical strategy allows for the “insider view” often adopted by the former “Jew” or reformed cult member in religious conversion discourse (51). As “ex-gays” John and Anne are able to take readers inside places such as gay bars where men “walked seductively and posed with intention” (51). The “authenticity” of the text appears more concrete with first-hand accounts of the sexual atrocities being committed in places that most of the reading audience has likely never been. Not surprisingly, Anne is initially led to salvation by an “insider”—a Jewish convert who has embraced Christianity.²⁰

This insight, however, is their ultimate undoing. While the status of “ex-gays” is their claim to irrefutable credibility, it is also the most significant element of this narrative that inhibits their argument. John and Anne never assert that they are “heterosexual,” they are always “ex-gay.” Slowly, the text begins to unravel itself as John and Anne, who embody the culturally constructed stereotypes of gay

men and lesbians, simultaneously become the perfect Christian couple. Gay or lesbian identity is no longer constructed around notions of instability; rather, it takes on a powerful sturdiness, a performativity that heterosexuality cannot secure or disrupt.

Love Won Out?

Although there are traces of the prodigal son narrative permeating the text, it would be naïve to accept that this was the typical fall/redemption Christian tale being retold. While the authors clearly establish themselves immersed in worldly desires, they never seem to make it home. By the end of the book the narrative is contradicting itself, undermining its assertions, and leaving important issues unresolved. Ultimately, while the authors espouse redemption, the reader is never offered a complete sense of transcendence. In the end, Anne and John fail to achieve the “authentic” identity they desire. Simply put, the Paulks cannot substantiate an “authentic heterosexual lifestyle” because they don’t have the experience that allows them to proclaim it. The couple never permits themselves to break with their identities as “ex-gays” to achieve such a goal.

In attempting to overcome their seemingly “inauthentic” identities, the authors are placed in the position of redeeming themselves. After all, there is little reason to present such despair—the crisis and epiphany described by Plummer—unless redemption is the final outcome. However, Anne and John have constructed themselves as such perfect representatives of the stereotypical “lesbian” and “gay man,” potent remedies are necessary to heal their wounds. In attempting to alleviate that damage, the authors call on the most authoritative voice they can find to deride their former personas—God.

John, for example, first hears the voice of God while drunk, snorting poppers, and decked out in full drag at the local gay disco. He describes being transfixed to the mirror ball in the center of the room and, as the music slowly stills around him, he hears God proclaim, “come back to Me” (107). He “immediately recognized it as the voice of God,” a connection he described as being “pure” (110). Anne has similar encounters with God throughout the text. Like John’s visions, they are precise and attend to minute details. In seeking help she prays:

God, I need to meet someone who is leaving or has left the gay life herself. Someone who is a Christian and is working through these things and is real honest with the contradiction she sees. I need this person to have short, brown hair, to be attractive to me, to play Frisbee with me, to ride a bike—to ride a bike double (61).

Not surprisingly, she is soon delivered such a person who matches her description and participates in her oddly prophesied activities. This attention to detail surrounding divine conversation lends a subtle but important point to the story. When God is brought up, particulars are very clear. There is no confusion in requests or interactions. Masks, be they drag or drug addiction, are never an inhibition for the higher power. While the queer reader might view these passages as little more than finely produced camp, the religious performance might be construed as credible by the “Focus on the Family” audience. After all, performances often entail a “compact” between audiences and actors, which “promises the production of

certain mutually anticipated effects” (Roach 219). These spectacles indicate the Paulks’ desire to witness God by performing religiosity, even if they fall short of true prophetic experiences.

