

Post-Gay Television: “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” Marriage, and Bullying On and Off
Screen

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Dedication

To all the LGBTQ's out there fighting the good fight, living in precarious times with sometimes very little in the way of support. It is not always easy, but as Graham Moore said at the 2015 Academy Awards ceremony: "Stay weird. Stay Different."

Abstract

The 2000-era has been a momentous time for LGBT policy shifts. This dissertation is an interdisciplinary project on these policy changes in the areas of military service, marriage rights, and bullying in schools within the context of post-gay television. I take as a starting point that post-gay politics assumes that civil rights for gays and lesbians have been achieved and continued activism is no longer needed. Since the 1990s post-gay politics has gained currency within important modalities of discourse (news media, television, print media). I investigate a cluster of television shows in which post-gay themes suggest that equality for gay and lesbian individuals has been achieved. Drawing from media studies, feminist studies, critical race studies, queer theory, and cultural studies, this dissertation examines the television shows *Army Wives* (Lifetime), *Modern Family* (ABC), and *Glee* (Fox) as case studies for theorizing the ways in which media facilitates the emergence of post-gay discourse. It does so by situating these shows within the context of, on the one hand, government hearings and documents and Supreme Court decisions, and, on the other hand, the industrial and popular discourse surrounding these TV programs. Post-gay television is often comprised of conservative and assimilationist political values such as the desire for gays and lesbians to openly serve in the U.S. military, same-sex marriage, and “equality” based initiatives to eradicate bullying in schools. These initiatives often mask structural issues such as the continued prevalence of homophobia in the U.S. Military, the assimilationist qualities of same-sex marriage, as well as the enforcement of heteronormativity and gender policing common in U.S. high schools. These series do not simply represent LGBT lives on screen; they also participate

in fundraising and public relations efforts for issues like marriage equality. Following the call to move beyond the politics of representation, my dissertation provides a critical historical and contextual perspective on the way in which the implementation and repeal of policy legislation is productive of what I am calling the politics of norms. It also considers how these policy changes and their treatment on television are informed by post-gay discourse.

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Introduction: Television in A Post-Gay Political Landscape (1990s-today)

Faking It (2013-present) is a MTV teen comedy that follows the high school antics of Amy and Karma, two female teens “faking” a lesbian relationship in order to gain popularity among their high school peers. In the pilot episode of the series, Karma schemes to boost their popularity at Hester High in Austin, a “blue oasis in the red state of Texas” where “outcasts” are the “in-crowd” (Faking It 2014). Karma goes so far as to (unsuccessfully) feign blindness and miraculous recovery. Karma is desperate to shake up her social life, as she says, “I’m tired of spending Friday night with my Netflix queue” (Faking It 2014). In what turns out to be a fortuitous series of events, out gay high-schooler Shane, of the “in-crowd,” mistakes Amy and Karma for a lesbian couple, and expresses his eagerness to adopt them as his new lesbian friends. Despite Amy’s denials, Shane announces to a large high-school contingent that the school should nominate Amy and Karma for homecoming queen and queen. Recognizing the possibility that lesbianism may equal popularity for the eager teens, Karma convinces the reluctant Amy to play the part. This plan goes smoothly until the inevitable moment that Amy and Karma must “prove” their lesbian-ness in a public make out session. For Karma, the kissing is clearly a performance. But for Amy, visibly emoting during and after this make-out session, this begins to call her heterosexuality into question. I begin this introduction with the example of *Faking It*, because I believe that it epitomizes the television trend that this dissertation critiques – the emergence of post-gay discourse between approximately 1990 and today. That Amy and Karma’s identification as sexual “other” corresponds with increasing their cultural capital speaks to one of the most prominent trends within post-gay discourse.

Like the proliferation of images of women in positions of power common within post-feminist television and the explosion of African-American visibility within television that appeals to post-racial discourses, the proliferation of gay and lesbian images on television in the 2000s speaks more to the commodification of difference within the intersecting trends of privatization and neoliberalism than it does about achieving equal rights or sexual liberation.

In post-gay politics the assumption is that civil rights for the gay and lesbian community have been achieved and there is no longer a need for continued activism. In the same timeframe (1990s-today) that post-gay politics has gained some currency within important modalities of discourse (news media, television, print media) a cluster of television shows has implemented themes and characterizations that suggest that equality for gay individuals has been achieved. In the political terrain the 2000-era has been a momentous time for LGBT policy shifts. This includes increasing access to marriage rights for LGBT¹ couples and the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Changes in health care and adoption rights, school policies having to do with LGBTQ bullying, proms, Gay/Straight Alliances, and a heightened national focus on gay teen suicide. As well as the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT). Each of these areas –

¹ Throughout this dissertation I use LGB, LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA at different times with intention to try to be as specific as possible about who is advocating for civil rights and/or on whose behalf advocacy is taking place. When I name lesbian and gay specifically, I am signaling that other identities may not be considered in that particular discussion. I use the term gay and lesbian to describe today’s post-gay political moment. Often, transgender, bisexual, queer, questioning and transgender individuals are marginalized when they are not altogether made invisible in the gay and lesbian movement. The choice to refer to gay and lesbian is meant to reflect the tendencies of the political movement. However, the absence of those words does not reflect my personal position that marginalized identities like transgender, queer, etc has everything to do with heterosexism and sexism, and that the recognition of those identities is required for any movement that is truly committed to sexual liberation. I use LGBTQ when I believe that these marginalized identities are recognized.

the implementation and repeal of DADT, marriage rights, and anti-bullying legislation – are explored in this dissertation.

INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

The images common to post-gay television present the message that gays and lesbians are post-struggle. This is true of the case studies that I examine in each chapter. In chapter one, on the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” as seen in Lifetime’s *Army Wives* (2007-2013), there is no trace of the need for continued advocacy on behalf of gays and lesbians. Once DADT is repealed, in the fictional world of *Army Wives*, women can openly serve in the U.S. military without fear of homophobia or discrimination. Add to that an easily acquired marriage and family life, and all is well for Charlie (Ryan Michelle Bathe) and Nicole (Kellie Martin), the lesbian couple in *Army Wives*. In chapter two, once again the illusion of being post-struggle plays out, in this case through the legal marriage of characters Mitch and Cam on ABC’s *Modern Family* (2009-today). Although the storyline places a few hurdles in the way of Mitch and Cam’s wedded bliss, including the threat of familial rejection, all ends well. Mitch and Cam’s families have a change of heart and they all come together to celebrate the nuptials. In chapter three, I analyze the recent legislation of anti-bullying laws implemented in school settings that again provides the fantasy that continued advocacy on behalf of gays and lesbians is unnecessary. For example, in the case of Fox’s *Glee* (2009-2015), where Kurt Hummel, the target of LGBTQ bullying, single-handedly and successfully confronts his bully leading audiences to believe that the issue of LGBTQ bullying ought to be resolved on an individualized level. However, both anti-bullying legislation as well as the show’s treatment of the issue

miss the fact that LGBTQ bullying is structural, systemic, and tied to a culture in which gender policing is largely accepted.

TELEVISION AND LIVED EXPERIENCE: THE DISCONNECT

Unlike most television featuring gays and lesbians, in terms of lived experience, gays and lesbians are far from being post-struggle. On March 26, 2015 Indiana Governor Mike Pence signed into law a bill that allows businesses to discriminate against gay and lesbian customers under the mantle of “religious freedom” (Bradner 2015). In early March 2015 Arkansas passed SB202, which bans the enactment of local anti-discrimination laws (Barnes 2015). In Kentucky, a “bathroom bill” that was advanced by State Senator C.B. Embry would have put a \$2500 bounty on the heads of any person using the “wrong” bathroom. Although “flushed” by the Kentucky legislature, this bill is part of a wave of anti-transgender legislative efforts that have made their way across the country (Cross 2015). This rash of anti-LGBTQ legislation is different than but not unrelated to the continued violence against LGBTQ individuals. In 2015 at least seven transgender women were murdered with little or no news coverage (mtv news staff 2015). In addition, for most LGBTQ individuals nationwide, the right to work without being discriminated against is not a guarantee. Many within LGBTQ communities live in poverty and do not have access to economic security, adequate healthcare, social welfare or other services. Importantly, the needs of the transgender community have yet to be incorporated into much of the activism on behalf of LGBTQ individuals. In the following chapters I argue this is a product of the narrowly focused issues prominent in today’s post-gay era.

APPROACH

The term post-gay helps facilitate our understandings of the state of contemporary LGBTQ activism and civil rights. Like post-race and post-feminism (and other posts²), it is an important term for cultural analysis. Post-gay is not a term that has had much currency in scholarly work. However, it is likely that post-gay will take off much like post-race and post-feminism has, and thus, it is important to start laying the groundwork for defining and understanding the critical use of the term. This project begins to do that work. Additionally, the emergence of post-gay discourse on television has yet to be studied. This introduction opens up that conversation and asks: What is the significance of the emergence of post-gay discourse on television? What are the social and political implications for the widespread appeal of post-gay discourse as it appears on television? How do the conventions of the sitcom, for example, help create and sustain post-gay discourse? In today's representational context, what are the consequences when sexual difference becomes cultural capital and a mode of consumption within media? This dissertation answers these questions intersectionally from a media studies, feminist studies, critical race studies, queer theory and cultural studies perspective, drawing on archival research and social and cultural theory to understand the significance of the emergence of post-gay discourse on our commercial media landscape. Evaluating a wide range of primary sources, including government hearings and documents, Supreme Court decisions, television studies scholarship, popular press television criticism, institutional

² Post-modernism, etc

reports, publicity and iconographic television programs, this dissertation traces the implementation of political policies and theorizes the connections between those policies, and the way they are taken up by television. Analyzing the intersection of post-gay, post-race and post-feminist discourses, my study draws new attention to the posting of gay and lesbian politics, and its corresponding uptake in television. Following the call to move beyond the politics of representation, my dissertation provides a critical historical and contextual perspective on what I am calling the politics of norms through the implementation and repeal of policy legislation and considers how both the policy legislation as well as its television treatment are informed by post-gay discourse.

POLITICS OF NORMS

To contribute to the burgeoning scholarship that approaches queer television studies by taking seriously the proliferation of gay and lesbian images on television in a way that moves beyond rehashing the debates about positive and negative representation, I take a cue from Samuel Chambers. Chambers' work draws from Judith Butler and Michael Warner, to define an approach to television criticism that moves away from the politics of representation to what he calls the politics of norms. As Butler writes in

Undoing Gender:

A norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of *normalization*. Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its operation. Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to

read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce. (2004, 41)

Warner's work in *The Trouble with Normal* also clarifies the importance of norms. Warner argues that norms are related to both legislation and statistical averages, but should not be conflated with either. As Chambers states, "A norm is not a piece of legislation (though it may be sustained by legislation), and it is not merely 'what people do' (though it is usually, also, 'what people do')" (2006, 84). The process of normalization is the construction and reinforcement of our ideas about what constitutes "normal." Thus, processes of normalization impact both those at the margins as they then become "other" and those at the center, since then they are subject to pressures to remain "normal."

Because television is imbricated in the production of culture, it participates in the production and reproduction of norms. In order to clarify this point, it is important to recognize that norms are not static, but rather are socially constituted and therefore in flux. Norms do not have meaning independent of socially enforced contexts. As Butler puts it, "the norm only persists as a norm to the extent that it is acted out in social practice" (2004, 46). For a norm to endure, it must depend on its daily reproduction. This is easily extended to the reproduction of norms on television, since television is often part of people's daily routine, and television itself is a site where norms are struggled over. Television is not to be thought of singly as a site of the representation of reality, but rather as a "cultural practice that produces and reproduces the norms of gender and sexuality that are our lived reality (both political and social)" (Chambers 2006, 85).

Television, like any other cultural object or text, participates in constructing and maintaining what we know as reality (Hall 1980, 128-138). It is difficult to measure television by how it compares to reality because reality itself is a moving target. That is not to say that accounting for the disconnect(s) between lived experience and the fantasies presented on television is not a useful endeavor. On the contrary, it is one that this dissertation considers throughout. Yet, I attempt to shift the focus from critiquing positive or negative images under the paradigm of representational politics and instead am engaged in tracing the shifting of norms within our post-gay political context. Under these conditions the politics of television itself becomes clear. As Chambers observes, “Television, to put it starkly, proves political because of the way it participates in the reproduction of norms (and therefore culture, and therefore reality)” (Chambers 2006, 85).

CONTEXT: THE EMERGENCE OF POST-GAY TELEVISION

This dissertation posits that the discourse of post-gay is participating in the narrowing of acceptable possibilities for embodying and performing LGBTQ identities as it plays a role in structuring LGBTQ content on contemporary television. As such, the primary concern of this dissertation is to address and theorize the circular relationship between LGBTQ related policies and their manifestations on television.

This dissertation picks up where Ron Becker left off in his analysis of LGBTQ visibility on television in the 1990s. In *Gay TV and Straight America* Becker argues that gay-themed programming in the 1990s was particularly relevant and timely due to the political battles being fought in Washington including struggles over the issues of same-

sex marriage, employment discrimination, and “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Becker’s analysis is framed by the following questions:

How do we account for the startling increase of gay-themed programming on prime-time network television in the 1990s? What does the emergence of this trend tell us about the changing dynamics of the industry that produced it? What does it tell us about the changing politics of the culture that shaped it? And what does it tell us about the changing anxieties and identities of the people who might have watched it? (Becker 2006, 3)

Becker contextualizes gay themed programming in the 1990s within market pressures to appeal to a perceived new audience, the socially liberal upwardly mobile professional (slumpies). This group is primarily upscale, college educated and politically left-leaning adults. Becker’s “slumpy class” emerges alongside what David Brooks terms Bobos, short for bourgeois bohemians, who combine a bohemian ethos with a bourgeois desire for material wealth and Richard Florida’s concept of the Creative Class, a growing population of workers whose function is to problem-solve and to create new ideas (this group tends to be highly educated). Bobos, the Creative Class and Becker’s slumpies take shape amidst the proliferation of multicultural discourse prominent in the early 1990s (Brooks 2000; Florida 2002). Multicultural discourse influenced the ways in which academic scholarship was approached and has influenced changes in university policy to emphasize cultural difference. In addition, many multinational corporations made changes to their Human Resource policies to include the message of multiculturalism. Becker asserts that multiculturalism is one of the discourses that helped convert yuppies to slumpies “by rekindling the youthful ideas many boomers had seemed to outgrow in the 80s” (2006, 113). In Becker’s frame, to sympathize with and consume gay content is

a convenient way to show allegiance and support for popular “gay” issues without having to get off the couch. Becker argues that the increase of gay content in the 1990s is partly an attempt (and what turned out to be a successful attempt) to attract this particular niche audience. This dissertation turns attention to the 2000s because the political climate for LGBTQ issues and its correlated televisibility necessitates reimagining.

