

This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:

Queer kin in the œuvre of Rebecca Brown : de-naturalizing biological kinship and performing the family

Reference:

Xhonneux Lies.- Queer kin in the œuvre of Rebecca Brown : de-naturalizing biological kinship and performing the family
Women's studies - ISSN 0049-7878 - 45:1(2016), p. 20-38
Full text (Publishers DOI): <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/00497878.2015.1111836>

Queer Kin in the Oeuvre of Rebecca Brown: De-naturalizing Biological Kinship and Performing the Family

Introduction

People cannot “fire their father from being their father,” we read in Rebecca Brown’s most recent work, the 2009 essay collection *American Romances* (22) – or can they? Brown, a contemporary lesbian author, critically engages with the concept of the biological family, recognizing the prevalence and almost inescapable pull of a romanticized version of “natural,” biological kinship, which her characters seem to “remember” and long to get back to. Yet, via scenes in which family bonds are shown to be constructed through, rather than naturally present in or represented by, the family album, Brown also signals an awareness of what I would like to call the performative nature of kinship.¹ But Brown uses more than the medium of photography to expose kinship as actively created rather than existing automatically in reality. Her writings are replete with de-idealized representations of families scarred by divorce or the father’s absence, and of children’s abandonment of their parents – portrayals that highlight the element of choice that is inherent in biological kin ties which are frequently thought to be natural and dependable. Thus Brown’s work illustrates the relevance of redefining kinship performatively, as intimate ties people actively and deliberately establish through words and deeds. This, in turn, leaves open the possibility of recognizing the chosen families of gays and lesbians as equally valid forms of kinship.

Before embarking on an analysis of the de-naturalization of biological kinship in Brown’s work or continuing with a plea for detaching the notion of kinship from biology to make it more inclusive, it might be useful to devote a brief paragraph to introducing the details and trajectory of Brown’s career. Brown engages with the concept of kinship creatively and

¹ This terminological choice is an obvious nod to Judith Butler’s theorizations of gender as a performance.

critically in works of a wide generic diversity. The project manifests itself, for instance, in her “modern bestiary,” *The Dogs* (1998), in her fictionalized autobiography, *The End of Youth* (2003), and in “Old” from her collection of prose poems, *Woman in Ill-Fitting Wig* (2005). Brown’s most well-known work is *The Gifts of the Body* (1994), which earned her several awards, including a Lambda Literary Award. The book recounts the heavily autobiographical and emotionally powerful experiences of a home-care worker assisting people with AIDS. It testifies to the existence and power of gay and lesbian chosen families, whose durability was revealed to the heterosexual majority during the AIDS crisis.

Kinship Created through / Performed in Cultural Representations of the Family: TV, Literature, Photography

Rebecca Brown frequently acknowledges the power of biological kinship, for instance mentioning, in her essay “Hawthorne” from *American Romances*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s futile attempt to “separate himself from [his family]” by changing the spelling of his surname. Drawing on different cultural registers in the essay, she finds parallels with the Beach Boys’ impossibility to completely detach themselves from their tyrannical father, Murry Wilson (25). The narrator of *The End of Youth*, too, learns “how long you stay your parent’s child” (69), bearing witness to her mother’s and father’s lasting influence throughout the stories in this autobiographically inspired collection. Brown indicates how this influence is not necessarily easy to carry, for instance in her debut *The Haunted House* (1986). The novel deals with the narrator Robin’s deeply entrenched sense of rootlessness due to her family’s continuous geographic mobility. The burden Robin’s past with her biological relatives presents for her is aptly dramatized in the final chapter: by then, she and her lesbian lover are sharing one of the houses Robin grew up in, but the building literally collapses under its weight. After this traumatic event, the remnants of the house are, once again quite literally,

flooded with memories, as relics from the narrator's youth come swirling by, like "the movie magazines" of her actress mother and the "broken toy propeller" with which her pilot father let her play (201). Thus Brown's first novel introduced a theme that would occur in most of her subsequent writings as well: *The Haunted House* shows that, even for a narrator who has grown up to create a family of her own with a lesbian lover, past experiences of biological kinship remain unbearably present.

Brown's work further exhibits a critical understanding of our western society's recurrent idealization of the biological family, understood as an intact and middle-class nuclear unit consisting of a husband and a wife with approximately two children. The former two should be legally married and are defined respectively as a biologically male breadwinner and a biologically female, economically dependent homemaker/childrearer. Such a family is supposed to be an affectionate and caring unit that protects and comforts its members. In spite of the growing cultural awareness of and alertness to the possible vulnerability of children and wives in the seclusion of the family home, this pattern of idealization remains remarkably constant. Brown reveals how this ideological configuration, embedded legally and socially in institutions, as well as psychologically, in most people's minds, is especially hard to escape. Throughout her writing, she engages with the concept of "family mythology," which can be defined as a powerful code family members automatically or unconsciously want to comply with, and which influences what they expect and demand from their kin relations. The exact nature of this mythical image differs for every social group, according to its members' (possibly conflicting) needs and concerns, but it nevertheless "dominates lived reality" (Hirsch 8). For instance in Brown's *The Children's Crusade* (1989), which relates the traumatizing effects of an acrimonious parental divorce, the nameless narrator is prone to inventing fantasy scenarios in which she perceives her parents through the lens of an illusory "family mythology." On these occasions, she pictures her dad as a "sweet, kind man who wears cardigans and house slippers and potters in the garage with things that aren't too big or

dangerous” and sees her mom, with “her flour-coated hands” and “her apron wrapped around her middle,” standing lovingly by his side (72). Yet the narrator subsequently stresses that this is “as much a child’s fiction, as a moon that’s made of cheese” (73), thereby pulling readers out of this comfortable illusion. The same happens in *The Dogs*, when the narrator of this “modern bestiary” – a peculiar mix of fantasy and realism – meets

Moms and dads and children in the park. The dads wear bar-be-que aprons over their short-sleeved shirts and slacks. The moms wear nice dresses, belted at the waist, while they pour Koolaid for their adorable kids. Harmless little puppies, those cute fuzzy happy dumb-looking ones like from the old TV show *Please Don’t Eat the Daisies*, frisk around the babies who happily play patticake [sic] with protective elder siblings on homemade-by-Grandma quilts. (94-5)

These merry family members, though, turn out to be monsters. The narrator watches in horror as “all of them are bursting from their human clothes. Their pale skin gets hairy and dark. The flesh of their hands is busted apart and claws poke through,” and the meat they are grilling is “human arms and legs” (97). Brown thereby effectively “pokes through” the mythical image of the ideal family as well, constructing this attractive illusion in *The Dogs* only to dismantle it with a few deft strokes. In this respect, the bestiary is representative of Brown’s oeuvre as a whole.