The Paulks’ attempts at achieving “authentic” heterosexual identities are further undermined by their lack of authority to speak as heterosexuals. While their experience is powerful insofar as it is difficult to refute, it also provides difficulties when establishing a heterosexual ontology. Marriage, for example, does not come naturally to the Paulks, who strive to understand their relationship. John even needs “coaching” in regards to romance (165). When the couple begins fighting shortly after marriage, they quickly attribute their problems to their disavowed sexuality. John explains, this fighting “led us to start worrying that our gay backgrounds were the root cause of the problem” (189). The Paulks never once conceive that arguing is a “normal” phase for many newlywed couples. Even after a therapist assures them that arguing is unrelated to their past sexual identities, they continue turning the experience inward, subtly blaming homoeroticism. The couple asserts, “we thought that to get along we had to be the same” (190). To counter this mentality and reinforce the perks of heterosexuality a counselor advises them, “Let your differences be your strength. Let the other enhance what’s lacking in you” (190). Yet even after therapy, marriage, and sexual intercourse, they are confined to defining themselves in “homosexual” terms. Despite the highly unstable nature of gay and lesbian identity projected by the narrative, achieving a heterosexual one seems almost futile.

Near the end of the text John asserts that their “identities as ex-gays were too narrow and confining” (192). This may be true, but it is never fully realized in the text. Everything about their heterosexual performances related to their status as “ex-gays.”²¹ This is true of relational discussions where John is amazed to be “having ‘father-son’ talks with *ex-gay men* about the female anatomy, the sexual response of women, and the romance and intimacy a man and a woman share on their honeymoon” (177, emphasis added). Their identities as ex-gays are evident in cultural rituals such as their wedding, where three out of five members of Anne’s bridal party had “come out of the gay lifestyle, and never before had they been made professionally up” (181). Even their ideals of masculinity and femininity revolve around unexplainable attributions to their former lives. On one occasion John is unhappy with Anne’s appearance and confesses that his negative reaction stemmed from “his own makeovers during his drag stage and about his idea of ‘the ideal woman’” (168). Anne explains, “in short, he was comparing me to Candi,” his former drag queen persona (168).

Temporally their identities as “ex-gays” are featured not only in the past and the present, but also materialize in the future. In a most peculiar segment of the text, John dreams that his young son, Timmy, is giving a speech before a group of people as an adult some time in the distant future. He remembers Timmy’s words clearly:

I’m here tonight to bear witness to the truth that homosexuality can be overcome. My own parents were once homosexuals but were transformed by God. And not only have my parents left homosexuality, but so have thousands of others. I’m living proof that it can be done! (208–9)

John believes the vision is meant to be a reality. Timmy was “part of God’s great plan to rescue people from the way of life Anne and I had left behind” (209). John’s status as an “ex-gay” is so fixed that even his son’s existence will, awkwardly, revolve around a supposedly dismissed sexuality. Oddly, it is never heterosexuality that is reiterated. Timmy’s visionary words reinforce only their status as “ex-gays.” John does, however, claim to have taken the proper precautions to ward off any potential sexuality issues Timmy might have. He recalls, “I bought a football, a soccer ball, and a basketball—the very things that had represented fear, failure, and rejection to me” (204). Thinking about being a father and projecting this performance of heterosexual gender roles are significant for John, who feels “a whole new rush of masculinity and healing” when contemplating his pending parenthood (194).

There emerges from this text a sexual ambiguity that undermines the solid authenticity that the Paulks are striving to achieve. When Bob Green, an “Anita Bryant minister,” was confronted with the fact that his reparative therapy program was not “straightening” people out, he did not deny that fact, but he did compromise it. He commented, “They’re not homosexual; they’re not heterosexual” (Blair 19). Indeed, all indicators point to an abstract middle, a modified sexuality that is represented by both the organization of the text itself and the experiences of the authors. But this liminal space does not easily fit within the rubric of identity that the authors have established for their readers. As explained earlier in this analysis, the structure of the text is split between both the authors who continually trade-off the position of narrator. Already we are hearing from a man and a woman in an attempt to create a universal experience that is seemingly forced. But added to that we are also hearing from a lesbian and a straight woman, a heterosexual man and a drag queen, all of whose voices radiate from the same bodies. Again, at no point in the narrative do the Paulks ever assert that they are “heterosexual;” they are always “ex-gay.” The organization of the text, never grounding itself in one voice or one sexual orientation, contributes to this ambiguity. The text performs an anomalous, protean sexual ethos even as it attempts to forge a distinct dichotomy between “homosexual” and “heterosexual.”