POST-GAY TELEVISION TRENDS

Following Rosalind Gill’s analysis of post-feminism, I suggest that like post-feminism, post-gay can be best understood as a sensibility. As Gill argues, “postfeminism is understood best neither as an epistemological perspective nor as an historical shift, nor (simply) as a backlash in which its meanings are pre-specified. Rather, postfeminism should be conceived of as a sensibility” (2007, 148). To best conceptualize post-gay discourse as a sensibility, I lay out the themes that make post-gay discourse recognizable as such on television. Post-gay discourse on television today has a number of relatively stable themes. This set of themes might be adopted for future use in the project of identifying what qualifies as post-gay television. These criteria can be used to name television post-gay, and is also useful for identifying a wide array of post-gay cultural products. It is also important to note that these themes operate differently in different texts and in different contexts, often distinctively but in some cases overlapping. First, post-gay discourse negates sexual variation and difference. In post-gay television there are proscribed rules to behave and perform gayness. Post-gay television tends to include a preponderance of upwardly mobile, professional, gender conforming characterizations of gays and lesbians. *Modern Family* (2009-today) is a good example of

this – the gay characters Mitch (Jesse Tyler Ferguson) and Cam (Eric Stonestreet) are well off, Mitch is a lawyer and Cam plays at stay-at-home fatherhood and occasionally works as a music teacher. Mitch and Cam are both stereotypically feminized, campy and/or over the top. Although Cam has a fondness for sports (out of character for hegemonic understandings of gayness) there are very few other outlying characteristics that would challenge dominant assumptions about gay male life. Mitch and Cam also fall into the age-old stereotype where one male partner assumes the more “butch” role and one the more “femme” role – and although these roles are at times interchangeable between Mitch and Cam, these two characters always embody one of these roles (always opposite each other, never both “femme”, never both “butch”). It is therefore made clear that in each interaction there is a presence that is either “manly” or “womanly.” This male/female frame allows Mitch and Cam to be understood within a heteronormative or heterosexually-based concept of identity. This pattern, as it is articulated on television, creates a very safe, non-threatening character for the viewing public at-large to consume. The “femme”/”butch” or woman/man dichotomy in post-gay television reinforces the notion that “normal” life partnerships are comprised of a woman (in body, in spirit) and a man (in body, in spirit).

A second pattern emerges in post-gay television, and that is the continued invisibility of a variety of lesbian identities on television. When lesbian characterizations do emerge on post-gay television, they are, like Mitch and Cam, safe and non-threatening to hegemonic understandings of lesbian identity. A good example of this is the multi-year storyline of Arizona and Callie on *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005-today). Although Callie’s

family heritage is Mexican, her “difference” in terms of race is not made a central issue or even a defining characteristic of her identity. Callie and Arizona, consistent with normative understandings of heterosexual couples, aspire to raise a family, and much of their dynamic circles around the parenting of their daughter, Sophia. They are both professionals, working as leaders in their respective fields – orthopedics and pediatrics. They both present as feminine women – their performance of gender lines up seamlessly with what mainstream womanhood is understood to look like. Callie and Arizona also aspire to conventional forms of partnership in that the two marry in a very traditional wedding ceremony.³ Typical of post-gay television today, the feminine lesbian is also present in the characterizations of Charlie Mayfield and Nicole Galassin in *Army Wives* (discussed in more detail in chapter one) and Karma and Amy of *Faking It* (discussed previously). The invisibility of the masculine lesbian is maintained – as she threatens hegemonic understandings of maleness and masculinity.

It is key that these characters invest in the same types of partnerships as most heterosexual couples because their normative investments highlight another of the keys to identifying post-gay television: in post-gay television characters desire marriage and family. This is noticeable in comparison to the kinds of family and partnership dynamics that are available (in life, in queer communities) but not made visible on television. These include single LGBTQ’s, female “butch”/”butch” pairings, female “femme”/”butch” pairings, male “femme”/”femme” pairings, male “butch”/”butch” pairings, various configurations of transgender and/or genderqueer pairings, polyamorous or non-

³ The TV wedding took place before same-sex marriage became a legal option.

monogamous groupings and/or pairings, among others. In this way, post-gay television makes invisible the bisexual, the transgender and the queer in LGBTQ.ⁱ

Most perniciously, more so than with bisexual identities,⁴ post-gay television consistently represents transgender characters as outsiders from the gay and lesbian community. The transgender character today often is dealt the hand of what the gay and lesbian character was dealt when television first made gay and lesbian characters visible. Although rarely found on television, transgender characters often fall into the victim/villain trope as described by Larry Gross in his seminal book *Up From Invisibility*. The first transgender character (that was also played by a transgender actress) introduced on prime time television, Carmelita Rainer of *Dirty Sexy Money* (2007-2009), befell the fate of the victim when shot to death at her cis-gender male boyfriend's Senatorial inauguration. One of the more recent portrayals of a transgender character is on the Netflix show *Orange is the New Black* (2013-today) where we see the character Sophia Burset cast as a villain as her character (as well as the preponderance of the cast) is imprisoned for various wrongdoings. In the case of Sophia, she was imprisoned for what amounted to a large sum of credit card theft in the auspicious pursuit of raising enough funds to transition from male to female (an expensive endeavor, indeed). However, Burset's status as villain is not as straightforward as past characterizations. Among the ecology of the television show's characters, Burset's characterization is complex as she is portrayed as a kind of role model among her fellow inmates.

⁴ Although these are few and far between.

Another criterion for identifying post-gay television is that same-sex couples adhere to normative understandings of patriotism. Same-sex couples with a connection to military life are not a widespread phenomenon on television, however; the same-sex couples and/or gay/lesbian individuals that do appear and have a connection to military life maintain consistency in terms of their (patriotic) participation. In post-gay television tied to the military, there is no room for dissent. This is articulated in the case of Lifetime's *Army Wives* (2007-2013). *Army Wives* introduces life-partners Nicole Galassin and Charlie Mayfield just months after the Army's restriction on openly gay servicemembers "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed. Again, as in the case of Callie and Arizona, the couple is interracial. And, again, Charlie's African-American heritage (we can only assume that is the case, as there is no discussion about her "race") is made invisible. This is one of the many sites where discourses of post-gay and post-race (and in this case, also post-feminism) converge. As the narrative plays out we learn that Nicole and Charlie also aspire to raise a family and get legally married. In this storyline, both things happen miraculously for this couple as a baby practically falls into their lap and they are sanctioned to legally marry in South Carolina, no less, what will likely be one of the very last states to accord same-sex couple's legal marriage.⁵ Like the other servicemembers showcased in *Army Wives*, Nicole's first marriage is to the Army itself, and then secondarily to her partner and life. The history of institutionalized homophobia, a disappointing nevertheless very real facet of much military-life (continued beyond the

⁵ By court order, legal gay marriage became an option in South Carolina in November of 2014.

repeal of DADT), is erased as Nicole thrives as an openly lesbian servicewoman in the U.S. Army.

In addition, in what I call fantasies of inclusion, in post-gay television it is common for family members or close friends who have previously ostracized their gay or lesbian family member or friend due to their sexuality to retract their opposition and instead embrace and welcome them into their lives – it is not a coincidence that this primarily occurs impending the same-sex couple’s marriage celebration. This happens in *Glee*, where Santana’s grandmother has washed her hands of Santana for years and refused to participate in her life in any way, only to express her love and devotion on Santana’s wedding day. It also takes place on *Grey’s Anatomy*, when Callie’s father who had a difficult time with his daughter’s coming out, also appears on her wedding day for the ritual father/daughter dance. The fantasy of inclusion motif (or what could be called the “happy ending” theme) tends to coincide with the gay or lesbian couples’ assimilation into heteronormative lifestyles. In other words, it tends to be easier for fictional family members to “come around” when they see gays and lesbians aspiring toward heteronormative and homonormative ideals.

As I touched on earlier in regard to *Faking It*, another theme prevalent within post-gay television is that sexual difference is exchanged for cultural capital. In the case of Amy and Karma on *Faking It*, the two young women trade their sexual “otherness” (both real and performed) for popularity in the liberal high school set in Austin, Texas. Thus, their sexual difference is commodified and the history of struggle of gays and lesbians is erased. Although television would have us believe that Amy and Karma’s

ability to trade their sexuality for popularity signals that equal rights or sexual liberation has been achieved, instead this trend speaks to the commodification of difference within the intersecting trends of privatization and neoliberalism in the context of the post-gay era.

THE POST DISCOURSES

Post-gay discourse emerges on television on the heels of post-race, post-feminist, and post (fill in the blank) discourses, each of which will be introduced here (see Squires 2010; Watts 2010; Vavrus 2010; Ono 2010; Calafell 2010; Brouwer 2010; Banet-Weiser 2007). That the characters in *Faking It* successfully attain cultural capital⁶ by claiming lesbian identities gets at the ways in which the pervasiveness of post-gay discourse interplays with the imperatives of commercial television. What is missing in this scenario played out by Amy and Karma's interest in trading on the "trendiness" of lesbianism is any recognition that to inhabit a lesbian identity in most public spaces today (including high schools) often comes with a (likely) certain amount of homophobia and/or discrimination. This is the same trend that is commonly found in post-gay discourse more generally, marked by a pervasive lack of acknowledgement of the often disadvantageous consequences of inhabiting a sexuality that marks one as "other." To trade on, sell, and promote lesbianism as free of any of the history of the oppression of sexual minorities, and instead to celebrate a particular version of lesbianism – no less a white,

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu defines cultural capital as expertise, or competency, in styles or genres. Those who have mastered these competencies gain social value among their peers. Cultural capital is said to derive from one's educational background as well as where one chooses to consume. This is distinguished between economic capital which refers to quantities of material goods acquired. For more see Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

conventionally attractive, youthful, feminine lesbianism – pits *Faking It* squarely within what I will name and examine as post-gay discourse on television.

The kinds of images that circulate in a post-gay media environment runs parallel to images that are circulating among scholars who are imagining and critiquing other sites of post-discourse, including but not limited to post-race and post-feminism. The discourse of post-(fill in the blank) is said to have come about in reaction to President Obama’s election, Hillary Clinton’s nearly successful primary campaign, and the numerous states who now allow same-sex partners to legally marry. Each of these post-discourses are used within political and cultural discourse in order to distract people’s attention from the very real material needs that have not yet been achieved by the work of the Civil Rights movement, the feminist movement or gay liberation struggles. Those who employ post-discourses are arguing that something like the successful election of a black man for President, for example, marks a new disinclination toward the need to continue to fight for and address civil rights issues. As Mary Vavrus argues, “The impulse to ‘post’ a politics is, I believe, one rooted in a generally decent, if misguided, belief that our society has reached a moment in which we are living out our lives on a level playing field” (2010, 222). In the following sections I review the posting of politics – in terms of post-race, post-feminism, and post-gay lenses – from a wide array of vantage points.

QUEER MEDIA LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation begins by situating contemporary LGBTQ visibility within a broader context that takes into consideration the existing literature in television studies.

In *Up From Invisibility* Larry Gross offers a comprehensive overview of key moments in LGBTQ visibility in television, news, sports, and film from the 1950s to the early 2000s (Gross 2001). Gross' project is very much in agreement with George Gerbner's Cultural Indicators project. The Cultural Indicators research found that the more television you watch, the more your views are influenced by television. Gross and Gerbner believe that your version of reality is shaped by your television viewing practices. Thus, the impetus for tracking and naming tropes and trends for Gross is that he believes that people derive their ideas about gays and lesbians from television. If television characterizes gays and lesbians as "predators" and "monsters" then this will have a direct correlation to how people personally relate to the gay and lesbian people in their lives. Such characterizations may also have political ramifications. As such, Gross' project is similar to the aims of groups like the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), a LGBT watchdog organization tasked with ensuring the media represent gays and lesbians responsibly. For Gross, media visibility, and particular "positive" images of queerness has a direct correlation with potential political power. In other words, where "positive" images might equal gays and lesbians having some say in government policy, invisibility marks a lack of political power. Gross' book is a political project that announces the historical injustices done to LGBTQ's in the media and hopes to correct the course that media take by naming the stereotypical tropes and trends: the way gays and lesbians can only be victims or villains, the way they are often sexually promiscuous, often desexualized, and characterized as sexual predators. For Gross, LGBTQ characters

that are allowed to exist in a variety of different ways, marks a sort of political and televisual progress.

Taking a similar approach to Larry Gross, Stephen Tropiano's *The Prime Time Closet* charts key moments for gays and lesbians in prime time television from the 1950s to the late 1990s. Tropiano groups these moments in terms of television genre (the prime time medical drama, the law and order drama, the dramatic series, the mini-series, and the television comedy). While Tropiano finds most of the characterizations of queers in these spaces to be "problematic," he is hopeful that the advent of LOGO (a premium cable network exclusively devoted to LGBTQ content) and other gay themed channels might offer some sort of "accurate" portrayal of LGBTQ lives. He is also encouraged by shifts in television like narrowcasting because he believes that a gay channel would take some interest in LGBTQ politics. This prediction, offered before LOGO came on the scene, is also tied to the idea of progress: that with time and with changes in the media landscape things will "get better" for queers (Tropiano 2002).

Steven Capsuto's *Alternate Channels* tracks the chronology of gay, lesbian, and bisexual images in radio and television from the 1930s to the 1990s. According to Capsuto, the shifts in queer visibility through the years have led to what he considers to be some sort of progress. Improvement, for Capsuto, is marked by less stereotypical roles and a more varied landscape of possibility for queer characters. But at the same time he cautions against complacency. He says that as time goes on groups advocating on behalf of sexual minorities have forgotten that they need to stay vigilant. He writes that he hopes that his book serves as testimony, as a reminder and as historical context for

understanding current trends in LGB visibility (in the canon of gay visibility research he is one of the only scholars that does not address T in LGBT). Like many other queer media scholars, Capsuto believes in the power of the media to shape attitudes and behaviors about sexual minorities (Capsuto 2000).

Susanna Danuta Walters' approaches the issue of LGBTQ representations much like Gross, Capsuto and Tropiano in *All the Rage*, a book that provides an overview of key moments in queer visibility (Walters 2001). Although Gross, Capsuto and Tropiano are all interested in the political ramifications of queer visibility, Walters provides the strongest critique of the underlying politics that she sees as shaping the way queer lives are made visible. The idea of paradox (also explored later in Kevin Barnhurst's collection *QMedia*) is a prominent focal point for Walters. Imagining the television landscape as it relates to queer characters as paradoxical means that Walters recognizes that the proliferation of queer characters on television since about the 1990s has forever changed the media landscape, probably for the better. However, she still remains concerned about the lived experiences of queers that do not seem to match up to imagined reality envisioned by television.

