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The (Not So) New Normal: A Queer Critique of LGBT Characters and Themes in Primetime Network Television Situational Comedies

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THE (NOT SO) NEW NORMAL: A QUEER CRITIQUE OF LGBT

CHARACTERS AND THEMES IN PRIMETIME NETWORK

TELEVISION SITUATIONAL COMEDIES

by

Robert Dallas Byrd Jr.

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2014

ABSTRACT

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This analysis of primetime situational comedies feature LGBTQ characters argues that through heteronormative and homonormative constructions of sexuality, race, gender, and class, many LGBTQ people are rendered invisible in the mainstream. Through discourse analysis, the study describes how these programs work to normalize gay and lesbian identity, which then resembles the dominant heterosexuality, aiding in the advancement of white, middle class gays, who privatize sexuality and mimic dominant conventions of gender, race, sexuality, and class in the public sphere. This research is important in understanding the American public's most recent shifts in public opinion on issues of marriage equality and moral acceptance, but also in understanding what groups of LGBTQ people may be excluded from the visible gay community. Further, it is important to examine the underlying ideology of these programs to extract meanings that have the potential to further subvert queer notions of sex and sexual politics, race, gender and class, which only work to advance the marginalization of those who do not fit the dominant mold.

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December 2014

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my parents, Robert and Cyndi Byrd. Their years of hard work and perseverance have always been a source of inspiration and motivation for everything I do. This work is as much theirs as it is mine.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my partner, Daniel Deason, who has listened to hours of dissertation talk, read hundreds of pages, and provided unlimited support. I would not have finished without him.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2012 election cycle marked the first time an American electorate voted in favor of ballot initiatives that legalized same-sex marriage, and it also marked the first time a majority of state voters, in any of the 50 states, opposed a state marriage amendment that defined marriage as a legal contract between one man and one woman. Three states, Maine, Maryland, and Washington, voted to legalize same-sex marriage. They joined six other states where same-sex marriage was already legal. The same-sex marriage campaign also received a boost from the United States Supreme Court on June 26, 2013. The Court, in a 5-4 decision struck down part of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which prohibited federal recognition of same-sex marriages performed in some states (Savage, 2013). The Court also dismissed an appeal on behalf of proponents of California's Proposition 8, an amendment that halted same-sex marriage in California in 2008. As a result, same-sex marriages resumed in the state a few weeks later. Nine other states legalized either same-sex marriages or civil unions in 2013: Minnesota, Delaware, Colorado, Illinois, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Hawaii. In 2014, Oregon became the nineteenth state to legalize same-sex marriage. Since the 2012 election, 16 judges in 12 states have ruled against same-sex marriage ban laws, and lawsuits challenging ban laws have been filed in all 50 states.

The changes in laws in several states are highlighted by national trends that tend to show a growing support for lesbian and gay persons. In 2011, for the first time since Gallup began polling the public on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) rights issues, the majority of Americans supported marriage equality (Jones, 2011). Since

2010, a majority of Americans also consider "gay or lesbian relations morally acceptable" (Saad, 2012 para. 1). The answers to a July 2013 Gallup Poll on Gay and Lesbian Rights showed that 54% of Americans now think that same-sex marriage should be legal, up from 40% in May of 2008 and 27% in 1996, the first year the poll question was asked (Jones, 2013). Election results and polling numbers represent a shift in American culture, but what factors have contributed to this shift in culture and what does this shift mean from the approximately 3.4% (Gates & Newport, 2012) of Americans who identify as LGBTQ?

Streitmatter (2009) argues that the American attitude toward gays and lesbians has evolved from fear and intolerance during the 1950s when words like pervert and deviates were used to describe gay men to a current era of acceptance. Streitmatter (2009) argued in his book *From 'Perverts' to 'Fab Five': The Media's Changing Depiction of Gay Men and Lesbians*, "The media have not merely *reflected* the American public's shift to a more enlightened view of gay people, but they have been instrumental in *propelling* that change" (p. 2). He along with others in the mass communication industry and in American politics have argued that the American media, particularly television, have played a major role in shaping attitudes about the LGBT community.

However, media critic Dow (2001) argues, "Popular culture can be political, in the sense that it can empower certain constituencies and can energize political agendas. However, one of popular culture's most salient characteristics is that it is ephemeral—its dependence on the power of personality, hot topics, and quickly shifting tastes makes it a fragile basis for lasting social change" (p. 137). It is impossible to draw a direct causal link between shifting perceptions of gay people and changing media representations, but

it is possible to examine the discourse of television sitcoms to discuss the representations and ideologies being espoused in such programs. Early television studies scholar Fiske (1987) argued that social change can occur and that television can be a part of that change, but he said, "it is wrong to see it as an originator of social change, or even to claim that it ought to be so, for social change must have its root in material social existence; but television can be, must be, part of that change, and its effectivity will either hasten or delay it" (p. 45).

Despite positive change in the representation of LGBTQ people, scholars argue that problematic narratives still exists in media representations (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Dow, 2001; Duggan, 2003; Linneman, 2008; Manuel, 2009; Mitchell, 2005; Papacharissi & Fernback, 2008; Shugart, 2003; Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006; Yep & Elia, 2012). Television narratives often exclude lesbians, transgender men and women, bisexuals, and gay men and lesbians of color, and fictional narratives of gay white men often rely on stereotypes of affluent couples with copious amounts of expendable income, overly effeminate caricatures, or sad and lonely gay men. Television programming and film from the last 10 years, like *Will & Grace*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *The L Word*, have been studied for their groundbreaking material and timing, but they have also been criticized for adhering to old problematic narratives, which often restrict queer people to heteronormative constructions of sexuality and gender (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Dow, 2001; Gross, 2001; Streitmatter, 2009; Westerfelhous & Lacrois, 2006).

Building on previous research, the purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the discourse of LGBTQ issues in network television sitcoms. This research is important in

understanding the American public's most recent shifts in public opinion on issues of marriage equality and moral acceptance, but also in understanding what groups of LGBTQ people may be excluded from the visible gay community. I argue these programs work to normalize gay and lesbian identity, which then resembles the dominant heterosexuality, aiding in the advancement of white, middle class gays, who privatize sexuality and mimic dominant conventions of gender, race, sexuality, and class in the public sphere. Further, it is important to examine the underlying ideology of these programs to extract meanings that have the potential to further subvert queer notions of sex and sexual politics, race, gender and class, which only work to marginalize those who do not fit the dominant mold.

I conducted a discourse analysis via reading theory of the five shows nominated for the 2013 Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) award for outstanding comedy series. The five nominees include: *Glee* (Fox), *Go On* (NBC), *Happy Endings* (ABC), *Modern Family* (ABC), and *The New Normal* (NBC). According to a GLAAD press release (2013), the media awards were designed to "recognize and honor media for their fair, accurate, and inclusive representations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community and the issues that affect their lives" (GLAAD.org, 2013 para. 10). The same release boasts that the three awards ceremonies, which are sponsored by major corporate donors like Absolut vodka, held in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco "bring together more than 5,000 supporters to raise nearly $3.5 million for the organization's work" (GLAAD.org, 2013 para. 11). During the awards ceremony in Los Angeles on April 20, 2013, NBC's *The New Normal* was given the award for best comedy—*Modern Family* and *Glee* are both past award recipients in the same category.

NBC launched *The New Normal* for the 2012-2013 season, the show which is loosely based on the life of the shows creator/executive producer Ryan Murphy, who also is co-creator and producer of other past and current television series with either gay and lesbian themes or character like *Popular* (1999-2001), *Nip/Tuck* (2003-2010), *Glee* (2009-2013), and *American Horror Story* (2011-2013). The show features a gay couple Bryan, played by Broadway and television actor Andrew Rannels, and David, played by film and television actor Justin Bartha, who live in Los Angeles. Bryan, a television producer, and David, a doctor, hire a surrogate to have the couple's first child. Bryan and David hire Goldie, played by Georgia King, who has just moved to California from Ohio with her eight-year-old daughter and narrow-minded mother, played by Ellen Barkin. NBC promotes the show on its site saying, "Goldie quickly becomes the guys' surrogate and quite possibly the girl of their dreams. Surrogate mother, surrogate family" (nbc.com/the-new-normal, 2012 "About the show"). The show had minimal ratings success, with the second largest audience, 6.88 million, viewing the show's pilot episode on September 10, 2012. The ratings climbed to 6.96 million viewers for the second week but dropped to just a little over two million by week 19. NBC announced in early May 2013 that the show would not be back for the 2013-2014 season (Goldberg, 2013). *The New Normal* suffered the same fate as NBC's other nominated show, *Go On*, which featured *Friends* star Matthew Perry. Perry played Ryan King, a sports talk radio personality trying to move on after the death of his wife. The show centers around the members of a group therapy program, of which one is a lesbian attorney named Anne, who recently lost her partner. A preview of the show aired during the 2012 Olympics, which garnered more than 16 million viewers; however, the ratings dropped to 9.73

million by the second episode and to less than three million by episode 19, similar to *The New Normal*.

A third show studied was also cancelled at the end of the 2012-2013 television season. ABC's *Happy Endings*, which was in its third season, was dropped by the network because of a decrease in the ratings. The season premiere aired with an audience of 5.57 million viewers on October 23, 2012, and the series finale aired on May 3, 2013, with an audience of 2.17 million viewers. The show, which first began airing in mid-season of 2011, is set in Chicago and is centered on six best friends: the married couple Brad (Damon Wayans Jr.) and Jane (Elize Coupe), Alex (Elisha Cuthbert), Dave (Zachary Knighton), Penny (Casey Wilson), and their gay friend Max (Adam Pally). The show begins, in season one, with the breakup of Alex and Dave and the change of the group dynamic that followed. As the series progressed, the troubled group dynamic is abandoned, and the show begins to take on more of *Friends* storyline—the stories of the six friends. The show's gay character, Max, is billed by the show's creator, David Caspe, the show's slovenly, uncultured, lazy, irresponsible, unemployed, non-stereotypical gay man. He was even described by one of the other characters as a "straight guy who likes dudes" (McDonald, 2011 para. 3). This is the second season *Happy Endings* has been nominated by GLAAD for Outstanding Comedy Series; the first was in 2012 during the show's second season.

Two of the nominated shows, Fox's *Glee* and ABC's *Modern Family*, were both in their fourth seasons during the 2012-2013 television season, and both series have been nominated for multiple awards. The awards count for *Glee* includes six Emmy Awards, four Golden Globes, and six Teen Choice Awards. GLAAD has nominated the show for

its Outstanding Comedy Series in each of the four seasons that the show has aired—and it

won twice (2010 and 2011) (IMDB Awards for Glee, 2013). Likewise, *Modern Family*

has received one Golden Globe Award and 18 Emmy Awards. The show has also been

nominated in each of its four seasons by GLAAD for Outstanding Comedy Series and,

also, has won twice, 2011 and 2012 (Internet Movie Database, 2013).

   Glee is an hour-long musical comedy program that centers on the McKinley High

School Glee Club and its director. According to the show's website, *Glee* is about

"talented kids who escape the harsh realities of high school by joining a glee club, where

they find strength, acceptance and, ultimately, their voice" (Glee About the Show, 2013

para. 1). The site also boasts the show's role in American culture and its place in

television history claiming, "Since its debut, GLEE has become a bona fide cultural

phenomenon, received prestigious honors, including a Golden Globe Award and a

Peabody Award, and singlehandedly made glee clubs cool again. The series boasts

critical acclaim, a die-hard fan base, two Grammy Award nominations, two platinum and

five gold albums, more than 43 million songs and more than 13 million albums sold

worldwide, two sold-out concert tours, a 3-D movie and four Emmy Awards and three

Golden Globes, including the award for Best Television Series—Comedy or Musical"

(Glee About the Show, 2013 para. 3). The show has also become known for its gay and

lesbian characters. In the first season, Kurt (Chris Colfer) came out as gay to the other

students in glee club and his hyper-masculine, auto mechanic father. Since then a

multitude of both regular and reoccurring gay and lesbian characters have been written

into the show, including a lesbian cheerleader, Santana (Naya Rivera), and her bisexual

girlfriend, Brittany (Heather Morris), who also happens to be a cheerleader. In season

two, Blaine (Darren Criss) is introduced to the show and later becomes Kurt's boyfriend. The third season marked a first for the show, the introduction of a transgender character, Unique (Alex Newell). Unique becomes a regular cast member during the fourth season.

Modern Family focuses on the story of Jay Pritchett (Ed O'Neill), his daughter Claire Dunphy (Julie Bowen) and his son Mitchell Pritchett (Jesse Tyler Ferguson). The storyline of the show centers on the dynamic of the Pritchett and Dunphy families, which include the gay coupling of Mitchell and his partner Cameron Tucker (Eric Stonestreet), who have adopted their daughter Lily (Aubrey Anderson-Emmons) from Vietnam. Mitchell's character bio on the show's website describes Mitchell and Cam as opposites who balance each other (Mitchell Pritchett, 2013). The *Modern Family* website bills the show as an "honest and often hilarious look into the sometimes warm, sometimes twisted, embrace of the modern family" (Modern Family About the Show, 2013 para. 2).

Discourse Analysis and Television Studies

Often discourse is identified as merely a conversation that is being had about a particular topic; however, discourse is far more complicated and far more attached to the dominant ideology than a mere conversation about a given topic. For the purposes of this study, discourse analysis is in reference to a web of meanings and understandings—a notion that has roots in the work of Foucault (1978). He does not limit discourse to a discussion between two people or a particular public discussion had by many. He contends discourse is a discussion in a particular context with various power relations at play. It is not only who was speaking but also how they spoke, what they said, what they did not say, the reaction to what they said, and who decided what could be said. Foucault, who argues, "knowledge is power," saw language as a tool for the powerful to maintain

power by not only restricting speech on certain topics but also prescribing which language was more appropriate for the topic and for whom it was appropriate to speak in the first place.

Acosta-Alzuru and Lester-Roushanzamir (2000) define discourse as "a system of representation in which shared meanings are produced and exchanged . . . Discourse emphasizes relations of power while also attending to relations of meanings and the process of production and exchange are therefore 'materialized' within the text" (p. 307). Similarly, Fiske (1987) argues that discourse "is a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area. These meanings serve the interests of that section of society within which the discourse originates and which works ideologically to naturalize those meanings into common sense" (p. 14). He also contends that discourse is a social act, which may support or transgress the dominant ideology. So then discourses function not only to read a text (like a television program) but also, in the grand scheme, to make sense out of social experiences.

Considering discourse is not simply a conversation but a discussion with a system of underlying meanings and social interactions, the analysis of discourses must then take that system of meaning into consideration. Discourse analysis scholars have debated the merits of text-based analysis for years. One of the early scholars, Fairclough (1992), argues that discourse analysis must include a detailed textual analysis that consists of both a linguistic analysis and an intertexual analysis. The linguistic analysis examines the words used up to the formation of sentences and dialogue while the intertextual analysis shows how the text is selected based on "conventionalized practices, which are available

to text producers and interpreters in particular social circumstances" (p. 194). Other scholars (Fiske, 1987; Philo, 2007; Fürsich, 2009; Gray & Lotz, 2012; Molina, 2009; Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983) argue that a strict textual analysis alone, without regard for context, audience, history, and producers, is not sufficient for understanding how a text interacts and informs the culture. This has been particularly true in the field of television studies at least since the 1960s and 1970s.

Television Studies

The early history of television analysis, which evolved into television studies, began in the social science tradition of positivist research. According to Gray and Lotz (2012), effects-based models were used to study television—like earlier studies of newspaper and radio. These models reduced television to a series of negative effects on society from degrading the arts to dumbing down society as a whole. The effects model research often examined the medium without regard for context or audience reception. Gray and Lotz also claim that before critical theories and methods became part of the academic lexicon in the 1960s and 1970s, the humanities, literature, and film studies denied television as a legitimate field of study because many saw television as the "vast wasteland" as argued by former FCC chair Newton Minnow, not worthy of academic study (Gray & Lotz, 2012). Gray and Lotz contend in the early days of television, researchers saw the medium as a monoglot, only speaking one language, instead of looking at the smaller pieces that make up the entire program (i.e., lighting, camera angles, script, editing, etc.).

With the rise of cultural and critical approaches, Gray and Lotz (2012) argue television programs were then "open for analysis" and "because of their popular status,

some critics regarded them as *especially* rich for study" (p. 12). Television critics began to focus on the ideological groundings of televisual texts, and how those groundings perpetuated a dominant ideology on a host of topics from race, class, gender, and politics to sexuality.

Television as Polysemy

Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) argue that television has a "pleasant disguise of fictional entertainment," but that there is a "concern for the 'dominant' messages embedded" in the text (p. 46). Fiske (1987) contends television is a cultural agent "particularly as a provoker and circulator of meanings" (p. 1). Further Fiske (1987) claims, "television broadcasts programs that are replete with potential meanings, and that it attempts to control and focus this meaningfulness into a more singular preferred meaning that performs the work of the dominant ideology" (p. 1). Fiske argues television programs are fortified with codes, which he defined as "links between producers, text, and audiences . . . through which texts interrelate in a network of meanings that constitutes our cultural world" (p. 4). He writes, "What passes for reality in any culture is the product of that culture's codes, so 'reality' is always already encoded, it is never 'raw'"(p. 5). In other words, commonsense can only be produced when "'reality,' representations, and ideology merge into a coherent, seemingly natural unity" (p. 6). Fiske sees television and the characters on the screen as encodings of dominant ideology, which means that for them to seem natural or realistic they must adhere to prescribed notions of being. He maintains, "Characters on television are not just representations of individual people but are encodings of ideology . . . the ideological codes are also important, for it is these that make sense out of the relationship between the technical

code of casting and the social code of appearance, and that also relate the televisual use to their broader use in the culture at large" (p. 9). Fiske along with Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) contend, however, that these messages are not monolithic and can be interpreted differently by individuals in various social situations.

Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) argue that television, "In its role as central cultural medium . . . presents a multiplicity of meanings rather than a monolithic dominant point of view. It often focuses on our most prevalent concerns, our deepest dilemmas. Our most traditional views, those that are repressive and reactionary, as well as those that are subversive and emancipatory, are upheld, examined, maintained, and transformed. The emphasis is on process rather than product, on discussion rather than indoctrination, on contradiction and confusion rather than coherence" (p. 564). Similarly, Fiske (1987) contends a discourse is not given meaning by a speaker or audience but by society. In other words, the meanings invited by a text pre-exist the use in any one text itself at any one time. A text, according to Fiske, refers to a television program that has been read by an audience, who through interaction with the program has begun to activate "some of the meanings/pleasure" that a particular program invites. He goes on to argue, "Texts are the site of conflict between their forces of production and modes of reception . . . A program is produced by the industry, a text by its readers" (p. 14).

Fiske, like Newcomb and Hirsch, claims television is polysemy, or having multiple meanings. He claims, "A program provides a potential of meanings which may be realized, or made into actually experienced meanings, by socially situated viewers in the process of reading" (pp. 15-16). Because the viewer is situated socially, he or she brings his or her own previous experiences, knowledge, viewing habits, history, etc., and

each can possibly take away a unique reading of the text. However, Fiske maintains, "This polysemic potential is neither boundless nor structureless: the text delineates the terrain within which meanings may be made and proffers some meanings more vigorously than others" (p. 16).

<div align="center">Textual Analysis</div>

Close textual analysis of television texts has become the preferred method of analysis for television studies scholars "to overcome the common limitations of traditional quantitative content analysis such as limitation to manifest content in to quantifiable categories," according to Fürsich (2009). Fürsich argues, "Textual analysis allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions and omissions of a text. Text is understood in its broader, poststructural, sense as any cultural practice or object that can be 'read'" (pp. 240-241). Fürsich's argument for a deeper, richer understanding through textual analysis has become the hallmark of television studies scholars.

Fiske (1987) argues, "A textual study of television, then, involves three foci: the formal qualities of television programs and their flow; the intertextual relations of television within itself, with other media, and with conversation; and the study of socially situated readers and the process of reading" (p. 16), and Gray and Lotz (2012) maintain a textual analysis explores not only the aesthetics of a program but also examines the text's "relationship to dominant ideology—its impact on and place in the culture and power networks that surround it" (p. 37). They argue that a researcher has to account for a program's audiences, producers, and history as well as its context and acknowledge that each is "intricately interwoven with the others" (p. 22).