The accounts of kinship Brown consciously disrupts generally correspond to romanticizations of a past type of family life, as shown by the reference to *Please Don’t Eat the Daisies* in the foregoing quote. This sixties TV series features a family of five with a mom who “ventures outside the home, only to realize the trouble it causes,” thus insisting on her status as a housewife/mother (Leibman 189). The sociologist Judith Stacey underlines the “increasingly potent ideological force” of a widespread “nostalgia for ... an idealized version of a 1950s Ozzie and Harriet image of the family” (*Family* 41), while Stephanie Coontz, a family historian, insists that the “most powerful visions of traditional families derive from

images [from] 1950s television sit-coms” (23). Such images of family life from a remarkably rosy “past,” then, wield an enormous influence, perhaps understandably so, given the vulnerability of many present-day arrangements. Some theorists even believe “[i]t is through the families we live *by* that we achieve the transcendence that compensates for the families we live *with*” (John Gilles in Stacey *Family* 87). The kind of kinship embodied by perfect TV families is constant and convincing, in sharp contrast to the often dreary reality of actual family arrangements. Thus the former type of family frequently works to provide those living in unstable, contemporary “cut-and-paste” families with a vision to aspire to or “live by.”

Moreover, the idealized images of kinship that populate the cultural sphere of, for instance, television provoke what we might call “paramnesia,” the process of creating imagery which structures our consciousness or perceptions through a substitution and simplification of actual memories (Berlant 57). Brown provides a dual definition of nostalgia in “A Child of Her Time,” the second essay from *American Romances*. She describes the feeling as “A longing for home” and “A longing for something far away or of former times” (39), often paralleling these two significations throughout her work. This means that her adult heroines tend to rethink their childhood as “something of former times,” not only because it belongs to their personal past, but also – and especially – because their early days in the family “home” are imaginatively reworked as a *past type* of family life that these characters long to reclaim, while knowing full well it was never actually part of their youths – or even of reality. As the narrator of “A Child of Her Time” confesses: “I remember ..., despite what I know is true, something that never was” (35). She is “nostalgic for somebody else’s childhood,” an ideal kind of family she never had, namely, that of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House* books, which are set in the late nineteenth century (39). Yet the conventional family, just like most visions of a golden age, dissolves when studied more carefully; even in the past, it has been in constant transformation and frequently even in trouble, never corresponding to wistful notions of how wonderful “things used to be” (Coontz 1). The actual

rarity of the “ideal” family life reveals how what is socially marginal can nevertheless come to figure as the ideologically fundamental. Indeed, Brown suggests that the family vision which exerts such a powerful pull on the narrator of “A Child of Her Time,” that of Wilder’s accounts, was manipulated by the latter’s “savvy author daughter” Rose (41). Critics agree that Rose’s role in the realization of the *Little House* series was “aggressive”: she “rewrote the prose so drastically that Laura sometimes felt usurped” (Thurman n.pag.). Brown’s narrator, too, concedes that Rose “edited, rewrote or added to her mother’s first person accounts,” because she “recognized that her mother’s story would appeal to poor, Depression-era Americans who longed for a more innocent time” (41). So Brown illustrates that the accounts affecting the narrator’s fabrications of her ideal past were themselves idealized, thereby uncovering, on several levels, the myth of a golden age of the family.

Like their TV– or literature-influenced “memories” often work to create a family life they never really knew, Brown shows how her narrators’ family photographs establish a similar effect and are thus instruments of “the familial gaze.” The latter term is Marianne Hirsch’s, and it refers to “the powerful gaze of familiarity which imposes and perpetuates certain conventional images of the familial and which ‘frames’ the family in both senses of the term” (11). A description of a picture of the female narrator’s parents in *The End of Youth*, for instance, presents a parental unity that was missing from reality. In the photograph, her father stands behind her mother, smiling “because his ... hand ... is resting on the smooth and naked shoulder of his pretty, sexy wife.” The narrator, though, does not “remember ever seeing them like this” in real life (64). Such family pictures clearly serve “not to represent but to memorialize” (Barthes *Fragments* 194), and a memorialization rarely involves accurate memories. Roland Barthes’ influential book on photography, *Camera Lucida*, reveals that “the Photograph [is] never, in essence, a memory” (91), and Brown herself is fascinated by this “deceptive” character of family photographs. “We tend to think ‘I don’t remember it right, but this picture remembers it right,’” she says. “But then we have to go beyond that to

see ‘this doesn’t remember it right either.’” She consequently tends to label family pictures “pseudo-documents” (personal interview). As “pseudo-documents” of family life, pictures threaten to evoke false memories rather than corresponding to an existing reality. Brown’s work shows that these memories are heavily influenced by conventions, which impose ideal images of the family on what we think we remember.

Family photographs, which seem reliable but actually tend to invite misreadings or imaginative reworkings, have a strong impact on Brown’s heroines, like the narrator of “The Aqua Series.” This is the penultimate tale from *The Evolution of Darkness* (1984), a collection in which Brown, who studied literature in graduate school, gathered most of the stories that made up her thesis. Its narrator recounts how she always “tr[ie]d to get back inside a photo of her parents at a banquet when her mother was pregnant with her” (154-5). Conspicuously, this same picture occurs in *The Haunted House*, where its attractiveness to Robin is heightened by a resolve that is typical for Brown’s heroines in general, namely the wish to “remember” a “thing that never was but was always wanted” (Saterstrom n.pag.):

There is a photograph. My mother and dad stand in line at a buffet meal. She’s wearing a maternity dress Though in this picture [my father] is leaning over my mother, watching her put food on her plate, I never think of this scene in this way. I think of this picture in a way that it is not. I imagine his clear face looking directly into the camera, and to me. I imagine that he is smiling.