Alexander Doty's book *Making Things Perfectly Queer* is a good starting point to talk about ways in which scholars began to approach theorizing television as having meaning for queers on a subtextual level (Doty 1993). Vito Russo's film *The Celluloid Closet* does very similar work in that it catalogues films that can be read as queer through a process of decoding images and signs have specific resonance in queer spaces and queer communities (Epstein and Friedman 1996). Many of the texts that Doty discusses

had yet to be considered from the perspective of queer theory. For example, he talks about queer signifiers in a text like *Kate and Ally* or *Laverne and Shirley*, or the way Jack Benny can be read as queer. Doty argues that although none of these texts are marked overtly queer, there are aspects to their narratives, or to the characters presentation or performance that have special significance when applying a queer perspective. Doty's approach is influenced and informed by the body of work put forward by queer theory – influenced primarily by poststructuralism. Being in conversation with queer theory marks a divergence between Doty's work and the work of the sociological/historical scholars mentioned above. Doty's connectedness to queer theory allows him to do the work of locating queerness in a number of popular culture spaces – both in their connotative and denotative forms. In doing so Doty advances a persuasive case for queer readings of popular culture texts not overtly marked as queer. He opens up important questions about what it means that writers/producers/directors that are not self-identified as queer are nonetheless involved in queer worldmaking. He also opens up questions about media reception – he asks, to what extent is a “queer reading” possible for audiences not identified as queer? These are questions that are not resolved with Doty, but are taken up years later by some of the contributors to *Queer TV*. The *Queer TV* collection provides theoretical approaches to queer media, as it engages with theory as well as queer subtextual/queer television reading practices.

The edited collection *Queer TV* addresses theories and approaches, histories and genres, and television itself. The central question that the editors put forward is “what is ‘queer’ about a queer television studies”? This question inspires a number of additional

questions including: What does it mean to queerly theorize television? How can queers make sense of television? What can queer theory offer to theories of television as a medium? How do we bring together queer theory and television studies? Where do these two bodies of work converge in ways that are productive for both? This body of work makes a case for less reliance on the text (in terms of the way queer theorists write about television) and more of an emphasis on the practice of television watching. The other move this collection of essays makes is away from critiques of positive/negative images – the editors argue that one of the problems with these kinds of critiques is that it assumes an agreed upon party line. What they call the “evaluative paradigm” assumes that there is such a thing that can be universally understood as “positive” and something that can be understood as “negative.” Also, the evaluative approach assumes that the only way “queerness” can be found is within a text that openly appeals to queer viewers (by representing queer characters) (Davis and Needham 2009).

The editors of *Queer TV* also acknowledge the importance of the history of queer television scholarship and acknowledge the contributions of those relying on the evaluative paradigm such as Gross, Capsuto, Tropiano, and Walters. The authors of *Queer TV* consider the evaluative approach as being politically necessary. What the collection tries to get at by turning away from the way in which queer scholars assess individual shows is the complexity of the experience of television watching. The collection is engaged with the way in which television shows are designed, produced, distributed and consumed in ways that can be termed queer. Also, the way in which experiencing television for queers is often complex has to do with the personal and

idiosyncratic ways in which television might be experienced – in ways that go far beyond the ways in which queer characters are portrayed. The ways queers might experience television has to do with: the physical placement of the television or viewing screen, the particularity of the images or sounds, engagement with the remote control, the location of television screening (whether out at a bar with a queer community or at home alone makes a difference), the technologies of broadcast option, the way in which shows could be (mis)read, appropriated, encountered and re-encountered, etc. The apparent queerness of shows that may not be overtly marked queer becomes known especially in queerly marked spaces – a queer bar with a queer audience for example. This is true of something like *Desperate Housewives*, which achieved mass appeal for a wider demographic (beyond its appeal to queerness). Another interesting claim that the editors make is that the cancelled series is marked as queer because it is a text that is left hanging, without resolution (sometimes rescued for posterity as a DVD release), in a way that is counter to conservative and patriarchal ideologies which valorize neat and tidy closure (Davis and Needham 2009).

Another position the editors in *Queer TV* take is the possibility that scholars have been homing in too closely to shows that feature queer characters. They ask if it is not possible that some of the queerest spaces/places/texts on television are those that do not openly feature queer characters and storylines (this position is in agreement with Doty's approach). They reference Lynne Joyrich's article "Closet Archives" where she talks about the show *Veronica Mars* as a queer text that does not feature queer characters but is instead resistant to heteronormative and homonormative norms (Joyrich 2006). They also

mention shows like *Smallville* and *Lost* that develop a narrative tension between openness and disclosure that resonates strongly with Eve Sedgwick's work and discussion of the closet that makes possible a way of understanding these shows as queer even in the absence of non-heterosexual characters (Sedgwick 1990).

The editors of *Queer TV* recognize that television studies and theories of television complicate the way in which queerness can be theorized on television. Television scholars have noted that queerness is difficult to accommodate on television as a medium because television is often perceived as part of the everyday experience – in other words, television is too quotidian to capture queerness. Queerness is most often displayed as excessive, as spectacle – in ways that are at odds with television's scheduled and domestic nature. The serial structure of television is also a limitation to the way the queer story is told – through the 1990s there was only one way queer people were allowed to be on TV and that was through the telling of their coming-out story, the revelation of their queerness. This is true in a show like *Melrose Place*, for example, where the show “assumes heterosexuality to be self-evident” and homosexuality is the secret that needs to be revealed (Davis and Needham 2009).

In “Epistemology of the Console” (reprinted in *Queer TV* with an updated preface) Lynne Joyrich speaks in particular to the media blitz in 1997 surrounding *Ellen*/Ellen's coming out on television. The majority of the popular press at the time lauded the way in which television had begun to represent sexuality on television. It seemed to be a time of proliferation of representations – a time for queer audiences (particularly) to celebrate. The question that Joyrich centralizes is: what does it mean to

know, particularly to know sexuality, through the medium of television? The original essay explores the way in which television both places and displaces subjectivities about sexuality on the small screen (Davis and Needham 2009).

Joyrich asks us to reconsider the way in which we understand sexuality on television. She notes that we have become accustomed to thinking about sexuality on television through metaphors of light – illumination, enlightenment, visibility. She proposes that visibility might not be the best way to understand sexuality on TV. The language of visibility has its own limitations, its own “blind spots.” Joyrich questions whether greater visibility really ought to be the ultimate goal. Joyrich’s project shifts the question from visibility to knowledge – instead of putting forward ways of understanding how television understands queerness Joyrich explores how television comes to know and understand sexuality.

The collection *Queer TV* is in close conversation with the contributors of *QMedia*, edited by Kevin Barnhurst. This book develops a series of links between queer studies and communication/media studies. This collection is not comprised of entirely academic scholarship in that it includes responses and reactions from journalists, activists and media professionals. The framework of the book as a whole takes the concept of paradox as a central theme. Barnhurst’s introduction, “Visibility as Paradox,” sets up the four sections that are introduced throughout the book: coming out as paradox, the paradox of the professional queer, the paradox of popularity and the paradox of technology. As exposed by this collection, on the one hand, greater visibility in television means a significant change (some might say progress) from the not too distant past. However,

Barnhurst notes that this change brings certain adverse consequences. He argues that queer visibility is complicated and contradictory, and its effects are often unpredictable. Mainstream LGBT visibility generally means that selfhood is expressed one-dimensionally and that the complexities of queer life are largely disavowed (Barnhurst 2007).

The first section of *QMedia* on the paradox of coming out centers around the idea that making queerness public is often key to folks who continue to be closeted – television is said to offer a window into a world and offers the opportunity to “come out” from isolation. This section, on the one hand, notes the growing visibility of queer people in the media but does not want to celebrate just yet. The second section of *QMedia* largely takes on the role of marketing to queers and queers involved in media production in relation to queer visibility. Scholars note that the existence of several gay visibility mainstream organizations such as GLAAD, as well as the advent of the gay market has opened up a number of doors to professional queers in media. However, this presents a new paradox, named by the editors as the paradox of the professional queer. The emerging group of professional queers has a number of outcomes for media visibility – one is that the professional queers have an opportunity to have their voices heard about the kinds of media that can and should be made. Often, professional queers have politics in mind, according to Katherine Sender. However, one of the tensions of the professional queer is the noticeable lack of women and people of color who, due to heightened harassment might be less likely to publicize their sexuality. This means that fewer women

and fewer people of color who are also queer are made known in the media. The outcome is the overwhelming dominance of marketing toward white gay men (Barnhurst 2007).

The television landscape today is increasingly fragmented, catering to niche and specialized viewers in greater proportions than ever before. Gay programming has become a regular feature of the televisual ecosystem since the early 1990s, growing more and more prominent into the 2000s. Much has been written on LGBTQ visibility since the proliferation of gay content on television surged in the early 1990s. Ron Becker's book *Gay TV and Straight America* contributes to media studies by accounting for the "gaying" of television throughout the 1990s, marking shifts in television content from within the context of changing social and political life. One of Becker's more important contributions is the argument that gay television content in the 1990s was geared just as much toward straight liberal urban-minded professional individuals (slumpies) as it was geared toward gay people. Like many queer media scholars, Becker sees the 1990s as a pivotal time for gay television – citing statistics that place gay themed episodes on forty percent of television shows between 1994 and 1997. Becker also develops the idea of straight panic – a term that has been revised from the often used homosexual panic – that shifts the meaning of the term to account for some of the mainstream reactions to an increase of gay programming on television. Becker uses the term "straight panic" to understand the anxieties that an increased visibility and therefore a supposed increased "acceptance" of gay people at the height of the emergence of media images of queers on television. Another important point to note, and one that distinguishes Becker from some of his colleagues doing similar work is Becker's move to understand not only gay

cultures and communities and how they are shaped and come to know themselves through television images but also how the heterosexual population comes to know themselves and see themselves as reflected in gay programming. Becker makes a compelling case for the ways in which gay programming may have tapped into some of the unconscious or just-under-the-surface fears of homosexuality that mainstream America faces fueled by the conservative right that often have concerning political implications (Becker 2006).

Katherine Sender's approach to gay and lesbian visibility in *Business Not Politics* is unique. She weaves together theoretical and political and historical information with forty five interviews with gay marketing and media professionals. Sender's argument centers on the growing visibility and commodification of the gay market, and works to complicate the relationship between business and politics. Sender argues that it would be a mistake to understand the relationship and interaction between business and politics and the gay market in a simplistic manner. Importantly, Sender notes that the gay market is not always targeting the entirety of the gay community, but instead leans toward favoring the myth of the upwardly mobile gay white male as the ideal consumer. The implications of this are drawn out when Sender argues that skewed market data as well as the homogenizing influence of increased market segmentation has forced consumers into problematic taxonomies. Therefore, what counts as an acceptable gay person for market purposes is male, white, desexualized, and professional or middle class. This renders lesbians, trans-folk, people of color, sex radical, and others completely out of the picture (Sender 2004).

In the chapter “Neither Fish Nor Fowl” Sender focuses on the invisibility of the lesbian market. She theorizes that that underdevelopment of the lesbian market is a result of a number of cultural factors including stereotypes about non-consumers and non-high income earners which render the lesbian consumer as “unimaginable” because she doesn’t fit neatly into either the demographic of the typical heterosexual female consumer or the ideal gay consumer (wealthy gay man). Finally, Sender interrogates the limiting impact of assimilationist discourse prominent among gay marketing trends. She instead insists on a politics of differentiation and asks us as critical scholars to take a closer look at the ways in which the historical signification of gayness through market factors has both enabled and constrained ways in which the gay community comes to be known has come to know itself – a call that is supposed to have just as much resonance for the non-gay community as well as the gay community (Sender 2004).

POST-RACE LITERATURE REVIEW

Post-gay discourse on television did not emerge in isolation, but rather in conjunction with a cluster of post-discourses including post-race and post-feminism, most prominently. The conceptual beginnings of post-race discourse might be said to be traced back to “the Cosby moment,” which is explored in depth by Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis in the 1992 book *Enlightened Racism*. This book explores *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992) as a case study that compares the television show’s presentation of race to the United States’ larger feelings about the contemporary state of race relations. As Jhally and Lewis note:

The United States is a country that is still emerging from a deeply racist history, a society in which many white people

have treated (and continue to treat) black people with contempt, suspicion, and a profoundly ignorant sense of superiority. Yet the most popular U.S. TV show, among black and white people alike, is not only about a black family but a family portrayed without any of the demeaning stereotypical images of black people common in mainstream popular culture. Commentators have been provoked to try to resolve this apparent paradox and, in so doing, to ask themselves about the show's social significance. (Jhally and Lewis 1992, 2)

Jhally and Lewis' qualitative audience study investigates the disparity between media images and social realities in the 1980s through the early 1990s in the U.S. They take stock of the popular press' reaction to *The Cosby Show*, which for the most part expressed a hopefulness about the show's aptitude for changing minds about race – in a positive (lessening of racial prejudice) sort of way. However, their study posits that *The Cosby Show* “sustain[s] the harmful myth of social mobility” (Jhally and Lewis 1992, 7).

As they state:

The Cosby Show is not simply a source of gentle reassurance; it flatters to deceive. The United States is still emerging from a system of apartheid. Even if legal and political inequalities are finally disappearing, economic barriers remain. In an age when most white people have moved beyond the crudities of overt and naked racism, there is a heavy burden of guilt for all concerned. *The Cosby Show* provides its white audience with relief not only from fear but also responsibility. (1992, 8)

In a series of audience surveys with both black and white viewers of the show, *Enlightened Racism* reveals that race is a factor in viewership reactions. Jhally and Lewis note that the show addresses black and white audiences differently. For the white audience, the show attempts to largely ignore difference when it comes to race. “It asks white viewers to accept a black family as ‘one of them,’ united by commonalities rather

than divided by race” (Jhally and Lewis 1992, 36). The show attempts to reach black audiences by showing them a version of themselves that they might aspire to – professional, intelligent, and thoughtful – providing images that reflect the “dignity” of upper middle class African-American life in the U.S. Jhally and Lewis’ results find that *The Cosby Show* is part of a shift in television that represented black Americans in a more “positive” light than shows that came before. However the marker of “positive” in this case meant presenting upwardly mobile black Americans whose markers of their “race” have been (for the most part) effectively erased. As a result:

The Cosby Show, we discovered, helps to cultivate an impression, particularly among white people, that racism is no longer a problem in the United States. Our audience study revealed that the overwhelming majority of viewers felt racism was a sin of the past; *The Cosby Show*, accordingly, represented a new ‘freedom of opportunity’ apparently enjoyed by black people. If Cosby and Clair can make it, in other words, then so can all blacks. The positive images of blacks promoted by shows like *Cosby* have, therefore, distinctly negative consequences by creating a conservative and comfortable climate of opinion that allows white America to ignore widespread racial inequality. (Jhally and Lewis 1992, 72)

According to Jhally and Lewis, *The Cosby Show* played an important ideological role for viewers by framing specific conceptions of the American Dream. In *The Cosby Show* the American Dream is presented as not only available but desirable. Therefore, the upper middle class lifestyle that the Cosby’s are dwelling within is thought of as not only possible, but aspirational (the flip side of that is that black Americans who do not reach this measure of “success” are then categorized as “failures”). Jhally and Lewis elaborate:

The American dream is not an innocent ideological notion.
To sustain consent for a market economy constructed upon

enormous disparities in income and wealth, it is necessary to persuade people not to question but to consume. People need to be convinced that, regardless of their circumstances, the system is fundamentally fair. We should realize, in this sense, that the American dream plays neatly into the hands of those promoting unfettered free market capitalism. However encouraging and hopeful the American dream may be, it sustains a right-wing political agenda. (1992, 74)

Other scholars have theorized post-race discourse as a convenient trend that allows society at large the permission to forget about our discriminatory racial past. Kent Ono suggests that an examination of post-race discourse is useful to evaluate today's media landscape in terms of race. "Postracism is the perfect elixir to help society forget about the icky historical abomination known as racism. It is one part cultural condition and one part political strategy, a creative solution to help free the mind of racism once and for all" (Ono 2010, 228). Although the content of most post-gay television shares similarities with "the *Cosby* moment" – in that it frames and celebrates gay lives as if homophobia and discrimination based on sexuality are a thing of the past – I argue that to understand the emergence of post-gay television we must look at a more complex set of interrelated contexts and histories than accounted for in *Enlightened Racism*.