The concept of intertexuality is key in the analysis of texts. Fiske (1987), Fairclough (1992), and Gray and Lotz (2012) all argue that examining intertexuality is a necessity of extracting meaning from a text. Intertexuality, according to Fiske, "pre-orient the reader to exploit television's polysemy by activating the text in certain ways, that is by making some meanings rather than others. Studying a text's intertextual relations can provide us with valuable clues to the readings that a particular culture or subculture is likely to produce from it" (p. 108). Genre is one form of intextuality that allows the audience to draw certain meanings from a program before ever viewing—it's funny, thirty minutes, and the protagonist usually gets in and out of some sort of comedic predicament. Holbert, Shah, and Kwak (2003) argue that different genres evoke different feelings (positive or negative) toward political issues. Gray and Lotz (2012) also discuss the concept of paratextuality, all outside material pertaining to the show like pre-press promoting the show like the DVD bonus material, trailers, opening credits, or anything else that falls outside the script of the show, but also influences how an audience reads the show. Gray and Lotz (2012) contend that paratexts work as intertexts to co-create meaning for a program both within the program and from without. This study includes both a linguistic analysis, as prescribed by Fairclough and Fiske, grounded in queer theory, but also a contextualized analysis that considers the historical contexts of LGBTQ representations on network television sitcoms and the current political landscape.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF QUEER TELEVISION

Avila-Saavedra (2009) argues that a queer perspective in media criticism must reach beyond the numeric representations of gays and lesbians toward a broader examination of the hegemonic notions of sexuality, gender, race, and class and how they interact in everyday lives. He contends, "Queer media studies examine how the mass media, as a cultural and social institution, contribute to the maintenance of the sexual status quo expressed by the pre-eminence of heterosexuality in the representation of social interactions" (p. 8). Queer theory is grounded in works of Foucault (1978), Sedgwick (1990), and Butler (1990). Although none of them use the term queer theory, their arguments about sex, sexuality, gender, and power have informed more than two decades of scholarship. Foucault (1978) claims in his *History of Sexuality* that knowledge of sexuality is power and that the absolute means of control over life and death comes through controlling sexual practice—that is defining what is acceptable and what is not. He argues that a society's laws, in order to control life, then begin to operate "more and more around the norm" (p. 144). Foucault claims we think of sexuality as part of our identity—what makes us who we are—when, in fact, sexuality is a social construct that makes us easier to control.

Likewise Butler (1990) argues in her seminal work *Gender Trouble* that sexuality is "always constructed within the terms of discourse and power" and power is "partially" understood in terms of "heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions" (p. 30). Butler contends that heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual practices are all understood and presented through a "framework" that is ultimately an "asymmetrical binary of

masculine/feminine" (p.31). In other words, "unity of gender is the effect of regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality" (p. 31). Queer theorists become more prevalent in the early 1990s as a response to the shift in gay and lesbian rights movement tactics and philosophy.

<div align="center">Roots of Queer Theory</div>

The early movement of homosexuals in the United States, now referred to as the homophile movement, sought social assimilation (Seidman, 1993). Seidman argues that many in the homophile movement saw homosexuality as symptomatic of a psychic abnormality. However, he contends, "the underlying shared humanity of homosexuals and heterosexuals was thought to warrant the elimination of discrimination" (p. 111). The movement did not work to establish a homosexual culture that would separate it from the mainstream in terms of an ethnic minority because the thrust of the movement was to blend the homosexual minority in with the mainstream by eliminating discrimination.

After the Stonewall Riots of 1969, which are seen as the unofficial marker of the beginning of the gay liberation movement, new political and academic thought began to surface. The gay liberation movement first moved toward the destruction of a "sex/gender system" that "locked them into mutually exclusive homo/hetero and feminine/masculine roles" (Seidman, 1993 p. 110). Seidman (1993) claims early liberationists theory operated under the assumption that human nature had "innate polymorphous" and "androgynous" characteristics (p. 110). He argues that it resembled, in the early years (the late 1960s and early 1970s), the postmodernist theory of sexuality, but in the late 1970s it gave way to an "ethnic/minority sociopolitical agenda" (p. 110). Where the liberationist model measures success by how much it upsets the established

system, according to Jagose (1996), the ethnic model, which established gays and lesbians as a minority group, is measured by securing "citizenship rights for lesbian and gay subjects" (p. 61).

Jagose (1996) states, "Ironically, given its origins in a race-based politics, the ethnic model's gay and lesbian subject was white" (p. 62). She argues that it was not just that the majority of the gay and lesbian subjects were white, but that by identifying as a gay or lesbian, a minority, often stripped subjects of other ethnic or racial identifiers. Seidman maintains that at this time there is a push toward community building "around the notion of a unitary lesbian and gay identity" (p. 116).

But the united front fractured over issues of gender and race. The gay liberation broke into at least three main factions, with many smaller groups inside those factions. The mainstream movement consisted of mostly white gay men with the lesbians and gay men of color left contesting the notion of a unitary gay subject (Seidman, 1993). Jagose (1996) claims that, "Lesbians and gays of color, frustrated by the assumption that they would have more in common with white lesbians and gay men than with their own ethnic or racial communities, began to critique both overt and covert racism in the mainstream gay community" (p. 63). According to Herkt (1995), "the gay identity is observably a philosophically conservative construct, based upon premises that no longer have any persuasive academic relationship to contemporary theories of identity or gender" (p. 45).

Although the ethnic model did claim some social change, as Seidman (1993) argues, "it reinforces broadly mainstream social norms that devalue desires, behaviors, and social bonds that involve attraction to both sexes" (p. 123). Moreover, Seidman argues that the unitary gay identity also reinforced the dominant binaries of hetero/homo.

He says, "If homosexuality and heterosexuality are a coupling in which each presupposes the other, each being present in the invocation of the other, and in which this coupling assumes hierarchical forms, then the epistemic and political project of identifying a gay subject reinforces and reproduces this hierarchical figure" (p. 130). In other words, the gay identity not only reinforces the heteronormative but also gives preference to the heterosexist notions of gender, sexual desire, and sexuality.

Jagose (1996) claims that the distinction between the ethnic minority wing of the liberationist movement and the queer movement, which followed, centered on the structuralist notion of a gay identity versus a post-structuralist theory of identification. According to Jagose, the lesbian and gay movements were committed to the idea of an "identity politics in assuming identity as the necessary prerequisite for effective political intervention" (p. 77). Identity is then provided in terms of categories of sexuality (e.g., gay/straight), whereas the post-structuralist notion of identity used in queer theory is "provisional and contingent" (p. 78). Those provisional and contingent concepts of identity make queer difficult to define, but its ambiguity, according to Jagose, is "often cited as the reason for its mobilization" (p. 97). Jagose argues that queer can describe a "wide range of impulses and cultural expressions, including space for describing and expressing bisexual, transsexual, and straight queerness" (p. 97). In the mainstream gay and lesbian movement, identity is not built on sexuality but on an ethnic minority model that seeks to normalize gay and lesbian relations to further gay and lesbian civil rights.

Being Normal

This process of normalization is problematic, according to Warner (1999) because it intends to define identity not on the basis of sex but on a sexual identity. By eliminating

a politics of sex, Warner argues, a hierarchy is created, which sorts "people by greater or lesser degrees of privilege" (p. 40). Furthermore, he claims, "Some people pay a higher price for the loathing of queer sexuality (or gender variance) than others. In the right social quarter, if you behave yourself, you can have a decent life as a normal homo—at least, up to a point. Those with the biggest fig leaves stand, always, at the top of the hierarchy" (p. 40). Warner claims members of the movement have never been able to resolve the sense that sex and dignity, which is often defined by no sex, are incompatible. He says at this moment in the movement those are the folks who are winning. Warner argues that like most stigmatized groups, gays and lesbians have devised a course to overcome stigma. The course he argues "was to win acceptance by the dominant culture, rather than to change the self-understanding of that culture" (p. 50).

Warner (1999) argues people did not really care about what normal was or being normal until the nineteenth century and the advent of statistical information that "surrounded" people with numbers "that tell them what normal is" (p. 53). He claims things like census figures, market demographics, opinion polls, social science studies, psychological surveys, clinical tests, sales figures, trends, etc. all perpetuated the obsession with normal. He claims, "Under the conditions of mass culture, they [people] are constantly bombarded by images of statistical populations and their norms, continually invited to make an implicit comparison between themselves and the mass of other bodies" (pp. 53-54). Thus, the normal is idealized and sought by people—especially those stigmatized by society.

The (Hetero) Normal

Warner argues that the model for normal then becomes the proffered heterosexual model—for which all other relationships or sexualities are judged in society. Berlant and Warner (1998) said:

> Heteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education; as well as in the conventions and effects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture. It is hard to see these fields as heteronormative because the sexual culture straight people inhabit is so diffuse, a mix of languages they are just developing with premodern notions of sexuality so ancient that their material conditions feel hardwired into personhood. (p. 554-555)

They argue that heteronormativity is a fundamental "motor of social organization in the United States" (p. 564). So that heteronormative forms of intimacy are supported in the marriage and family law, in the domestic sphere of the home, in work, and in politics. They contend that queer people are sometimes able to invent versions of heterosexual institutions, but they do so by "betrothing" the "couple form and its language of personal significance," which does nothing to transform the "material and ideological conditions that divide intimacy from history, politics, and publics" (p. 562).

Duggan (2003) argues that the process of normalization is not only a product of heteronormative, dominant ideology but also a product of the neoliberal, assimilationist politics of the gay and lesbian movement that began in the 1990s. She contends that on the surface, an era of greater acceptance of gays and lesbians appeared to be on the rise.

However, she claims, acceptance was mostly aimed at "assimilated, gender-appropriate, politically mainstream portions of the gay population" (p. 44). She claims that this shift was noticeable in politics, the work place, and media representations. She also contended that the neoliberal "equality machine" adopted tactics that no longer represented a broad-based progressive movement but had become "the lobbying, legal, and public relations firms for an increasingly narrow gay, moneyed elite" (p. 45). Consequently, she argues, the fight for same sex marriage and openly gay military service has replaced "the array of political, cultural, and economic issues that galvanized the national groups as they first emerged" (p. 45).

Duggan (2003) terms the neoliberal sexual politics the "new homonormativity," which she claims, "is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p. 50). She notes homonormativity is not parallel with Warner's term heteronormativity because it in no way mimics the "institutions promoting and sustaining heterosexual coupling" (p. 94), but that it does work to bring "the desired public into political salience as a perceived mainstream, primarily through a rhetorical remapping of public/private boundaries designed to shrink gay public spheres, and redefine gay equality against the 'civil rights agenda' and 'liberationism,' as access to the institutions of domestic privacy, the 'free' market, and patriotism" (p. 51). She argues then that there is a rhetorical recoding of the LGBTQ movement where civil rights becomes defined by a few conservatizing institutions (marriage, military service, parenthood), and the right to privacy becomes "domestic

confinement." All of this adds up to "corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic public life" (pp. 65-66). Ward and Schneider (2009) claim attention must be given to how normative sexual practices can take hold even within feminist, socialist, and gay and lesbian movements. They claim that particular attention must be given to heteronormativity's "companion," homonormativity, "or the pursuit of lesbian and gay rights traditionally granted to white, middle-class heterosexuals, such as privacy, domesticity, and consumption" (p. 435).

<div align="center">LGBTQ Representations on Television</div>

Scholars often argue that there is a history of heteronormative and homonormative LGBTQ representations in television programs. Media scholar Dow (2001) argues that representations of same-sex attraction have existed since the beginning of television. She points to a drag queen routine performed by Milton Berle on the *Milton Berle Show*. She also maintains "there were powerful gay undertones in the comic relationships of Jack Benny" on his show (p. 129) and the frequent use of homosexual characters as villains in 1950s television. While these may not have been particularly positive portrayals of homosexual individuals on television, the representations did offer an early visibility of homosexual characters in a time when homosexuality was only discussed in relation to pathology and criminality—not the subject of popular television programming.

The early representations of homosexuals became more visible in the 1970s with gay-themed made-for-TV movies that featured not only gay characters but also gay-related issues like the AIDS epidemic. Dow argues there were rules, however, for

"repressing homosexuality" in television portrayals during the 1970s and 1980s. Those

rules, according to Dow (2001), were:

> First, representations of gays and lesbians were incorporated as "one time"
>
> appearances rather than as integral elements or regular characters in a series
>
> narrative . . . Second, such characters are never "incidentally" gay; they appeared
>
> in episodes or movies in which their sexuality was "the problem" to be solved;
>
> third, the problem they represent is depicted largely in terms of its effect on
>
> heterosexuals. Homosexual characters are rarely shown in their own communities,
>
> homes, or same-sex romantic relationships but are depicted in terms of their place
>
> in the lives of heterosexuals. Finally, and perhaps most crucially for a commercial
>
> medium like television, representations of gay or lesbian sex, or even desire, are
>
> absent. (p. 129)

Dow claims that a few of the rules were subverted in the 1990s but almost always in the

context of a comedic situation. She also asserts that the few prime-time representations of

gays and lesbians that have taken the risk of depicting actual gay and lesbian sexual

interaction "have predictably run afoul of sponsors and conservative interest groups" (p.

130). In contrast, by the early 2000s, gay representations in the media began to summon

large audiences, which yielded more advertising revenue (Streitmatter, 2009).

The myth of the gay buying bloc—affluent gay men with mountains of

expendable income for luxury products (Sender, 2001)—fueled the newest

representations of gay men on television. However, this new obsession with the buying

bloc alienated a larger swath of the diverse LGBTQ community in favor of the bank role

associated white, middle class gay men (Aslinger, 2009). With the emergence of shows

like NBC's *Will & Grace* and BRAVO TV's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, the networks sought not only to represent the desired gay audience but also to attract the viewers in a wider heterosexual audience who wanted to relate.

Sitcoms Go Gay

One of the first reoccurring gay roles on television was Billy Crystal's Jodie on the ABC sitcom *Soap* (1977 to 1981). The show has been both criticized for its reinforcement of prevalent gay stereotypes from the late 1970s and lauded for its groundbreaking depiction of a gay character on primetime network television (Streitmatter, 2009). Streitmatter argues that the show included many demeaning references or names for the gay character including: fruit, sissy, homo, and pansy, which were generally used by family members during family functions and moments around the table. According to Streitmatter, this somehow lessened the severity and the vitriol of the comments.

At the same time, Streitmatter also claims the most repeated negative message about homosexuality in *Soap* was the reinforcement of the "suicidal homosexual" (p. 38). Crystal's character, at one point in the show's four seasons, attempted suicide because of his unrequited love for a man who did not want to accept his same-sex attraction. Despite reinforcing mainstream stereotypes of gay men, Streitmatter claims the show also challenged other stereotypes. He argues that Crystal "put a new and highly attractive face on homosexuality, as his on-screen persona was exceedingly personable and likeable" (p. 40). Streitmatter also claims that Crystal's character, who was athletic and "a man of honor and courage" worked against the established caricatures of gay men during the time. Larry Gross (2001) found the representation problematic because of the changes in

Crystal's character, which seemed to grow less queer throughout the course of the show. Gross (2001) argues:

> [Jodie] began as a flamboyant gay character, toying with a sex-change operation: when he first appeared he was wearing his mother's dress. Shortly afterward, he attempted suicide when his closeted lover left him. The next season Jody realized he was actually bisexual becoming involved with a woman and fathering a child. By the time the show was canceled Jody was embroiled in a custody fight and preparing to marry another woman. (p. 84)

Streitmatter (2009) argues that Crystal's character helped to facilitate a conversation between "gays and non-gays" during the 1970s by talking about what gay visibility meant for straight men as well as for gay men. Streitmatter's analysis of *Soap* only discusses the surface of the show without delving into how the show fit with the dominant view of sexuality and the gay and lesbian movement's ideologies. Also taking into account Gross' short but problematized assessment of the show's gay character, the first reoccurring gay character on network television probably worked to further pathologize queer sexuality while giving preference to normal, heterosexual sex.

I'm Gay If That's OK

Becker (2006) argues that by the 1990s the culture of male homosexual panic, the conflict between heterosexual identity and the fear of being labeled homosexual, was joined with a culture of heterosexual panic, which he maintains "describes what happens when heterosexual men and women, still insecure about the boundary between gay and straight, confront an increasingly accepted homosexuality" (p. 23). He argues that many things contributed to "straight panic" in the 1990s, including the gay and lesbian civil

rights movement and the "visibility of gayness in popular culture . . . on primetime television" (p. 23).

Becker maintains that this shift from homosexual panic to heterosexual panic was indicative of an American society that had a greater acceptance of social difference and diversity—helped along by things like the debate over openly gay service members in the United States military. He says, "Increasingly, Straight America(ns) faced a world where being gay wasn't so bad, where being straight wasn't so effortless, and where social identities in general and sexual identities in particular were increasingly relevant even as the line between them became ever more indeterminate" (p. 24).

Additionally, Becker (2006) argues that these "new circumstances" could be "disquieting" for straight, mainstream American culture, and that these anxieties were in part exacerbated and negotiated via television programming during the 1990s and into the early 2000s. Gross (2001) makes a similar but more nuanced argument. He says the hallmark of gay and lesbian characters on television is that they are non-threatening to heterosexual viewers. Dow (2001) makes a similar argument in her critique of the 1997 coming out of Ellen Degeneres' character on *Ellen*. Dow argues, ". . . a useful parallel to be drawn between *Ellen* and *Cosby* [*Show*], which is that just as *Cosby* was often interpreted as a sitcom about black people that was largely geared toward the comfort of white people, Ellen was a sitcom about a lesbian that was largely geared toward the comfort of heterosexuals" (p. 129). The comfort of heterosexuals while portraying a lesbian woman liberating herself from the closet is, as Dow assesses, a strategy used by the network to claim great visibility for gays and lesbians, but at the same time, as not to upset the heterosexist dominant culture.

Dow also makes another important argument in the assessment of *Ellen* and the position of personal versus political in her coming out story. According to Dow, the coming out episodes and surrounding press worked to create an air of personal liberation for DeGeneres and her character, which avoided any political statement that applied to a wider range of queer sexualities. Dow argues that this "repression of the political—is classic television strategy in its representations of marginalized groups, and it blinds us to the contradictions inherent in claiming political progress from media representation" (p. 136). However, she claims media can empower certain groups, if only for a short time, but that empowerment is fragile at best. Dow concludes, "Media avoidance of such political stakes is more than mere omission; it should be recognized as an expression, indeed a production, of power" (p. 137). In other words, the media has the power to eliminate the political but give the aura of political progress by virtue of its power to construct meaning.

Will & Grace

The coming out episodes of *Ellen* in many ways paved the way for other networks to roll out additional shows with gay characters in the late 1990s. Perhaps the most watched and most written about shows with openly gay characters and cast members began with NBC's *Will & Grace*, which featured the first major gay character in a network television sitcom and was launched in 1998. In 2003, the cable network Bravo TV, owned by NBC, began airing *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. *Will & Grace*, at the peak of its eight-year run, reached a viewership of 19 million people (Streitmatter, 2009). Several media scholars have both praised *Will & Grace* for its first-in-television depiction of main gay characters and criticized it for its problematic representations of LGBTQ

subjects (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Cooper, 2003; Linneman, 2008; Mitchell, 2005; Quimby, 2005; Shugart, 2003).

Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) provided one of the first examinations of *Will & Grace*. They conclude that *Will & Grace*, though providing a first in television history with a gay lead character, relied on "familiar situation comedy conventions" like equating "gayness with a lack of masculinity . . . sexual tension and delayed consummation, infantilizes the program's most potentially subversive characters, and emphasizes characters' interpersonal relationships rather than the characters' connection to the larger social world" (p. 87). Further, the researchers argue that the show's adherence to such conventions did little to transgress mainstream norms that privilege heterosexual relationships, and, thus, "can be seen as heteronormative" (p. 87). The show's failure to transgress the dominant views of sexuality and gayness is further seen, according to Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002), in Will's character because "he offers a different model for homosexuality" (p. 89). However, they and other scholars point to Will's "different" sexuality as a reinforcement of the heteronormative because of his ability to "pass" as straight (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Shugart, 2003).

Battles and Hilton-Morrow also contend that the show emphasizes interpersonal relationships focused on gender dyads (male/female) rather than the characters' connections to a larger social world, which could have possibly led straight viewers to the assumption that we have entered into a "post-gay" period, "in which the struggle for gay rights has already been won and that an individual's personal rejection of homophobic attitudes equals the improved social standing of sexual minorities. Viewers are congratulated for their acceptance of gays and lesbians, but without any real

consideration of the compromised lives of gays and lesbians within our heteronormative culture" (p. 102). Mitchell (2005) argues that this avoidance of political messages and adherence to heterosexual conventions allowed the show to be successful and suffer little in the way of public backlash.

Mitchell (2005) calls it the show's neo-liberal façade, which she argues, allowed "the show to appeal to and further normalize oppressive ideologies of class, race, sexuality, and patriarchy even while appearing to advocate on behalf of the gay Other" (p. 1052). Mitchell (2005) argues that the show's writers use exaggeration and absurdity to neutralize any exploration into political or controversial subjects like race, class, gender, or sexuality. She claims, "*Will & Grace* is neither wholly subversive of nor entirely complicit in hegemonic relations of power. Rather, like the larger culture in which it is produced, the program is a site of contradiction, a site of ideological contest in which values, practices, and social norms are enacted, challenged, and negotiated" (p. 1063). She maintains the show did not work to produce a narrative that would counter racism, sexism, or heterosexism though the show did contradict the studio system's reliance on heterosexuality as the norm for primetime television. However, she argues, "the inclusion of sexual difference may enable the program to more effectively secure systemic social inequity because it appears progressive" (p. 1064).

Similarly, Shugart (2003) argues shows like *Will & Grace* (gay man/straight woman partnerships) perpetuate the notion to women that only conventionally defined straight men carry out sexist practices and that gay men, because of their lack of sexual attraction toward straight women, cannot perpetrate the practices. She claims this notion renormalizes "sexism under a host of 'exceptional' circumstances" and the "implications

for gay men are that the price of privilege is sexism, a fact that necessarily defines them by their heteronormative sexual relationships with women. The gay men in these configurations thus become patriarchal allies—rather than adversaries—in efforts to naturalize and reproduce heteronormative politics" (p. 89). Quimby (2005) in reference to Will's and Grace's relationship on the show, argues that the dynamics of their relationships could simultaneously defy the dominant ideology concerning heterosexual relationships and marriage while at the same time bolstering the dominant ideology. Similar to *Will & Grace*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* has met a mix of critical views that generally see the show as a missed opportunity to actually transgress the dominant ideologies of sexuality and heterosexual privilege.