Complicating the matter further is the fact that John and Anne never completely overcome their attraction for members of the same sex. Most reparative therapists never promise full “recovery.” Neither is homoerotic attraction necessarily framed as failure. Rather, it is a time to contemplate the *true* nature of the desire, to invoke performative utterances that will sustain their heterosexual identities. Reparative therapist Joseph Nicolosi instructs patients who become sexually involved to ask each other:

What were the *authentic* emotional needs I wanted gratified by you? Comfort, attention, security, affection, power, sexual release. . . . What *authentic* emotional needs do I have in relation to you now? (*Healing* 220–21, emphasis added)

A popular assumption running throughout this discourse is that gay and lesbian desires are stronger and more complicated to manage than heterosexual impulses (Nugent and Gramick 18). As such, change is something that evolves slowly, sometimes never being attained. Exodus International acknowledges that “at no

time has *Love in Action* stridently proclaimed a new-found cure for homosexuality" (Blair 18). Readers have been assured, however, that "love," not sex, "won out." Purification is complicated in this text because the authors cannot completely slay the "beast" until it is no longer a part of themselves (Burke *Philosophy* 40).

Throughout the text, "homosexuality" reveals the fragility of faith, as opposed to its strength. When one woman enters her life, Anne conceded, "I never imagined anything weakening my faith, I had no idea how vulnerable I really was" (108). After she entered the *Love in Action* program, she had to "monitor every thought and [she] had to do it for months" (126). The addiction metaphor is played to its fullest in showing that Anne needs constant monitoring, never being trusted with women. Tempted by another participant of the program, Anne is "caught" hugging a woman by a person who was supposedly awoken by God to check on them. In another segment, she and some friends are allowed to stray from the group on a trip to San Francisco only if three of them remain together (136). The temptation of being paired in a city infamous for its production and support of gays and lesbians merited an accountability system. Lesbianism is so powerful it could easily induce sex on the streets of San Francisco from two people who supposedly do not want it. Or, conversely, heterosexuality is so fragile that the prevention of such acts is inevitable. When such desires are overcome, they are often contextualized in the framework of an addict. After having a sexual response to another woman Anne explains, "I had subconsciously reached back for an old familiar form of security" (191).

Anne's lesbianism, however, is perhaps the most elusive portion of the text. Throughout the book readers are led to believe that Anne is incomplete because of her lesbianism. However, one significant element that is carefully masked is her sexual experience. Anne is not a sexually active lesbian. In fact, in a text that is 211 pages long, Anne's only physical lesbian experience starts at the top of page 117 and ends at the bottom of 119. The suffering transpires over dozens of years, and yet her sole homosexual relationship is but two months long. In 1998 Anne's sexuality was briefly questioned by *Time* magazine, and John defensively stated: "It doesn't matter whether she dated 400 women or one. She was a lesbian" (Carlson 16). The "authentic" nature of Anne's redeemed soul was dependent on her authenticity as a lesbian. Of course, this begs the question, what makes an "authentic homosexual"?

The answer to that question is certainly not proscribed. To frame sexuality solely in terms of sexual acts is to thrust sexual identity back to the days of Paul and the Romans. To define "homosexuality" without considering sexual acts, however, is to deny a striking reality in the lives of most gay people. The Foreword to *Love Won Out* clearly states that one can be a devoted Christian and "homosexual" if those sexual desires are not acted upon. Despite the fact that Anne manages her yearnings in this very manner throughout the text, she continues to seek out redemption in a compulsive manner. Being attracted to women is simply shrugged off as a familiar form of security.