Herman Gray's *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* also puts forward the question of "progress" for black Americans as measured by televisual narratives. In particular, Gray situates the proliferation of images of African Americans on television not as signs of progress but rather as signification of the shift to commodify diversity. As such, Gray notes that, "*Cultural Moves* questions conventional assumptions about recognition and visibility, and, especially assumptions

about African American investment in representation as a route to African American membership in national culture” (Gray 2005, 2). Gray suggests that looking to representations of African Americans on television, particularly thinking about “network” television as an equivalent to understandings of the nation or national identity, no longer has as much resonance as it once had. In fact, he argues that there is a disconnect between an increase in visibility and lived experience – an increase in one does not necessarily translate linearly to “progress.” Key to this argument is the proliferation of images of African Americans on television, which he argues does not necessarily impact material lived experiences. In other words, with increased visibility we do not see a more equitable legal system or a reduction in racism or racist practices in the United States. Instead, the proliferation of images of African Americans tends to provide an “out” in that it makes it more difficult to decipher the functioning of the racist nation state.

Gray’s more recent work in “Subject(ed) to Recognition” continues to argue against visibility as liberation. Gray’s work suggests that media is saturated with images of African Americans to the extent that considerations of representation no longer have much resonance. As Gray comments:

Will seeing more frequently and recognizing more clearly and complexly members of excluded and subordinate populations increase their social, political, and economic access to life chances? More importantly, with the proliferation of representations made available by new media technologies and distribution platforms, will the intensity, variety, and reach of representations of race or ethnicity, gender or sexuality that daily crisscross the Internet challenge and destabilize the structure and cultural dispositions of identity, self, community, belonging, and politics to which we have become so accustomed? (Gray 2013, 773)

Instead of considering an increase in visibility as liberation, Gray suggests that the intersecting imperatives of difference, visibility and recognition coupled with shifting media practices, popular discourses like multiculturalism, consumer choice, and constraints of the market “operate as normative techniques of regulation of control” (2013, 774). Gray continues:

Accordingly, we are now operating within a different field of power, one that dissipates the capacity of the politics of representation to deliver on its historical promise of social justice. Rather than mere sites of struggle over *this accurate account or that authentic meaning*, my contention is that cultural representations found in the media, discourses about difference and value that animate our political discourse, and media activism that petition media institutions generate a desire for recognition. I regard this exercise of power as an *incitement* to visibility. This discursive proliferation also produces new political and cultural disputes over what counts as discrimination and social progress. (Gray 2013, 777)

Another key aspect of Gray’s claims have to do with the trend toward privatization and neoliberalism and the correlating impact this has had on the marketing of cultural difference. With neoliberalism, and the coinciding imperatives of post-racial discourse, comes a celebration of difference. As Gray notes, “It is with the move from race consciousness to color blindness, antiracist to antiracial, and intentional to postintentional racism, to invoke David Goldberg and Imani Perry once again, that racial neoliberalism willingly concedes, even celebrates difference” (Gray 2013, 780). Finally, Gray encourages scholarship that approaches representational politics in the media with attention to the mobilization of affect. “Shifting our assumptions and indexes for assessing legibility, parity, and accountability in media might encourage us to detail

exactly how and where media organize and circulate affectively compelling sentiment, attachment, and (dis)identification to public policies, bodies, histories, and cultures” (Gray 2013, 793). Rather than abandon questions of representation altogether, Gray suggests expanding “our focus to include sentiment and resonance,” and in so doing, media scholars might better be attuned to how “racial sentiments mobilize interest and disinterest and (as the basis of public policy), how they produce lack of care and indifference in different sectors of the population” (2013, 793).

As Banet-Weiser shows in “What’s Your Flava?” identities based on race, gender, and sexual orientation are desired markers of difference in branding, particularly in social media. Looking to children’s television, Banet-Weiser claims that representations of race and gender work as a kind of cultural capital. Banet-Weiser presents post-feminist and post-racial discourses as intersecting imperatives in her study of the branding of “Flava” dolls. Like questions of cultural diversity in the discourse of post-race, Banet-Weiser is concerned with the disavowal of feminism and its production as a branded consumer product that takes feminism into account but fails to address differences in race and gender that institutionalize disadvantage for the impoverished, women, and people of color (Banet-Weiser 2007).

POST-FEMINISM LITERATURE REVIEW

Rosalind Gill has theorized postfeminism as a sensibility that involves a number of interrelated themes that have permeated our media. These include “the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism,

choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference” (Gill 2007, 147). She describes the way in which these themes are patterned and overlap as contributing to a postfeminist sensibility. Importantly, Gill also expands on the idea that postfeminism is interconnected with contemporary neoliberalism. This is one of the comparisons that can be made between postfeminist and post-gay sensibilities. The usefulness of Gill’s approach is that she crystallizes postfeminism into a series of trends that enable future scholars to better identify postfeminist cultural products.

Gill makes a similar argument to the one made by Susan Douglas in *Enlightened Sexism*. Douglas makes the case that the circulation of sexist and misogynist images in today’s media as seen in shows such as *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), *The Bachelor* (2002-today) or *The Swan* (2004) are trends within post-feminism. She describes “enlightened sexism” as a form of backlash against feminism that uses what she calls “embedded feminism” that permit sexist stereotypes to persist in media. As she states, “Enlightened sexism is a response, deliberate or not, to the perceived threat of a new gender regime. It insists that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism – indeed, full equality has allegedly been achieved – so now it’s okay, even amusing, to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women” (Douglas 2010, 9). Douglas argues that television, particularly reality television, fosters what she calls a delusion of female empowerment. The disconnect between women’s lives as presented on television, and women’s lived experiences – as the wage gap persists and gender inequality continues to plague every area of institutional and social life – are the main foci of Douglas’ case. Douglas’

chapters demonstrate that television is a site where fantasies about women are being carried out in particular ways that resonate with anti-feminism and enlightened sexism – and in ways that often disavow feminism.

In Angela McRobbie’s seminal essay “Post-feminism and Popular Culture” post-feminism is defined as “an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined” (McRobbie 2007, 255). McRobbie is particularly interested in the role popular culture plays in maintaining the conditions for post-feminist discourses to continue to gain currency. McRobbie notes the effectiveness of media as participants in the undoing of feminism, while at the same time seeming to appear as if the media response is “a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism” (2007, 255). Like the trends within post-gay discourse that invoke messages of gay and lesbian equality as signaled by the prevalence of gay marriage, McRobbie’s argues that post-feminism is similarly invoked in the media in a way that suggests that equality for women has been achieved. As McRobbie states, “My argument is that post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force (2007, 255). Key to McRobbie’s argument is the notion that for post-feminism to have taken hold, feminism must be understood as being of the past, or as she says, having “passed away” (2007, 255). The same can be said of the rootedness of post-gay discourse, in that for in order for it to have taken hold, homophobia must be considered a thing of the past.

THE EMERGENCE OF POST-GAY DISCOURSE

The term post-gay was first introduced into circulation by British journalist Paul Burston to describe and critique the politics of the mainstream gay rights movement (Collard 1998). The term came into the spotlight in the U.S. when *Out* magazine editor James Collard defended his usage of the term post-gay in *The New York Times*. He described the term as useful in characterizing the way in which sexuality ought not to be the primary means of defining the gay community (Ghaziani 2011, 99). The term has also been taken up as a way to describe the absorption of gay style into mainstream culture, including consumer culture. In its inception in the 1990s gay politics had a radical bent, an observable in-your-face set of demands that set it apart from mainstream heteronormative culture. Into the 2010s the radical nature of the gay movement that was exemplified by organizations of the 1990s, such as ACT-UP or Queer Nation, has largely shifted. Today's most prominent gay activist groups are the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and GLAAD – rhetorically distant from its predecessors in its disavowal of specificity. Aside from common knowledge, there is no particular marker of gayness or lesbian-ness in the naming of the groups HRC and GLAAD, who are ostensibly supposed to represent and advocate on behalf of the gay and lesbian (and bisexual and transgender) community. This shift away from specificity and toward generalities, from an emphasis on a gender and sexual “revolution” to a more conservative emphasis on gay marriage, for example, is accounted for in scholarly work as post-gay. Post-gay discourse is distinguishable particularly in the types of campaigns mainstream gay rights organizations set out to accomplish, including advocating for issues to do with the family,

marriage rights, employment nondiscrimination and military reform like the recently won (somewhat ironic) battle to overturn “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

The post-gay era (1997-today) is best understood as a “historically specific social pattern” (Seidman 2002, 29) that dictates and prioritizes a particular set of social values over others. The features of the post-gay era become clearer when compared to the prior “closet” (pre-World War II) and “coming out” (WWII-1997) eras. Although I think it is useful to frame gay and lesbian history into distinct timeframes – the closet, coming out, and post-gay era, as Ghaziani does – it is also important to note that these boundaries are not distinct, much like we cannot pretend to know some monolithic account even of what it means to talk about the “gay community.” I use these terms with caution then, acknowledging that the history that I mean to capture here is not to make grand statements about gay and lesbian history and experience, but rather to say that the frames of the closet, coming out and post-gay eras capture the way dominant discourse has produced and reproduced these particular narratives. It is also important to note that these dominant discourses have been gendered, raced and classed in particular ways, many of which I will elaborate on later. That being said, the primary features of the closet era include the concealment of one’s sexual identity – choosing to hide your sexual identity from your family and friends – as well as a tendency to be isolated from others who might share the same sexual identity. In the closet era networks between others in the gay community were minimal. Often the gay person carried around a sense of guilt and fear about their sexual identity – this manifested itself in the internalization of commonly held societal views about homosexuality, and the sense that one was duplicitous – living a

public life and a private life that did not match up. The coming out era had people “coming out” of the closet, opening up about their sexuality, and constructing a world in which networks of queer people came together and formed (often exclusive) communities. The sensibility of this time tended to shift from guilt and shame about one’s queer identity to a more positive outlook on being gay or lesbian (Ghaziani 2011).

The post-gay era tends to be a time when gay and lesbian activists seek to emphasize their similarities to heterosexuals (Ghaziani 2011). The post-gay era is also a time when the “heterosexualization of gay culture” becomes a dominant feature of gay activist discourse (Mendelsohn 1996). As Daniel Mendelsohn puts it, one of the features of the post-gay era is “the over-time acceptance of mainstream cultural norms by those who were once revolutionaries” (Mendelsohn 1996, 3). The heterosexualization of gay culture in terms of politics lends itself to an emphasis on family issues, marriage, adoption, employment non-discrimination as well as inclusion in the armed forces. These focal points are especially hetero-oriented in contrast to LGBTQ politics in other eras. As Ghaziani notes, “Once upon a time, gay politics had a distinctive and defiant edge and enforced the right to have sex in public places and bath houses, debated the morality of ‘outing,’ and used dramatic, theater-as-politics tactics such as ACT-UP’s disruption of Easter service at St. Patrick’s cathedral” (Ghaziani 2011, 100).

The two conflicting trends that Ghaziani lays out merit unpacking in the context of the post-gay era – the first is the already mentioned “heterosexualization” of gay culture, or an emphasis on assimilation, and the second is the internal diversification of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities. The internal diversification

of lesbian and gay culture gestures toward the multiple ways in which one can claim and perform alternative sexual identities, so much so that the LGBTQ(IA) movement “has exceeded a critical threshold” in a way that makes organizing and activism around identity very complicated (Ghaziani 2011, 117).

Ghaziani studied the shifting names of identity groups serving the LGBTQ population at Princeton University over a forty-year period. He found that the trend has been to move from an “us versus them” approach to organizational naming to an “us and them” strategy. The “us versus them” approach included the tendency to be very specific about the people that the organization served (often this manifest itself in a series of initials – GABLAB (Gay, Bi, and Lesbian and Princeton) and PEARL (Princeton’s Eagerly Awaited Radical Lesbians). As of this writing, the organization that serves the LGBTQ population at Princeton is called “Pride Alliance” – a naming strategy that is emblematic of the “us and them” approach most often found in a post-gay era. Important here is not only the movement away from acronym, but also the strategy of de-emphasis that brings about the all-inclusive group Pride Alliance. Partly, as enumerated by the leaders of Pride Alliance at the time, the desire for a generic name comes from the initiative not to exclude and to maximize the possibilities for inclusion. Thus, one of the favored strategies in the post-gay era is that of generality – “an equal opportunity maneuver that includes everyone by erasing all letters” (Ghaziani 2011, 114). In fact, when questioned about the use of the word “pride,” some group members of Pride Alliance comment that pride is not necessarily about gay pride or LGBTQIA pride, but about a possibility that gays and allies might feel a sense of pride in a generalizable way

– prideful about being people and prideful about celebrating diversity. Also relevant is a 2007 Princeton campaign called the campus Ally project. This reimagining of the Princeton shield with the word Ally at center – the two Ls marked with two different colors – is meant to be representative of two individuals that share everything, are similar in every way, except one important difference. In this way, another trend within post-gay discourse can be said to be the way in which post-gay “leaders prop-up heterosexuality as an object against which a gay subjectivity is narrowly defined” (Ghaziani 2011, 114). This can be called a “mainstreaming effect” – a particular rhetorical strategy that rejects the terminology of gay and lesbian or any kind of signifier of identity in favor of the generalizable “people.” Other instances outside of Princeton where organizational names have shifted from “us versus them” to “us and them,” and/or from instances where groups use identity markers within the title of the outreach to those that use more generalizable names include the Human Rights Campaign Fund (now Human Rights Campaign), the Millenium March, and Center on Halsted (Chicago’s first LGBT community center).