The Fab Five

The year 2003 was labeled by media outlets as the "Year of the Queer" because of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Lawrence v. Texas, which declared sodomy laws unconstitutional, and because of the popularity of shows like *Will & Grace* and the newly launched *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Bravo TV went from the outskirts of television networks to the top of the ratings charts with a new reality make over show, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Bravo, affiliated with NBC under the larger umbrella of Universal, landed a moneymaker in *Queer Eye*, and critics and viewers, along with advertisers, fawned over the show. Although the show provided an outlet for a nearly invisible group, gay men, in mainstream television, it often did so by ignoring the overarching heteronormative hegemony at play in society (Papacharissi & Fernback, 2008; Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006).

Westerfelhaus and Lacroix (2006) critically examine the first two seasons of *Queer Eye* to shed light on what they termed a "strategic rhetoric of heteronormativity," which speaks to the natural or normal status given to heterosexuals and heterosexuality in culture, law, politics, religion, and "social understandings of human sexuality" (p. 428). They argue that the typical episode of *Queer Eye,* "functions as a ritual that supports the sociosexual order while seeming to challenge the order's heterosexist attitudes and values." In other words, the show intends to challenge the dominant view of queer individuals and problematize heteronormativity through visibility, but, in actuality, the content further perpetuates the dominant social order, which privileges the heterosexual as natural and normal and relegates queer sex to dirty, criminal, and unnatural. The five protagonists of *Queer Eye,* the researchers argue, are given a brief pass within the heterosexual hegemony to violate some boundaries with the understanding that they will not go too far and that they will eventually return to status quo. They contend, "Rather than threatening the dominant order, such rituals actually promote social stability, even as they seem to challenge it. They do so by reaffirming the values and reasserting the social structure of the dominant order" (p. 430).

Therefore, they argue the "Fab Five" contested the hierarchy with homoerotic innuendo, touching, and teasing, but failed to actually upset the hierarchy by stopping short of challenging the sociosexual hegemony (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). Similarly, Papacharissi and Fernback (2008) claim that *Queer Eye's* departure from the heteronormative—it reversed the typical role of the gay man in society where the gay characters had a dominant role over the straight men—was a rouse. The presence of dominant gay characters appeared to transgress the dominant heteronormative status quo

and hail the homonormative alternative but fell short. Papacharissi and Fernback also argue, "The prominence of gay characters allows gay audiences to feel empowered, but at the same time, is packaged within the trendy aesthetic of gay chic, which does not capture the realities of the gay conscience. Like gay window advertising, *Queer Eye* sustains popularity by overtly and covertly 'winking' to a sexually diverse audience, while resting on commodified portrayals of sexuality" (p. 352).

The researchers also argue that although there appear to be homonormative discourses present in the show, the dominant heteronormative power structures are "ultimately reinforced." They claim the role reversal present in *Queer Eye* "advertises a veneer of homonormativity," but the text ultimately marginalizes the queer characters into traditional heterosexist categories that negatively portray gay men or stereotype them as more feminine. The gay men in the show are experts at grooming, housekeeping, decorating, cooking, and culture, which paints them into the realm of the feminine and does nothing to subordinate the dominant heterosexist vision of homosexuality.

According to Papacharissi and Fernback (2008), the show also complicates the relationship between the gay characters and the straight men they are making over. The show presents the relationships, which are portrayed as positive, as transient. There is no inclination that the relationships have lasting power, rather they are only the product of an unusual or extraordinary situation—they are not normal in the heterosexual sense. Ultimately, Papacharissi and Fernback argue the reality show was designed and aired to appeal to a wide variety of viewers. The researchers refer to the "polysemic structure" of the show as a source of its attraction to a wide mainstream audience. In other words,

because so many different meanings could be attached to the show from different people, it appealed to both straight and queer audiences, which, in turn, appealed to advertisers.

The criticism from researchers regarding programming either aimed at or representative of queer audiences suggests a lack of a queer audience; however, queer audiences generally viewed the programs in large numbers as well. Westerfelhaus and Lacroix (2006) argue that queer audiences, to some extent, have so long been deprived of representation of any sort in the mainstream television and film industries that any representation seems to be a step forward. The same is true, to some extent, for viewers of programming on Logo TV, the television network created to attract gay and lesbian viewers. The images seen have been the primary images and representations projected by the mainstream. Therefore, they seem to be "normal" even in the context of a queer network. The heteronormalization of queer representations in television, which are bought into by both the mainstream and queer community, have created lucrative television franchises and an air of collusion that not only aids in the perpetuation of the heteronormative hegemony in the mainstream but also within queer media as well.

What previous television representations of queer sexuality all seem to have in common is the avoidance of a politics of sex. The characters are stripped of their political agency, which is often replaced with a personal narrative of liberation that is often centered on same-sex marriage, parenthood, military service, or identity politics. These more conservative aims of the gay and lesbian community have a long history within the movement, but are also challenged by a queer critique that argues for a wider representation of queer sexuality and a politics of sex—which is seen as more subversive to the heteronormative constructions of sexuality, gender, race, and class.

Method

For the purposes of this study, I will analyze the discourse of sexuality, gender, race, and class within the context of LGBTQ characters on primetime television—specifically in the five programs mentioned previously. The shows will be analyzed via a textual analysis using Stuart Hall's (1986) preferred reading theory. Fiske's (1984) argues that television is polysemy, meaning multiple meanings can be extracted from the same text. Similarly, Hall asserts that viewers negotiate with the text via their own social setting, which may lie outside the dominant ideology. Hall (1986) contends that text can be read from three, different positions—preferred, negotiated, and oppositional—within the dominant ideology. Hall maintains all discourse operates through a code. Further, he contends, that discourse is sometimes decoded through a dominant reading in which the consumer uses the dominant cues of society to understand the meaning assigned by the producer of the information—this is the preferred reading. A negotiated reading is produced "by a viewer who fits into the dominant ideology in general but who needs to inflect it locally to take account of his or her social position" (Fiske, 1992). In other words, the reader allies with the dominant ideology in some instances but conflicts with it in others. Finally the oppositional reading is a total rejection of the dominant reading. Hall (1986) claims some audience members may "detotalize" or deconstruct the "preferred" code to reconstruct an alternative message within "some alternative framework of reference" (p. 138). The oppositional reading of the text allows for rejection of the dominant cues and assignment of meaning based on an oppositional viewpoint.

The initial reading included 50 hours of television programming from the 2012-2013 network television season—*Glee* (22 episodes, 45 minutes each), *Modern Family* (24 episodes, 22 minutes each), *The New Normal* (22 episodes, 22 minutes each), *Go On* (22 episodes, 22 minutes each), and *Happy Endings* (23 episodes, 22 minutes each). From the overall database of episodes (Appendix A), only episodes involving LGBTQ characters or subject matter directly were closely analyzed in the second round of analysis, and, upon further analysis, particular episodes or portions of episodes that represented prevalent themes and issues were pinpointed for use in the final study. The analysis of the text (the television programs) underwent a three-part process that began with a detailed descriptive analysis of the text. A descriptive analysis for each show was done independently to ensure all major themes were discussed. The final analysis provides readings from three of the five shows, *Modern Family,* those shows with main gay characters and prominent gay-themed plot lines. As stated before, a queer analysis of television programs that does not consider any aspect of identity beyond sexuality silences those who identify at intersections of sexuality, gender, race, and class.

Chapter III focuses on the construction of a normative sexuality in the programs, with specific attention given to the shaming of queer sexuality, which does not mesh well with the dominant heteronormative conceptualization of sexuality and the homonormative construction of "romantic love." Chapter IV takes a deeper look at how the issues of privilege, race, and gender in the network television sitcoms. The main focus is on the symbolic annihilation of LGBTQ people of color and the subversion of women via a heterodominant gender structure. Chapter V examines issues of class and consumption in the programs, which excludes any queer individual not belonging to a

constructed gay buying bloc consisting of affluent gay men with large disposable

incomes. Lastly, Chapter VI includes my conclusion, which consists of implications for

LGBTQ people and future areas of research.

As stated previously, the purpose of this study is to analyze the discourse

regarding LGBTQ issues and people in network television sitcoms. This research is

important in understanding the American public's most recent shifts in opinion on issues

of marriage equality and the legitimacy of same-sex relationships. I examined the

potential for television programs to normalize a particular brand of gay and lesbian

identity, which possibly resembles the dominant heterosexuality. This normalized

identity aids in the advancement of white, middle class gays and lesbians who privatize

sexuality and mimic dominant conventions of sexuality, gender, race, and class in the

public sphere. Further, it is important to examine the underlying ideology of these

programs to extract meanings that have the potential to further subvert queer notions of

sex and sexual politics, race, gender, and class, which only work to further marginalize

those that do not fit the dominant mold.

CHAPTER III

GOOD GAY, BAD QUEER

Yet the image of the Good Gay is never invoked without its shadow in mind—the

Bad Queer, the kind who has sex, who talks about it, and who builds with other

queers a way of life that ordinary folk do not understand or control.

—Michael Warner (1999, p. 114)

Gay and lesbian nuptials are nothing new to primetime, network situational

comedies. In the mid-1990s, two popular sit-coms, *Roseanne* and *Friends*, depicted

wedding or commitment ceremonies involving recurring, gay and lesbian secondary

characters. The popular ABC sitcom, *Roseanne*, featured the first-ever primetime

television gay wedding on December 12, 1995. The central character, Roseanne, plans

the ceremony for her business partner and recurring character, Leon. The over-the-top

ceremony described by Leon during the episode as "one gigantic, offensive, Roseanniacle

ball of wrong" (Walker & Mancuso, 1995) essentially worked to show, in contrast to the

spectacle planned by Roseanne, that ceremonies between two men are the same as

between a man and a woman. In other words, the ceremony demonstrated that gay

weddings, like straight weddings, are all about love between two people.

That episode of *Rosanne* followed by an early 1996 episode of the NBC sitcom

Friends, which featured the lesbian wedding of Ross' ex-wife, Carol, to another woman,

focused on an equality of sameness in their message regarding same-sex unions. Candice

Gingrich, the lesbian sister of then Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who

vehemently opposed same-sex civil unions or marriage, starred as the officiate in the

Friends same-sex wedding episode. Candice Gingrich's script seems to be more of a

commentary aimed at the religious right than at gay and lesbian audience members. Gingrich's character begins the wedding service by saying, "You know, nothing makes God happier than when two people, any two people, come together in love. Friends, family, we're gathered here today to join Carol and Susan in holy matrimony" (Abrams & Schlamme 1996). Gingrich's script, which emphasized sameness as equality, was not a novel idea on 1990s primetime television. According to Becker (2006), many television narratives in the 1990s revolved round the notion that gays and lesbians were "indistinguishable" from straight people (p. 185). The assimilationist narrative, as many have argued (Becker, 2006; Dow, 2001; Duggan, 2003; Warner, 1999), works more to ease the minds of straight viewers than to promote the rights of gays and lesbians. By presenting an image of gay and lesbian characters void of sexual agency, the television shows do not challenge the heteronormative assumptions regarding marriage, family, and sexuality, which is what Warner (1999) argues is the goal of many same-sex marriage proponents within the gay and lesbian movement. He argues marriage rights would further solidify societal sex norms that alienate alternatives to the monogamous, married couple unit. He claims, "An alternative would be harder than ever to articulate or legitimate since marriage would have received the imprimatur of the very movement that had once come into being to open up different life horizons for them" (p. 93).

Warner argues that an assimilationist view that aimed to make gay and straight indistinguishable would create a divide between the good gay, the gay man who reflects the dominant heterosexual world in every way, and the bad queer, a person who works to transgress gender norms, explore sexuality publicly, or refuses to mimic the heteronormative prescription for relationships and families. The good gay became the

norm for 1990s and 2000s television sitcoms. Has the same trend continued into the current decade with so many more shows focused on gay and lesbian main characters and themes?

The purpose of this chapter is to explore more recent depictions of gay couples in network television sitcoms, and how those depictions further work to normalize a gay sexuality that promotes heteronormative and homonormative ideals regarding marriage, parenting, and sexual expression. First, I will examine the history of the marriage equality movement along with the opposition to the movement from both within and outside the LGBTQ rights movement, and how the movement, in many ways, works to promote heterosexuality as a desired model and queer sexuality as the antithesis of equality. I will also discuss same-sex parenting as an extension of same-sex marriage and heterosexual privilege. Secondly, I will examine the relationships of the gay couples for evidence of heteronormative and homonormative privileging and the symbolic annihilation of any queer subject falling outside the preferred heteronormative model. Warner (1999) argues that most arguments for marriage equality either work to shame queer sexuality or work to annihilate any other alternative sexuality

<div align="center">Marriage Equality as a Movement</div>

Warner (1999) claims marriage did not become the "dominant" issue of the lesbian and gay movement until the 1990s. The marriage movement began with a case decided by the Hawaii Supreme Court in 1993. In Baehr v. Lewin, the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying amounted to discrimination. In response to the Hawaii court ruling, federal lawmakers successfully passed the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. DOMA, among other things, excluded the federal

government from recognition of same-sex marriages allowed by individual states, meaning all rights given to heterosexual married couples could not be given to same-sex married couples even if they were legally married in the United States. Before Baehr v. Lewin, the idea of marriage equality occasionally surfaced. Since the 1970s, the Hawaii case and a few other instances of gay and lesbian couples trying unsuccessfully to attain marriage rights were the thrust of the steps taken (Warner, 1999). Warner argues, "The mere posing of the issue was a jolt. It made heterosexuality of marriage visible, to many people, for the first time . . . And it advanced a claim of equality that had undeniable appeal" (p. 87). The topic of same-sex marriage remained quiet for twenty-five years within the queer movement for many reasons, according to Warner, all of which center on the "need to resist the state regulation of sexuality" (p. 88).

Warner (1999) reasons that marriage rights and state sanctioned gay sex would further solidify societal sex norms that alienate alternatives to the married unit. He maintains "an alternative would be harder than ever to articulate or legitimate since marriage would have received the imprimatur of the very movement that had once come into being to open up different life horizons for them" (p. 93). Similarly, Prasad (2008) claims marriage has prejudicial effects on society, which include "the fortification of inequality through the reification of patriarchy and heterosexism, and the unnecessary regulation of human sexual expression" (p. 195). The concept of sex complementarity, that there are essential differences between men and women thus making opposite-sex relationships more legitimate and whole, plays a major role in the functioning of the heterosexual, patriarchal institution of marriage. Prasad claims sex complementarity has been the foundation for how marriage as an institution has been viewed in our culture;

thus, heterosexual marriage is conflated with natural and normal. Both Warner (1999) and Prasad (2008) argue that the conflation of heteronormative with natural and good problematizes any alternatives. For that reason, gay and lesbian relationships that resemble the sex complementarity then are seen as legitimate and good while any other relationship that falls outside of that construct or in some way challenges the patriarchy is not natural or bad. The prescribed heteronormative model includes private sexuality, gender binary roles, race, and class.

Warner (1999) claims that one of the arguments in favor of same-sex marriage is that it would normalize queer behavior as well as queer "self understanding" (p. 111). He claims that some marriage supporters see marriage as a way to change the sex lives of gays and lesbians—a way to "not challenge the norms of straight culture" or "flaunt sexuality" or live "differently from ordinary folk" (p. 113). They see marriage as a way to "civilize" the sexual culture of gay men. Warner contends that many of the arguments for same-sex marriage rely on the same homophobia used in the arguments from anti-gay and anti-ame-sex marriage opponents. Warner sees the fight for same-sex marriage as a choice between two arguments: "Embrace the politics of shame outright, allowing married gay couples to be relieved of stigma in order to make its coercive effects felt all the more by the unmarried; or simply deny that the legal institution of marriage has any connection to the politics of shame at all" (p. 114). In other words, abandon the broader fight for social justice to extend a privilege to a few, who may be able to avoid stigmatization or symbolically annihilate anyone who does not fit the mold or subscribe to the argument. Warner contends marriage is a privilege—a package that is sanctioned and enforced by a third party, the state. Marriage is not needed, however, to extend the

benefits of marriage to people outside the institution, which are social justice issues and should be fought for as such.

Warner states there are no specific benefits to same-sex marriage in a broader queer movement. Green (2010), on the other hand, argued that contrary to the warnings of queer and feminist activists and researchers, many gay and lesbian married couples do not uniformly subscribe to modern marriage conventions such as monogamy and heteronormative gender roles, meaning same-sex marriage could offer a queer rendering of heteronormative marriage.

Queering marriage

Some researchers argue same-sex marriage provides a way in which to challenge the patriarchy of marriage by upsetting the dominant/submissive dichotomy, which is analogous with heteronormative marriage (Green, 2010; Prasad, 2008). Queering of marriage then transgresses the privilege of marriage by bucking not only the patriarchal conventions of heteronormative marriage but also by bucking the homonormative notions of love and romance (Clare, 2013). The heteronormative and homonormative conceptions of marriage work to depoliticize sexuality and the struggle to obtain social justice through creating same-sex marriage in the patriarchal image and grounding marriage in the visceral conceptions of romance and love. Prasad (2008) contends, "Same-sex marriage poses a clear threat to the patriarchal code. By obfuscating the sexed rule that husbands are to dominate over their wives, same-sex marriage posits the institution of marriage in a state of transgression from orthodoxy" (p. 208). Prasad (2008) also maintains:

>   The queer marriage is not so much concerned about the anatomy of those engaged
>   in marriage as it is preoccupied with destabilizing the normalization of

heterosexual patriarchy. In sum, the queer marriage seeks to defy the dichotomy of good (read: heterosexual, male-headed) versus bad (read: homosexual, female-headed) households it makes marriage more ameliorable by not excluding the already disenfranchised from having full standing in the institution. (p. 206)

However, Prasad (2008) warns that if the patriarchal code that has ruled marriage historically continues to be unchallenged after same-sex marriage rights are gained, then same-sex marriage becomes a tool for symmetrical equality, and resembles the heteronormative. Further, he claims that marriage equality would not act as a "substantively liberating endeavor" from oppressive societal norms and conventions (p. 209).

Similar to the heteronormative conception of marriage, with patriarchal pitfalls, the homonormative conception of marriage works to privilege marriage through romance as a means to be normal and apolitical (Clare, 2013). In other words, the transgression of gay intimacy or sex can be camouflaged in romance. Romance blends queer sexuality in with the heterosexual world around it. Clare argues, "With love, you can appear so long as you disappear: gay intimacy can appear when it disappears in universal love" (p. 794). Therefore, same-sex relationships can appear so long as they are described in a romantic way, but not in a way that makes queer sexuality visible. According to Grindstaff (2003), a similar invisibility is forced upon women within the discourse of marriage and sexuality. Grindstaff argues that heterosexual women are not allowed sexual agency, desire, or practices because women work as the agent of monogamy within in the heteronormative. However, within the homonormative, lesbians act in contrast to the perceived promiscuity of gay men. In both the heteronormative and homonormative,

lesbians are marginalized because the lesbian identity is voided of sexual behavior; thus, it is not important to the maintenance of the heteronormative marriage.

The struggle to queer marriage, to transgress dominant conceptions of marriage and relationships, can also be seen in same-sex parenting. Gay and lesbian couples who raise children find themselves in a position of either reinforcing the heteronormative or challenging the norms.

Same-Sex Parenting

Hopkins, Sorensen, and Taylor (2013) argue that same-sex parents continually negotiate what they term a "dialectic of accommodation and resistance," meaning that they simultaneously confirm and reject heteronormative family structures. They argue that while same-sex families may, more than ever, resemble their heterosexual counterparts, they have not "fully embraced the heteronormative ideal" (p. 106). They found that gay and lesbian parents acquire children in a variety of non-traditional ways, raise children to adopt more fluid gender roles, shirk traditional divisions of labor within the home, and do not always adopt monogamous sexual relationships. However, "When same-sex couples become parents and seek legal recognition of their relationships through marriage, they embrace a fundamentally heteronormative and heterosexist institution that has traditionally defined what kinds of sexual relationships, gender roles, and families are legitimate" (Ortyl, 2012, p. 106). Often the question becomes more about how the children adjust to same-sex parenting and what long-term effects gay and lesbian parents' sexuality may have on their children. In fact, multiple studies have been conducted to answer that question—can same-sex parents provide a nurturing and healthy environment for children?

Studies conducted generally rely on quantitative analyses of self-reported survey data that compares children with same-sex parents to those of opposite-sex parents or single parents, with mixed results. Other studies, such as the one conducted by Landau (2009), examine the way media presents the children of same-sex couples. She argues, "The progeny of same-sex parents are portrayed like lab rats in a social experiment, testing the homophobic hypothesis that gay and lesbian parents make gay children" (p. 91). Landau claims these representations depict gay-headed households as problematic when compared to the normalcy of opposite-sex counterparts. Further, the U.S. print media often presents same-sex parenting as acceptable only if the children are properly masculine or feminine and straight. Landau claims that often news media rely on a "common trope of heterosexual reproduction" (p. 90). This trope privileges, according to Landau, heterosexual, biological reproduction—intercourse between a male parent and female parent. She contends these constructions "'other' the range of origins of children of same-sex parents, thus relegating them to an outer social-scientific space" (p. 90). This social-scientific space relegates the children to the position of the studied rather than the living—as a question to be answered. Landau argues that mass media outlets generally discuss the sexuality of children of same-sex parents as if continuing the social science experimentation. The stories often assertively pronounce the children's heterosexuality because, as Landau argues, "Homosexuality is not preferred and gay parenting is only good for its role in repeating extreme heterosexuality in children" (p. 92).