John is equally susceptible to digressing back into the "gay lifestyle," yet his problems are largely sidestepped in this text. While arguments can be made concerning gender equality here, the likely answer is much simpler. The previous text released by the Paulks dealt exclusively with John's life, almost completely

ignoring Anne. The masculinity issues revealed here are an entire paper unto themselves, but it should be noted that men outnumber women in these programs by a figure of about ten to one (Herscher A17). Even in Spitzer's study, 143 of the 200 people he interviewed were men (405). Of course, it is the male body that is "routinely *made 'normative'*—singular and whole, the property of one person who has one gender, one proper name, one self—by virtue of *becoming anti-theatrical'*" (Phelan 73).

John's problems are exposed in his struggles with properly performing masculinity. He describes his group's attempts in "consciously retraining our responses," doing everything he could think of to *act* straight because he no longer "wanted to be identified as a gay man" (139). Such statements affirm he is quite possibly gay, or perhaps something much more ambiguously defined. In an interview John discloses: "But when you begin a relationship with a woman that you believe God has led you to, then you develop attraction to that person. To say that we've arrived at this place of total heterosexuality—that we're totally healed—is misleading" (Ybarra A6). In fact, he adds, "I don't know if I'll ever have the intensity for sex with women that the average man on the street has" (A6). Sadly, there is a lack of self-actualization that is deeply ingrained in this rhetoric. It is certainly not a rhetoric of liberation, but rather a rhetoric of self-loathing that undermines the very "authenticity" it so desperately desires. The ontological heterosexual security promised is nowhere to be found at the text's conclusion. In fact, the most unshakable element of their identity is the one they desire the least. The seeming ontological presence of gay and lesbian performativity is one that John and Anne simply cannot reformulate.

Consuming "Coming Out" Narratives

Exodus International has been plagued by stories of people who are either psychologically damaged or unaffected by their measures. They have closed at least 13 chapters in recent years because the leaders of those groups realized they were gay, despite attempts to become otherwise (Leland and Miller 49). In fact, two of Exodus' original founders fell in love with each other and abandoned the organization (Rich 19). John Paulk himself was recently discovered at a gay bar in Washington, DC, and forced to resign from Exodus International's Board of Directors (Savage 70).²² These stories add to the body of research that concludes such "treatments" are more often than not ineffective. With scientific support for reparative therapy programs lacking, we may expect such programs to continue to rely on personal narratives for proof of their effectiveness in the future. Such testimony may help recapture some of the credibility lost by these groups, although we should remember Fisher's point that "narrative rationality does not negate traditional rationality" (281).

Stories expressed by individuals such as John and Anne Paulk are often difficult to challenge because readers cannot easily disconfirm others' personal experiences. The Paulks very likely did feel that being gay was at the root of all their problems. When Anne and John tell of their multiple miscarriages, I do feel for them and believe they are in fact struggling. Nevertheless, the text demonstrates dramatically

that the Paulks are just as obsessed with their sexuality now as they were in the past. The methods of dealing with that sexuality have simply been altered. In doing so, however, they invite an interpretation of their sexual identities that is neither gay nor straight, but something much more ambiguously defined.

The Paulks, however, cannot account for this complex notion of identity. Although John and Anne are seemingly saved, they are always “ex-gays.” As such, the conclusion of the text leaves readers with two competing theories of identity formation. While *Love Won Out* positions gay and lesbian identity as a performative construct that can be subverted through heterosexual identity performances, whatever those may be, gay and lesbian identities are the most secured at the book’s conclusion. While heterosexual performance is consistently constructed as a subversive tool, by the end of the text the manner in which it functions cannot seemingly displace the feelings the authors are experiencing. Although sexuality is originally posited as flexible, by the book’s conclusion homosexual identity has taken more of an ontological form. So powerful is the performativity of gay and lesbian identity, heterosexuality cannot debunk it. For any number of readers, heterosexuality simply becomes the new mask hiding the “real” John and Anne Paulk.