The Human Rights Campaign Fund, founded in 1980 with the purpose of raising money for gay-supportive Congressional leaders, symbolically marked its growth in 1995 when they dropped the Fund from their name and launched a revamped website, printed newly designed promotional material and unveiled the equal sign in a block as their new logo – the generic equal sign and the language of “human rights” (as opposed to gay rights) importantly lacks any remnants of connection to gay life as it has become publicly recognized. The rainbow flag is missing, for example, and also makes invisible any direct link to the people for whom HRC is working on behalf. Also notable is the “Millenium

March on Washington for Equality” held in 2000 – its predecessors were the “National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights” (which was used two years in a row) and the “National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation” (Ghaziani 2011, 105). Finally, the “Center on Halsted” a LGBT community center opened in Chicago in 2007 (Chicago’s first LGBT center), is a 170,000-square-foot building (shared with a Whole Foods) that is “not your average LGBT center,” according to *The Advocate* (Sokol 2007). The “Center on Halsted” is understood as gay only through the context of its location – on a street that is known for its high concentration of gay and lesbian residents. In this way, the Center is gay by association – the connection to gay life and culture is implied. The *Chicago Sun-Times* ran a headline that promoted the center as “An Equal-Opportunity Hangout: The Center on Halsted to Welcome Gays and Lesbians - and Everyone Else” (Ghaziani 2011, 105). In *The Advocate* article gay city Alderman Tom Tourney is quoted as saying that the space is expensive – it was expensive to build and is expensive to operate – and for that reason it better be available to everyone. The message across the board from the Human Rights Campaign, to the Millennium March, and the Center on Halsted is very similar – to be gay or to have a gay identity is unremarkable (Bawer 1993; Harris 1997; Signorile 1997; Sullivan 1996), at least in the sense that it is necessary to be explicit in the naming of organizations and events (Ghaziani 2011). In this way, “Post-gay politics paradoxically attempt to organize the collective by making identity boundaries less distinct. Us-versus-them is not tenable if participants refuse to divide the world as such” (Ghaziani 2011, 116). Importantly though, identities with clear boundaries are found to be more effective

for generating political change – clear identity boundaries are useful for responding to discrimination, lobbying efforts, attempting to give voice to underrepresented groups, mobilizing on behalf of said groups, and managing the resources of said groups (Armstrong 2002; Gamson 1995). The assimilationist strategy found most prominently within post-gay politics is not (always) compatible with working on behalf of interest groups. What often happens to assimilationist groups is that they function more often as social groups than anything else. And while that might seem non-problematic at first glance, or maybe indicative of some measure of “progress,” these trends are exactly what Michael Warner cautioned against when he wrote *The Trouble With Normal*, as I address in more detail in chapter two (Warner 1999).

Post-gay sensibilities are not all that different from what Lisa Duggan points to in “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism.” She argues that within homonormativity “dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions remain unchallenged, gay identity become ‘privatized’ and ‘depoliticized,’” (Duggan 2002, 179) “and the structure of social inequality that demarcates a heterosexual center and an LGBT margin, while symbolically reconfigures, remains materially intact” (Ghaziani 2011, 118). In other words, any kind of semblance of equality that post-gay or homonormative rhetoric brings is only “virtual” equality. In a post-gay era, activism is an attempt to mitigate conflict and collective identity is implied rather than explicit.

In some ways, it is not surprising that we find ourselves in a post-gay era. The LGBT movement has historically vacillated between a politics of respectability and confrontation. Some of the earliest activism on behalf of gays and lesbians including

“The Mattachine Society” and “The Daughters of Bilitis” also prioritized strategies of suppression – and as mentioned, the HRC elected for a similar approach in the 1980s. However, today’s post-gay politics is also unique, and can be set apart from LGBT movements of the past. Like Duggan’s concept of homonormativity, today’s post-gay rhetoric has a narrow sense of what “equality” means; lobbies for formal access to the United States’ most conservative institutions, and the “right to privacy” is configured in terms of the domestic (Ghaziani 2011). As Ghaziani notes,

The danger to be avoided is using the prefix post- for a dubiously cutting-edge cultural conversation that is blissfully ignorant of a group’s historical and present-day struggles. Post-gay could entail a multiculturalist blurring of modernist boundaries and a move toward expanded tolerance and freedom – or it could entail a neoliberal, class- and racially inflected, and surface blurring that redefines the contours of hetero- and homonormativity. (2011, 120)

Which of these it will be is yet to be seen.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

CHAPTER ONE

In chapter one, "**Don't Ask, Don't Tell**" and its Repeal as seen in Lifetime's *Army Wives* (2007-2013), I discuss the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) as one of the central issues on the agenda of gay and lesbian activism within the context of the post-gay era. In this chapter I explore the narrowing conceptions of citizenship and conceptions of the American Dream as tied to processes of privatization under neoliberalism that intersect with similar tendencies within the post-gay era. I argue that in the post-gay era, post-gay television exclusively allows for same-sex couples to adhere to normative conceptions of patriotism. In other words, in post-gay television tied to the military, there is little room for dissent. The same-sex couples that appear on television, as I explore in the case of Lifetime's *Army Wives* (2007-2013), maintain consistency in terms of their patriotic participation. In *Army Wives* gay and lesbian couples desire to marry, and espouse the belief that the right to serve ought to be unquestionably highly valued by everyone. Thus, the show offers only limited versions of what it means to be gay and lesbian, excluding all those that would hold oppositional positions in regard to gay and military service as well as those that might not view the U.S. military as a benevolent and infallible institution. Set post-DADT repeal, *Army Wives* showcases the lesbian couple in the show, Charlie and Nicole, as free of the conditions of struggle that would most likely plague many same-sex couples imbricated within Army life still today. For example, Charlie and Nicole's normative aspirations to marry and start a family (what would take time, money, effort and likely struggle in the lives of most gays and

lesbians) are instantly a possibility once the couple announces their shared desires. I argue that the disconnect between what is possible for gay and lesbian military couples on television, and in real-life post-repeal of DADT is a reflection of today's post-gay era. In the case of Lifetime's *Army Wives* the historical and structural discrimination against sexual otherness that has long been a key component of U.S. military life is completely erased.

CHAPTER TWO

In chapter two, **Post(ing) Same-Sex Marriage: Discourses of Marriage Rights as they Circulate on and around ABC's *Modern Family* (2009-today)**, I discuss same-sex marriage rights as one of the central issues (if not the single issue) on the agenda of gay and lesbian activism within the context of today's post-gay era. In this chapter I take *Modern Family* as a case study to examine the way in which the policy issue of marriage equality is instantiated on television. I argue that *Modern Family* is one of the paradigmatic examples, both in terms of what the text offers through its narrative as well as the extratextual discourse surrounding the show, of how post-gay discourse on the topic of same-sex marriage materializes on television. In the world of post-gay television on the topic of marriage, especially as exemplified by *Modern Family*, a heightened desire for marriage and family is espoused outwardly by the gay male characters in the show, as well as by their support network on their behalf. This chapter details *Modern Family's* unique relationship with the city of New York. Specifically, on Monday May 12, 2014, just days before the premiere of the two-part special gay wedding episode, the television show announced that they would reimburse all the marriage licenses purchased

in the city of New York on that day. In this chapter I argue that this promotional plug brings marriage as a value center stage at the same time that it erases the possibility of any kind of critical engagement with marriage as a societal value. I argue that today's post-gay political climate enables and encourages the public/private partnership between the city of New York and the ABC network. I suggest that *Modern Family* holds a unique place in the world of comedic sitcoms, and examine the significance of the showrunners' decisions that are tied closely to U.S. policy decisions. This is evidenced by the timing of the decision to host a same-sex marriage on the show that co-creator Christopher Lloyd announced to *Entertainment Weekly* the day after the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act. As this example demonstrates, on *Modern Family*, the legitimization of same-sex relationships on television is only made possible by the legitimization of same-sex marital relationships approved by the state. In order to provide additional context for the emergence of same-sex marriage as a priority issue within today's post-gay era this chapter also details a brief history of marriage rights in the U.S. Finally, this chapter explores queer critiques of marriage in both queer theory and on television as an alternative perspective to the narrow definitions of marriage and family that have become most prominent on post-gay television.

CHAPTER THREE

In chapter three, **The Invention of the Bullying 'Epidemic': Fox's *Glee* (2009-2015) as a Post-Gay Text**, I discuss LGBTQ anti-bullying legislation efforts as one of the more recent issues that has been taken up by gay and lesbian activism in the post-gay era. In this chapter I take *Glee* (2009-2015) as a case study for the way post-gay

television operates on the topic of LGBTQ bullying. I argue that *Glee* operates as a post-gay television text on a number of levels including its presentation of a white young gay man as the exemplar for LGBTQ bullying awareness in schools, as well as the show's presentation of bullying as a peer-to-peer or individualized problem that resonates with the neoliberal underpinnings of post-gay discourse. In this chapter I argue that bullying initiatives that are framed as an individualized problem, like in *Glee*, fail to allow for the possibility that homophobia and gender policing are entrenched structural and systemic issues in school settings that ought to be addressed as such. I argue that the treatment of LGBTQ bullying in schools in *Glee* is consistent with today's middle-class assimilationist and post-gay response to the issue that is found in most anti-bullying initiatives that have been enacted in school settings. This chapter approaches the issue of LGBTQ bullying from the perspectives of media studies, queer theory, critical race theory, and feminist studies to better understand the discursive impact of anti-bullying measures implemented in schools and taken up by television. I suggest that *Glee* is a fitting case study because the show's writers and creators have spoken of their rationale for developing a bullying storyline that is in direct response to news attention of gay youth suicide (particularly the rash of suicides that were widely reported on in the summer of 2010). I explore *Glee*, along with other media that has attended to the issue of bullying in schools like the much-publicized *It Gets Better* project, to reflect upon the selective and partial lens prevalent in today's post-gay era. This chapter's stakes lie in the way in which the influence of post-gay discourse recasts the issue of bullying as resolved by anti-bullying legislative measures. I argue that contrary to this, not only are

nationalized anti-bullying measures tied to the tendencies of (limited) political action within the post-gay era, they are also dangerously propelling continued stereotypes about gays and lesbians as helpless victims in need of (state) protection, reinforcing the school-to-prison pipeline, and adversely targeting vulnerable populations for increased school surveillance and potential school expulsion. That said, this chapter links *Glee* and other media on bullying to post-gay discourse at the same time that it makes a case for the rethinking of bullying initiatives in their current state because of their problematic alignment with post-gay discourse.

CHAPTER ONE

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and its Repeal as seen in Lifetime's *Army Wives* (2007-2013)

Gay and lesbian civil rights and military service converged during the March 27, 2013 hearings on *U.S. v. Windsor*, the Supreme Court case that challenged the constitutionality of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). In fact, Solicitor General Donald Verrilli's first argument claimed that DOMA, the national law that upheld marriage rights for opposite sex couples exclusively, ought to be considered unconstitutional because of gay and lesbian soldiers. As he states, "What section 3 [of DOMA] does is exclude from an array of Federal benefits lawfully married couples. This means that the spouse of a soldier killed in the line of duty cannot receive the dignity and solace of an official notification of next of kin" (*United States v. Edith Schlain Windsor* 2013). The September 2011 repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) resulted in gay and lesbian soldiers being afforded the opportunity to openly serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. However, due to the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the Federal Law that had jurisdiction over the funded government agencies of the U.S. Armed Forces, the same benefits afforded to heterosexual soldiers on base would not be granted to gays and lesbians. Verrilli's leading argument makes central the plight of lesbian and gay⁷ servicemembers in the context of our national conversation about marriage rights. Verrilli's comments reveal the implicit limitations dominant discourses place on the kind

⁷ I use lesbian and gay rather than LGBTQ intentionally, as bisexual, transgender and queer people in LGBTQ are not often considered by advocates of marriage equality or the right to serve.

of lesbian or gay soldier that is in different contexts both marginalized and privileged in today's socio-political climate. In his comment, Verrilli assumes that the advocates who support the repeal of DADT are, by necessity, supporters of marriage equality. Verrilli's equation of lesbian and gay civil rights, and the question of same-sex marriage reflects a much larger tendency that can be seen in the normalizing discourses present in today's post-gay politics.

The post-gay era (roughly marked between 1997-today) is understood, to draw on Seidman's idea, as a "historically specific social pattern" that dictates and prioritizes a particular set of social values over others (Seidman 2002). During this period gay and lesbian civil rights activists tend to emphasize their similarities to heterosexuals (Ghaziani 2011). As Ghaziani argues, "The post-gay era may be marked by the acceptance of a segment of gays and lesbians who are gender conforming, middle class, upwardly mobile – in other words, those best able to take advantage of the benefits of assimilation and the valorization of a particular type of diversity" (104). Ghaziani examines the decisions gay and lesbian activists made in the naming of their events, and organizations. For example, he notes that the Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRC), the largest gay activist organization founded in 1980, marked their growth in 1995 by launching a new web site, and designing the easily recognized yellow and blue equal sign logo. The decision making behind the language of human rights, as opposed to an acknowledgement of the more specific identity group they are supposed to represent (gays and lesbians), as well as the use of the generic equal sign (instead of a more recognizable symbol of gay life like the rainbow flag), delinks the HRC for whom the

group is advocating. Importantly, there is no evidence to suggest that bisexuals, transgender people, or queer people are considered by HRC. The post-gay era is also a time when, as Daniel Mendelsohn puts it, “heterosexualization of gay culture” becomes a dominant feature of gay activist discourse. He also notes that one of the features of the post-gay era is “the over-time acceptance of mainstream cultural norms by those who were once revolutionaries” (Mendelsohn 1996, 3). In *Respectably Queer*, Jane Ward comes to similar conclusions, as she states,

Queer activists use diversity rhetoric to compete with nonprofit groups to garner corporate funding and mainstream legitimacy, enhance their public reputation or moral standing, establish their diversity-related competence or expertise, and accrue ‘liberal capital.’ I argue that this instrumentalization of diversity has increased the demand for utilitarian and easily measurable forms of difference – creating the most room for those who embody predictable and fundable kinds of diversity, adversity, or transgression. (Ward 2008, 6)

Post-gay discourse emerges in tandem with shifting conceptions of the American Dream due to processes of privatization under neoliberalism. This means at the same time that what is deemed acceptable in gay and lesbian public life narrows, so do the frames available for conceptualizing U.S. citizenship, as elaborated by Lauren Berlant. The reason it is key that post-gay discourse emerges at the same time as fantasies about the American Dream begin to shift and narrow is that each shape the other. In other words, the promise of the American Dream, that one should invest in work and family-making and by doing so one can secure the benefits of the state, resonates in the post-gay era, especially in the areas of gay military life and marriage equality. Later in this essay I further analyze the connections between the post-gay era and conceptions of the

American Dream in the case of *Army Wives*. In *The Tolerance Trap* Suzanna Danuta Walters reinforces the idea that the post-ing of politics has resonance for the issues of marriage and the military. As she notes, “This book challenges received wisdom that asserts tolerance as the path to gay rights. Most gays and their allies believe that access to marriage and the military are the brass ring of gay rights and that once we have achieved these goals we will have moved into a post-gay America” (2014, 3). She continues, “The ‘accept us’ trope pushes outside the charmed circle of acceptance those gays and other gender and sexual minorities, such as transgendered folks and gays of color, who don’t fit the poster-boy image of nonstraight people and who can’t be – or don’t want to be – assimilated” (Walters 2014, 3). In this way, the heterosexualization of gay culture and its normalizing tendencies means that in a post-gay era, values such as marriage, family, and inclusion in the armed service are highly valued.