For example, in 2012, a study published by Regnerus (2012) received a great deal of media attention because the researcher claims children of heterosexual parents are better adjusted and succeed at higher rates when they are raised by their married father

and mother, who remain married throughout the child's life. Regnerus also claims previous research that suggested the children of lesbian parents do as well as those with opposite-sex parents is flawed because the samples used in those studies were limited. In the same edition of the *Social Science Research* journal, Marks (2012) argues that differences between the children of lesbian mothers and those raised by a married father and mother include: (a) health, mortality, and suicide risks, (b) drug and alcohol abuse, (c) criminality and incarceration, (d) intergenerational poverty, (e) education and/or labor force contribution, early sexual activity and early childbearing, and (g) divorce rates as adults. (p. 735). Marks asserts that a brief released by the American Psychological Association, which stated the children of lesbian and gay parents lead as successful and happy of lives as their counterparts in heterosexual families, may have been premature and not guided by appropriate and accurate research.

All of the research presented in that edition of *Social Science Research* is concerned with the subject of children raised by same-sex parents, which are justified, in the words of the researchers, because of a shifting cultural climate in which same-sex parenting is becoming more and more common (Amato, 2012; Eggebeen, 2012; Regnerus, 2012; Marks, 2012). Eggebeen (2012) claims, "The immediate concern that drives the studies on children raised by gay or lesbian parents is obvious. We are currently undergoing a cultural and legal battle over whether same-gender partners should be allowed to marry and this debate is, in part, grounded on scientific conclusions about gay or lesbian couple's fitness as parents" (p. 775). Landau's assertion that the children of same-sex parents have become social science lab rats holds true with the release of the 2012 research with one exception. Amato (2012) argues, in the same

edition, no matter the results of social science research the data "should not be used to restrict the civil rights of any group of individuals" (p. 774). The argument over the viability of same-sex parenting in the real world becomes an oft-presented subject on primetime television, where gay parents or soon-to-be gay parents work to be seen as equal to their straight counterparts.

The remainder of the chapter focuses on examples that represent prevalent themes found in all of the programs in the way of sexuality, marriage, and parenting. In most cases, the examples are a blend of all three areas. I have extended Warner's thesis that all arguments in favor of same-sex marriage either shame alternative sexualities or ignore alternative sexualities to parenting and family. I will begin with examples where shaming, which was used throughout all five programs, helped to align the on-screen families with heteronormative standards of sex and family. I end this chapter with examples in which the topic of sexuality was ignored. Instead, the movement for marriage equality is placed within a modified queer memory of marriage and family rights, which is contextualized via a conjured history of the gay rights movement.

<center>Sex Shaming</center>

The fourth season of *Modern Family*, starts where season three ends. *Modern Family* is an award-winning sitcom from ABC, which features two gay parents, Mitchell and Cam, who adopted their daughter Lily from Vietnam in the first season and tried unsuccessfully to adopt a son in the third season. The third season ends with Cam and Mitchell learning that the birth mother's grandmother convinces her to keep the child they are set to adopt. The fourth season begins with Mitch and Cam processing the news and disappointment, but with a house full of baby toys and "empty picture frames," the

process is revealed to the viewer to be difficult. Mitch and Cam both work to appear fine

with the disappointment outwardly, to both themselves and to family members, but are

clearly, at least to the viewer, not fine. However, their revelation is handled with humor

that on the surface appears to poke fun at the insecurities of gay men trying to achieve the

heterodominant world of parenting.

After the opening credits, the scene shows Mitch and Cam sitting in their kitchen

talking about coffee—what kind of coffee, what kind of milk is in the coffee—when

Mitchell begins to break the forced monotony of the avoidant conversation:

"Okay. This is ridiculous. We need to talk about the elephant in the room." The camera

pans to a giant stuffed elephant sitting in the corner, revealing the double meaning of

Mitch's statement. The scene cuts to a confessional style interview, which is a staple of

the show, with Mitch and Cam discussing the elephant:

> Cam: The giant stuffed elephant was a gift from our good friend Pepper.
>
> Mitch: Gay guys having kids is . . . it's relatively new, so our community has not
>
> yet learned how to modulate baby gifts.
>
> Cam: When Steven and Stefan had little Rocco, our friend Longinus sent over the
>
> whole cast of "Yo Gabba Gabba."
>
> Mitch: Now Rocco cries whenever he sees bright colors.
>
> Cam: Now I'm not allowed over there. [A reference to the bright colored shirts
>
> Cam often wears.]

After the confessional, the scene shifts back to the kitchen and Cam replies, "I guess we

should donate it somewhere, along with the 800-pound gorilla. [Camera pans to a giant

stuffed gorilla next to the elephant] I mean, you know, now that we're not getting a baby."

The scene continues with both Cam and Mitch reassuring each other that not "getting a baby" is the best decision for the entire family only to be interrupted by Lily, the couples' adopted daughter, who asks of the whereabouts of her "new baby brother." Cam and Mitch explain to Lily that the family is no longer gaining a new baby. She replies to their comforting with a request for a kitten that she will name Larry, the name she picked for the new baby brother she was expecting. The focus of the family shifts then to adopting a new cat for Lily. Later in the episode, the three of them are shown selecting a cat at a local animal shelter—a process that begins to mimic the process the couple went through in their attempt to adopt a child:

> Cam: Okay, hi. Yes, we're gonna take this one.
>
> Clerk: Oh, I'm gonna need you to slow down a bit. There's a process we need to go through to see if you're a suitable cat guardian.
>
> Cam: Oh really? Because I thought the process was, I say, "We'll take this one." And then you say, "Thank God because we have too many cats."
>
> Clerk: No. We need to ensure these cats are going to good homes. That's why we need you to fill out this form, and then there'll be a site visit.
>
> Mitch: Okay, um, we've just been through a very frustrating year trying to adopt a baby so . . . You'll forgive us if we're not really in the mood to jump through too many hoops for a cat.
>
> Clerk: Oh? Why wouldn't they give you a baby?
>
> Cam: It's complicated.

Clerk: So are cats.

Mitchell: Are they? 'Cause that one over there has been licking itself ever since we got here. Okay, you know what? I'm . . . I can't do this.

Lily: What about Larry?

Mitch: I'm sorry, Lily. Not today.

[Scene switches to the confessional interview.]

Cam: Mitchell stormed off, but I couldn't. I had to give her a piece of my mind.

Mitch: And how'd that go?

Cam: I may have strayed off topic just a bit.

[Scene changes back to the animal adoption tent.]

Clerk: No, sir!

Cam: No, she will always be Norma Jeane Baker to me.

Clerk: What is your point exactly?

Cam: That like the thrice-married starlet, this cat is being deprived a stable home.

Clerk: I'm sorry if you're upset.

Cam: You're the one who should be upset, ma'am. We are animal lovers. That cat would've been on the receiving end of affection 24 hours a day. Satisfying its every need would've been our top priority. [As Cam makes his argument, Mitch drives by with the giant elephant and gorilla strapped to the top of his Prius. Mitch is in the middle of making the "car dance" for Lily, which means he's pumping the brakes to make the car bounce. The dancing effect creates the effect of the two stuffed animals having sex on top of the car.] Okay, in light of that tableau, I would like to take back the phrase: receiving end.

Later in the episode, the story line comes back to Cam and Mitchell in the parking lot trying to rearrange the animals on the roof of the car to avoid another "sexual" position. The two come to the realization that they are not entirely fine with the failed adoption attempt because it left a void in their future plans.

> Cam: You know, I had our mornings all planned out. The baby and I would walk Lily to kindergarten and then cut back home through the park and feed those ducks that you're not supposed to feed but everybody does.

> Mitch: I bought a picture frame for my desk, and it's just sitting there, waiting for his face.

The two come to terms with their unhappiness and decide that the animals are finally in a "perfectly innocent" position on the car roof before they drive off to reveal that the animals are in yet another sexual position.

In terms of extracting meaning from the text, the television program, we must consider Fiske's (1987) assertion that television is polysemy, having multiple meanings. He argues that the audience reads and interacts with the program through particular ideologies that help them make meaning of the text. Fiske contends that characters in television programs are encodings of dominant ideology, which help the audience to make sense out of them. But he contends not everyone reads the characters or the programs in the same way because they come to the program with their own knowledge and experiences. Similarly, Hall (1986) argues that all discourse operates through code that the audience learns to interpret through societal cues. Further, he contends that discourse is sometimes decoded through a "dominant" or "preferred" reading in which the audience member uses the dominant cues of society to understand the meaning

assigned by the producer of the information. However, Hall also claims many audience members will attach their own "ground rules" to the reading of a text in a "negotiated" reading of a text (p. 137). Finally, Hall (1986) maintains some audience members may "detotalize" or deconstruct the "preferred" code to reconstruct an alternative message within "some alternative framework of reference" (p. 138). This "oppositional" reading of the text allows for rejection of the dominant cues and assignment of meaning based on an oppositional viewpoint. For the remainder of this chapter I will provide "preferred" and "negotiated" or "oppositional" readings of the examples chosen from the programs. I will begin with the "preferred" readings, which account for the readings intended by the producers of the programs. Finally, I will provide "negotiated" or "oppositional" readings of the programs that challenge the dominant cues used in the "preferred" reading.

A "preferred" reading of the elephant and gorilla refers to Mitchell and Cam's emotions after losing a child and trying to process the feelings with reminders all around—the toys, the empty picture frames, the plans that will never happen. However, the gorilla and the elephant also lend to a more "oppositional" reading. The elephant and gorilla refer to something else that is never discussed or resolved—sex. Cam and Mitchell are apprehensive about their sex becoming public—the 800-pound gorilla and giant elephant in the room are non-heterosexual sex. The apprehension is heightened when those private fears and worries are made public—when the two animals appear to be having sex on the roof of the car. The notion that somehow the perceived perversion of non-heterosexual intercourse is destructive to the family unit is apparent in this episode, and it makes Cam and Mitchell unfit to adopt a cat never mind a male child. The conservative notion of parenthood then becomes an agent in the hiding of sexuality. Cam

and Mitchell are quick to give away the elephant and the gorilla to hide their sexuality and normalize their family unit. In other words, queer sex makes them unfit for parenthood or a place in the heteronormative discourse of the gay rights movement.

Similarly in episode three of *The New Normal*, an NBC program that was cancelled after its first season, titled "Baby Clothes," David and Bryan, the gay main characters of the program who hire a surrogate to give birth to their child, encounter resistance to their efforts toward parenthood. A man in a baby-clothing store confronts them about a public display of affection they share in front of his child. Bryan and David are more concerned about defending themselves and their future child than about being public with sexuality. Shaming of public sexuality, in this case in the form of public affection by non-queer people, is not seen as a threat to sexuality but a threat to their children. As the episode progresses, the fear of what their child may have to endure is lessened by their ability to stand up for what they think is right. They come to the realization that they and their child will have to endure attacks no matter what, even if they were not a gay couple, but they have to instill in their child the ability to cope with such attacks and to learn from them.

During the episode Bryan and David accompany Goldie, the couple's surrogate, to an outlet mall to do some shopping for Shania, Goldie's daughter. During the trip, a straight couple confronts David and Bryan about a kiss the two share in the children's clothing department:

Man: Wow!

Bryan: Excuse me?

Man: Would you mind not doing that?

Bryan: Oh, no, it's OK. He's actually going to let me buy this thing [in reference to baby hat on his head].

Man: No. Uh, don't do that in front of my daughter. Kissing another man. This is a family store, and I shouldn't have to go home and explain that to my kid.

Bryan: Explain what?

Man: Look, I don't care what kind of crap you do in the privacy of your own home, but don't bring it in here.

David: Let's just go. It's not worth it.

Bryan: No, no, no. Explain what sir? Love?

Man: There are places you'd get your ass kicked for that crap. I'm trying to be cool here.

Bryan: Oh, well, you really are being cool, sir. Thanks for your intolerance and your bigotry and for fostering this ignorance in another generation. And for bringing back the fanny pack.

Following the exchange Bryan and David are upset that they did not stand up more for themselves, and they worry what life will be like for their child as he or she grows up with two dads.

David: You're not still thinking about the guy from the outlet mall, are you? That was an isolated incident. Honey, it's OK.

Bryan: It's not OK.

David: There will always be stupid jerks in the world. You can't let them bother you. Just ignore them.

Bryan: That's your plan? Ignore them? I've been ignoring people like that my entire life, David. That's not good enough anymore. We're having baby.

David: Yes, God willing, everything's chromosomally correct . . .

Bryan: Will you stop that?! We are bringing a baby into a world where idiot people feel free to say and do the things they say and do because we have been trained to ignore them! That guy is not the problem. We are the problem.

David: Well, what did you want me to do? Get in his face? I'm not that guy.

Bryan: I don't know! I'm not crying for me. I'm crying because what if that happened in front of your kid? What will we do then? Just be ashamed of who we are? What kind of message does that send to our child? I don't want our kid to feel that. To see him or her get hurt like that, that would just kill me. As a parent, you're supposed to protect your child. You tell them not to play in the street, and-and don't do drugs and wear a thick Shea butter moisturizer at night. But how are we supposed to protect your baby from hate?

Later at the gym David defends another gym member, who is intellectually disabled, from a third gym member's insensitive comments. The guy yells in the smoothie line, "Will you give the idiot an IQ boost already? This retard's holding up the line!" After David punches the guy for insulting the patron with a mental disability, he is thanked with an insult from the guy he is defending—"Hey! I don't need you fighting my battles for me fag."

David is upset by the exchange and is later banned from the gym for punching the guy, who also turns out to be gay; however, the guy that called him a fag is allowed to remain a member because there are no rules against using the word in the gym. David

shows up to a doctor's appointment with Goldie and Bryan to hear the baby's heartbeat.
Goldie confesses that she heard the man at the outlet store, but she is ashamed that she
did not do anything or say anything in response.

> Goldie: I pretended I didn't hear when that guy said you were disgusting for being
> gay parents, but I did hear . . . I should have marched up and confronted them,
> but I was too afraid.
>
> Bryan: It's OK.
>
> Goldie: No, it's not OK. And the next time that happens, I promise I'll speak up.
> If only these ignorant people with all this hate in their hearts could see you like I
> do.
>
> Bryan: Did you just intentionally quote a song from cabaret to lift my spirits, or
> was that a well-timed accident?

The issues for Goldie and for David and Bryan are that they see their love like everyone
else's love—gay or straight—and the issue is that if others would not see them as sexual
objects, but as two people who love each other and want nothing more to raise a child
together then they would not have so much "hate in their hearts." Bryan and David come
to terms with the issue at the end of the episode when David decides to let "more joy" in
his life:

> David: I need to learn to let joy in my life. All the negative stuff, the fear it's all I
> know. Like, in med school, they teach you to only look for the bad parts in things.
> The exceptions, not the rules . . . We'll never be out of the woods. There will
> always be something. I hate that all the tough stuff a kid faces in life will be even
> tougher for our kid because he or she will have two dads. So even though it's not

> going to be easy, I need to try to celebrate the wins. Like, when we heard that heartbeat yesterday, I don't think I have ever loved you more, because that . . . that was the sound of our family.

David's realization is a reflection of the overall message of the marriage equality/family movement within in the gay rights movement. The message that LGBTQ people should be happy with what they have and change things when they can, but the overall path to happiness and self-fulfillment is through family, marriage, and children. In other words, enjoy the "wins" like being able to get married and have children.

Both examples can be read using the dominant codes of the marriage equality movement, which promote an equality of sameness. Duggan (2003) argues that an equality of sameness is a part of the neoliberal, assimilationist politics began in the 1990s. Although there appeared to be some success in the movement, she claims it was mostly aimed at "assimilated, gender appropriate, politically mainstream portions of the gay population" (p. 44). The "preferred" reading posits that gay couples are like straight couples. They have their ups and downs, their struggles and disappointments, but in the end they are no different from straight men and women. An "oppositional" reading of the two scenarios reveals an underlying theme of sex shaming. The two couples' happiness is dependent upon their ability to look like everyone else, which means their ability to suppress their sexuality, where queer sex is invisible, and romantic love is what makes them the same, a recreation of heterosexual love.

The next two examples avoid the discussion of sexuality in a broader sense, and instead, focus on marriage equality as an inalienable right, which has been fought for by generations of gay men for centuries. This creation of queer memory is lost on many in

the queer community because it lacks the "institutions for common memory and generational transmission around which straight culture is built" (Warner, 1999, pp. 51-52). He claims, "Every new wave of queer youths picks up something from its predecessors but also invents itself from scratch . . . And since the most painfully instructed generation has been decimated by death, the queer culture of the present faces more than the usual shortfall in memory" (p. 52). Given this shortfall in queer memory, the struggle for marriage is historicized in a broader LGBTQ fight for social justice. Characters from all five shows often refer to marriage equality or marriage rights as a struggle that has been a part of larger gay rights movement for generations, when in actuality it only began in the late 1990s.

Rewriting History

In the final two episodes of the fourth season of *Glee*, ABC musical comedy show that in 2012 was in its fourth season, Blaine, one of the gay teen members of the fictional glee club, plans to propose marriage to Kurt, his partner who is a college student in New York. Blaine first mentions the idea of gay marriage in episode 21 when he not only alludes to new marriage laws in New York, where both he and Kurt will be attending college the next year, but also later in the same episode when he asks Kurt's dad, Burt, for Kurt's hand in marriage:

> Burt: Anderson, you wanted to see me? You're not going to sing to me, too, are you?
>
> Blaine: I just wanted to give you this. [He hands Burt a jewelry box] You can open it. [Burt opens the box to reveal a rainbow lapel pin.] I thought you could wear it at work to show support for gay marriage.

Burt: Oh, it's really sweet of you. Gay rights has been my top issue, even though it makes me wildly unpopular with my distinguished colleagues. They're on the wrong side of history, so screw 'em.

Blaine: I am so glad that you feel that way, because assuming that we legally can, um, I wanted to formally ask for your permission to ask Kurt to marry me.

Burt: You kidding, or are you nuts?

Blaine: Kurt is my soul mate. I know that I've hurt him badly, but I also know that if I want to get him back, I have to do something bold.

Burt: Blaine, it means a lot to me that you love Kurt, and you know, you're been like family to me . . .

Blaine: So you're saying that you're OK with me asking for his hand?

Burt: Of, of course not. No, you're still kids. Did you learn anything from Finn and Rachel? [A reference to a heterosexual couple whose high school engagement failed shortly after their graduation from high school.]

Blaine: They are completely different. Completely different. I don't think you understand how it feels to finally be able to legally get married.

Burt: And you don't really get what it is to be married. Straight, gay, whatever. It's not the same as living together. Blaine, listen, let's sit down for a second. Seriously, come here. Look, I can't tell you why, but something happens when you exchange vows. It's a big deal. It's why getting divorced is so much harder than breaking up. There's just a really big difference between marrying a person and marrying an idea.

Blaine: What if he meets someone else?

Burt: Do you think you two were meant to be?

Blaine: Yes.

Burt: Do you think you two have a true love?

Blaine: Yes.

Burt: Then stop worrying.

Blaine: I've got to go.

Burt: Thanks for the pin.

Blaine: Sure.

Burt: Hey it's gonna be OK.

Blaine: How do you know that though? When two people love each other like you

two do everything works out.

Blaine refers to hurting Kurt in this scene. He had sex with another guy from Ohio at the

beginning of the season, which caused a break up between he and Kurt. The marriage is a

way for him to right his transgressions and show Kurt, and everyone else, that he is

committed to and in love with Kurt. The only way to atone for the transgressions of

casual sex and non-monogamy is to settle down and get married—to mimic their straight

friends who have either had marriage proposals or weddings. Through his romantic

gesture he will right the wrong and normalize his relationship with Kurt. His

homonormative romantic relationship has credence then not through a freedom to express

his sexuality and sexual desire, but by his ability to build and maintain a public romantic

relationship with only one other man.

Blaine continues to search for a straight ally in his proposal plans with Kurt. He

seeks Sam, one of the straight identifying glee students, whom he once had a sexual

attraction to. Sam is Blaine's best friend, who sees Blaine's attraction to him as a form of flattery, but not something that he would want to pursue sexually:

> Blaine: You can only do this once, so it-it has to be perfect. It has to be, you know, special.
>
> Sam: Are you actually talking about a marriage proposal? Dude, we're in high school. You're not ready to get married, and I'm not letting you.
>
> Blaine: Well, I'm not asking for your permission. I'm already gonna do it. What I'm asking for is your help about how to do this. From my best friend.
>
> Sam: OK. Then as your best friend, I need to remind you that just a few weeks ago, you were totally confused. You didn't even know where Kurt stood with this Adam guy.
>
> Blaine: Well, I don't remember you being this introspective when you were asking Brittany to marry you.
>
> Sam: One, I don't even know what that means, and two, we thought the world was ending. And when we realized it wasn't I regretted it.
>
> Blaine: Will you listen to yourself? You sound exactly like the rest of the world, saying that 'it's not time yet.' Well, you know what? People like me have been hearing that for hundreds and hundreds of years. This is happening. I am gonna ask Kurt to marry me. And not only are you one of my best friends, but I was kind of hoping that you would be my best man. So let me know if you uh change your mind.