Three months later I was born. My father was in Asia. (25)

The fact that the narrator’s dad is not there when his wife gives birth probably shocks readers, because the incident does not seem to match the information they are given via the description of the photograph. As the feeling of kinship that spoke from the family photo apparently did not exist in reality, the picture is shown to have created it for the narrator. The critic and photographer Patricia Holland affirms that, “[l]ooking at [pictures,] we ... construct a fantastic past” (13). We should note that Brown’s creation of such a “fantastic past” can be

further explained by what the author herself calls her general “affection for wanting to aggrandize lives.” Brown clarifies this desire by means of an autobiographical example, namely “the story about my father,” which she draws on in her work as well: “as I looked at his life in retrospect, I realized that other people conceived him as a great hero and that we used this idea to give meaning to our tiny little lives” (personal interview). In *The Haunted House*, Robin also tends to “aggrandize” her past spent in the company of her parents by idealizing her dad: in retrospect, she sees her pilot father – who was in fact an irresponsible drunk – as “a hero,” and that makes her “something of a hero too” (14). Brown recognizes that her entire oeuvre revolves around such “self-aggrandizements,” or “the idea of a small person trying to see their life in a bigger context” (personal interview). Frequently, this bigger context is formed by social and cultural family ideals, though Brown’s narrators remain aware of – and direct the reader’s attention to – the fact that they are remodeling their lives after something that was not actually part of (their) reality.

The examples I mentioned earlier, concerning the function of family photography in *The Haunted House*, *The End of Youth*, and *The Evolution of Darkness*, can actually be read as quite explicit accounts of how kinship is *constructed* rather than natural. The medium of photography does not just discover families who were already there before the appearance of the camera. Rather, it actively contributes to their emergence by automatically conferring a familial relation upon people situated in the same photographic frame of the family album; hence cultural anthropologist Mary Bouquet’s redefinition of photography as an “old reproductive technology” (87). The fact that a photograph seems to be a straightforward copy of reality naturalizes the institution of the family, and the illusion pictures create of only “freezing” specific moments in time further helps to perpetuate a mythical image of families as “stable and united, static and monolithic” (Hirsch 51). The ease with which Brown’s readers most likely turn the “textual photographs” into mental images testifies to the extent to which the “photographic vision” has taken hold of, and is embedded in, family life and rites.

We are perfectly familiar with “the substance and code of family photography that is ... becoming indissociable from ... the very fiber of kinship” (Bouquet 110) – a practice Brown’s writings frequently work to defamiliarize and uncover.

I would argue that pictures even contribute to the “family romance” in Brown’s fiction. Introduced by Freud, the concept denoted the process by which adolescents separate themselves from their parents, sometimes through a fantasy of having other parents than their own. Much more recently, though, Ken Corbett has rethought the family romance as an act of *unison* rather than separation:

family romances are also told by parents or between parent and child in the service of attachment. Children frequently request that stories of conception and birth be repeatedly told, as they strive to comprehend reproduction, parental sexuality, and family formation. (601)

Here, family romances are those stories a family tells about its members or its constitution, and which serve to increase family closeness – a process that, in Brown’s writing, is typically punctuated by photographs in which characters read their origins and their familial relations.

In a lot of Brown’s work, such family closeness is absent in reality. For instance, her narrators’ parents typically “ignore one another completely” (as Robin describes her parents’ average level of interaction in *The Haunted House* [18]). Yet their poor relations are perked up through the click of the camera. The resulting photos are, in several senses, “the positive development of a negative” (Hirsch 8): the laws of family photography do not allow people’s distance from each other to show in pictures, which are, rather, supposed to signal unity. So photography can be labeled an “instrument of [the] togetherness” of a family (Bouquet 87). While wedding photos, for instance, are common, there is no such thing as a divorce album. The photograph is obviously able to uphold familial happiness, but it generally fails to capture the tensions that equally arise within the context of the family. So, in looking at pictures, connectedness and kinship are interpretative tools with which we unite and understand scenes

that might otherwise fail to make sense. Apparently, “[w]e see what we have learned to see” and now expect from family pictures (Bouquet 95).

Brown’s writings succeed in uncovering these expectations and ideological operations, to which Marianne Hirsch has also devoted attention in her critical work on family photography. “Eye and screen” are, for Hirsch, “the elements of ideology: our expectations circumscribe and determine what we show and what we see” (7). She calls the camera the “one instrument [that] helped construct and perhaps perpetuate the ideology which links the notion of universal humanity to the idea of familiarity” (48). Yet texts like Brown’s, which put the family photo into a narrative setting, manage to cast doubt on the “documentary authority” so often attributed to pictures, and reveal the ideological constructions behind them, thereby contesting them. Only in such a context of textual embeddedness, and thus of “meta-photography,” can the naturalness of the photograph be opposed, and the family’s all too recognizable habits of portraying itself be questioned (8). Brown’s heroines, moreover, misinterpret family photographs, like the narrator of *The Haunted House* who projects a smile on her father’s turned-away face. Thus Brown’s characters oppose the authority of the camera lens as the only filter through which the familial gaze passes, creating opportunities for agency and, thereby, for a challenge to the power of the gaze itself.

Brown’s opposition to the authority of the familial gaze and, by extension, to the influence of a romanticized biological kinship, is thus apparent from her evocations of family photography (as well as from her general representations of biological kin relationships, which we will subsequently discuss). In order to better understand the value of her literary project, it is vital to keep in mind the power of the societal idealization of a historical and “natural” biological kinship. Several critics discuss “the popular nostalgia for ... breadwinner-homemaker nuclear family life” (Stacey *Family* 9) or the “contemporary romanticization” of those “happy, homogenous families that we ‘remember’ from the 1950s” (Coontz 29; 31) and which continue to shape people’s expectations and hopes for family life. This most wanted

kind of kinship is, of course, reproductive and heterosexual; it is natural because it results from “the natural facts of sexual reproduction” (Franklin and McKinnon “Introduction” 2). Since David Schneider – who is generally held responsible for the “death of kinship” in, and the consequent revitalization of, anthropology (4) – the discipline has been forced to face the circularity of such argumentations:

The notion of a “base in nature” creates a self-justifying and untestable definition of kinship: “kinship” as a sociocultural phenomenon is ... defined as entailing those “natural” or “biological” facts which it is at the same time said to be “rooted in” or “based on.” (Schneider in Franklin and McKinnon “Introduction” 2)

Rather than continuing to defend kinship as a biological reality, Schneider exposed it as an artificial construct of anthropologists eager to establish a universal standard for people’s social organizations. In the public imagination, though, an idealized version of the heterosexual family continues to reign supreme, still including suppositions about “the naturalness, emotional intensity, self-sufficiency, and balance of the nuclear-family unit” (Skolnick 13). So biological kinship is as yet thought to be naturally given – as opposed to gay and lesbian “chosen families,” for instance – and the idea that people are denied choice as to the selection of their relatives ostensibly offers them a unique level of security.