Post-gay discourse informs what I term post-gay television. By unpacking the tenets of our post-feminist media culture we can better understand the components of post-gay television. Rosalind Gill’s scholarship introduces a number of interrelated themes that help to conceptualize the often contested and contradictory meanings of postfeminism. Following Gill’s analysis of post-feminism, I suggest that post-gay can be best understood as a sensibility. As Gill notes, “postfeminism is understood best neither as an epistemological perspective nor as an historical shift, nor (simply) as a backlash in which its meanings are pre-specified. Rather, postfeminism should be conceived of as a sensibility” (Gill 2007, 148). To best conceptualize post-gay discourse as a sensibility, I will first lay out one of the themes that make post-gay discourse recognizable as such on

television. One of the criteria for identifying post-gay television requires that same-sex couples adhere to normative understandings of patriotism. In post-gay television to do with the military there is little room for dissent. Same-sex couples with a connection to military life are not a widespread phenomenon on television, however; the same-sex couples and/or gay/lesbian individuals that do appear, and have a connection to military life maintain consistency in terms of their patriotic participation.

The same assumptions are made in Lifetime's *Army Wives* (2007-2013) – the television show and its characters adhere to traditional norms in the areas of marriage and patriotic duty. Everyone desires marriage, and believes that the right to serve ought to be unquestionably highly valued by all. In this way, the show offers only limited versions of what it means to be gay and lesbian. The Supreme Court demonstrates the “worthiness” of the gay soldier by hinging marriage rights upon his/her character. It is not a coincidence that the image of the gay soldier is held up by the Supreme Court as today's model citizen. It is the norms that circulate within today's post-gay political climate that make the equivalence of gay soldiering with model citizen possible. Presumably, the only marker of “difference” is his/her sexuality as he/she is otherwise normatively configured as white, upwardly mobile/professional class, monogamously paired, normatively bodied and normatively gendered. Following Judith Butler, the gay soldier as model citizen identified by the Supreme Court marks her or him as embodying a livable, grievable, meaningful life. As such, normalizing the gay soldier has ramifications for those outside the parameters of ideal citizenry. In other words, all others are not worthy, not grievable, not recognized. As Butler states, “If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the

start, not conceivable as lives from certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense” (Butler 2010, 1). She continues,

The epistemological capacity to apprehend a life is partially dependent on that life being produced according to norms that qualify it as a life or, indeed, as part of life. In this way, the normative production of ontology thus produces the epistemological problem of apprehending a life, and this in turn gives rise to the ethical problem of what it is to acknowledge or, indeed, to guard against injury and violence. (Butler 2010, 3)

This chapter questions in what ways the frame of a lesbian and gay rights agenda has been mobilized to promote the infallibility of the U.S. military under the mantle of post-gay discourse. This is especially salient in comparison to the all-too-common practice of treating the U.S. soldier as expendable. To be a veteran in the U.S. today often means jumping through bureaucratic hoops to get the basic services promised. For example, as of this writing, the Department of Veteran Affairs is still addressing long wait lists for health care benefits for veterans that were brought to public attention in April of 2014 by a whistleblower. In the interim, at least forty veterans died while waiting for care in Phoenix, AZ (Clark 2014).

That the idea of violating a lesbian or gay serviceperson’s civil rights is mobilized by the Supreme Court to make the case for marriage equality makes sense in the context of our post-gay era – a timeframe that is marked by an emphasis on assimilationist political strategies. It is necessary to think through the implications of the prominence of the gay soldier upheld by the Supreme Court against DOMA, as well as the televisual counterpart to gay and lesbian military service as seen in Lifetime’s *Army Wives*. That the issues of marriage and service converge at the Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Windsor* is a

reflection of today's politics and activism on behalf of gay civil rights. Further, the politics that upholds the gay soldier as a model citizen as seen on Lifetime television's *Army Wives* aligns seamlessly with post-gay sensibilities. My goal in this chapter is twofold. First, I use *Army Wives* as a case study to understand the emergence of post-gay discourse on television. In doing so, I introduce *Army Wives* as a cultural text that operates according to the imperatives of post-gay discourse. Second, I lay out the historical context of the DADT measure in order to better understand today's gay and lesbian socio-political climate. Importantly, I note that post-gay discourse intersects in important ways with both post-race and post-feminist discourses – each of which are present in *Army Wives*. By examining the intertwining and overlapping “post” discourses in the *Army Wives* text, the way sexuality is mobilized to affirm conservative and assimilationist ideals in the post-gay era becomes clear.

POST-GAY TELEVISION: LIFETIME'S *ARMY WIVES*

In this section I extend the logic of post-gay discourse – marked by an assimilationist and conservative ideological frame – to Lifetime's *Army Wives* (2007-2013). The Lifetime show *Army Wives* began its run in 2007, and at the time featured the fictional lives of Claudia Joy, Pamela, Roxy, Denise, Army husband Roland (an honorary Army wife),ⁱⁱ and their lives as they relate to and revolve around their spouses and, by proximity, the U.S. Army. Toward the end of season six, about seven months after the repeal of the Clinton era provision dubbed “Don't Ask, Don't Tell,” *Army Wives* introduced Charlie Mayfield, the female director of the community center on base and her life-partner Captain Nicole Galassin. *Army Wives* as a cultural text is instructive on a

number of accounts, including the politics of sexual identity. Mary Vavrus' work looks to *Army Wives* to unpack the show's particular take on gender politics, as well as its connection to the military-industrial complex. As Vavrus notes,

Army Wives produces gendered military propaganda using the conventions of soap opera and serial drama—genres typically intended for female audiences—in an attempt to fix meanings around Army family life. I argue that this works via the show's constitution of two different marriages: the first weds individuals to the Army (including its regime of gender politics) to achieve homeland defense; and the second weds the Lifetime network to the military-industrial complex through partnerships and strategic alliances that extend Lifetime's brand and construct verisimilitude about contemporary military life. (2013, 93)

The argument that I make extends Vavrus' by noting that with the introduction of the lesbian storyline in season six of *Army Wives*, although the couple is same-sex, nothing changes about the way in which the show invests in the marriage partnerships of its characters. Charlie and Nicole marry each other, marry the Army, and by extension the viewer is asked to invest in these same ties. The emphasis on sameness between straights and gays resembles the normalizing discourse of homonormativity that has been articulated by Lisa Duggan, among others. Homonormativity is described by Duggan as a politics that upholds dominant heteronormative assumptions. Homonormative gay culture is both demobilized and depoliticized – it is fueled by an overwhelming concern for domesticity (marriage rights, adoption rights) and consumption. She suggests that with homonormativity comes shifts in the priorities of gay and lesbian equality movements including an emphasis on “access to institutions of domestic privacy, the ‘free’ market, and patriotism” (Duggan 2013, 51). Duggan continues:

This new homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: ‘equality’ becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, ‘freedom’ becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the ‘right to privacy’ becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped. All of this adds up to a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life. (2013, 66)

I suggest that post-gay discourse is similar to homonormativity, but introduces a new dimension – the suggestion that continued advocacy on behalf of gay and lesbian civil rights is no longer necessary.

Army Wives is unlike other television on the military. As Vavrus observes, “Although military-focused TV programs such as *China Beach*, *JAG* and *M*A*S*H* have had successful runs, they focused neither on military family life nor on wars occurring at the times the program aired. *Army Wives*, on the other hand, does this as it partners with brick-and-mortar support organizations, corporations, and individuals to create sympathetic narrative commentary about the current conflicts’ impact on families” (2013, 96). In addition, since season two, *Army Wives* issued their scripts to the Pentagon in exchange for filming at Charleston Air Force base and for the use of Air Force reservists as extras (Vavrus 2013 following O’Connor 2008). This is not the first time that the Lifetime network has partnered with governmental institutions and private organizations. Meehan and Byars report that part of Lifetime’s branding as “women’s television” includes partnerships with liberal feminist organizations such as the National Organization of Women (NOW) and the MS Foundation (2000). The result, as Meehan

and Byars note, is “telefeminist programming formulae that defuse any basic structural challenges to patriarchy and its institutions” (2000, 34).

After seven seasons, Lifetime Television cancelled *Army Wives*, the network’s most popular and longest running show to date (Release 2013). The show attracted primarily women and “propelled Lifetime to be the #1 ad supported cable network in the 10-11 time period” (Release 2012). Lifetime Television brands itself as a network for “women,” but resists the feminist label. As Byars & Meehan put it,

By not challenging the assumptions about labor, sexuality, and power that underlie the model of ‘having it all,’ Lifetime remains commercially viable presenting television that provides role models for a way of life made possible by second wave feminism, but which Lifetime defines as feminine, never feminist. (1994, 36)

Post-feminism and post-gay discourse are intersecting imperatives. The disavowal of feminism in *Army Wives* paves the way for the emergence of post-gay discourse. As Vavrus points out, many of the gendered storylines are not only not feminist, but lend themselves easily to post-feminist critique. For example, Army wife Pamela Moran returns to the work force after divorcing her husband, Chase. And, Roland Burton, husband of Lieutenant Colonel Joan Burton, maintains the role of primary caretaker to their children, proving he is more competent than his wife at the stereotypical “female” domestic duties. More post-feminist than feminist, as Vavrus argues, these untraditional storylines are instead “a legitimation of traditional gender performance and meritocracy that renders feminism apparently unnecessary” (2013, 95). The same can be said of the treatment of sexual politics in *Army Wives*.

In the same way that *Army Wives* presents women in positions of power, opening up the door to potential military recruitment of women – so too does the initiation of the lesbian storyline post-DADT repeal. Enloe’s research has shown us that women are less drawn to the military than men (Vavrus 2013 following Enloe 2000). However, by presenting women in positions of power within military life as a hybrid soap opera, *Army Wives* and the U.S. Army collaborate to recruit women. Following this, by portraying lesbian women thriving within military culture on *Army Wives*, Lifetime’s partnership with the military extends its efforts to recruit not only women, but lesbian women as well.

There is investment in post-gay discourse among the creative team of *Army Wives* that is completely absent in *Under the Sabers: The Unwritten Code of Army Wives* by Tanya Biank, the book that inspired the television series. Biank’s book follows the real-life stories of four women married to Army men stationed at Fort Bragg between late 2000 through 2003. In the book, published six years before lesbian soldiers first appeared on the *Army Wives* television series, there is almost no evidence that lesbian soldiers, gay soldiers, or “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” were part of military life in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where her exposé is set. It is obvious that *Army Wives* creators and writers invented Charlie and Nicole’s (lesbian) storyline for the purpose of resolving the Army’s culpability in its long history of homophobia and persecution of gay and lesbian soldiers. The invisibility of gay and lesbian soldiers in Biank’s original text throws into relief the fact that television writers and producers are actively participating in the creation of post-gay discourse in the television series. Except for two casual mentions, gays and lesbians

are an unknown entity in *Under the Sabers*. Instead of acknowledging or fleshing out any kind of recognition that gay and lesbian military service existed in 2006 Fayetteville, Biank offensively dismisses alternative sorts of identities. The first mention of sexual difference occurs when “transvestites” are identified by Biank as part of a shifting demographic that has played a role in Fayetteville’s economic depression. As she says,

More than twenty years later, another war buildup changed everything again, as young draftees from across the nation tramped through town with Vietnam a sure thing in their futures. This time the councilmen and local merchants sold out Fayetteville’s soul, allowing strip clubs, topless bars, and brothels to multiply like bacteria in a petri dish. The 500 block of Hay Street filled with druggies, hookers, and transvestites. (Biank 2006, 37)

In this statement, transvestites get short shrift. It is unthinkable to Biank that someone might claim the identity position of transvestite. Biank also assumes that these “characters” contribute to the demographic of Fayetteville negatively. Also important is the moralizing directed at all sorts of “deviant” groups – “druggies,” “hookers,” and “transvestites” are apparently the lowest of the low. The second mention of sexual difference occurs when Biank describes the scene at a local bar where Army wives are known to go to blow off steam. As she says, “most of the women, including some from her own group, were wearing tank tops and tight low-riding jeans, but one black man near the bar outdid them all. He had on a powder blue, sequined miniskirt, and a white halter top that matched his electric white pageboy wig” (Biank 2006, 87). This observation is interesting because Biank does not actually name this character at the bar as gay or transgender, and at the same time expresses a certain kind of admiration for this person willing to dress in public in a way that would draw attention to himself, in female

dress. In this instance, there is still no acknowledgement that this (presumably) transgender person is part of the ecology of a place like Fayetteville, staunchly heterosexual but for these few examples. That the storyline for Charlie and Nicole, would come out of a book that never directly mentions even the possibility that there were gay people involved in the Armed Services, is further evidence of the way in which Charlie and Nicole are inserted, not coincidentally on the heels of the repeal of DADT, to resolve in fantasy form the Army's culpability in creating a hostile climate for gays and lesbians in service.

Army Wives introduces life-partners Nicole Galassin and Charlie Mayfield just months after the Army's restriction on openly gay servicemembers "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed. The story-arc of this lesbian couple is contained within seven recurring episodes. Although *Army Wives* made common practice of introducing new characters and storylines, in most cases the new characters had a long-term presence, or reoccurred throughout the remainder of the series. Uncharacteristic of the television show's introduction of other reoccurring characters, Charlie and Nicole's story-arc is neatly contained. The lesbian storyline also comes on the heels of the real-life repeal of DADT. This synchronicity of events leaves one to question what particular agendas might have been in play by the *Army Wives* production team. The repeal of DADT, and the presentation of the lesbian storyline on *Army Wives* is not coincidental. Charlie and Nicole are excused from the cast of *Army Wives* once they have accomplished the television show's post-gay work. In other words, the show no longer needs Charlie and Nicole once the audience is convinced that the Army would "play by the rules." Post-

repeal, discrimination and struggle that has been a regular feature of Army life historically basically disappears, or *Army Wives* would have us believe that to be the case. Further evidence of understanding Charlie and Nicole as part of the post-gay design of the television show is seen in the series' sendoff episode *Army Wives: A Final Salute*, or rather not seen, as Charlie and Nicole are made invisible. After Lifetime cancelled *Army Wives*, the network hosted a two-hour finale episode that included commentary from the cast as well as "real-life" Army wives. In it, Charlie and Nicole are nowhere to be seen – not in flashback or in the commentary about what the show has meant to "real-life" Army wives.