Blaine takes another straight friend to help him find an engagement ring for Kurt. During the shopping trip, Kurt meets a lesbian, Jan, who has been with her partner, Liz, for more

than thirty years. Jan finally gives Blaine the confirmation he needs to pursue his plans to propose to Kurt. Jan tells Blaine that if all gays and lesbians had listened to people telling them to wait for marriage then "we wouldn't be moments away from the Supreme Court finally telling us that we are just as crazy and awesome as everybody else" (Episode 22). She also asks Blaine if he and Kurt have any gay or lesbian role models that they can turn to for advice before she asked him to meet her and Liz for dinner.

Jan and Liz describes their relationship for Kurt and Blaine during dinner, which also reveals a larger gay and lesbian history, which includes the struggle for acceptance and sameness:

Jan: It was love at first sticks [name of the band they saw playing and the restaurant they are currently eating at] that's what we always say.

Liz: Well, the irony was that we met at the concert you know. We grew up in the same town just a few blocks from each other.

Blaine: Wow

Liz: We went to the same high school.

Kurt: You guys are like a Nora Ephron movie.

Liz: Exactly

Blaine: Did you go to prom together?

Jan: No

Liz: Yeah

Jan: Well, we went together as a group. We took boys, of course. Merle and Tommy, those poor fools.

Liz: Merle and Tom

Jan: They had no idea what was going on.

Liz: It was different times then, you know. There were, there were no gay clubs at school. You know, nobody talked about it. We had no representation.

Jan: But somehow we always found a way. That summer we went on a bus tour of the United States. We saw the sights. And in the end we decided we liked Ohio the best.

Liz. Yeah, yeah, came back, moved in together, got each other through college, and we broke up

Jan: Twice

Liz: and got back together again

Jan: Twice. And then we bought the house in Lima.

Liz: What haven't we seen from our porch?

Jan: Nothing.

Liz: Hmm

Jan: AIDS

Liz: Yea

Jan: Don't ask, don't tell

Jan: Ellen

Jan: We've seen it all side-by-side. Remember when we couldn't even do this in public, hold hands? . . .

Kurt: . . . it's great and really inspiring to hear your story. You know, I know I don't, and we don't really have too many gay and lesbian role models to look up to, so

Later in the scene Jan asks Liz to marry her. She announces that she wants to get married as soon as possible and waiting is not necessary because there are plenty of places in where it is legal right now. The final scene of the episode, which is also the final scene of the season, shows Blaine holding a ring box behind his back as he and other glee club students watch the wedding of their teacher, Will Shuster, and guidance counselor, Emma Gerber. The episodes work to historicize gay marriage into a larger struggle for gay rights, but also to argue for an equality of sameness via romantic love.

Throughout the two episodes Blaine references an altered queer memory for a new generation of gays and lesbians that includes a long struggle for marriage equality without real mention of other human rights issues or sexuality in general. An "oppositional" reading of Blaine's argument examines his use of a symmetrical civil rights discourse that promotes equality through sameness and a homonormative concept of marriage via romance and love. Blaine's argument is given credence by an older lesbian couple, Liz and Jan, who have lived through several milestones in the gay rights community. Hume (2002) argues, "Each era uses public memory to suit its own needs, but those memories are by definition built on historical, cultural building blocks, each representing another era's needs and cultural norms" (p. 46). Blaine's memory of marriage equality stretches past the last 25 years into a struggle that he described as one that has taken hundreds and hundreds of years to overcome. This memory looks beyond the political and social arguments for same-sex marriage and never once mentions a struggle for sexual or gender equality. The show uses the young coupling of Blaine, a high school senior, and Kurt, a college freshman, as the impetus for the site of the

memory, a memory that skirts around a broader sense of civil rights and emphasizes marriage as a basic human right.

Similarly, the sixth episode of *The New Normal* works to position gay marriage as a struggle for the expression of romantic love not a struggle for sexual freedom. However, the *New Normal* episode works to achieve this argument by dispelling arguments that work to oppose marriage equality. The episode, titled "Bryanzilla," centers on a pretend wedding for Shania and one of her classmates. The pretend wedding is an analogy for gay weddings. Opposition to the pretend childhood wedding mimic the arguments against same-sex weddings and marriage. Also interspersed in the episode is an allusion to a common gay objection to same-sex marriage that plays out between David and Bryan.

In this episode, Shania, Goldie's daughter, announces her pretend engagement to a boy in her class, Wilbur. Bryan decides to plan and host the wedding at his and David's house—complete with catered food, gifts, cakes, and attire, just like a "real" wedding. The wedding episode is an attempt to show multiple sides to the marriage equality debate via the analogy of a child wedding, which is presented from the outset as a "pretend wedding." The most viable argument presented in the debate is in favor of gay marriage as a right to express love in whatever way is deemed appropriate and necessary by the two people in love. This is shown through Bryan, who wants to marry David, and Shania and Wilbur, who want to "pretend marry" each other. The other sides of the argument are shown to be either ridiculous or absurd. The arguments are seen through Jane's religious rhetoric, which castigates Shania's pretend marriage and David and Bryan's relationship

and hypothetical marriage as well as David's reluctance to get married if it is not legally

binding and legitimate or, in his view, necessary.

Bryan and David discuss the merits of gay marriage with flashbacks to earlier

times in their relationships. During one of their early dates, Bryan and David discusses

the possibility of one day getting married:

Bryan: I want to get married someday and live happily ever after, don't you?

David: Sure, I also want to be a seven-foot-tall center for the Chicago Bulls, but

that's not gonna happen.

Bryan: I don't know what that means.

David: Marriage for guys like us, it's a fantasy. Gay people can have fabulous

commitment ceremonies, but until it's sanctioned by the U.S. government, it's

nothing more than just playing house.

Bryan: Yeah but emotions are real. I mean it's still a declaration of love.

David: Until every single consenting adult in this country can marry whomever

they choose, I refuse to even consider getting married.

Bryan: That's so unromantic, but so political and Harvey Milk hot. Um, OK, so

marriage is off the table. What about kids?

David: That, I'd be interested in with the right guy.

Bryan and David's differing opinions are made more apparent later in the episode when

Jane attacks Shania's pretend wedding and the idea of gay weddings. The difference of

opinion and value are set as a stumbling block, not only for Bryan and David in their

relationship but for the marriage equality movement as a whole—if gay people cannot

agree on the future of marriage equality and the outcome best for the community, then anti-gay opponents will win:

David: Bryan, Shania is a nine-year-old girl with a crush. If she wanted a fantasy playground wedding, I get it, but not everyone wants what you want. This is becoming the social event of the season.

Bryan: Oh, from your lips. Do the Kardashians have any school-age children?

Jane: Can someone please explain to me what the hell is . . .

Bryan: Oh, yeah, it's Shania's wedding invitation. We wanted to do a customized presentation box, but there just wasn't enough time. And we couldn't agree on a ribbon.

Jane: Why are you doing this to Shania?

Goldie: Oh, Nana, it's just a pretend wedding.

Jane: No, see, that's what these gays do. They "pretend" you can define what marriage is. Today it's two children. Tomorrow, it's the banana polishers. Next thing you know, they're gonna have a wedding for their dog.

Bryan: Actually, we had a commitment ceremony for Smelly and Mabel, the Schuler's boxer, last spring, and the beef bouillon fountain went over big.

David: Not helping.

Jane: Marriage is not for dogs, it is not for children, and I'm sorry, boys, but it is not for you.

Rocky: Mrs. Forrest, there was a time not too long ago, when it was illegal for black people to marry white people.

Jane: Kept things organized.

Bryan: When the state of California finally makes gay marriage legal, my partner and I will be getting married, right, David? Right?

David: I don't know.

Jane: Aw, Cinderfella. Looks like that glass slipper doesn't fit. And this sham wedding isn't happening either.

David's unwillingness to commit to marriage with Bryan becomes a point of contention through the remainder of the episode along with the debate over Shania's pretend wedding. To sabotage the wedding, Jane plants a few of Shania and Wilbur's classmates in the audience to derail the ceremony. When Shania decided to cancel the pretend wedding, she and Bryan are disheartened. However, the events of the day cause David to have a change of heart regarding his relationship with Bryan. David takes Bryan to his office as a surprise to propose to him with Goldie present:

Bryan: Why are we here? You promised me dumplings.

David: There's something I have to do. It'll only take a minute.

Bryan: I don't like being in your office after dark. It feels like there are ghosts. Ghosts of patients who couldn't understand their co-pay and died talking to their insurance company.

Goldie: Hi, Bryan. Pretend like I'm not here.

David: There's something I want to ask you, and I could only do it like this.

Bryan: David, stop it. What's going on? Just give me a minute.

David: [to Goldie] You doing OK?

Goldie: Yeah, I'm great. You do you.

David: There. Hold it right there [while holding a the sonogram wand].

Bryan: Oh, David. David, look, you can see his or her tiny, little fingers. What are you doing? Is it my birthday.

David: I wanted to do it like this, in front of our baby, so that one day, he or she could say, 'I was there. I was there when my daddies got engaged.' There was this, uh, moment at Shania's fake wedding when I looked over at you, and the tears in your eyes were real. I always knew how important getting married was to you, but it wasn't until that moment that I truly understood what commitment meant. We're having a baby, Bry. This is our family. You, me and that kid. Forever. Family is the ultimate commitment. Getting married, it just seems I don't know, easy.

Bryan: But you don't believe in it.

David: But you do, and I believe in us.

Bryan: Oh

David: Bryan Collins . . .

Bryan: Oh, my God, it's happening.

David: Will you do me the honor of being my husband?

Bryan: Yes.

Marriage is presented as the logical choice for two committed adults, who want to raise children and be in a committed relationship with one another. This argument excludes any talk of a larger issues of acceptance of sexual or relational differences— being gay and wanting a same-sex marriage is the "different" relationship referred to in the analogy of the "pretend" child wedding of Shania and Wilbur. Just as the "pretend wedding" may have been absurd to some, the idea of two people wanting to express

themselves in a way that is different from the norm is, by contrast, logical. Thus, any

argument in opposition to same-sex marriages is absurd, whether it is from anti-gay

opponents or queer objectors.

Summary

This chapter is an attempt to illuminate the arguments presented in favor of same-

sex marriage in primetime sitcoms, which either shame queer sexuality via

heteronormative expectations of private sexuality or symbolically annihilating queer

sexuality in favor of homonormative conceptions of romantic love. Sexual shaming

forces queer individuals to adopt a relationship that resembles the heterosexist,

patriarchal structure, which includes a dominant/submissive dichotomy and a privatized

sexuality. Shaming serves to stifle a queer sexuality, which may work to transgress

heteronormative relational dynamics like monogamy, coupling, and private sex.

Relationships presented in these programs avoid appearing too far outside the norm, and

sometimes work to outwardly duck heterosexual fears of open gay sex or queer sexuality

by disavowing sexual promiscuity or multiple-partner relationships. Shaming also works

to push those who do not fit the heteronormative model further to the margins of society

by presenting those who conform as worthy of social justice and civil rights. Those who

do not conform are then presented as an "other"—an embarrassment to the good gays

who have been civilized by domestic heteronormativity.

Similarly, the homonormative concept of romantic love works to symbolically

annihilate the bad queer from primetime television. Narratives that do not attempt to

shame queer sexuality often avoid the conversation of sexuality all together. Instead, they

argue from an ahistorical memory of same-sex marriage as a part of a broader gay rights

movement, or work toward a politics of sameness whereas gay and lesbian couples fight for rights via romantic love that is the same as the romantic love sought after by straight couples. By historicizing the marriage equality movement within a wider and older gay rights movement, the programs are able to help construct a site of queer memory where marriage has been a goal of gay men and women for centuries. In actuality, the movement for same-sex marriage is a phenomenon of the last couple of decades. The queer memory also relies on the construct of romantic love as an equalizing power whereby gay and lesbian couples are entitled to the same rights and privileges as their straight counterparts.

Just as sex shaming works to further marginalize those who fall outside of the heteronormative sexual model, the homonormative fight for marriage equality works to further privilege those who fit the homonormative by bestowing the privileges associated with marriage in the United States. In other words, privilege is usually bestowed to white, gay men in monogamous relationships that resemble heteronormative and homonormative relational standards. Often those at the intersection of sexuality, gender, race, and class are not given entrance into either the heteronormative or homonormative and are, consequently, denied the privileges associated with both. These intersections will be discussed further in the next two chapters with a discussion of race, gender, and class as they intersect with sexuality and gay identity.

CHAPTER IV

GAY = WHITE MAN

The U.S. 'gay community' is a primarily white community despite its claims and efforts to be more inclusive. It projects whiteness through a projection of an image of normalcy which is inherently a white image.

—Niels Teunis (2007, p. 268)

The implications for women are that sexism is cast as only a vestige of conventionally defined straight men, suggesting that sexist practices by gay men—or less rigidly masculine men—'don't count,' thus renormalizing sexism under a host of 'exceptional' circumstances. The implications for gay men are that the price of privilege is sexism, a fact that necessarily defines them by their heteronormative sexual relationships with women. The gay men in these configurations thus become patriarchal allies—rather than adversaries—in efforts to naturalize and reproduce heteronormative politics.

—Helene A. Shugart (2003, p. 89)

University of Mississippi student Sierra Mannie caused a raucous debate among many white gay bloggers and readers in early July 2014 with an opinion piece posted on the *Daily Mississippian* online, later posted on Time.com, titled "Dear white gays: Stop stealing black female culture" (Mannie, 2014 para. 1). In the piece, Mannie argues white gay men often appropriate the stereotyped culture of black women by adopting racist dialectical, physical, and affectional characteristics of black women. Mannie contends:

I need some of you to cut it the hell out. Maybe, for some of you, it's a presumed similar appreciation for Beyoncé and weave that has you thinking that I'm going

to be amused by you approaching me in your best 'Shanequa from around the way' voice. I don't know. What I do know is that I don't care how well you can quote Madea, who told you that your booty was getting bigger than hers, how cute you think it is to call yourself a strong black woman, who taught you to twerk, how funny you think it is to call yourself Quita or Keisha or for which black male you've been bottoming — you are not a black woman, and you do not get to claim either blackness or womanhood. It is not yours. It is not for you. (Mannie, 2014 para. 1)

Mannie tells readers to check their privilege and be part of the solution rather than continuing the "foolery" of acting the part of a "strong black woman . . . or a ghetto girl" (Mannie, 2014 para. 13). However adept many of Mannie's observations and arguments may have been, many white, gay bloggers responded, in many instances, with vitriol and condemnation.

One commenter on one such response post claimed gay, white men are not afforded white privilege, and, thus, are not complicit in perpetuating white dominance and oppression over racial and gender minorities. Another blogger, published on *Huffington Post* more than a week after Mannie's commentary first appeared, appropriately notes Mannie's argument, while correct in the way of racial appropriation, ventures into transphobic territory by privileging cisgender identity (D'Agostino, 2014). D'Agostino contends Mannie's piece works to legitimize "gender normative rhetoric that de-legitimizes gay men and trans-women." (D'Agostino, 2014 para. 3). D'Agostino argues:

Some men are as authentically feminine as some women. And some feminine

men who are white grow up around black people who are feminine, so, yeah, their

femininity might seem a little "black" to you. Really not their fault. Really none

of your business. This is to say, your heterodominant feminist fantasy of owning

"womanhood" is not the reality of queer people or feminine men. Femininity is

theirs *also* and it is not for *you* to allow or deny their gender expression.

(D'Agostiono, 2014 para. 5)

However, D'Agostiono's (2014) argument does not fully adhere to his earlier admission

that appropriation of black culture is damaging and the product of white privilege.

Instead, D'Agostino provides an escape plan for those white gay men, who do not fully

adhere to gender norms, from their privilege, thus, legitimizing white, gay racial

appropriation and sexism via exclusion from the hetero-dominant culture. By excluding

white, gay men from the broader scope of white privilege, he allows a space for them

within black womanhood—supporting the argument made by Mannie.

The exclusion of white, gay men from white, male privilege is not a new concept.

For decades, white gay men have operated from the assumption that their sexual minority

status excludes them from dominant forms of oppression and privilege; however,

previous researchers have pointed to the dangers of viewing sexual minority status as an

exclusionary factor in racism and sexism (Johnson, 2003; King, 2009; Nero, 2005;

Shugart, 2003; Stone & Ward, 2011; Ward, 1999; Ward, 2008; Yep & Elia, 2012). In this

chapter, I will discuss how white gay characters in primetime network television shows

are given a pass from white male privilege. This pass comes not only by way of their

sexual minority status but also through the symbolic annihilation of people belonging to

intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. White gay men then stand-in as a representation of all sexually queer people despite race and/or gender identity, which works to further privilege white men and subordinate women and people of color. First, I provide a brief discussion of white male privilege before discussing previous literature on race, gender, and sexuality. Finally, I analyze several examples from the programs included in this study to illustrate how whiteness and maleness are privileged.

<div align="center">White Male Privilege</div>

Any discussion of white male privilege should include a discussion of the invisible and imbalanced nature of privilege. Carbado (2005) concludes there are two categories of male privilege about which men should develop awareness. First, the invisible advantages that men can count on each day without ever having to work to earn them. The other, he argues, "includes a series of disadvantages that men do not experience precisely because they are men" (p. 195). Men, Carbado (2005) maintains, do not have to envision themselves as engendered because, "a white heterosexual man lives on the white side of race, the male side of gender, and the straight side of sexual orientation. He is, in this sense, the norm. Mankind. The baseline. He is our reference. We are all defined with him in mind. We are the same as or different from him" (p. 192). However, Carbado (2005) argues, not all men experience and enjoy the same advantages to an equal level.

Men at the intersection of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation must contend with other factors that negatively affect their privilege because those men must "simultaneously contend with and respond to negative identity signification. That is, we simultaneously live with and contest our nonnormativitiy. We are 'different,' and our

identities have negative social meanings" (Carbado, 2005 p 193). Thus, he contends, listing all male privileges is problematic because a universal manhood does not exist, and constructing such a universal would obscure or trivialize those men outside the white, middle class, heterosexual construction of manhood. Further, he argues that class, race, and sexual orientation impact male identities and may either limit or expand their privilege.

<div align="center">Race, Sexuality, and Privilege</div>

Despite the limitations of nonnormative gender, racial, and sexual identities, much of the rhetoric of the gay rights movement works to eliminate difference and relies on a narrative of sameness whereby sexuality trumps other identities. Yep and Elia (2012) argue the "new homonormativity" relies on the hegemonic view of racism as a thing of the past, and reduces any instance of oppression or discrimination as a product of homophobia, not a combination of sexuality, race, gender performance and class. By focusing solely on homophobia, only the concerns of white queers are reflected. They contend, "Queers of color cannot afford to ignore how their 'other' differences interplay with their sexuality" (p. 899) because those difference are salient in day-to-day life.

Stone and Ward (2011) argue that "Blackness" has been used by whites on both sides of the "modern gay rights discourse" to help forward their own causes and arguments (p. 606), especially for white pro-gay rights activists during much of the movement's history. They claim these activists have "relied on Blackness as the dominant metaphor for difference, victimization, and resistance, or as a rhetorical device to achieve specific political ends, such as mobilizing voters, coalition building, or discrediting their opposition" (p. 606). Stone and Ward (2011) also claim the vernacular

of the gay rights movement reflects white privilege. For example, they argue, concepts such as "the closet," "coming out," "lifestyle," and "sexual identity" are "rooted in white, middle-class, and American conceptualizations of the relationship between self, sexuality, and community, thereby rendering the same-sex desires and queer subjectivities of people of color unintelligible or invisible within US queer politics" (pp. 606-607). In other words, most people of color are eliminated from the discourse of the gay rights movement via privileged language.

Teunis (2007) argues the "gay community" in the United States is predominantly a white community regardless of the claims that it is more inclusive. He contends "It projects whiteness through a projection of an image of normalcy which is inherently a white image" (p. 268). By aligning the movement with a broader normalized society (i.e., white, middle class, and heterosexual), gay rights activists and members of the white gay community are able to gain access to social institutions and spaces not previously available to them because of their sexuality. For example, the movement's push for marriage equality is generally led by white men and women, according to Teunis, "who display little or no concern for critical political issues that face gays and lesbians of color" (p. 269). He argues the issues do not cause the promotion of whiteness inherently. Whiteness, he claims, is given dominance by the way the issues are promoted, which overshadows other issues within the larger LGBTQ community.

Coopting Blackness

In general, race has been used in the modern gay rights movement as a model for gaining particular rights and privileges that, more than anything, benefit white gay and lesbian members. The discussion of race is subordinated by the discussion of sexuality

and gay identity. However, racial issues have often served as a talking point for anti-gay and lesbian rhetoric since the beginning of the modern gay rights movement. Stone and Ward (2011) claim the anti-gay campaigns resemble white segregationists movements during the 1960s black Civil Rights Movement. Principally white religious conservatives, who traditionally opposed racial justice causes, led the groups. In recent years, they have attempted to build a coalition with Blacks by pitting gay rights versus black rights. Stone and Ward argue that while the gay rights focus has shifted in the 2000s to military service and marriage rights, "they [gay rights activists] have taken up direct analogies between gayness and blackness that have fuelled white racism in the movement, and reinforced the white construction of homosexuality" (p. 608). Further, white anti-gay conservatives, during this same period, framed their cause as a fight to protect children against sexual immorality and/or sexual assault, which "prompted gay activists to work at humanizing LGBT people by drawing parallels to other historically maligned and oppressed groups (Jews, interned Japanese Americans, ' Third World People,' women and working class people)" (p. 608).