However, Brown’s de-idealized depictions of biological kinship bear witness to the element of choice that was always part and parcel of family life. They highlight the idea that people are, and always have been, at liberty to perceive or to deny the facts of biology as the basis for intimate kin relationships – relationships that can therefore more accurately be rethought as deliberately constructed or actively performed. Biological fathers in Brown, for instance, are typically not dependable; they leave their offspring after a divorce in *The Haunted House* (21), as in several stories from *American Romances* and *The End of Youth*. We will see that there are indeed crucial reasons to oppose the automatic connection between kinship and biology. This link too often constitutes a kind of truth, a guiding line for what

“real families” are that confers recognition only on those units who live up to the ideal. As Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon see it, “ideologies of kinship become embedded in and signifiers of relations of power that draw lines of hierarchy and exclusion, produce dominance and subordination” (“New Directions” 278). The installation of an ideologically motivated hierarchy of types of family life inevitably shrinks the sphere of what constitutes “legitimate kinship.” In the pecking order of possible family forms, the social power of kinship configurations as well as the recognition and support they receive can be seen to decline drastically from intact nuclear families consisting of a husband, a wife, and children (over adoptive families, reconstituted families, or single-parent families, to draft but a provisional list) to queer families. The latter are indeed the least fortunate family units, as they are generally ignored, or even actively rejected – a harmful practice that Brown will be seen to counter in her writing.

De-idealized Depictions of Biological Kinship: Selectivity in the Family

1. Parental Divorce

Brown’s representations of biological kinship that expose the element of choice inherent in such family ties include parental divorces, the trope of the absent husband, and the idea that, by growing up, children grow apart from their mothers and fathers. The parents Brown portrays are typically miserable together, as were her own mother and father. “My parents were unhappy with one another, and our home got volatile from time to time,” Brown divulges in her essay “On Living Long Enough” (n.pag.). Her work shows the influence of a normative standard of family life on people who struggle to conform, as her narrators’ mothers often feel trapped in loveless marriages, fearing a divorce would result in a socially unintelligible and, consequently, worthless family. By devoting attention to these mothers’

feelings and decision making processes, many of Brown's works starkly reveal the inhibiting effects of public pressure and of the internalization of society's expectations for family life.

Both *American Romances* and *The End of Youth* convincingly dramatize the far-reaching influence of common idea(s) of what kinship should look like. In the former collection, the narrator of "A Child of Her Time" explains how her parents' decisions concerning the organization of their family life were directed by an enormous societal pressure to conform to the conventions of kinship. The narrator relates how, by the time of her birth, her "parents had pushed each other as far away as they could while still staying in a marriage" (34). She adds that "if you were married, you were supposed to pretend you were happy, but I also knew they stayed married because they didn't want to have failed – at love, at family, at doing what you were supposed to do" (38). Even though the narrator says her mom reasoned according to "some old idea she once had had about what a family was" (34), its influence still proved particularly strong for her. The themes of parental divorce and the authority of social norms on what constitutes a "normal" family arrangement recur in "Nancy Booth, Wherever You Are," a story from *The End of Youth* that recounts the young narrator's admiration for her Girl Scout leaders. The narrator always went to Girl Scout camp, yet there were "a few times, around the years of [her] parents' divorce," that she was not allowed to go. Conspicuously, her parents sent her to "church camp" instead – as if to compensate for what they might still consider a "sinful" act (36). Thus Brown underlines the oppressiveness that the widespread influence of normative family arrangements presents for the protagonist's parents and, by extension, for the protagonist herself.

While the parents of most of Brown's narrators at least temporarily succeed in convincing family acquaintances that they do live up to the conventions of kinship, trying to keep up appearances towards their children becomes all but impossible, and the efforts required to make a family work are thus revealed to such "insiders." After all, these children are witness to frequent fights and, typically, the withdrawal of their father. To many of Brown's narrators,

then, their parents' divorce does not come as a surprise. The narrator of *The Haunted House* aptly summarizes this situation, which is classic for Brown's families: "he'd check back into town every now and then... Then he was gone for good" (21). The disappearance of her dad was so gradual Robin hardly noticed it when he had, at last, really left. For Brown's average heroine, the father's (imminent) departure is the timeline against which her youth is projected; his choice constitutes, for instance, a temporal frame rather than a main event in many of the tales from *The End of Youth*. In "The Smokers," where the narrator discusses the smoking habits of her family, she continually relegates her parents' divorce to a subclause, as in "After my father left, my mother switched to Benson and Hedges. Then after he'd been gone for a while, she used a graduated filter" (60) or "My mother stopped smoking a few years after she moved away from the last place she lived with my father" (77). Of course, this does not mean that Brown's child narrators are not scarred by their parents' decision. It only goes to show that for these characters, who can see through the veil of privacy which typically shields family disputes from public scrutiny, it is unsurprising that their father's gradual withdrawal ultimately results in a definitive separation.

The practice of divorce shows that ties of biological kinship cannot be taken for granted. Rather than being evident, remaining part of a family is a matter of conscious choice, and the family relations emerging after a divorce are also freely chosen and actively worked out – they are, to say it with Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, "elective affinities" (66). Reactionaries who stubbornly hold on to a belief in the intact nuclear family as an ideal and natural unit predictably oppose the possibility of ending such kin ties and lament the prevalence of divorce. Such conservative social critics frequently refer to the fate of the poor children involved, but – unlike Brown – they miss the crucial point that these do not necessarily benefit from living with parents who stay together. Brown's writings typically demonstrate an awareness of the emotional damage that can be done when children are continually exposed to parental fighting. In "A Child of Her Time," a story from *American Romances*, the narrator's

knowledge that she is the reason her mother remains in an unhappy marriage – she calls it “the mess I had created by being born” (34) – makes her feel terribly guilty. So Brown’s narrative indicates that children may be aware of, and suffer from, serving as a cementing force. The scene from “A Child of Her Time” thereby also exposes the enormous efforts (or “cementing forces”) that may be required to keep a supposedly natural unit together, thus once more underscoring the essentially chosen character of kinship ties.