Like *Army Wives*' disinterest in acknowledging that same-sex partners would struggle in a myriad of ways if they were to be openly gay in the military, the show presents the same disinterest in acknowledging the disadvantages people of color face in the military. Instead, as lesbian women, and in the case of Charlie, as a woman of color, they thrive. Charlie and Nicole are an interracial couple, yet Charlie's African-American heritage (the audience can only assume that is the case, as there is no discussion about her "race") is made invisible. This is one of the many sites where discourses of post-gay and post-race converge. While the introduction of non-heterosexuality on a show as starkly heterosexual as *Army Wives* is significant, instead of signaling progress, the way Charlie and Nicole's story unravels plays into many of the themes common to post-gay discourse in that the couple is normatively patriotic, and aspire to conventional marriage and family. The post discourses (post-gay, post-race, and post-feminism) all masquerade as

celebratory discourses when in fact they operate according to sexualized, racialized, and gendered conventions.

Although Nicole and Charlie are same-sex, they otherwise fit a very specific historically safe-for-television paradigm as professional feminine lesbian women. Lesbians on television have rarely presented as anything other than feminine. This is true of Ellen DeGeneres' character on *Ellen* – that featured a coming out storyline that Anna McCarthy describes as a media event (2001). It is also true of the newer iteration of Ellen's personality on her daytime talk show. Although today's Ellen dresses in masculine clothing and sports a short haircut she also maintains an appeal to traditional femininity, for example, by agreeing to be the ambassador for CoverGirl makeup. Contemporary television almost exclusively features feminine lesbiansⁱⁱⁱ. When looking to prime-time broadcast and cable television the feminine lesbian trope abounds. Examples include Emily on *Pretty Little Liars*, Brittany and Santana on *Glee*, Willow on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Stef and Lena on *The Fosters*, and Callie and Arizona on *Grey's Anatomy*. The prominence of the feminine lesbian makes sense in industry rationale in that the appearance of feminine lesbians is an attempt to capture the widest possible audience. As Moore and Shilt point out, female masculinity is an identity position that challenges current ideas about masculinity and what it means to be a man. Therefore, television shows that desire a crossover audience are unwilling to feature female masculinity out of fear that it would have an adverse effect on the show's fan base (Moore and Shilt 2006).

The coupling of feminine women on television is more likely to access the heterosexual male gaze than masculine-feminine female coupling, masculine-masculine female coupling or male-male coupling. This is evidenced by the success of *The L Word*, Showtime's breakout hit featuring the lives of mostly feminine lesbian women. *The L Word's* second season was renewed faster than any other show on Showtime's lineup. In fact, Showtime's vice-president for original programming, Gary Levine, banked on the show's appeal to heterosexual men telling the *New York Daily News* that "lesbian sex, girl-on-girl, is a whole cottage industry for heterosexual men" (quoted in Sedgwick 2004). This is reiterated by Sarah Warn who notes that the overtly feminine lesbians in *The L Word* are meant to attract both straight and gay viewers (2006). The cultivation of what Candace Moore calls a "polymorphous audience" was endemic to *The L Word* from the start (2007). Showtime's top executive Bob Greenblatt is quoted as saying, "We want people everywhere to buy it. So yes, the women are all attractive and we make no apologies about that" (quoted in Moore 2007). It is notable that Greenblatt conflates attractiveness with femininity – a conflation that is true to Hollywood but less true to life (especially in queer communities where female masculinity is more normalized). In addition to appealing to straight men, *The L Word* has crossover appeal for straight women by presenting attractive feminine lesbians that straight women might aspire to be. Also, the marketing of the show appeals to straight women's desire to be seen as "heteroflexible" with the T-shirt slogan "I'd go gay for Shane" (Moore 2007). That the show, at least early on in the series, is hesitant to introduce masculine female characters^{iv} speaks to the history of unease about "butchness" and female masculinity among

professional middle class, gender nonconforming lesbians (Kennedy and Davis 1997; Morgan 1993; Rubin 1992; Stein 1997). I return to this analysis of *The LWord* later in this chapter.

As the narrative in *Army Wives* plays out we learn that Nicole and Charlie also aspire to raise a family, and get legally married. In this storyline, both things happen miraculously for this couple as a baby practically falls into their lap, and they are sanctioned to legally marry in South Carolina, no less, one of the most conservative U.S. states.⁸ Like the other servicemembers showcased in *Army Wives*, Nicole's first marriage is to the Army itself, and then secondarily to her life-partner. The history of institutionalized homophobia, a disappointing but very real facet of much of military-life (continued beyond the repeal of DADT), is essentially erased as Nicole thrives as an openly lesbian servicewoman in the U.S. Army.

Captain Nicole Galassin is dropped into the plot of *Army Wives* right at the same time the troops are about to deploy to the fictional African country of Narubu. Their mission is to resolve a violent dispute between warring tribes. In Narubu, Nicole proves herself to be an invaluable resource to the U.S. Army. Her (womanly) skills allow her to extract herself and a number of troops out of danger by recognizing that the tribes in Narubu are matriarchal. They will respond to her and respect her expertise. Gender saves the day. Nicole returns home from battle, and is declared a war hero. However, before Nicole can be publicly recognized for her bravery, a male colleague approaches General Clarke (a man who is on record as having spoken in favor of DADT before its repeal)

⁸ On November 17, 2014 the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the state's marriage ban, and marriage licenses were issued to same-sex couples the following day.

about Nicole's lesbian identity. General Clarke is not receptive to the male soldier's desire to dismiss Nicole's act of bravery because she is a lesbian. As General Clarke says,

Do you have any idea the kind of courage it took for Captain Galassin to do what she did? She saved lives that day, Major. Most likely prevented an international incident. We should thank God we have soldiers like her. But instead you want me to penalize her because she happens to be gay. I don't care how I have been quoted, the Army has clearly stated its policy and I will not tolerate anyone in my command that tries to undermine that policy. (Army Wives 2012)

The lone soldier is dismissed by General Clarke, and he stands in as the unique "problem" that needs to be reformed. In this way, the institutionalized homophobia of the U.S. Army is seen as a thing of the past, neatly resolved by General Clarke's change of heart.

As Charlie and Nicole's plotline continues they express their shared desire for marriage and kids. These options that in many "real-life" circumstances are just out of reach, or at least difficult for lesbian and gay couples to acquire, are readily available in *Army Wives*. In a telling scene, Nicole and Charlie are invited over to Captain Joan Burke and Roland's house for dinner, a couple who represent a model heterosexual family with two beautiful children. We learn that Nicole, because of the pressures of her career in the Army and the enforced silence of DADT, has been hesitant to commit to the relationship with Charlie long-term. But, directly after Nicole and Charlie have dinner with Joan and Roland, Nicole is in the street proposing a marriage, a proposal that is happily accepted by Charlie. Here we see one of the features of post-gay sensibilities on television. In this case, gay life is only measured in comparison to the heterosexual norm. Their marriage is

only problematized once, by the critical stance of Nicole's mother, who at first is skeptical of the proposed marriage (and who seems to have been discouraging of Nicole and Charlie's relationship from the start) but shortly thereafter comes around, and proudly agrees to attend the wedding that she once threatened to boycott. Like the fantasies of inclusion theme laid out in the introduction, Nicole's mother who had previously criticized her daughter's sexual identity and relationship decisions, welcomes the partnership of Charlie and Nicole coinciding with their decision to marry. Importantly, the marriage is not problematized by the real-life struggles of a same-sex couple wishing to marry. Also amazingly, the couples' shared desire to have children is only a brief struggle, before a friend of a friend's baby fortuitously falls into their communal lap. The lenses offered by *Army Wives* display a world where wedded bliss and babies are easily acquired by all, highlighting the illusion that post-gay discourse would have us believe: in a post-gay television landscape lesbian and gay individuals aspire to domesticity, heterosexual versions of normalcy, and have access to it right at their fingertips.

Thus *Army Wives* offers promises of a post-gay life. Post-gay discourse emerges at the same time images of U.S. citizenship shift due to processes of privatization implemented by the Reagan administration. In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* Lauren Berlant traces the limited frames available for conceptualizing and practicing U.S. citizenship that began to emerge in the late 1990s back to what she calls "the right-wing cultural agenda of the Reagan revolution" (1997, 7). The promise of

the American Dream, as elaborated by Berlant, resonates into the post-gay era. As she argues,

It would be all too easy to ridicule the Dream, and to dismiss it as the motivating false consciousness of national/capitalist culture. But the fantasy of the American Dream is an important one to learn from. A popular form of political optimism, it fuses private fortune with that of the nation: it promises that if you invest your energies in work and family-making, the nation will secure the broader social and economic conditions in which your labor can gain value and your life can be lived with dignity. (Berlant 1997, 4)

Charlie and Nicole are molded by the *Army Wives* writers and production team into staking their claim to the American Dream, and in our post-gay context, this signals rewards and benefits granted. But, these rewards and benefits are limited. In a post-gay era, when constructions of sexual difference converge with constructions of U.S. citizenship these images and characterizations are almost universally normative. That one must adhere to normative versions of person both in sexual identity roles, and citizenship persona in a post-gay era brings into question the kind of “freedom” available in a post-gay era. In other words, as post-gay television characters Charlie and Nicole are allowed to be interracial, as long as “race” isn’t made an “issue.”⁹ Charlie and Nicole are allowed to be same-sex, as long as they are both feminine lesbians. Nicole and Charlie are allowed a primary same-sex relationship, as long as they aspire to conventional forms of marriage, and family life. In this way *Army Wives* constructs the military as a possible caring entity, providing a very enticing fantasy of the love relationship (with the Army).

THE L WORD

⁹ The imperatives of post-race discourse are at work in this case.

The L Word also featured the plight of a lesbian soldier under the DADT provision. However, unlike *Army Wives*, *The L Word* is not largely focused on military life or military families. Nonetheless, the series introduced Tasha Williams (Rose Rollins) in season four in what would unravel into a two season long storyline that pits Williams' lesbian identity at odds with her aspiration to make a life-long career out of military service. As opposed to *Army Wives*, where the lesbian storyline appears on the show after the repeal of DADT, in *The L Word* Tasha's struggles with military life occur under the enforcement of the DADT provision. Where *Army Wives* reflects back on the DADT measure, *The L Word's* real-time temporality offers a different perspective. Although not explicitly post-gay, *The L Word* is inflected with post-gay sentiment in the form of Tasha's eventual separation from the Army portrayed as an individual choice.

In season four of *The L Word* the show's creators introduce two black female characters, Tasha Williams, and Papi (Janina Gavankar), in what appears to be an effort to diversify the primarily white cast. Although Tasha and Papi come to have a significant place within the ecology of the television show, they remain outsiders for a number of reasons. Their racial difference as black women, their "masculine" performance of gender, as well as their socio-economic status as working class set them apart from the rest of the characters. In particular, Tasha's status as working class becomes a contentious issue a number of times in the context of her relationship with Alice (Leisha Hailey). For example, when the couple apartment-hunt together, Tasha's salary cannot support Alice's proposed standard of living. It is significant that working-class status, black "masculinity," and the desire to serve in the U.S. Army converge in the character of

Tasha. Tasha's patriotic stance is unwavering – in line with traditional working class values.

On one hand, *The L Word* offers a critique of what comes to be thought of as an unfair policy (DADT). However, the inflection of post-gay politics comes in the form of conforming to homonormative performances of citizenship. In season four of *The L Word* Alice and Tasha begin dating. Alice is working in media at the time and Tasha is just back from a tour in Iraq. Although Tasha is hesitant to get involved, careful about public displays of affection, she is seen with Alice at the race track, and is reported engaging in “suspicious behavior” (The L Word 2007). This instance sets off a series of events that result in an investigation and subsequent trial, under the DADT provision. Tasha enlists the assistance of an Army lawyer, Captain Curtis Beech, who initially refuses to defend Tasha. He eventually comes around with the encouragement of his wife, who insists that Tasha and Alice are not unlike the two of them. The appeal to sameness is a key factor in legitimating Tasha as worthy of assistance. Or as Davies and Burns put it, “The conventional attractiveness of the women, their harmonious management of their class and racial differences, and the recontextualization of their performances of gender within a conventional heteronormative framework, allows Captain Beech to produce an account of Tasha as an adequately patriotic citizen” (2009, 184). It is key that Tasha is only validated as a soldier through the acceptance of her male heterosexual lawyer. Tasha's sense of patriotic duty seems to trump her identity as a lesbian at numerous junctures in the investigation. As Tasha proclaims, “I'm not fighting to allow gays to serve openly in the military. I'm not even trying to overturn DADT” (The L Word 2008). Tasha's

disavowal of politics is one of the ways the show inflects post-gay sentiment into this particular narrative. By positing Tasha as pro-military, at whatever the cost, *The L Word* avoids critiquing DADT outright.

In the end, Tasha is dishonorably discharged, but only after she publicly announces her “truth” at her DADT discharge hearings. In other words, Tasha is not discharged on the Army’s terms but on her own. Interestingly, the woman prosecuting Tasha’s case is revealed to be a lesbian herself. This is made known in subtle gestures, like watching her check out other women in locker rooms. But the subtlety is not lost on Alice, who threatens to use her media connections to out Tasha’s prosecutor, also at risk of separation from the military. Alice’s actions provide Tasha with an opportunity to resume her military career, as Tasha’s prosecutor agrees to drop the case because of Alice’s threat. However, it is Tasha’s allegiance to “duty,” to the military code of conduct that instead inspires her to be truthful about her romantic relationship with Alice.

THE COMPLICATED AND CONTRADICTIONARY HISTORY OF DADT

There are many ways to historicize and contextualize DADT. My approach relies on information provided by government reports, with a particular interest in unpacking the logic of the initial policy as well as its eventual repeal. My intent is not to take for granted the importance of the repeal of DADT in terms of gay civil rights. At the same time, I suggest that much can be learned about today’s gay politics by taking notice of what and who is valued by prominent gay civil rights organizations, and how those values transfer to media. This section is limited due to the constraints of time and space, but I aim to historicize and contextualize the salient moments in the implementation and

repeal of the DADT policy that lead up to the emergence of post-gay discourse. Tomes have been written about DADT (see. Bérubé 1990; Halley 1999; Nicholson 2012; Shilts 1993; Vaid 1995). Instead of duplicating the existing research, I present a partial review of some of the key issues and moments in the history of gay soldiering, the trials and tribulations, and its celebrations. All of which enables us understand the history of the DADT policy and repeal as a lead up to today's post-gay political era.