Of course, a major problem underlying the text that could inform this contrast is the poorly established correlation between gender and sexuality. Simply because John and Anne strive for cultural ideals of “masculinity” and “femininity” does not mean that they can simultaneously reposition sexual identity, even if the two are intertwined in some cultural contexts. Anne may learn to wear make-up and John to throw a football, but the idea that masculinity inherently produces heterosexual men and femininity creates heterosexual women is erroneous.

At the same time, they do present us with the opportunity to revisit Butler’s thesis regarding performativity. Why do John and Anne never quite achieve the status that they desire? What performative utterances would enable them to further their personal goals? What is the boundary identified by Butler that can be “fixed?” To what extent can this boundary be “fixed?” And, most important, is there a constant—i.e., their sexuality—that cannot be negotiated by John or Anne, regardless of their efforts? In many ways, the Paulks seem to exemplify Butler’s theory of identity, continually asserting moments of exclusion, constantly positioning an “I-am-not” relationship to others. However, the manner in which they perform their identities is more convoluted, never completely asserting “I-am-not,” but always “I-used-to-be,” or “I’m recovering from.” Unlike Butler’s theories that posit a perpetual state of becoming, *Love Won Out* inhibits this developmental process because the Paulks depend on their own self-exclusion for identity formation, leaving scant space for resisting the binaries of sexuality they develop.

In her book on birth narratives, Della Pollock tells of the mothers who “became who they were in narrative performance. They became themselves becoming.... They subjected themselves, and me, and you to often unnerving, transforming articulations of memory, discourse, and desire” (7). This state of progression is stalled in the discourse adopted by the Paulks because the secrets they share do not reformulate the “coming out” narrative, but secure it in an outdated, stereotypical, and reductive manner.

Nonetheless, the Paulks’ narratives supplement contemporary understandings of

performativity, which have offered much insight into the theorization of identity. As diabolical as texts such as *Love Won Out* may appear to queer audiences, they offer a new way of contemplating a sexual identity, one which is nostalgic in its discussion of homosexuality, but wishful in its positioning of heterosexuality. To entertain such notions, Butler's point that one cannot simply choose the self he or she wishes to be on a given day need not be dismissed. Certainly, identity formation can never be accomplished so simply. However, this complicated discourse offers the opportunity to rethink the degree to which new ways of *articulating* sexuality alter the discursive performances that formulate and locate conceptions of identity. As a category of being, the term "ex-gay" carries with it a history, a structure, and performative constraints not completely understood with the words, "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "heterosexual," "homosexual," "straight," or "queer." Indeed, the term "ex-gay" worked against its lofty political goals because it forced the very question of authenticity that ultimately thwarted it. In this case, heteronormativity was disrupted not because of successful homosexual identifications, but because at key moments those connections failed. Anne, for example, is never fully able to substantiate herself as a lesbian in the larger discourse surrounding the controversial couple. This is not to say that Anne's case requires us to speak of an "authentic" sense of self, only that heteronormativity in this particular case study was disrupted more by heterosexuality than homosexuality, because there was a literal shortage of lesbian identifications. The manner in which the Paulks struggle with their identity is ultimately undermined by their embracing the discourse of being "ex-gay."

Their development as "ex-gays" also worked against the narrative strategies employed by the text. "Coming out" is a process in which people reiterate their stories and their sexual identity throughout their lives, never being able to achieve a full sense of "being out" to the entire world. While such processes have been embraced, rejected, struggled with and against in a variety of queer communities, the performative nature of coming out does not mesh well with the discourses set forth by the Paulks. Certainly, in some ways "coming out of homosexuality" does parallel the act of "coming out" as a gay man or a lesbian woman. It is seen as urgent, necessary, dangerous, and threatening. But the form of the coming out narrative is substantially altered when used by the Paulks. As they shifted their identities to a narrative that privileges heterosexuality, they alter the reiterative process of "coming out" to a heterosexual narrative that assumes ritualistically ascribed social progress underscoring heteronormativity. They meet, get engaged, and marry. The couple has children, and then, breaking progression, they "regress" into their former "homosexual" identities. The narrative form and the reiterations it requires leave little room for the closure desired by the Paulks, always positioning them to "come out" time and again.