Brown’s writings, from the early novel *The Children’s Crusade* up to her most recent collection *American Romances*, also reveal other negative effects of parents’ decisions to stay in an unhappy marriage. While the narrator of “A Child of Her Time” from the former collection feels like an impediment to her mother’s freedom and happiness, the latter novel illustrates that parents may even use their offspring to harm each other during their marriage. Beck-Gernsheim fears that, “when little care is taken, the child directly experiences the parents’ manoeuvres and attempts to gain influence” (64), and this possibility is exaggerated in *The Children’s Crusade*. The child narrator worries her parents would

plant something on me. Wire my diapers so the next person who picked me up would explode. Or fill my baby-powder dispenser with something that would choke us. ... Before I opened my birthday presents, I listened to see if they ticked. ... the only thing that was reasonable in the reign in which I lived was terror. (38)

Much more influential than the *kind* of family arrangements children are in, then, is the amount of domestic disputes characterizing that family unit. So studies which reveal that “children whose parents divorce fare slightly worse than those whose parents remain married” in fact say little about the influence of a breakup on children’s well-being (Stacey *Family* 60). *The Children’s Crusade* serves as a good example of such common-sense thinking, as the narrator learns all about domestic disputes in her unhealthy home before her parents finally divorce. Her mother and father not only teach her by example; they also explicitly train her in the art of arguing – a situation Brown fictionalizes by means of a remarkable present the child

narrator receives from her parents, namely a small shooting gallery. “They both swished around me,” the narrator explains, “whispering instructions” (39). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the narrator later repeats the kind of household hostility she grew up with, despite her resolve to create a better home for her and her partner. In the end they, too, require “one of the[ir] children [as their] messenger” (117), just as the narrator used to be her parents’ go-between (33). Thus *The Children’s Crusade* can be said to dismantle the authority of the normative family by showing the harm a child suffers while living with parents who continually quarrel. The values that are instilled in the narrator in such an environment are not healthy (or even helpful), which is one more illustration of the pointlessness of keeping the nuclear family intact regardless of the actual relationships between its members.

2. Absent Father, Nurturing Mom: The Traditional Division of Family Labor

In many of the family homes Brown portrays, the role patterns are rather traditional in that the distant father usually leaves it entirely to his wife to take care of the household and the kids. These family arrangements are in fact extreme instances of Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales’ standard sociological division of traditional kinship roles into “instrumental” and “expressive” functions. The former are thought to belong to the father, who is supposed to discipline, to provide an income and protection, while the performance of “expressive” tasks like sustaining intimate relations and nurturing or comforting relatives is, theoretically, reserved for wives or mothers. This distinction, which to Parsons and Bales was “an efficient division of labor within the family [that] provided for the well-being of all members” (Carrington 11), is shown in Brown’s work to generate an emotional distance between fathers and children which is damaging to every family member. As Robin’s mother in *The Haunted House*, trying to protect Robin from her father’s indifference, teaches her: “Don’t let on you want anything. Don’t let ‘em disappoint you” (34). The narrator is trained to shield herself emotionally,

because she is bound to suffer when she keeps opening up to a father who does not care for her in return. Conservative social critics persistently define the family as a unit that imparts to children “concepts of duty, commitment, humility, authority, magnanimity, integrity and all the other elements of emotional maturity” (John Howard in Coontz 94). Yet what families, just as frequently, may also teach their children is how “to sever close bonds, to cope with loss,” or how it feels to be left behind or to separate (Beck-Gernsheim 65). Indeed, whereas children are traditionally thought to experience enduring love and commitment while growing up in biological families, *The Haunted House* demonstrates that they can just as well witness, and thereby learn about, the *limits* to these values.

As we have seen in *The End of Youth*, where the narrator’s dad is “gone for good” (21), Brown’s average father figure even tends to disappear entirely in the event of a divorce – a situation that engenders a “feminization of kinship” (Stacey *Family* 34). In “My Western,” an essay from *American Romances* in which the female narrator likens her wandering father to some of the most famous cowboys in movie history, she remarks, “my parents got divorced, and I didn’t see my father again for years” (70). Here Brown works with what Judith Stacey calls America’s “cultural obsession over the decline of dependable dads” (“Queer” 396): the majority of divorced fathers apparently fails to systematically keep in touch with or support their offspring (Jamieson 51), a trend over which there is currently a moral panic among U.S. policymakers and citizens alike.² Such fatherly absence leaves an empty space in the family that is literalized in *The Haunted House* when Robin’s mom proudly shows her a family album from which, strikingly, all her dad’s photos are gone: “She points to a blank space on

² This concern is exemplified by the existence of numerous groups involved in the so-called father responsibility movement that emerged in the U.S. when discussions about family values started to center on the problem of the absent father. The conservative Christian and all-male organization the Promise Keepers is one of these groups. The Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009, introduced by Senator Evan Bahl, also speaks to the enduring significance of the social crisis of “fatherlessness.” As Bahl put it: “Conceiving a child doesn’t make you a man, but raising one responsibly does. Unfortunately, absentee fathers have become a national epidemic” (qtd. in Gadsden et al. n.pag.). Fatherhood responsibility is high on President Obama’s agenda as well. Addressing the military fathers gathered at the White House for a screening of *Cars 2* on June 15, 2011, he announced the launch of the “Year of Strong Fathers and Strong Families,” adding that “across the country, one of the things that we’ve been trying to do is to stress the importance of fatherhood” and to reach out to “fathers who may have trouble living up to their responsibilities” (n.pag.).

the page. ‘Do you remember this?’ I shake my head. I can see nothing there. ‘This,’ she points, ‘is your father’” (140-1). Though for Robin’s mom the idea may be too painful to face, her husband was, in a very real sense, “not there” for his daughter when she grew up – a failure Brown manages to make tangible in this moving mother-daughter scene.

Unsurprisingly, Brown’s father characters inevitably grow into strangers whose arrival home is a special event. To stick to *The Haunted House* as an example, Robin’s mom always “made a big run to the commissary” “[w]hen she knew [her husband] was coming back” (6). Children in such homes therefore take to seeing their father as a guest, as the behavior of the kids in *The Haunted House* also suggests:

My father blew into town from Gods-knows-where the week after my ninth birthday. ... I made sure our glasses matched. I didn’t let my brother use his special Mickey Mouse cup. My brother and I ate slowly, conscious of our manners. My mother and father and I all talked politely. (34)

Arlene Skolnick argues that three in fact very distinct social entities are usually collapsed under the common denominator “home” because, ideally, these are all part of the sphere of the home: i.e. “families,” “co-residential groups,” and “domestic units.” The latter revolve around participation in the basic activities and minutiae of daily life, like cooking and eating together. Such domesticity covers the “essence” of what it means to be family and, as the scene from *The Haunted House* illustrates, it involves a high level of togetherness or intimacy – something Robin and her brother are not used to sharing with their father. Skolnick’s “three social phenomena,” Brown’s work also demonstrates, “can and sometimes do vary independently” (19-20). Many of the fathers Brown depicts, then, are “family” only in name.