In contrast, anti-gay white leaders, according to Stone and Ward, work to demonstrate their solidarity with black voters by dismantling connections or comparisons between the black rights movement and the gay rights movement even though this connection works to obscure queer people of color, enfeeble arguments for affirmative action, and coopt black civil rights as a rhetorical weapon for causes and groups with no interests in furthering black civil rights. They argue that the deployment of race by the religious right and gay and lesbian activists suggests that both are similar in their willingness to cite race in troublesome ways. Gay rights activists, as a result of co-opting

black civil rights rhetoric, exclude LGBTQ people of color from the gay rights narrative. This marginalization translates to symbolic annihilation in the mass media, a process by which the mass media ignore, exclude, marginalize, or trivialize a group of people via exclusion from its products (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). In other words, exclusion from the work of the "gay community" leads to exclusion from media portrayals of the "gay community," and, thus, exclusion from the dominant culture, which, in turn, leads to further marginalization and trivialization.

Symbolically Annihilating LGBTQ People of Color

Teunis (2007) argues that whiteness in the gay community "is visible, palpable, if for no other reason than that images of men of color are absent" (p. 269). He references a study in which he examines all issues of *Out* magazine from 2002. He claims men of color are only featured in one of two sections. Teunis maintains, "First, Latino gay men are represented only as musicians, whose work is reviewed in the appropriate pages. Second, black men model the peak of health in advertisements for HIV treatment drugs" (pp. 269-270). He further argues the "gay community" has benefited from symbolically annihilating LGBTQ people of color in several ways. First, he concludes that the portrayal of whiteness has been used to lend to the gay community an air of respectability, and the that the portrayal of whiteness lends to the myth of the affluent gay male, which will be discussed further in Chapter V.

Nero (2005) argues that racism and homophobia keep black gay men invisible or marginal in American film and television. He contends that the dual dominant ideological beliefs that African American males are hyper-masculine, and cannot be gay, and "America's homophobic preoccupation with white masculinity" and how it produces

same-sex attraction black gay men are not granted a space—black gay men "cannot

exist" (p. 235). Nero adds, "Like the controlling images of black women as mammy,

jezebel, and welfare queen, the ubiquitous image of the black gay male as an impostor or

a fraud naturalizes and normalizes the exclusion of black gay men from sites of territorial

economies where wealth is created" (p. 235). By casting black gay men as imposters or

frauds in television programing, Nero contends, black gay men are then excluded from

participation in queer cultures, which "reveals white hostility toward black gay men" (p.

240). This exclusion he argues is participation in an "unspoken pact to keep blacks on the

bottom," a concept introduced by Bell (1992) in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*. Bell

argues, "Americans achieve a measure of social stability through their unspoken pact to

keep blacks on the bottom—as aspect of social functioning that more than any other has

retained its viability and its value to general stability from the very beginning of the

American experience down to the present day" (p. 152).

The unspoken pact referenced by Nero could be a possible accounting of

perceived homophobia from the African American community directed toward white gay

men. Teunis (2007) maintains the resistance by the white gay community to integrate

race into the discussion of sexuality, "makes White gay men blind to the possibility that

the perceived homophobia in African American communities is very race specific. If a

gay identity is a white identity, which it is in the eyes of many though certainly not all

African Americans, then homophobia is also directed towards white gay men, who are

perceived to be wealthy, and therefore part of the problem rather than part of the solution

of racial inequality" (p. 270). The next section of this chapter discusses a specific

example of symbolic annihilation of queer people of color, and how it was openly

discussed in the programs examined for this study. I also discuss the coopted ethnic minority language used in the programs to, in some ways, place sexual identity on par with racial and ethnic identity.

Acknowledging Invisibility

The symbolic annihilation of people of color broadly and LGBTQ people of color more specifically is not only a theme seen throughout this study, but the invisibility of people of color also becomes the topic of a at least one episode of *The New Normal*. In episode four of *The New Normal*, titled "Obama Mama," Bryan and David acknowledge and come to terms with their whitewashed world. In an effort to prove to Jane, the socially conservative mother of their surrogate, they not only preach diversity, but they also practice diversity in their everyday lives, the couple hosted a dinner party for Jane and all of their "black friends." The episode begins with a discussion among Bryan, David, and Goldie, the couple's surrogate, about the upcoming election—the 2012 Presidential Election. Bryan and David are upset at the prospect of Goldie voting for Mitt Romney and try to convince her to vote for Obama—their candidate of choice. Jane, a long-time Republican, confronted David and Bryan about their protests:

> Jane: You stay out of my granddaughter's head! I put years into shaping it, and I will not have you left-wing Nancy boys poisoning her with your hug-a-Muslim bull crap!
>
> David: Mrs. Forrest, what a disturbing surprise.
>
> Jane: I will have you know that my family has voted Republican since Abraham Lincoln, the freer of the slaves. I am proud of my party, and I have been a supporter since 1972.

[Flashback to 1972]

Protestors: No more war!

Young Jane: Dick Nixon knows how to keep America strong! That's why I like dick. Who is with me? I like dick! I like dick!

[Back to present]

Bryan: Oh, so we have you to thank for Watergate and Reagan and Bush and Baby Bush.

Jane: Oh, honey, even we don't like the bushes anymore.

David: But you're voting for Mitt Romney, which is the equivalent of saying the poor aren't entitled to health care, or the environment doesn't need protecting.

Jane: Mitt Romney is interested in preserving every American's right to make his or her own choices.

Bryan: Unless you're gay.

Jane: I thought gay wasn't a choice. You've already polluted Goldie's womb with your gay sperms. Leave her vote alone.

Bryan: You know what I think this is about? Obama is black, and you don't like anybody who's not like you.

Jane: Oh, I would slap your face right now if I didn't want to get a handful of man makeup.

Bryan: It is tinted sunscreen! I'm just gonna say it. Mrs. Forrest, I believe you are a racist.

Jane: Why is that the place that all you liberals go to? Just because I don't like a man who wants to take my hard-earned money and dump it into a broken system,

I'm a racist? Don't you think it's a little more racist to vote for a black man simply because he's black? And what about you two? I don't imagine you're lighting candles on Kwanzaa. Couple of hypocrites. Like every other liberal, you talk the talk, but you can't walk the walk.

Bryan: That is not true! We have black friends. We have oodles of them!

Jane: Right.

Bryan: We do, and if you don't believe me, you can come to our party on Friday night, and you can meet them for yourself.

David: Mmm

Jane: Great. I'll see you and all your homies on Friday.

[Jane leaves]

Bryan: Great!

David: So, we're having a party?

Bryan: Yup. Know any black people?

Later in the episode, Bryan and David discusses their social circle during a scene in their bedroom. The two come to the realization that they have no black friends, and aside from one doctor friend of David's, who is Indian, they have few friends of color.

Bryan: Mrs. Forrest is right. We are phony, liberal frauds. We are racists!

David: We can't be. We are two educated, successful, enlightened gay men.

Bryan: I guess we can't be held entirely responsible. We do meet a lot of black people.

David: Right.

Bryan: We see them at work.

David: Uh-uh.

Bryan: We run into them at parties, except for our own. I mean, is it our fault that none of them stick?

David: Yeah, using the pejorative "them" is not helping our case.

Bryan: We have to get some black people to come to our party. I will not be called a bigoted, armchair liberal by anyone. Maybe we could get the cast of Tremé to come. I sat next to them at the Golden Globes last year, and since nobody watches that show anyway, they could easily pass as your run-of-the-mill, non-famouses.

In an attempt to have black people at his party, Bryan invites Rocky, his employee and only regular character of color on the program, to the party and encourages her to bring along her friends, thinking all of her friends would be black. During the party, Bryan and David work frantically to present a diverse front for Jane; however, the lack of diversity in their social circle become more apparent than before. Rocky arrives at the party with a group of white friends, and Bryan hires one of the waiters, an actor, to pretend to be their other black friend. The only other guest of color is Rocky's brother, who Bryan and David has never met and who is revealed to be a Republican during the dinner party. David and Bryan are forced to come to the realization that they have little diversity in their social circle. At the end of the episode, Bryan and David along with Goldie vow to work on widening their social circles in an effort to provide a more diverse environment for their child.

David: You know, it would be nice to have more diversity in our lives if not for us, for the baby.

Bryan: It's true. Growing up with two white dads. I mean, how much travel and culture and dance can one kid take?

David: I'm serious.

Bryan: I know, I know, and I agree. I mean, we talk the talk, but we don't always walk the walk.

David: Not a word to your grandmother.

Bryan: We will deny it, I swear.

Goldie: You know, it's never too late. Come on.

[Goldie walked to a bi-racial couple, Asian woman and black man, during a school function for her daughter.]

Um, hi, I'm Goldie, Shania's mom.

Renee: I'm Renee. This is my husband Joe and our son Matthew.

David: So, how far along are you?

Renee: Almost six months.

Goldie: Oh, congratulations. I'm not showing yet but, um, I'm pregnant, too.

Joe: Oh, congratulations to you.

Goldie: Oh, well, thank um, actually it's, it's not my baby. It's theirs. I'm their surrogate.

Renee: You know, we've done this before. If you have questions about being first-time parents, we should have dinner sometime.

Bryan: Uh, we would love that.

David: Yeah, that'd be great.

Renee: Cool.

David: Nice meeting you.

Bryan: See you.

Joe: This is perfect. We were just saying we need some gay friends.

David and Bryan's realization that they have a racially homogenous social circle, in a "preferred" reading of the episode, is a testament the potential growth for enlightened and educated gay men. For that matter, white people of all sexualities and genders. The episode provides a feel good story that begins with the internal struggles of two men, who are forced to come to terms with their own potential biases and ends with the two men feeling better about themselves because they make an effort to acquire new, diverse friends. However, the two never acknowledge or own their white male privilege or racist behavior. In an "oppositional" reading, the episode is fraught with racist behaviors from nearly all of the white characters.

The first exchange between David and Bryan and Jane, Goldie's mother, is an example of the co-opting of race by both sides of the gay rights movement. Jane uses the argument of liberal racism while Bryan and David accuse Jane of being a racist because of her political affiliations and stance on issues like marriage equality. Jane actually never mentions race until David accuses her of being a racist, which he claims to be her reason for not voting for President Obama. The couple seems to equate racism with being in opposition to gay rights, which connotes a gay claim to a racial minority status on equal footing with racial civil rights movements. Bryan and David also consider themselves impervious to racism because they are both educated, successful, enlightened gay men. The couple acknowledges racism but only the overt racism that they saddle Jane with in the opening of the episode. However, Bryan and David wield a more systemic and covert

type of racism—one born from privilege and a refusal to face head on the results of that privilege.

Though David and Bryan's privilege is evident in nearly every aspect of the program (i.e., their home, their jobs, their employees, their friends), it is never the topic of discussion in this particular episode. The fact that the only "black friends" the two of them have are their employees never becomes a topic of real conversation. Bryan and David's "black friends" and potential future "black friends" are presented more as possessions—something to boast about or to own. Also interesting is that none of these current or potential "black friends" are LGBTQ. Bryan and David never mention the possibility of finding new LGBTQ friends of color, which suggests LGBTQ people of color do not exist or at least do not exist in a world where two white successful, educated, and enlightened gay men can befriend them. For all intents and purposes, LGBTQ people of color are symbolically annihilated, not just in this episode but also in a broader sense across the programs under study here.

Intertextually, all five programs provide a predominantly white, educated, "enlightened" front for the gay community. With only a couple of exceptions, two minor characters from *Glee*, all adult LGBTQ characters presented in the programs are white, middle class men with few connections to people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Even fewer are LGBTQ people from differing racial or ethnic backgrounds. Aside from racial whitewashing, the representations of LGBTQ women are also sparse. Often when women were represented, LGBTQ or otherwise, they adhered to traditional gender roles to the point of replicating heterosexist, patriarchal relationships with gay men. According to an annual GLAAD report (2011) on LGBTQ representations in

television, 33% of all LGBTQ characters on primetime television are women, and 67% are gay men, only one bisexual character was scripted for the season. The report claims that there are no LGBTQ people of color in primetime regular or recurring roles. In other words, the vast majority of characters representing the LGBTQ community on primetime television are white gay men.

<div align="center">Gay Men and Patriarchy</div>

Similar to arguments that exclude white gay men from racism by virtue of an ethnic model sexual minority status, assertions that exclude gay men from the dominant patriarchy are dangerous and misplaced. Ward (1999) argues sociologists who study gay men and masculinity often overlook the connection of gay men and their relationship to women in the way that the relationship between heterosexual men and women are studied. She contends, "Sociologists of masculinity grant epistemic privilege, or special knowledge, to gay men, considering their unique standpoint outside of heterosexual sexual relations, or outside of men's sexualized domination over women" (p. 153). Ward (1999) posits the notion gay men, because they "exist outside of heterosexual relations of gender domination, closer to moving beyond sexism than heterosexual men is problematic because it implies that gay men are interested in the appearance of hegemonic masculinity but are not infatuated with the political power associated with masculine privilege" (p. 155). Ward (1999) argues that sexism becomes a way for gay men to distance themselves from women while abiding by hegemonic norms. Although there are other ways to illustrate or to demonstrate a non-existent sexual attraction to women, many gay men prefer to bash women. Ward (1999) claims, however, that not all queer sexism aimed at women from gay men is linked to heterosexual norms and

privilege. Ward adds that gay men often are able to render women invisible because of the absence of sexual attraction, which would then at least force some negotiation in a sexual partnership. Ward contends that to build real alliances between gay men and women, which is differentiated from "cultural narratives about women's friendships with gay men," is to work against the presumptions that gay men are beyond sexism that they share in the victimization from heterosexual masculinity (p. 155). She concludes that gay men need to also fight against the notion that queer sexism is not an urgent matter in society.

Aligning with the Patriarchy

Shugart (2003) argues that the television depictions of gay men/heterosexual women relationships in both television and film conflate a "recoded and normalized" male homosexuality with privileged male heterosexuality to extend heterosexual male privilege to the gay men depicted. In doing so, she argues, "blatant sexism is reinvented and legitimized, and gay male identity simultaneously is defined by and renormalizes heteronormativity" (p. 67). She contends that one of the staples of the gay man/heterosexual woman genre (e.g., *Will & Grace*) is the heterosexualization of the gay male through traditionally masculine stereotypes and roles as well as the foil character (the overly flamboyant or effeminate character that is in stark contrast to the lead gay male character). In other words, the program adheres to a gender binary where relationships are defined in dichotomous masculine/feminine terms. However, Shugart claims this is only the first step to aligning the gay male character's sexuality with the heterosexual norm. The second step "features increased sexual access to, license with, and paternalistic control of women, all of which accordingly reframe gay male sexuality

as an extension of heterosexual male privilege predicated on control of female sexuality" (p. 80).

Shurgart (2003) maintains the representations of gay men and heterosexual women in many shows and films work as "fill-ins" for the "sexist sex that many straight men are conditioned to idealize" (p. 88) she continues, arguing that the representations "function not only to control female sexuality but to control gay male sexuality, as well" (p. 88). Further, Shugart adds:

> The implications for women are that sexism is cast as only a vestige of conventionally defined straight men, suggesting that sexist practices by gay men—or less rigidly masculine men—'don't count,' thus renormalizing sexism under a host of 'exceptional' circumstances. The implications for gay men are that the price of privilege is sexism, a fact that necessarily defines them by their heteronormative sexual relationships with women. The gay men in these configurations thus become patriarchal allies—rather than adversaries—in efforts to naturalize and reproduce heteronormative politics. (p. 89)

The following section of this chapter provides an analysis of the relationship between Goldie and David and Bryan from *The New Normal* that exhibits many of the heteronormative opposite-sex dynamics mentioned in previous literature— gay men act as "fill-ins" in the absence of straight men. I also analyze an episode of *Modern Family* where the absence of a woman creates a replication of the gender binary between Mitchell and Cam. The two adhere to the masculine and feminine roles prescribed by the patriarchy.

The New Object

Although the creators of *The New Normal* aim to depict a family situation that shows a change in "normal," many of the relationships between the characters remain reminiscent of patriarchal constructions of family (i.e., subservient wife and dominant husband). In the case of *New Normal*, Goldie, David and Bryan's surrogate, is employed to carry their child. They have an active role in her life as she carries out her duties. Goldie left her home in Ohio because she caught her husband in bed with another woman. In search of a new life for her and her daughter, Shania, Goldie moves to Los Angeles where she then becomes a mother again, this time for a gay couple. Early in the season, Goldie shares with Bryan and David that she wants to go back to school after their baby was born to pursue a law degree—a degree they offer to pay for because of her commitment to them. At one point, David and Bryan move Goldie and Shania into their guesthouse so that she could be more comfortable, in a nicer neighborhood and house, than in her apartment, which is in a neighborhood often referred to as undesirable by other characters. Goldie eventually discovers, however, her true talents as a seamstress and abandons her desire to become an attorney.

As a character, Goldie is presented as a woman trying to find independence from men; however, her previous dependence is only replicated in her new home with a gay couple, who not only control her economically but physically as well. In the fourth episode, titled "Obama Mama," Bryan and David not only work to control her vote in the presidential election, they also work to control her eating habits. In the opening scene of the episode, the couple surprises Goldie and Shania with a morning visit. When they arrive Goldie and Shania are eating fast food hamburgers for breakfast.

Bryan: Goldie, what is in your mouth?

David: Oh, my God, is that fast food?

Bryan: Oh, please tell me you're bulimic so at least it'll come up before it hits our baby.

David: Or you could eat this healthy, organic food we just got you at the farmers' market.

Bryan: I had never eaten broccoli before I met David.

Nutrition can be fun!

Goldie: Guys, pregnancy cravings are totally normal, and it's just so delicious.

David: Yeah, I know, but that delicious burger could cause all kinds of developmental issues for our baby. See, not a lot of people know this, but charbroiled meat is a carcinogen proven to affect DNA.

Goldie: Oh, well, I ate like this when I was pregnant with Shania, and she turned out just fine. Okay?

[She said this as David watches her squeeze ketchup from the bottle into her mouth]

Goldie's eating habits and general well-being are often the subject of David's ridicule. As a doctor and the biological father of the baby, David assumes many of the traditional heterosexual masculine partner roles in David and Bryan's employer-employee relationship with Goldie.

When read via the dominant code, Hall's (1986) "preferred reading," Goldie, a newly single woman, found reprieve in Los Angeles from an unfaithful husband, a dire economic situation, and an oppressive social setting. She works to provide a future for

her and her daughter by opening her mind and allowing the possibility of a new normal.

She is empowered by her own willingness to provide Bryan and David with something

they cannot do on their own and something so far removed from her previous life in

Ohio. She often refers to herself as an independent and strong woman during the season

because of her courageousness to blaze her own path.

Goldie's plight looks much more bleak in an "oppositional" reading of the

narrative. Goldie finds no independence from the patriarchal structures that have ruled

her life thus far. Her grandmother Jane raised her after her mother and father abandoned

her at a young age. She, like her mother and grandmother, gave birth to a child in her

teens, and married the father in accordance with social pressures that work to contain

women and their sexuality within the confines of marriage and motherhood. Her new life

in Los Angeles mimicked her old life. Instead of a man who objectified her for sexual

purposes, now two men objectify her for reproductive purposes. David and Bryan

infantilize Goldie to ensure their own ends by controlling her diet, housing, livelihood,

and body. She did not transform into an autonomous woman, rather, she transforms into a

new object meant as a means to an end for two new men.

Following the Binary

Many of the episodes of *The New Normal* and *Modern Family*, the only two

programs in this study with prominent male-male romantic couples, emphasize relational

story lines without a female identified character; however, those episodes often rely on a

gender binary (masculine-feminine) to tell stories that viewers could easily read via a

dominant code. Many of these episodes rely on the common trope of the infantilized

feminine, where women are treated as children who need to be controlled for their own

good (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002) in contrast with the dominant masculine character. The dichotomy generally takes shape via traditional gender roles (i.e., feminine domestic duties and masculine economic obligations) with the masculine character being the levelheaded breadwinner inept at performing maternal responsibilities versus the irrational caretaker with little interest, knowledge or skill in performing masculine roles.

In episode four of *Modern Family*, "The Butler's Escape," and episode ten of *New Normal*, "The XY Factor," the gender binary is used in the absence of a female-identified character. In the episode of *Modern Family*, Mitchell and Cam switch roles for the episode with disastrous consequences, and, in *New Normal*, Bryan comes to terms with his role as the "mother" in his future son's life. First, I will discuss both episodes before providing a preferred and oppositional reading for each.

Mitchell and Cam's narrative starts with the first day of Cam's new job as a middle school music teacher. In the episode, Cam and Mitchell both adjust to new household duties in which Cam left for work while Mitchell was left to care for Lily. The audience is given the background for Cam's new position near the top of the episode before seeing a scene where Cam explained for Mitchell how to take care of Lily.

> Cam: Okay, Lily's drop-off time is between 8:45 and 8:50, so you should be fine to get to work by 9. Here is her checklist for her backpack.
>
> Mitchell: Uh, wow.
>
> Cam: Oh, I have this whole thing planned. Okay, I'm gonna walk in, take off my jacket, and say, "here comes treble." Big swing on the first day. Please don't tamp down my enthusiasm.
>
> Mitchell: Okay, what else?