Despite the seeming sturdiness of gay and lesbian identity subtly reinforced here, homosexual desire is, in part, disrupted. While the authors position heterosexuality as fragile, the Paulks do have sex, do have a child, and do seem to care for one another. Butler argues "far from an essentialist joke, the queer appropriation of the performative mimes and exposes both the binding power of heterosexualizing law and its explorability" ("Critically" 22). Although recognizing the marginalized status of gays and lesbians, a continued focus on the reinforcement of all laws concerning

sexuality should be examined for explanations that are not easily understood. Specifically, what is the performativity displayed by the Paulks who never claim to be heterosexual, but have disavowed their homosexual identities to be understood as “ex-gay”?

This convoluted notion of identity is further muddled by the Paulks’ attempts to validate their authenticity through dramatic visions, which are never fully explained. Perhaps these apparitions were included to account for that “unanticipated resignifiability” mentioned by Butler, but nonetheless shared by popular audiences. Certainly some individuals who subscribe to Focus on the Family’s ideology will accept the fantastic stories. But with the power of God, one would expect, at the very least, some sense of redemption—readers expect resolution, not continued performance. At the end of the book, John and Anne are still struggling with their feelings for members of the same sex and have even brought their child into the mix. Love may have won out in a very ritualistic manner, but the God represented in the text was not wholly effective, never allowing them to achieve a new sense of self. In many ways, religion becomes that element of culture that is “merely” performed.

The numerous visions that awkwardly penetrate the text place an “irrational” slant on something that was consistently framed in “rational” terms. In a very objective manner, Anne and John attempt to locate the precise moments when they “fell” to homosexuality. They are able to reach deep in their pasts and uncover at age four when they made the transition. They can recall the weather on those days, and even offer detailed thoughts concerning their states of mind at the time. Even the Love in Action program is methodological as it teaches them to discipline their thoughts strategically. Objective and systematic reason, however, is not the explanation offered for the “cure,” and the “cure” seemingly does not work. There is an odd combination of psychology and religion, methodology and faith, rationality and unreasonableness. While this combination is often a powerful one in self-help rhetoric, it seems to be undermined in this narrative by illustrating that psychological reasoning is effective and faith is not.

Although it is tempting to assert this ending could offer Christian readers an excuse to withhold contributions, what better way to spark donations than to insinuate that faith has yet to win out. After all, in 1995 ads placed by Exodus International generated up to \$40,000 at a time from donors (Bury and Sawyer). It is one of the many ways in which those in power may “performatively maintain their sense of entitlement by ritualistic consumption of ‘different’ bodies” (Gingrich-Philbrook 64). Their very suffering might enhance the ethos of the authors in the eyes of the reading audience. With a Christian readership that contributes thousands of dollars at a time for such programs, perhaps the struggle between identity constructions outlined makes perfect sense.

Despite these criticisms, the Paulks maintain that their lives have been enriched by their participation in the Love in Action program. Perhaps it is true that narrative rationality does not negate traditional rationality, but the discourse of reparative therapy also suggests that traditional rationality does not necessarily negate narrative rationality, either. Nonetheless, as scholars such as Spitzer increasingly embrace personal testimony to scientifically account for the possibilities of reparative therapy, it is more imperative than ever for scholars of sexuality and

performance to scrutinize the political and cultural implications of those offering a “cure” to gays and lesbians. While conversion therapy may seem like the only viable option for those struggling with their queer identities, activists and allies should not lose sight of the diabolical motives of those offering the antidote, the disdain and contempt they hold for LGBT life, and the world they envision without us.

Notes

¹ The issue of reparative therapy was featured in a number of periodicals and on a variety of television programs that included *Crossfire*, the *McLaughlin Group*, the *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, *Politically Incorrect*, *Good Morning America*, *Hard Copy*, and *Nightline* (Cruz 10).

² See also J. Paulk.