The mothers in Brown’s writings, meanwhile, are not allowed to take a break from the domesticity that defines a family: they typically “did the things that women did – cooked and cleaned and worried,” as the narrator of *The End of Youth* describes her mother’s and grandmother’s daily activities (67). Apart from being housewives, women are further

supposed to derive their primary identities from their status as mothers, a social rule that causes mental trouble for the narrator's mom in *The Haunted House*. She "was always living for someone else" (84) and experiences something of an identity crisis when she is left by all those she sacrificed her life for: her husband disappears, and her children do not need her as much as they used to. Robin then fruitlessly tries to assure her that "being my mom is[n't] all you are" (114). Yet the fact remains that women continue to be "the main parenting agents" (Giddens 156), which is why Robin's Girl Scout leader is amazed about "how some of the fathers had taken as much interest in the troops as some of the mothers and wasn't that a wonderful thing" (27). This kind of reaction highlights the prevalence of the ingrained assumption that women should shoulder the burden of raising children while some fathers are able to live as tourists in their families. The Girl Scout leader's praise for those men who do perform domestic tasks implies that their contribution is entirely voluntary – they are under little obligation to help out. In this dominant ideological scheme, women will not generally be rewarded for childrearing. The fact that they fulfill such functions is a "natural" rather than a "wonderful thing."

Brown debunks the idea that "the everyday tasks of mothering are taken to be 'natural' expressions of femininity" (Coltrane 791) in *The Haunted House*, where mothering clearly does not come naturally to Robin's mom. As she admits to her daughter: "I wanted to be free of you – the awful tug of need and love, the brutal love of need, the vital, awful dragging of my heart" (145). The narrator of *The End of Youth* recounts a similar situation in "The Smokers." Her mother had recourse to cigarettes to "get away from [her] kids, the noise, the crap" (80). Thus Brown uncovers the effort that is required to make a family work – far from being spontaneously loving and natural, the family is a demanding unit that calls for an enormous amount of what we might term "construction works," especially on the part of mothers and wives. But women are "no more innately gifted" for this than men (Barrett and McIntosh 145). These observations underscore the importance of my larger argument for

redefining the family performatively, and for reading Brown's work as a valuable opposition to society's tendency to downplay the "elective" character of family life by presenting it as natural. The examples from *The Haunted House* and *The End of Youth* show that, for women, investing time and effort in the biological family is socially presented as even less a matter of choice than for men. Women's feelings of inadequacy, as well as any of their attempts to act or reflect upon the choice they have regarding their involvement in their "natural" family lives, may therefore be fraught with guilt. Thus it is important that Brown's narrators do not blame their mothers for their desire to get away from their needy children from time to time. Like the narrator of "The Smokers," Brown's heroines tend to be "grateful" (80) that their mothers found a way to escape, even if only in something as fleeting as a cigarette.

Moreover, it should be noted that Brown actually builds an alternative to the female nature of child-rearing into her work, as the fathers in *American Romances* and *The Haunted House* were raised by their dads rather than their mothers. The narrator of the latter novel explains how her grandfather "took care of his son, my father. He raised him" (50). In "My Western" from *American Romances*, the narrator's dad Vergil despises his father for similar behavior, remembering him "washing dishes at the kitchen sink, a hero and a veteran diminished by his wife" (139) who "henpecked" him (140). Vergil's disdain for his father suggests how traditional role patterns may be hard to change because they are also productive of gender. While his brother revels in memories of "their father coming home from World War I and teaching him and his big brother how to take apart and clean and put a gun back together" (138), Vergil does not recall any of his father's more traditional male acts, as if the latter's role of "housewife" damaged his masculinity in his son's eyes. So occupying oneself with household tasks clearly revolves around more than just managing the necessary work – it equally involves establishing one's gender. Home can then be seen as "a gender factory," in which "the *musts* of work to be done" are combined with "the *shoulds* of gender ideals" (Jamieson 69). This may be why the traditional division of domestic and family labor between

men and women is, as we have seen, sometimes so hard to change. After all, Vergil voices a popular opinion when he implies that even the banal action of “washing dishes at the kitchen sink” entails the construction of a certain identity – one that, in Vergil’s eyes, does not befit men, especially not those who used to be war heroes. Thus Brown convincingly illustrates the idea that tasks like household work or childrearing are traditionally associated with femininity in more than one sense: women are supposed to perform them, but they are also thought to derive a sense of gender identity from these chores.

3. Growing Up Is Growing Apart

The theme of leaving and being left behind was already apparent from the distancing strategies many of Brown’s father figures apply. Yet it is also frequently translated into a related topic that is equally at the heart of Brown’s representations of biological kinship, namely, the idea that growing up is growing apart and that children inevitably leave their parents as they get older. The desire of children to gain autonomy when they grow into adulthood is dramatized in *The Children’s Crusade*, where the transition from dependence to independence that each generation has to live through does not go smoothly, as the narrator is hurt by the painful severance this engenders. Addressing her husband Stan, she talks about “the pretty babies of our dreams. ... Who tore themselves away from us. Who left. Who leave, but leave enough of them inside us to keep on coming back to tear us up again” (117). The narrator adds, “I wanted them to stay,” but she knows it is normal for them not to “come back and be the kids we wanted so unbearably,” which is why she advises her husband to doubt the children’s sincerity when they “say that they are sorry, that they’ve finally learnt, and that they’ll stay” (118). Far from being an unproblematic shift in the parent-child relationship, the process of separation that necessarily accompanies her children’s growth into adulthood “tears” the narrator “up” inside, even making her fear her kids are out to harm her.

