Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (University of Colorado, 2011)

“Media Representations of Gay and Lesbian Couples with Families: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Proposition 8 Advertisements”

Department of Sociology

Monday, December 12, 2016
10:00AM
Cornett Building
Room A317

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Steve Garlick, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Aaron Devor, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
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Dr. Alexandra D’Arcy, Department of Linguistics, UVic

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Abstract

While the inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals in the media is not a recent phenomenon, the increased representation of families headed by gay and lesbian couples is somewhat new. Research has shown that mediatized representations of gay and lesbian individuals and couples more often than not adhere to stereotypes and perpetuate ideas that the constructors of these representations want their audiences to consume. Research has also focused on audiences’ reception and processing of the messages that these representations may carry. This study, instead, focuses on the construction of representations of gay and lesbian couples and their families, bringing to the forefront the importance of discursive practices that are used to construct visual, linguistic, and aural elements of the media consumed by audiences. Looking specifically at advertisements (both for and against) concerning California’s Proposition 8, a ballot measure proposing to ban same-sex marriages, this study shows how elements of the composition of the advertisements coalesce and mutually enhance each other to create particular understandings of gay and lesbian families. Using Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Semiotics, this study uncovers the underlying ideologies that inform the discursive and semiotic choices that have been made. Together, the music, the visuals, and the language are formed into a coherent whole, the advertisement. This thesis argues that how gay and lesbian people are represented is equally as important as the overt messages that are being disseminated to the audiences. By studying the discursive practices utilized by these advertisements, we are able to see that ideologies of idealistic family life and heterosexual relationships influence both advertisements in their characterisation of gay and lesbian couples and their respective families.