Cam: Oh! The dimmer came in for the switch, so I want you to call the electrician, but not Brad. Remember? We had a problem with him last time about the billing.

Mitchell: He wanted his name above the title?

Cam: Yes, you've done that joke before. So cute. So funny.

Mitchell: What else?

Cam: Oh! Lily needs to get a present for Gio's birthday party. And don't be thrown by the invitation. It is a pirate's party, not a Pilates party. Now sit. I wanna talk juice boxes.

Mitchell: Cam. Cam, I know what's happening here. You're feeling very anxious about your first day at work, and you're focusing that anxiety on my day with Lily.

Cam: Really? Are you sure I'm not completely confident about my first day because it's gonna be a home run, and I am worried about you because you're taking on a little bit more of the Lily load? [To Lily] Don't be scared, sweetie. Mwah!

Mitchell: She's not scared! Wh-wh-what are you doing?

Cam: Just call me if you need me.

Mitchell: I won't!

Cam: And thank you for managing my expectations today. Not necessary.

Mitchell: I saw you practicing a bow last night.

Cam: That was just in fun. You know, I highly doubt some teenagers are gonna throw rose petals at my feet.

Mitchell: Yeah.

Cam: But I wouldn't be surprised if I got slow-clapped out of my first class.

Cam and Mitchell both, as it turns out, were overconfident in their abilities to handle the new roles. Cam bombs his first day of teaching and Mitchell found himself ill-prepared to handle the responsibilities of taking Lily to school, grocery shopping, handling the household repair, and cooking dinner. Mitchell enlists the help of his sister, Claire, to finish the household tasks before Cam comes home for the evening, giving the illusion that he is able to handle the new role. At the end of the evening, Cam and Mitchell discussed their days.

Cam: It was a disaster, Mitchell. They hated me! Not just the kids, the teachers. They wouldn't sit with me at lunch. I had to sit alone.

Mitchell: Oh, honey.

Cam: And my sweater... the shop teacher spilled juice on it. He said it was an accident, but it wasn't an accident.

Mitchell: It's okay.

Cam: It's not okay! I failed miserably. And look at you. You did everything so perfectly.

Mitchell: Well, yes. And... and... and no. Look, look, I . . . I gotta tell ya. Uh . . . I've just been watching how you've done things all these years, and I just perfected it.

Claire: Oh, please, Mitchell!

Cam: Claire . . .

Claire: Cam, he was every bit the failure you were. He was late picking up Lily.

She was in with the custodians. The only thing he had less to do with than dinner

was the dimmer. And her hair was in braids because there was gum in it. And . . .

why are we hugging?

Cam: Because I know if he called you for help and heard as many insults as I

know he had to hear, then he had a worse day than me.

Mitchell: Oh, she was horrible, Cam.

Cam: Oh! You know what? It's gonna get better.

Mitchell: No, I know. We just need some time to settle into these new roles.

Cam: You were right to lower my expectations.

Mitchell: I just wish I had lowered mine.

Similarly, episode ten of *New Normal* features the characters struggling with their gender

roles in preparation for their new child, whose gender they do not yet know.

In accordance with the dichotomous gender binary, each of the men hopes for the

gender matching the roles they perform. Bryan, the feminine character, makes it known

that he prefers to have a daughter, and David, the masculine character, hopes for a son.

During the episode, Bryan works to prepare the nursery for the newborn, but without a

gender, he finds decorating to be "creatively frustrating." Near the top of the episode,

Goldie reveals the baby's assigned gender, male, which causes a mixture of emotions

from David and Bryan. David began to make plans for the anticipated birth of their son—

all involving typical masculine activities like jungle gyms, light saber fights, and Pee-

Wee Football. In fact, to help him prepare a friend invites him to help coach his son's

football team. During the game, Bryan, feeling left out, forces himself into a coaching

position because, as he said, "We're having a boy and I want to participate in his life."

Bryan's coaching experiment fails, but he finds his talents lie elsewhere—in the kitchen.

Bryan hosts the post-game pizza party at his and David's house, which the boys on the

football team enjoy. Bryan begins to understand his role in his son's life.

> David: And you thought you wouldn't be able to relate to boys.
>
> Bryan: Well, kids will say anything if there's free pizza.
>
> David: Bryan, look at them. They're having fun, they're learning new things. This is not the work of a man that doesn't know how to connect to boys. You know, you don't have to be scared about not relating to your son just because your dad didn't know what to do with a boy like you. You're already a better dad than he was. Because you're trying. Our son is very lucky because he is going to have an awesome dad.
>
> Bryan and David: [simultaneously] Me.

In a "preferred" reading, both of these episodes demonstrate the normality of

same-sex parenting and relationships. The two couples seemingly worry about what most

"normal" heterosexual parents or parents-to-be might worry about—taking care of their

children and home. The appearance of normal relies here on both partners performing

roles prescribed by the dominant ideology—both the masculine and feminine. One

partner is charged with the nurturing homemaker role while the other performs the

masculine duties of earning money and controlling most household affairs. Much like

most heterosexual or opposite-sex couples experience in day-to-day life. However, an

"oppositional" reading of these two examples reveals an unwavering adherence to

patriarchal codes that subverts the feminine and privileges the masculine.

In the absence of a female-identified character, the feminine partner takes on the role of the subverted. The more masculine characters, Mitchell and David, infantilize Cam, in *Modern Family*, and Bryan, in *The New Normal*. Both Cam and Bryan serve the homemaker function, have to be coddled to fight against their hysteria, and both find solace in their ability to provide "motherly" functions within their family dynamic. At different points in both series, Cam and Bryan are referred to as "baby momma" or "mother." Butler argues that sexuality is "always constructed within the terms of discourse and power" and power is "partially" understood in terms of "heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions" (p. 30). Butler contends that heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual practices are all understood and presented through a "framework" that is ultimately an "asymmetrical binary of masculine/feminine" (p. 32). She argues gender conformity is a "regulatory practice" that makes heterosexuality a compulsory model. Gender roles then, according to Butler, are regulated through an "exclusionary apparatus," which eliminates any other model from the discourse (p. 32). Both *Modern Family* and *The New Normal* miss an opportunity to transgress the compulsory masculine/feminine dichotomy by presenting blurred gender roles or queered gender identities, or the opportunity to dispense with engendered notions of identity all together. Instead, both opt to present a heterosexist, patriarchal construction of gender politics where women/feminine are subordinates of men/masculine. Both programs, ironically, adhere to the shows' titles. Each family represents a repackaged family unit that on the surface appears to be new or evolved, but actually provides only a modern/normal take on family by way of reliance on labels from the dominant ideology that work to reaffirm oppressive gender roles and heterosexist structures.

Intersection of Race, Gender, and Queer Identity

Finally, a discussion of the intersection of race, gender, and sexual identity is needed to fully discuss the interplay of both racism and sexism within a broader queer representation on television. *Glee* provides the only character, although a minor character, at the intersection of race, gender, and queer identity. Unique, a black transgender girl played by cisgender actor Alex Newell, transfers to William McKinley High School, the fictional school in *Glee*, during the fourth season. During the season, a few episodes tackle the issue of Unique's gender identity, but only in secondary plot lines. Unique appears sporadically in episodes during the season, but the main story line centers around her love interest, Ryder Lynn, a member of the school's football team and one of the straight boys in the glee club. Unique "catfishes" Ryder throughout the season, meaning she purposely misleads him via social media to think she is someone else. She pretends to be a white, blonde high school girl named Katie with a crush on Ryder. The two communicate via social media and develop an online relationship. When Unique reveals that she is indeed Katie, the show has its first tangible conversation about gender identity and, to some degree, race and sexuality, albeit brief:

> Unique: Yes, I'm Unique aka Wade, aka Katie, aka Catfish. Marley, I love you, but you don't have to cover for me anymore. It started off innocent at first, and then he started telling me things, and it got way too deep to stop. And you don't know how long it's been since I felt this close to someone without all of this [pointing to her body] getting in the way. I know you're probably gonna punch me in the face, but the truth is, I reached out to you because I liked you. So I got a picture of a cute blonde to make you like me back. But all the stories, all the

jokes, the connection that we had, that was all me. And that was all real. I'm sorry
I stayed hidden. I didn't do it to hurt you. I just I really don't want to lose what we
have.

Ryder: We don't have anything. I'm not gonna punch you in the face. But I'm
also not gonna talk to you ever again.

The "preferred" reading of Unique's crush and subsequent "catfishing" of Ryder offers a
glimpse of the struggles a transgender teen in a mid-American high school may
experience. Not only is Unique dealing with her own gender identity, she is also
struggling with typical teenage sexual development—a story that may appeal to a wider
teen audience who can relate to the story if not directly then indirectly. The plot line also
relies on the audience's knowledge of popular culture to relay meaning. The social media
phenomenon of "catfishing" was made popular by the MTV reality program and the story
of Notre Dame football star Manti Te'o. Te'o, who in 2013 made national news headlines
after he discovered that a woman he met online and established a long-distance
relationship with did not exist. The audience, in a "preferred" reading, is meant to feel
empathy for Unique and Ryder not through the issues of gender identity and race, but
through the teenage experience of love and rejection. Unique represents the jilted teenage
lover. She is the girl with a crush on a guy who is out of her league—a plot line not
unfamiliar in popular television programs and films. Ryder plays the part of the confused
and angry object of Unique's affection. Unique's secret, the "catfishing," causes a rift
between the two that eliminates any hope of Ryder connecting with Unique or her alter
ego, Katie.

In an "oppositional" reading of Unique, her position at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, however, problematizes the "preferred" reading. Unique, as Nero (2005) argues, is an imposter. Her character represents an imposter on several levels. Nero argues that black men are cast as imposters in television programming, which disallows them the space to join a broader discussion of sexuality or class. The program's creators render Unique an imposter through racial and gender terms. As a black male, Wade, Unique's given name, is an imposter. Because Wade is a black male, he cannot be gay, as Nero argues. Black men are only given space to function as hyper-masculine characters in a white story. Unique as a transgender woman is an imposter because as one of the show's characters claims, "Unique is definitely a guy." Unique's gender identity serves as a subject for a debate during the season with many of cast members referring to her with feminine pronouns. Other characters refer to her via her assigned name, Wade, and with masculine pronouns despite her asking for everyone to refer to her as a girl. Finally, Unique's race and gender transgression, impersonating a blonde, white girl, a true object of sexual attraction, represents the ultimate offence as an imposter. In an attempt to find a space to express her gender identity and sexuality, Unique is forced to create an alternate persona—one that is allowed sexual attractions to men and allowed to perform feminine gender roles. Unique symbolically annihilates herself to gain an artificial visibility within the dominant ideology.

Summary

Overall, the creators of all five programs missed an opportunity to provide characters who buck normalized gender roles and acknowledge and confront their own privilege. This chapter suggests that by symbolically annihilating LGBTQ people of color

and gender minorities while also reinforcing the dominant patriarchy through adherence to traditional forms of sexism and assigned gender roles, the programs further entrench heteronormative ideology in to mainstream society.

The gay men in these programs replicate heterosexist norms in that they are white, they abide by the masculine/feminine binary, they resist acknowledgement of their white, male privilege, and they objectify women via patriarchal codes further marginalizing LGBTQ people of color, women, and gender-queer individuals. Bell's (1992) argument that "Americans achieve a measure of social stability through their unspoken pact to keep blacks on the bottom," (p. 152) rings true in this analysis. Just as groups of immigrants worked during the early 1900s to climb the rungs of the power ladder by distancing themselves racially from blacks (Roediger, 1991), activists from the neoliberal gay rights assimilations movement have worked to present the gay community as reflective of the dominant culture (Duggan 2003). These programs are a reflection of the racial exclusion from the broader gay rights movement. In a similar way, the movement has worked to exclude women, or at least subvert women, in a manner consistent with the white patriarchy. The two programs with adult same-sex couples in long-term monogamous abide by the compulsory gender norms, masculine/feminine, in which the masculine is given preference and dominance over the feminine.

Despite moments in the gay and lesbian rights movement's history when members worked toward an ultimate goal of broad social justice, the current movement's reliance on co-opted black civil rights rhetoric, colorblind racist assumptions, and heterosexist gender norms works to further marginalize people falling outside the white heterosexual male standard. Programs like the ones studied here have the power to make

those groups and individuals visible. Discussions of the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality are essential to an overall move toward broader social equality. Fiske (1987) argues that television cannot be the originator of social change. Fiske (1987) says, "Social change must have its root in material social existence; but television can be, must be, part of that change, and its effectivity will either hasten or delay it" (p. 45). The question then is not can television programs help to spur social change. The question is can the mainstream gay rights movement in the United States change and effect change in the dominant culture to make effective social change for all?

CHAPTER V

RICH AND FABULOUS

And although the assimilationist rhetoric of neoliberalism promises equality for
'all', in reality, only gays and lesbians with enough access to capital can imagine
a life integrated within North American capitalist culture. It goes without saying
that 'all' actually refers to normative citizen-subjects with a host of rights only
afforded to some (and not all) queers.

— Julie Tilsen & David Nylund (2010, p. 69)

Perhaps now we can at least take comfort in the fact that, advertising tells us, we
can spend our way to happiness through weight-loss programs, skin-care
products, and expensive clothing purchases, and can just be as happy as all the
heterosexuals spending their way into bankruptcy because of their insecurities.
That is progress of a very limited sort.

— Donald E. Hall (2009, p. 45)

Mass media are full of representations of rich gay men. Men with impeccable
material taste, large nicely decorated homes, and insatiable consumerist appetites have
been the central characters in television shows like *Will & Grace* and *Queer Eye for
Straight Guy*. These men give home decorating and personal fashion tips to average
Americans on early morning network news programs. Aside from their acute sense of
fashion and taste, most Americans have probably come to equate gay men with larger
than average disposable incomes via media representations. However, Gates (2014)
found in a study of food insecurity among LGBT people that 1-in-4 LGBT people,

approximately 2.4 million people, experienced "a time in the last year when they did not have enough money to feed themselves or their family" (p. 1). Gates (2014) also found, in 2012, 4-in-10 lesbian, gay, and bisexual people aged 18 to 44, who were raising children, received food stamps. In a separate study released in June 2013, researchers argued same-sex couples are "more vulnerable to poverty in general than different-sex married couples" (Badgett, Durso, & Schneebaum, 2013, p. 1). Researchers in the same study reported African Americans in same-sex couples poverty rates nearly double the poverty rates of opposite-sex African American couples, and "African American men in same-sex couples are more than six times more likely to be poor than white men in same-sex couples" (p. 3). Despite a growing body of Census and income data that suggest otherwise, the vision of affluence in the gay community persists in the mainstream.

The Atlantic writer Nathan McDermott tackles the issue in a March 21, 2014, article where he tracked the myth to the 1990s boom in gay and lesbian marketing. He argues an array of social issues leads to LGBT poverty including job discrimination, homelessness, and misinformation. The myth, McDermott (2014) says, has been so often told that it has become a pervasive element in the social construction of the LGBT community. He also maintains the influence of popular culture aids in the perpetuation of the myth of gay affluence:

> Popular culture has helped launch gay people in to the mainstream, but for all the benefits that shows such as *Will & Grace*, *Modern Family*, and *Glee* have had for the LGBT community on the public's consciousness, few cultural outlets accurately represent the realities gays and lesbians face in America today. Realities like poverty, discrimination, homelessness and food insecurity. And as

Justice Scalia has shown, this misinformation is more damaging than simple

ignorance. It holds back the entire gay equality movement. (McDermott, 2014

paras. 20-21)

With such compelling evidence as to the plight of many in the LGBTQ community, why

do mass media representations so frequently rely on a vision of affluent gay men? I argue

in the remainder of this chapter that the creation of an affluent gay market not only

provides gay-targeted media outlets with a carrot for advertising revenues, but it also

works to create an attractive, powerful gay community for the mainstream. In the same

way that a heteronormative sexuality and an adherence to dominant racial and gender

norms aids upholding homonormative standards, perpetuating the ideal affluent gay man

or couple normalizes gay identity. In this chapter, I first detail the history of the gay

market segment created to attract national advertisers to gay and lesbian media outlets.

Second, I provide literature on the impact of the creation of a gay market segment on the

broader LGBTQ community, and finally, I provide preferred and oppositional readings of

examples from two of the five shows in this study.

<div align="center">Creating the Gay Market</div>

A strong push to include gay and lesbian-centered market began in the 1990s.

Sender (2004) argues the emergence of this push came on the heels of various advertising

and promotional campaigns aimed at gays and lesbians along with an up-tic in television

programming aimed at gay and lesbian audiences and gay-centered media outlets. She

suggests the upswing meant that gays and lesbians were then "considered a sufficiently

large and profitable group to warrant marketers' attention, and signal a mature phase of

the gay market" (p. 1). The new concentration on gay and lesbian consumers, however,

did not necessarily mean a push toward gay rights initiatives. Sender argues, "Marketers have attempted to establish a commonsense idea that the business of gay marketing can be considered independently of the politics of gay rights, identity, and visibility . . ." (p. 3). Sender contends, "By separating business from politics, marketers appeal to a liberal-utilitarian economic model in which financial decisions can be made free of political motivations or ramifications, and where marketers can reach new consumers and generate increased profits independently of any impact this activity might have on social relations or cultural politics" (p. 3). However, Sender (2004) maintains, this line of argument disavows the extent to which "all economic activity has political effects" (p. 3), and the increase in gay visibility as a result of this marketing push has been contested by both those inside the LGBT community and those opposed to the efforts of LGBTQ activists.

Sender argues that like other market segments and publics, marketers construct the gay market. In other words, the LGBTQ buying bloc does not essentially exist. Those trying to sell goods and services call it into being. People who identify as gay are then made a visible target market. She contends that the gay market is based on two fictions: "the fiction of market segmentation and the fiction of an essentialized gay identity" (pp. 143-144). She contends that the assumptions and technologies that make market segmentation possible are "built upon ideological foundations and have political consequences, not least because they make visible a fictive entity called 'the gay market' in a history of cultural invisibility and homophobia" (p. 144). Sender said she found that many marketers see the ideal gay consumer as male, young, single, and childless: "The elevated affluence and education levels used to describe the gay market are extrapolated to a psychographic profile of gays as tasteful, trendsetting, and loyal customers" (p. 146).

She concludes that this view of the gay market excludes many LGBTQ people from the marketers' image of gay. She argues the elusiveness of many LGBTQ identified people results in gay market researchers limiting their samples to homogenous, non-representative samples. For this reason, she says the bulk of gay market research has come from middle-class, white gay men. Middle-class, white gay men have historically been the most visible members of the gay community, she contends, so their ability and willingness to participate in market research is much greater than others. Generally speaking, most respondents to LGBTQ-identified marketing surveys are those who are "protected by wealth or an independent means of income, and whose willingness to participate is thus influenced by the very factors that market research aims to measure" (Sender, 2004, p. 148). Sender argues that this is not exclusive to gay marketers (especially magazine publishers). She said, "All readership surveys tend to exaggerate the affluence of their subscribers" to attract advertisers to their publication.

Creating a gay market geared at those craving visibility also creates an air of enthusiasm, which furthers the attractiveness of the gay market to advertisers and producers. Sender (2004) contends that what may seem to marketers like enthusiasm to be heard, as a consumer on the part of gay respondents may actually be an enthusiasm for visibility in general. She argues that many LGBT respondents may complete marketing questionnaires in a bid for visibility in a world where the opportunities may be limited. The enthusiasm is then promoted and prolonged as Hall (2009) argues through consumption. He argues most current gay media outlets like *Out* magazine promote a mindset of "happiness-inducing consumerism" (p. 43). This mindset does not promote a "concrete interest in the future;" it promotes, according to Hall, the "ever-expanding

entertainment, clothing, and fragrance options" (p. 44). He argues that it only promotes

the ecstasy of consumption. He contends some positives result from market visibility and

from the pleasures of consumption; however, "it is not socially transformative in any

ethically responsible, much less queer or radical, way" (p. 44). He contends, "Perhaps

now we can at least take comfort in the fact that, advertising tells us, we can spend our

way to happiness through weight-loss programs, skin-care products, and expensive

clothing purchases, and can just be as happy as all the heterosexuals spending their way

into bankruptcy because of their insecurities. That is progress of a very limited sort" (p.

45). Tilsen and Nylund (2010) maintain the trend of generalizing the LGBTQ community

for the purpose of demographic information, which will be used to target the community

as consumers, creates an alignment between the LGBTQ community and neoliberalism.

They contend that support for neoliberal causes, as a means for visibility, includes

promoting militarization, privatization of welfare and healthcare, marriage equality, and

conspicuous consumption. Tilsen and Nylund argue, "And although the assimilationist

rhetoric of neoliberalism promises equality for 'all,' in reality, only gays and lesbians

with enough access to capital can imagine a life integrated within North American

capitalist culture. It goes without saying that 'all' actually refers to normative citizen-

subjects with a host of rights only afforded to some (and not all) queers" (p. 69).

Assumptions about the Gay Market

      Sender (2004) concludes that like all market segments the gay market segment in

constructed with three assumptions in mind: homogeneity, separation, and essence.