Thus Brown illustrates once more how biological kinship is essentially chosen: just like the father characters in her work often abandon their wives and children, those children can later detach themselves from their mothers and fathers in a struggle for autonomy. This struggle does not necessarily result in a complete separation (even in *The Children's Crusade*, the narrator's manipulative children "keep on coming back," though usually not with good intentions [118]). Yet Brown's works typically reveal that a certain rupture in the relationship always ensues: many of the children she portrays at least *consider* taking a distance from their parents, while others effectively act on this option – at times they do so out of a sense of self-protection, because growing up generally means seeing your mother and father die. Thus Brown subverts the widespread expectation of a continuing and close bond between parents and children that is for instance apparent from assumptions about children taking care of their elderly parents.

A similar push-and-pull dynamics, generated by a conflict between parents' desires to keep their children close and children's typical need to escape parental influence, can be found in *The Haunted House*. The novel shows the painfulness and finality of the consequent ruptures in the early, interdependent relationship between parents and their children. The adolescent narrator Robin worries that, despite the fact that she "grew away from [her mother]," the latter is still "able to read [her] mind" and to see right through her: "I'm afraid she knows I'm thinking this and hug my arms closer to myself like I'm trying to keep this secret from her" (134). Yet her mom realizes that they lost this special connection when Robin grew up, a loss that deeply upset her, as she explains to her daughter:

we outgrow this perfect love. And, despite the wanting to go back, we can't. ...
When something truly goes away, you cannot get it back. And nothing else is like it, Robin dear. There is a lack, an empty shape no other shape can fill. You never could come back to me. Dear Robin, when that first thing changes, everything then

must. You learn to measure each getting rid, each keeping. ... There's no again, no going back. You learn to live with what you have. (145)

These laments may be taken to illustrate the fact that, according to the sociologist Lynn Jamieson, some “children seek more individualism (making decisions earlier and going their own way more) than their parents can cope with” (64). Even if such a wish for individuation is perceived as completely normal, in the sense that infancy is commonly understood to be a stage that prepares children for an autonomous adulthood which they will grow into relatively smoothly, Brown uncovers how the process may entail feelings of loss and hurt, and should rather be regarded “in terms of ‘recovery’ in the way which comes quite naturally when one considers the situation of someone getting over the loss of a ... partner” (Giddens 104). This rethinking entails, of course, the possibility that the family relationship may disintegrate like a love relationship sometimes can, which again points up the crucial role of choice in bonds between biological kin.

Conclusion: Queering Kinship

In anthropological theories on, as in the popular understanding of, biological kinship, the emphasis is mainly on kinship as a form of connection. Think, for instance, of David Schneider's famous definition of ties between biological relatives as bonds of “diffuse, enduring solidarity” (61). This fairly one-sided conceptualization frequently creates a societal disregard for the equally prevalent “acts of disconnection” in family life (Franklin and McKinnon “Introduction” 18). Brown may be said to redress the balance by focusing precisely on such ruptures, thereby also highlighting the element of selectivity that is equally part of “blood” ties. Through topics like divorce, the absent father, or the idea that growing up means growing apart, she exposes the chosen nature of biological kinship: parents are free to

leave each other, just as fathers are free to leave their families, and just as kids, in growing up, are free to distance themselves from their mothers and fathers.

Brown's work therefore allows us to redefine the biological foundation of kinship as a cultural construct – albeit an exceptionally authoritative one – that is, as Schneider also saw it, employed in various “symbolic” ways to demarcate relations (38). Clearly, nothing in the naturalized bonds between biological kin guarantees enduring solidarity. Such a rethinking of the family reveals commitment to be a question of negotiation rather than attribution: “permanence in a relationship is no longer ascribed (‘blood is blood’), but produced” (Weston 101). Affirming the importance of the *quality* of actual and specific social ties, then, over and against the traditional illusion of a connection that exists automatically in the name of biology, clears the way for a more inclusive conception of kinship which I would like to call, in Butlerian fashion, performative.

This amounts to, paradoxically, both reinforcing and undermining the notion of kinship. I propose to hold on to the extremely powerful concept as means with which to delineate a distinctive type of human interaction – even if this no longer denotes an institutional, formal relation that is taken for granted or fixed beforehand – while simultaneously filling in the family slots rather differently. This disrupts the possibility of knowing automatically who exactly counts as kin and does away with family myths that were never true to begin with. If the bonds of biology do not necessarily result in, and therefore cannot be equated with, kinship – some relatives, like the absent fathers Brown represents, may be undeserving of the label – the opposite is also true: friends who are not biologically related might in fact be reconceptualized as kin on the basis of their actions. With Mary Bernstein and Renate Reimann, we then can rethink families as “groups of individuals who define each other as family and share a strong emotional and/or financial commitment to each other, whether or not they cohabit, are related by blood, law, or adoption, have children, or are recognized by the law” (3). Thus, new family arrangements become both visible *and* valid.

Brown's oeuvre further contributes to replacing the "destructive sanctity of *the family*" with a care for "diverse and vibrant *families*" (Stacey "Queer" 386) through her literary portraits of queer kinship. "A Good Man," Brown's moving AIDS narrative from the 1993 short story collection *Annie Oakley's Girl*, focuses on the anonymous lesbian narrator's close kinship tie with her gay friend Jim, who has AIDS. The narrator redefines herself as "his sister" because she is Jim's primary caregiver, and the "hospital administration does not look favorably upon ... giving detailed medical information about patients to non-family members" (96). In addition, she is "allowed to stay after hours as his sister" (99). The narrator recalls a similar act of selecting kin on Jim's part, when he named everyone marching with him at the Gay Pride March as "my family. My kith and my kin and my kind. My siblings" (112). Such representations of family ties between and among what Jim calls the gay "brotherhood" (102) and the lesbian "sisterhood" (103) are vital; after all, despite the growing acceptance and acknowledgment of "'alternative families' differentiated by class, 'race' and ethnicity, life-cycle, single parenthood, chosen lifestyles," and so on, gay and lesbian families continue to be stigmatized (Weeks et al. 298). This persistent stigma – and, thus, the (im)possibility of a redefinition of who counts as family – has enormous effects not only on the emotional lives of those involved, but also on the material circumstances in which these lives occur. Kath Weston explains what is at stake:

Who will be authorized to make life-and-death decisions when lovers and other members of gay families are hospitalized or otherwise incapacitated? Will court rulings continue to force some parents to choose between living with their children and living with a gay or lesbian partner? Should a biological grandfather who has never spoken to his grandchild because he disapproves of his daughter's lesbianism retain more legal rights vis-à-vis that child than a nonbiological coparent who has raised the child for ten years? Will the phrase "related by blood or marriage" be allowed to stand as a justification for refusing lovers public accommodations;

denying them visiting rights at nursing homes, prisons, and hospitals; disqualifying gay families for family discounts; or withholding the right to pass on a rent-controlled apartment after death? (5)

Separating the term kinship from biology and thereby extending it can do the crucial work of helping to dissolve the ideological, economic, legal, and political borders that divide “acceptable” families from those who are deemed “improper,” like gay and lesbian kinship arrangements.