³ Of course, there is nothing inherently “heterosexual” about make-up or football. Rather, they are culturally ascribed as being associated with traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

⁴ Several scholars have challenged Butler’s approach, pointing to a cloudy relationship between agency and performance. See especially the articles by Nussbaum; Rothenberg and Valente; and Walker.

⁵ For scientific critiques condemning reparative therapy see Drescher; Murphy “Freud”, “Redirecting.” The legal implications of reparative therapy have been examined by Cruz.

⁶ There are important definitional differences between “performativity,” “performative,” and “performance” that deserve mention. In addition to Butler’s definition of performativity, Langellier has offered clarity to these terms, explaining that the term *performance* “implies the transgressive desire of agency and action” (129). A “performative,” on the other hand, is a discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names. Each of these concepts works in tandem with one another, as performativity “must be rooted in the materiality and historical density of performance” (Diamond 5).

⁷ Certainly, reparative therapy techniques have been practiced for decades. However, the Paulks have taken those discourses to a new level, placing them center stage in the public sphere. This is not to downplay the importance of vernacular discourse, only to highlight that “ex-gay” identity is a relatively new phenomenon.

⁸ Stuart Hall has refuted such “traditional” notions of identity. He defines these conventional uses as having an assumed stable subject, a fixed point, and “the search for a kind of authenticity to one’s experience” (10).

⁹ Because “performances,” “performatives,” and “performativities” are discursively created in ubiquitous ways, this analysis will oscillate between *Love Won Out* and the discourse surrounding the Paulks themselves. Such a treatment is necessary when engaging such complicated theories because units of analysis are rarely discreet, never acting apart from other discursive forms.

¹⁰ Some organizations such as the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), label themselves a psychiatric organization, but have little scientific proof justifying their position on sexuality. NARTH, in particular, has strong political ties to Exodus International. In 1998, the APA issued a statement condemning the reparative therapy practices these organizations promote.

¹¹ “Love in Action” is the branch of Exodus International that “treated” Anne and John.

¹² Peterson and Langellier remind us that all personal narratives are inherently political (136).

¹³ Arterburn is the founder of New Life Clinics, an organization advocating reparative therapy. Not surprisingly, Arterburn’s justification for participating in these programs is also grounded in a personal experience narrative. His brother was a gay man who died of AIDS in 1988.

¹⁴ The trope of “authenticity” surfaces in a variety of reparative therapy discourses. See especially the works by Aardweg; Davies and Rentzel; Nicolosi.

¹⁵ Personal testimony that involves subject matter such as molestation and other private affairs are central to the understanding of these experiences. Certainly, no-one wishes to believe that such narratives are fabricated for the sake of a text. The manner in which these accounts are employed and the message they seek to reinforce, however, are not beyond critique. While not denying their experiences, this rhetoric should be approached with a critical eye for emotional exploitation and unfounded universal accounts of gay and lesbian life.

¹⁶ This developmental “ugliness complex” is common in reparative therapy discourse. See, for example, Aardweg (71).

¹⁷ The addiction metaphor is present in any number of reparative therapy narratives. See especially the books by Aardweg; Davies and Rentzel.

¹⁸ The use of recovering alcoholic testimony here is intriguing. Members of groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous never revoke their identities as alcoholics. Despite the invocation of this rhetoric by reparative therapy advocates, “AA” members always introduce themselves as “alcoholics,” never former or ex-alcoholics.

¹⁹ For the sake of space, I have primarily dealt with the sight metaphors in Anne’s narrative. However, they are also used by John and their friends in other reparative therapy texts; see, e.g., J. Paulk (155, 192).

²⁰ It should be noted that Jewish people do not fare well in organizations such as Exodus. Pietrzky has observed, "For all their rhetoric about 'Judeo-Christian values,' Jews who wish to become 'ex-gays' will find no solace in Exodus" (32).

²¹ Burke reminds readers in his discussion of identification and consubstantiality that "in being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself" (*Rhetoric* 21).

²² John has since been rehired by the organization.

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