According to Sender, the assumption of homogeneity assumes that everyone in a

particular group shares one defining characteristic that "renders all other differences

within the group unimportant" (p. 154). There are obvious holes in this line of thought especially when considering gender, race/ethnicity, and class issues that divide the LGBTQ population into many more groups. Separation assumes that the gay market can be made discernable from those outside the group. However, in reality, those identifying as bisexual, transgender, pansexual, two-spirited, polyamorous, etc., challenge this assumption because they do not share in this single identifier—gay. In an effort to appeal to a broader base of consumers many marketers began using nomenclature such as the GLBT or LGBTQ market to show a broader inclusion of constituents. Sender argues that this is in name only: "in reality bisexuals and transgender people remain largely invisible both in the routines of market formation and in the image of the gay market these routines help to produce" (p. 164). Finally, the assumption of essence assumes an essentialized, or inherent, gay identity, that is definable and knowable. Sender contends those who fall outside the normalized construction of gay (i.e., lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, LGBTQ people of color, and poorer LGBTQ people) undermine the essentialized view of sexuality used in the construction of the gay market segment. She argues that the three assumptions work to purge all dissenters because they are not attractive to advertisers. She says that this process does, "violence to those who don't belong by making them invisible or laughable, by depriving them of revenues for publications, and by making their presence less legitimate in the public domain. Yet it also does violence to those who appear to fit the idealized stereotype of the white, affluent, gay male consumer by essentializing gayness to a reified fact and thereby negating an expansive view of sexuality and desire" (pp. 171-172).

The result of the construction of the gay market segment is a commodified gay culture that has been stripped of many of the people who helped to develop various aspects and subcultures within the community. This whitewashing of the culture excludes many LGBTQ people, which creates a more attractive package of consumers for advertisers and goods producers. The construction of the gay market also serves to further assimilate the dominant gay culture into the dominant heterosexual culture—a culture that privileges whiteness, wealth, masculinity, and marital status. The gay liberation movement then, over time, has been diminished from a movement striving to overturn the dominant power structure to a non-movement concerned with equality through sameness and privileged visibility, further marginalizing those who do not fit the market ideal. In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide oppositional readings of examples from *Modern Family* and *New Normal* that exemplify the power of the illusion of the gay market segment and its prevalence in mass media. Both examples, work from the dominant ideological notion that gay men not only possess the means to consume but that they represent a powerful buying bloc that influences other buyers and could potentially cure the economic ills of the country.

<div align="center">"They Come to Play"</div>

Examples of the gay market segment and identity via consumption are ample in all five programs studied; however, most are so seamlessly weaved into the fabric of the shows that gay consumption, affluence, and market presence are seldom the sole subject of large chunks of discussion. For example, all but one of the gay characters in the five shows are either employed in high paying occupations or are at least partnered with a person with such a job. The one exception to the gainfully employed trend is Max from

Happy Endings, who despite his underemployment is not shown in financially dire conditions. The characters, whose homes are part of the set, all live in large houses that are nicely decorated. Their tastes in clothing, décor, and food are often exhibited or are desired or sought out by others. The gay characters in *Glee*, *Modern Family*, and *New Normal* often buy trips, clothing, food, houses, and other material goods without financial consequence. The characters often acknowledge their own financial wealth or material consumption as a badge of honor, and, in many cases, are charged with the task of throwing opulent parties or redecorating someone's home or both.

The creators and writers of *Modern Family* exemplify the power of the assumed gay buying bloc in the culmination of a three-episode story arc that tracks the progress of Mitchell and Cam, Claire, and Phil's, Mitchell's sister and brother-in-law, house flip (buying a house, remodeling, and reselling at a profit). On a denotative level, the house flip draws on the popularity of house flipping as an investment strategy. The process of house flipping is the subject of several programs outside the sitcom genre, on do-it-yourself networks and programs. Thus, the audience is well aware of the time, money, and work most house flips require. The audience is also most likely aware of the financial gamble associated with house flipping. If the house sells at a high enough price, the flippers not only recoup the money spent to buy the house but they are rewarded with a profit. The story storyline culminates with what is essentially the reveal episode, in keeping with the do-it-yourself genre. In episode 20, "Flip Flop," not only does the audience see the finished house, or at least a portion of the finished house, but the payoff is revealed as well. During the episode, Phil, who is a real estate agent, haggles with his business rival Gil Thorpe, who attempts to buy the house way below the asking price.

Just as the group comes to terms with taking a loss on the house flip, Gil ups his offer to compete with the "gays."

The scene begins with Mitchell, Cam, Claire, and Phil viewing the house with another prospective buyer, who does not buy, when Gil arrives to inspect the house. Because Gil does not know the relationship between Phil and Mitchell and Cam, the two impersonate to be perspective buyers.

Gil: Hey, Dunphy.

Phil: Gil.

Gil: Your office said you'd be over here.

Phil: Yeah, I am here. With my buyers. What do you guys think?

Mitchell: Oh, my God! This house is perfect.

Cam: I especially love the warm embrace of the parlor!

Mitchell: It screams you.

Cam: No, it screams you, sweetie.

Mitchell: Oh, dis doggie door, Cam. Look.

Cam: Awww!

Gil: Damn it. Gays. They come to play.

Phil: I'm busy, Gil.

Gil: Don't accept any offers without talking to me first. My buyer wants in, all right?

Phil: I don't know. We're pretty far down that road.

Gil: All right. We'll up the offer.

Phil: Gil Let me tell you how this is gonna go down. First, you're gonna buy me a lovely dinner. [A reference to something Gil told Phil earlier in the episode about what was going to happen when Phil sold the house to Gil's buyer]

No, that's not it. First, I'm gonna buy you a lovely dinner. Then I'm gonna take you in the back . . .

Cam: It's gonna happen! It's gonna happen!

Claire: We're gonna sell the house.

Cam: You see, Mitchell? I told you so.

A "preferred" reading of this scene relies on the dominant assumption of a powerful gay buying bloc, which in this case prevents the main characters from losing money on a real estate investment. The overall message of Gil's assertion that the gays "come to play" is that when gay men want a material good they get material goods and will most likely stop at nothing to get it. Through this narrative of power, gay men gain visibility not only as consumers but as powerful consumers, meaning they have the disposable income and bargaining power to wreak havoc on their competition. Secondly, the power of gay men as trendsetters is prevalent in this scene. If the gays want it then it must be worth having because gay men are assumed to have an eye for material goods. Phil understands this power, which is why he introduced Cam and Mitchell as his buyers, and Cam and Mitchell understand this power, which is why they begin to point out the features of the house. Overall, the "preferred" reading presents a positive view of the power gay men have in the market, which garners visibility and credibility outside the market.

A "negotiated" reading of the scene, however, hones in on the assumptions made in the construction of the gay market segment. This scene perpetuates what Sender (2004)

argues are the assumptions of the gay market segment: homogeneity, separation, and essence. An amalgamation of the three assumptions is seen in this scene. Gil's assessment of the "gays" as a group who comes to play offers a homogenized view of the gay community, one that assumes all gay men have the means and drive to make big purchases in a competitive way. The assertion also depicts the separation of the gay market from other markets. In this case, the separate gay market is a desirable market for Phil, who is trying to earn the maximum amount of money on an investment. The buyers were not a straight couple, and if they had been, the outcome would have been different. The buyers were, in fact, a desired market segment—they were gay men. Finally, the essentialized gay eye for consumable goods transforms Mitchell and Cam into a commodity. Mitchell and Cam are hot commodities. As trendsetters and trend seekers, knowing what they like, what they want, and how much they will pay for it is valuable to those selling goods to everyone.

A "negotiated" reading, however, does not completely deconstruct the scene for a new understanding of the power of the gay market segment assumptions. The most striking thing about an "oppositional" reading of this scene is the invisibility of an alternative or a transgression of the assumptions. As previously stated, the three assumptions of the gay market segment are so permanently ingrained in the dominant ideology of the gay community that contesting those notions would be futile. The gay men in the scene, Mitchell and Cam, are only given power via buying power. Without their ability to present as members of the gay buying bloc or as commodified trendsetters, they have no standing with the straight characters in the scene. Thus, those LGBTQ

people without the cultural or economic capital to compete and comply with the overall desirable gay market are rendered invisible and powerless.

This scene provides an example of the established power of the gay buying bloc, Gil knew the gays "come to play;" however, an example from *New Normal* provides insight in to what could be even more power in the form of same-sex marriages and wedding ceremonies. In Chapter III, I examined episode six of *New Normal* as an example of the presentation of same-sex marriage as logical development for same-sex couples. In this chapter, the episode is examined for it adherence to the narrative of gay affluence and the potential of gay affluence to provide a national economic boost. During the episode, Bryan takes on the duty of planning Shania's "pretend" wedding to her classmate. As Bryan's plans take shape, an expensive nuptial extravaganza emerges with a customized dinner menu, a handmade dress, high-end invitations, and a celebrity guest list. Bryan's planning seems to get more and more elaborate as the episode moves along. He enlists the help of his work assistant, Rocky, played by NeNe Leakes, to plan the wedding. Byran's planning begins soon after Shania makes the wedding announcement in scene near the top of the episode.

Bryan: Ooh.

Goldie, Shania, and Rocky: Ooh.

Byran: Hamachi tartare on crisped wonton, chipotle marinated flank steak, and my favorite, the lamb slider. Now, the lamb might get a little breathy, but we can have a mint amuse bouche on hand if need be.

Rocky: Got it. My dad can't afford a new leg.

Goldie: These all look so foreign. Were you up all night making them, Rocky?

Rocky: No, but I was up all night hating my life.

Bryan: Okay, so I've ordered the gardenias, I sent out the invitations. Now, Goldie, where are we with the dress?

Goldie: Uh, I think I'll just make her something myself.

Bryan: [to Rocky who is keeping notes of his orders] Okay, so we're gonna need a dress.

David: What's going on?

Shania: We're planning my wedding.

David: I thought it was a pretend wedding.

Goldie: It is, but it's a real pretend wedding.

Bryan: Duh, David.

Rocky: You take that crazy Baton. I am going to go have a drink.

David: Bryan . . .

Bryan: mmm-hmm?

David: Can I talk to you for a second?

Bryan: Yes. [to Goldie and Shania] Let me know if that's too chewy.

David: A wedding? A real wedding? With flowers and food and a dress? I'm surprised you didn't hire a monkey to be the ring bearer.

Bryan: I tried, but the only one in town is booked on some TV show.

David: Bryan, Shania is a nine-year-old girl with a crush. If she wanted a fantasy playground wedding. I get it. But not everybody wants what you want. This is becoming the social event of the season.

Bryan: Oh, from your lips. Question. Do the Kardashians have any school-age

children?

A "preferred" reading of Bryan's wedding planner role relies on the comedic nature of

his over-the-top planning of Shania's "pretend" child wedding. The audience, knowing

the role of gay men as purveyors of taste and material consumption, understand the joke

and can appreciate the analogy to a "real" gay wedding because of the assumption that

gay weddings are the "social event of the season." Bryan's overboard planning is set

against a backdrop of absurdity, which nearly every other character in the episode

acknowledges. Rocky's well-timed jabs allude to the amount of money being spent on the

event and time being wasted on the planning, and David's outright protest of the

extravagant planning mimics arguments made about same-sex marriage and the possible

repercussion for ostentatious displays of unconventional relationships. In the end,

however, Bryan's wedding planning is viewed as the ultimate romantic gesture. He

receives praise for his food choices and the atmosphere he creates. Bryan uses his essence

as a gay man—good taste, large budget, and command of trends—to plan the event. In

the end, the audience is provided an example of the extravagant, romantic weddings that

could be if marriage equality is written in to law. They are also invited to imagine the

economic boon that would occur if gay men everywhere began to host these types of

weddings.

However, what happens when gay men in actuality don't throw weddings like

this? What about queer individuals and groups who will not participate in same-sex

weddings? The preferred reading presupposes that gay marriages will not only provide

equal rights to people seeking the same thing as their heterosexual counterparts—the

logical next step—but also will provide gay men an arena to flaunt their affluence. The notion that gay weddings will be grand spectacles of romantic love relies on homonormative assumptions about relationships and economics. This standard not only excludes LGBTQ people who do not subscribe to the institution of marriage or who are denied the privilege via racism and patriarchy, but it also excludes LGBTQ without the means to produce grand wedding ceremonies replete with exotic foods, one-of-a-kind couture, and seemingly endless budgets—or at the very least wedding ceremonies that do not mimic the opposite-sex model.

<center>Summary</center>

The "preferred" reading of the discourse regarding the assumption of gay affluence in these programs can be explained by Fiske's (1987) arguments that television works to promote meaning that supports the dominant ideology. That system of meaning operates to "naturalize those meanings into common sense" (p. 14). By presenting gay affluence as natural or common sense, the programs' creators and writers do not have to approach the subject as bluntly as the issue of gay marriage or gay parenting, which may not yet be naturalized in the dominant ideology. However, adherence to the narrative of gay affluence is much more positive than issues of race, gender, non-normative sexual desire, and poverty, which are all symbolically annihilated via the programs studied. The avoidance of these issues is not only an issue of television programming involving gay men—it is seen across the programing spectrum. I argue that these issues lie so far outside the heteronormative (white, heterosexual, male middle-class) conception of the world that being confronted with issues most likely deemed radical by the mainstream would cause too much dissonance to retain an audience. However, the dangers of

perpetuating a homonormative conceptualization of all LGBTQ people only works to further marginalize those falling outside the dominant prescribed, acceptable gay model—white, male, monogamous, and middle-class. In many ways, this chapter accounts for the issues discussed in the previous chapters. As the gay rights movement has become increasingly more marketable, via the narrative of gay affluence, the more traction the homonormative model seems to gain. Probably more now than ever before in the gay rights movement adherence to the homonormative is essential because of the shift in the last couple of decades to a new model of assimilation.

If queer persons of color or queer gender minorities cannot appeal to the producers of consumables, how do they make themselves visible to the majority? If queer people are more likely to be at or below poverty levels than their straight counterparts, but the only representations in the media depict a different story, then how do they become visible? The answer to both questions is that they do not become visible—they remain hidden in the shadows as not to negatively affect the movement toward marriage equality or same-sex parenting rights. The constructed gay market segment with assumptions of homogeneity, separation, and essence work to maintain this segregation of queer individuals and groups. By assuming all gay people think, live, buy, consume, earn, and feel alike, marketers, often times gay men and lesbians, purge those who think, live, buy, consume, earn, and feel differently from the ranks of the gay community. Being purged from the community via an inability to wield great purchasing power, queer people who fall outside the constructed marketing segment essentially fall outside the push for civil rights and privileges associated with the gay and lesbian movement.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

One of the pleasures of working on a project like this is answering questions about your work and the subject of the study. People generally perk up when I mention I get to watch television and call it research. Nearly everyone has his or her favorite Mitchell and Cam story from *Modern Family*, or she or he may want to know if I like to watch the programs too. In general, people talk about how great the shows are for giving America a glimpse at gay couples and their families. Some mention the scarcity of such characters in the history of television, while others laud the programs for doing well and maintaining a following. Some ask me what I think of the programs from a researcher's standpoint. I generally give them either a short concise answer of "well there are issues," or I begin a 10 to 15 minute lecture that begins with, "It is what they do not talk about that is the issue."

The responses I get to my critiques are interesting, and they are why I think this research is so important. There is the assumption that because Mitchell and Cam, Bryan and David, Kurt and Blaine, and Max are funny, well liked, successful, happy, and on primetime network television, their presence in popular culture must be a step in the right direction. Many have said these characters give people with no connection to the LGBTQ community a connection, which they argue helps to turn the tide of public opinion. Giving these characters that power, the power to influence public opinion or to educate the mainstream on LGBTQ culture, is hostile. It is hostile to the many individuals and groups who fall outside the realm of the white, middle-class, monogamous, gay male world. What happens when they meet someone in real life that does not look like Cam

and Mitchell or David and Bryan? Who is eliminated from this sitcom simulation of the LGBTQ community?

This study offers a critique of these programs and examines the invisibility of many members of the LGBTQ community that are symbolically annihilated for their non-normative sexual desires or relationships, racial or gender identities, or low socio-economic status. By presenting an LGBTQ community void of the "L," "B," "T," or "Q" or by avoiding representations of people at the intersections of LGBTQ and race, ethnicity, gender, and class, television producers deliver to television audiences characters who represent dominant heteronormative subjects with which to relate. Those audiences then deliver advertisers to the program producers via a palatable gay subject. Other cultural factors such as racism, heterosexism, sexism, and classism also play a role in the decision-making processes. By eliminating anyone outside the norm from the discourse, the norm remains intact without upsetting the status quo.

When television programs shame queer sexual practice or eliminate representations of people who do not subscribe to the homonormative conceptualization of romantic love from the discourse, a swath of queer individuals and queer causes are also eliminated from the discourse. Shaming serves to stifle queer sexuality, which may work to transgress heteronormative relational dynamics like monogamy, coupling, and private sex. In essence, the current narrative works to avoid the media representations of homosexuals in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s when men who had sex with men were depicted as sexual deviants, and generally, only made it to the media via police reports of vice activity or crime reports of child molestation charges. Further, the media coverage of the 1980s outbreak of the AIDS epidemic also focused heavily on the sexual practices of

gay men, practices deemed to have deadly consequences for a population that seemed, via media reports, to put sexual gratification before public health. By contrast, the representations examined in this study are nearly always void of non-normative sexual practices, and the discussion of sex stayed true to the heteronormative model: monogamous, committed relationships between partnered gay men. Because of this resemblance to straight coupling, marriage is given credence over all other gay and lesbian civil rights and privileges.

Marriage is then depicted as the measuring stick by which the gay rights movement is measured—it is part of the natural evolution of the movement. However, that assumption is dangerous, especially to those excluded from this image. Feminist scholars have long seen marriage as a white, patriarchal institution working to subvert women and grant privilege to men. In this same way, gay marriage works to subvert LGBTQ people of color, those with non-normative gender expressions, LGBTQ people living below poverty level, and those with non-normative sexual desires. So what happens when same-sex marriage is codified in all 50 states? Does the gay rights movement end? I argue that such a stout emphasis on marriage does not provide wider social justice to LGBTQ people—especially those excluded in the discourse created by these programs.

Another troubling critique of the programs in this study was the avoidance of issues of race and gender. Consistent with previous research the programs studied presented a discourse that excused gay men from racism and sexism because of a shared minority status. By symbolically annihilating LGBTQ people of color and gender minorities while also reinforcing the dominant patriarchy through adherence to traditional

forms of sexism and assigned gender roles, the five programs further entrench

heteronormative ideology into mainstream society. The gay men in these programs

replicate heterosexist norms in that they are white, they abide by the masculine/feminine

binary, they resist acknowledgement of their white, male privilege, and they objectify

women via patriarchal codes, thereby further marginalizing LGBTQ people of color,

women, and gender-queer individuals. More troubling is the notion that because gay men

claim an ethnic-model minority status with people of color and women they can operate

as stand ins for those groups within the discourse. By this logic, LGBTQ people of color

or gender minorities do not have to be visible because their plight is the same as that of

white gay men.

Finally, an adherence to a narrative of gay affluence eliminates even more people

from LGBTQ discourse. People without the means to buy and spend and wield

purchasing power are not represented in the programs. The dangers of perpetuating a

homonormative conceptualization of all LGBTQ people only works to further

marginalize those falling outside the dominant prescribed, acceptable gay model—white,

male, monogamous, and middle-class. Pride festivals and parades across the country

began in the 1970s to provide an opportunity for queer people to publicly acknowledge

their differences from the mainstream. The early movement longed for a total

reevaluation of the sexual norms in the United States, which they sought via a discourse

of difference; however, as the 1970s gave way to the 1980s and 90s, pride events and the

gay rights movement became ever more marketable entities with obligations not only to

the gay community but also to the corporate sponsors and advertisers footing the bill. The

characters in these programs represent years of perfecting the product of gay rights.

This study provides my interpretation of the programs studied, which is only one of possibly hundreds of ways to interpret the programming. I approach these readings from a privileged perspective. I am white. I grew up in rural Mississippi in a lower-to-middle class home with two parents. I have completed graduate education. I am a cisgender gay man in a committed monogamous relationship. My privilege as someone who fits the hetero and homonormative construction of "proper" gay man prevents me from feeling the full effects of symbolic annihilation. I can see myself or, at least, someone who closely resembles me on television. I do not purport to completely understand the damaging effects of exclusion from the dominant discourse of gay rights. However, through awareness of my privileged position, I acknowledge that without a broader discourse of social justice that considers intersections of sexuality, race, ethnicity, gender, and class, the white patriarchy will not only persist but will gain strength.

Television is not the only media ripe for this type of analysis. The sports media industry, for example, is an interesting site for such research. The 2014 coming out of former University of Missouri football star Michael Sam and the media event that followed provide an excellent opportunity to discuss the discourse surrounding sexuality, race, and professional sports. The coverage often includes similar notions as discussed in previous sections of this paper—ethnic minority status, normalized sexual attraction and practices, racialized masculinities, and adherence to privileging heteronormative notions of gender and power. The news media in general is also understudied in this vein of research and may also provide yet another mode of cultural production that contributes to an overall normalized version of LGBTQ identity and the further marginalization of those

who fall outside the dominant notion of normal. Coverage of national issues like LGBTQ

teen suicides and hate crimes, the Chik-fil-A boycott and response actions by LGBTQ

activists, and the social justice issues like marriage equality, equal protection laws, equal

pay laws, or sodomy laws, would give additional insight in to the maintenance of

heteronormative ideology in the United States.

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