In a recent interview, Brown commented on the “irony” that gay and lesbian families are still not generally recognized as such, when they are, for instance, shouldering a large social burden by taking care of so-called “damaged children” such as “AIDS babies.” The author explained that “there are so many children born without a stable parent or parents, and then so often they are adopted by gay families. So people don’t respect us as parents, but we’re actually doing some heavy lifting for the culture” (personal interview). This insight once more underlines the cultural and social significance of Brown’s efforts to broaden the concept of kinship in her work, and to rethink it as close bonds that people actively and purposely create. As Weston puts it, one does not need to be a radical activist “to worry about the way [conflicts over conceptions of kinship] will translate into the most personal areas of [people’s] lives” (5). Brown is a self-described activist “worker bee” who typically stays in the shadow of louder barricade-stormers and demonstrators (De Moor and Gydé 34). She remains acutely aware of the effect of kinship definitions on people’s personal lives, and makes an important contribution to this discussion by engaging creatively and critically with the concept of kinship throughout her writing career.

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer of *Women's Studies* whose useful and constructive suggestions greatly improved this article.

Works Cited

- Barrett, Michèle, and Mary McIntosh. *The Anti-Social Family*. London and New York: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Jonathan Cape, 1979. Print.
- . *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 1993. Print.
- Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth. "On the Way to a Post-Familial Family: From a Community of Need to Elective Affinities." *Theory, Culture and Society* 15.3/4 (1998): 53-70. Web. 11 March 2012.
- Berlant, Lauren. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington DC: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1997. Print.
- Bernstein, Mary, and Renate Reimann. "Queer Families and the Politics of Visibility." *Queer Families, Queer Politics: Challenging Culture and the State*. Eds. Mary Bernstein and Renate Reimann. New York: Columbia UP, 2001. 1-17. Print.
- Bouquet, Mary. "Making Kinship, with an Old Reproductive Technology." *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*. Eds. Susan Franklin and Susan McKinnon. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001. 85-115. Print.
- Brown, Rebecca. *The Evolution of Darkness*. London: Brilliance Books, 1984. Print.
- . *The Haunted House*. 1986. San Francisco: City Lights, 2007. Print.
- . *The Children's Crusade*. Seattle: The Seal Press, 1989. Print.
- . *Annie Oakley's Girl*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1993. Print.
- . *The Gifts of the Body*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994. Print.
- . *The Dogs: A Modern Bestiary*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1998. Print.
- . "On Living Long Enough: Reaching Middle Age, Despite Myself." *The Stranger* 4-10 March 1999. Web. 14 March 2011. <<http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/on-living-long-enough/Content?oid=381>>
- . *The End of Youth*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2003. Print.
- . *American Romances*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2009. Print.
- . Personal interview. 20 March 2012. Transcript.

- Brown, Rebecca (texts), and Nancy Kiefer (images). *Woman in Ill-Fitting Wig*. Washington: Gorham Printing, 2005. Print.
- Carrington, Christopher. *No Place Like Home: Relationships and Family Life among Lesbians and Gay Men*. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 2002. Print.
- Coltrane, Scott. "Household Labor and the Routine Production of Gender." *Families in the U.S.: Kinship and Domestic Politics*. Eds. Karen V. Hansen and Anita Iltis Garey. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998. 791-808. Print.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: BasicBooks, 1992. Print.
- Corbett, Ken. "Nontraditional Family Romance." *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 70 (2001): 599-624. Web. 11 March 2012.
- De Moor, Katrien, and An Gydé. "Laten we de kast nu sluiten!" *Zizo* 9.54 (2002): 34-9. Print.
- Franklin, Sarah, and Susan McKinnon. "New Directions in Kinship Study: A Core Concept Revisited." *Current Anthropology: A World Journal of the Sciences of Man* 41.2 (2000): 275-279. Web. 11 March 2012.
- , "Introduction: Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies." *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*. Eds. Susan Franklin and Susan McKinnon. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001. 1-25. Print.
- Gadsden, Vivian et al. "Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009." *NCOFF: National Center on Fathers and Families website* 17 February 2010: n.pag. Web. 9 January 2012. <<http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/updates-from-the-field/legislation/responsible-fatherhood-and-healthy-families-act-2009>>
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992. Print.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1997. Print.
- Holland, Patricia. "Introduction: History, Memory, and the Family Album." *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography*. Eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland. London: Virago, 1991. 1-14. Print.
- Jamieson, Lynn. *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998. Print.
- Leibman, Nina Claire. *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1995. Print.
- Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President to Military Fathers and Their Children." *Whitehouse.gov* 15 June 2011: n.pag. Web. 9 January 2012. <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/15/remarks-president-military-fathers-and-their-children>>

- Saterstrom, Selah. "Q&A: Rebecca Brown." *Tarpaulin Sky Online Literary Journal* 11 (2006, 2007): n.pag. Web. 17 October 2007. <<http://www.tarpaulinsky.com/Fall06/Brown-interview.htm>>
- Schneider, David. *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1980. Print.
- Skolnick, Arlene. *The Intimate Environment: Exploring Marriage and the Family*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973. Print.
- Stacey, Judith. *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. Print.
- , "Gay and Lesbian Families Are Here; All Our Families Are Queer; Let's Get Used To It." *American Families: A Multicultural Reader*. Eds. Stephanie Coontz, Maya Parson, and Gabrielle Raley. New York and London: Routledge, 1999. 372-405. Print.
- Thurman, Judith. "Wilder Women: The Mother and Daughter Behind the *Little House* Stories." *The New York Times* 10 August 2009. Web. 30 May 2011. <http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/08/10/090810crat_atlarge_thurman?currentPage=all>
- Weeks, Jeffrey, Brian Heaphy, and Catherine Donovan. "Families of Choice: Autonomy and Mutuality in Non-Heterosexual Relationships." *Changing Britain: Families and Households in the 1990s*. Ed. Susan McRae. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. 297-315. Print.
- Weston, Kath. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. Print.