Because DADT required servicemembers to keep their sexual lives secret there has been no effective way to track how many gay and lesbian servicemembers participated in the U.S. Armed Forces under DADT. However, it is estimated that there were at least 60,000 gay Americans in the Armed Forces and at least 1 million gay veterans in the U.S. as of 2011 (Clark 2014). In February of 2010 the Senate Committee debated the continuing effectiveness of the DADT policy. The topic of gays in the military had not been heard since the 1993 hearings that resulted in the DADT policy that effectively permitted gay and lesbian servicemembers to participate in the Armed Forces, as long as they did not disclose their sexual orientation. The law required that gay and lesbian servicemembers not engage in sexual activity. It also prohibited commanding officers from questioning soldiers about their sexual orientation. However, the policy was open-ended in that if an officer suspected someone of being gay or lesbian, they were permitted to set in motion discharge proceedings. In other words, DADT did very little to protect gay and lesbian soldiers from discrimination, harassment, and eventual separation from the Armed Forces.

There is likely a long history of gays serving in the U.S. Military. Although hard data is difficult to find, one can only assume that as long as the military has existed, gay people have been involved in service (Shilts 1993, Sheridan Embser-Herbery 2007). The military has not always had a policy excluding gays and lesbians from service (Sheridan Embser-Herbert 2007). The first time that gays were banned from service was during World War Two (WWII). The reasons the military gave for excluding gays from service at the time include men having feminine bodily characteristics, and “effeminacy in dress and manner” (Bérubé 1990, 29). Other reasoning for excluding gays from service included the perception that homosexuals would become “bad” soldiers, and cost the military money in the long run. The irony of the ban on gays in the military during WWII was that this was the first time in the U.S. that the gay and lesbian community started to form a public identity. Military ports in places like San Francisco inspired the beginnings of gay urban life. In 1964, five years before the now famous Stonewall riots, one of the first gay rights demonstrations took on the military ban of gays as its central issue. In 1992, Bill Clinton made a presidential campaign promise to repeal the ban on gays in the military. In fact, Clinton claimed at the time that he would lift the ban on gays in the military by Executive Order, if necessary, much like President Truman did when he desegregated the military in 1948. However, once Clinton was installed in his presidency he came up against vocal opposition to lifting the military ban from the religious right, social conservatives, as well as military personnel. On the first day Clinton took office The White House received 434,000 calls in favor of continuing the ban (Bailey 2011).

During the 1993 Senate Committee hearings, the last hearings on the issue of gays in the military at the Congressional level until the 2011 repeal, the most common argument made in support of gays serving in the military is what has been termed the race analogy. The race analogy claims that the military should be integrated with gay people for the same reason, and in many of the same ways as the military was integrated with black people (it is important to note that in this context, “race” was rarely discussed as anything deviating from African American). However, Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued against this line of thinking. His reasoning was that homosexuality is not a “benign” characteristic like race. Importantly, the issue of race was not only used to either support or detract from arguments about the integration of the military by gays, but whiteness itself became a feature of the prominent figures that were representative of the desire for gays and lesbians to serve. In “How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White it Stays” Allan Bérubé critiques the whitening strategies used by the Campaign for Military Service (CMS), an ad hoc organization formed weeks after the passage of DADT, during the 1993 Senate hearings on gays in the military. This group, comprised of mostly well-to-do white people including David Geffen, Barry Diner, and David Mixner (a personal friend of Bill Clinton), took the position of asserting the gay response to the Congressional hearings held by the Senate Armed Services Committee chaired by Sam Nunn (Bérubé 2001). Bérubé notes that the constituency of CMS, and the makeup of the U.S. Senate – both primarily white professionals – became a common ground from which to debate the merits of the military’s ban on gays. The race analogy did not prove to be persuasive enough to lift the ban, in part because the opponents to

lifting the ban, spearheaded by Sam Nunn, skillfully noted that unlike the CMS (in which no leadership positions were held by black people) the U.S. Military in fact does employ people of color in their highest ranks (Bérubé 2001). It did not help that the race analogy was continually and consistently only made by white people. Certainly, the race analogy argument could have been strengthened if it had been launched by people who face racial discrimination. As the CMS were asked to act as gatekeepers to the hearings, this meant that the people who were both black and gay were completely missing from all legitimated accounts. One servicemen's story could have been particularly useful, and that is retired officer Sergeant Perry Watkins, an openly gay African American veteran. Watkins was dishonorably discharged from the Army for being gay shortly before he retired, yet he successfully appealed his case to the Supreme Court, and won. He is the only gay soldier to retire with full honors prior to the repeal of DADT. As Bérubé notes,

Watkin's absence was a lost opportunity to see and hear in nationally televised Senate hearings a gay African American legal hero talk about his victory over antigay discrimination in the military and expose the racist hypocrisy of how the antigay ban was in practice suspended for African Americans during wartime. The lack of testimony from any other lesbian, gay or bisexual veteran of color was a lost opportunity to build alliances and communities of color and to do something about the '(largely accurate) perception of the gay activist leadership in Washington as overwhelmingly white.' (Bérubé 2001, 243)

The resounding absence of disparate voices reinforced another popular myth, that even in a military culture, a place that is disproportionately black and Latino, the most presentable, respectable face of military life is the white face.

The most prominent argument against lifting the ban heard at the 1993 Senate hearings had to do with “unit cohesion” – a term that was deployed as a justification for homophobia. Many years later, retired soldiers admitted to making up this particular rationale for the exclusion of gays from the military when they discovered that there is no legitimate reason to limit service in the military (Bailey 2011). Interestingly, in 1957 the Navy commissioned the Crittenden Report, which is the first known study about gay people serving in the Armed Forces. The report concluded that gays and lesbians posed no security threat, were not any kind of risk, and could serve as effectively as anyone else. As the Crittenden Report states, “No factual data exists to support the contention that homosexuals are a greater risk than heterosexuals” (S.H. Crittenden and Department. 1956-1957). At the time, there was little existing research in support of the contention that gays in the military were a threat to “unit cohesion”, “unit readiness” or effectiveness; however, the military has a history of covering-up information that supports lifting the ban when it is at odds with the anti-gay sentiment of the military institution. Reports such as the Crittenden Report became classified and not allowed as evidence in Senate hearings.

In 1993, after five months of hearings, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was offered, and agreed upon as a “compromise” in lieu of lifting the ban on gays and lesbians serving in the military. In *Virtual Equality*, Urvashi Vaid summarizes the effort to repeal the ban and the end result. She writes:

The story behind the gay and lesbian movement’s fight to end the military ban and the resulting ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ compromise reveals a great deal about the end-point of mainstreaming. The compromise formalizes a heterosexual

denial against which gay men and lesbians have struggled for decades. It mandates the closet for gay, lesbian, and bisexual members of the armed forces, and makes them vulnerable to prosecution simply because of their statements and nonsexual conduct (such as subscribing to a gay magazine). It underscores the idea that no matter how straight-acting, patriotic, normal-looking, accessible, and heroic we are, the straight world resists our open integration into its society. This compromise epitomizes virtual equality; instead of receiving equal treatment, gay and lesbian service troops are subjected to different rules. (Vaid 1995, 148)

In theory, the implementation of DADT was to enforce effective military participation based on conduct rather than sexual orientation. Gay servicemembers (former and active) have since reported that they were asked about their personal lives on a daily basis, from “what are you doing this weekend?” to “why aren’t you married yet?” and often gay soldiers who attempted to keep their private lives private were disciplined for being “anti-social” (Bailey 2011). Despite the purported aim of the DADT measure, DADT actually failed to protect the privacy of gay and lesbian servicemembers. In addition, the adverse effects of the DADT measure had a disproportionate impact on women. Women were discharged under DADT at a rate that was approximately twice their representation (Sheridan Embser-Herbert 2007). Sheridan Embser-Herbert calls DADT’s disproportionate impact on women a “double whammy” and argues that:

’Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ provides service members a mechanism for harassing women in a way that virtually insures that they won’t complain about the harassment. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of documented instances in which women who were harassed by being targeted as a lesbian did not complain because they feared that such a complaint would trigger an investigation of their sexual orientation. (Sheridan Embser-Herbert 2007, 47)

DADT impacted women of color disproportionately as well. According to a Task Force Study of the 2000 U.S. Census black women were discharged under DADT at a rate that was three times their representation in the military. Black women reportedly were less than one percent of the military population, but they were discharged under DADT at a rate of 3.3% (Dang 2000). The same report notes that black women were discharged under DADT even if they were not a lesbian. There were cases in which men brought charges against black women (this is likely applies to women generally as well) because they refused sexual advances. In other cases, women were discharged under DADT simply for being in positions of power that threatened men who were not interested in serving under black women.

A non-profit organization called the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) formed just weeks after the passage of DADT to serve those adversely affected. One of the widespread consequences of the passage of DADT included the reporting of military officials as gay or lesbian by psychiatrists (there is no patient confidentiality on base), by parents, or friends. In a number of cases private journals were confiscated, used as evidence, and as a basis for discharge. If we are to take at face value that DADT was created to make sexuality a non-issue that was not the result. As an anonymous gay servicemember says about living on base under DADT, “the Army continues to ask, continues to pursue, and continues to harass” (Bailey 2011). Discharges of gay soldiers increased dramatically starting at the time the DADT policy began to be enforced. In 1994 there were 615 discharges for being gay, and in 2001 there were 1227 (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network). As a measure to assist with educating enlisted

soldiers about the ins and outs of the DADT policy, the Pentagon issued a pamphlet as part of an educational campaign that stated, “Don’t ask means that a soldier will not be asked to divulge or discuss their sexual orientation unless there is credible information of homosexual conduct” (Bailey 2011). Of course, the vague language of this material leaves much room for interpretation. What exactly is credible information? Who has the discretion to decide what is credible and what is not? Although its persuasiveness is questionable, and may or may not have had an impact in the countless cases of violence enacted against LGBTQ servicemembers on base, this pamphlet was not released before the murder of PFC Barry Winchell in 1999, whose story eventually was transformed into the Showtime film *Soldier’s Girl* (2003). Winchell was harassed for months because he was suspected of carrying on a relationship with a transgender woman. Under the DADT policy there were no options for legal remedy available to harassed gay or presumed gay soldiers.

Commanders in the field were aware that gay people do not undercut the mission. Between 1994 and 2003 over fifty-four gay Arab linguists were discharged from the military (Office 2005). This set of discharges is said to have had an adverse effect in terms of the availability of intelligence leading up to the events of 9/11 – a controversy that garnered significant news coverage. In 2003 the U.S. was involved in two overseas wars, and as a result the enforcement of DADT shifted. Starting in 2001 the discharge figures begin to decline (from 2001-2004 discharges are reduced from 1227 to 653). In 1999 the Army published a handbook for reserve commanders instructing them that: “if someone has orders for deployment, and someone makes a statement that they are gay,

send them anyway and deal with it when they get back” (Bailey 2011). Under this set of circumstances, it becomes more and more clear that the argument that gay servicemembers were a distress to “unit cohesion” or “combat readiness” is false. It is estimated that 4000 soldiers left the service yearly because of DADT. The overall estimated cost of the DADT policy to the U.S. Military is \$383 million (Servicememebers Legal Defense Network). Starting in 2009, support for the repeal of DADT was initiated by the U.S. Military. At this time the military leadership shifted from not supporting the repeal to how to implement it. This is evident from the commentary during the March 18, 2010 hearing before the Committee on Armed Services. As stated by Senator Carl Levin,

The Secretary of Defense testified before this committee on February 2, 2010, that he supported the President’s decision to work with Congress to repeal the law known as ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,’ and said that, ‘The question before us is not ‘whether’ the military prepares to make this change, but ‘how’ we best prepare for it. (Senate 2010, 2)

On December of 2010 President Barack Obama signed the repeal of DADT into law, and in September of 2011 the repeal of DADT began to be implemented. Importantly, it was made apparent immediate after the repeal that the result would be unsatisfying for many gays and lesbians who were discharged during the enforcement of DADT. As trial lawyer Dan Woods notes,

The law that was passed and signed by the president will not reinstate people who were previously discharged under DADT. They will be free to re-apply or re-enlist and would be considered again if still eligible. One of the problems is that some of the members of our armed forces who were discharged under DADT have ‘aged out,’ so they are now too old to re-enlist or enlist in the armed forces. There is

nothing in the law that provides for any monetary compensation or benefits to those people discharged under DADT. (Araiza and Woods 2011, 16)

The repeal of DADT is considered one of the major accomplishments of the Obama administration, and in some ways it is. Yet, it is important to recognize both the progressive, albeit post-gay elements, as well as the limitations of the policy repeal.

CONCLUSION

In the televised world of *Army Wives* Nicole and Charlie thrive. They are inserted into the *Army Wives* community, and gain friends and allies. Nicole is an Army Captain, and an openly gay woman. The couple access legal marriage. When they decide they want to start a family, there are no impediments placed in their way. *Army Wives* showrunner Jeff Melvoin is quoted as saying, “It was our intent during this season to introduce a lesbian couple in an unexpected and natural way. In this manner, we felt we were reflecting the reality that we’ve observed researching the military since the repeal of the ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy” (Bibel 2012). However, contrary to Melvoin’s intent, outside of the televised universe of *Army Wives* the struggles of gay and lesbian couples, married to the Army or not, are very different from heterosexual pairings on the issues of marriage and family.

Military bases still refused to issue military IDs to same-sex spouses a year and a half after the repeal of DADT,¹⁰ and many same-sex military couples were ineligible for military sponsored housing. In January 2013 Ashley Broadway, the spouse of Army Lt. Colonel Heather Mack, was denied membership in the Fort Bragg Officer’s Spouses’

¹⁰ A policy change is in progress on this account and should be effective by October 2013

Club (Thompson 2013). The organization went so far as to change the rules to require an official military ID for entry even though the club had no such rule previously. After much ado, and much bad press for Fort Bragg, the administration of the Fort Bragg Officer's Spouses Club finally allowed Mack entry into the club.

The disconnect between what is possible for gay and lesbian military couples on television, and in real-life post-repeal of DADT is a reflection of today's post-gay era. Like in *U.S. vs. Windsor*, on *Army Wives*, white, normative gays and lesbians are rewarded for maintaining a conservative and assimilationist ideological frame. The possibilities for identity expression possible on *Army Wives*, as well as the values asserted by gay and lesbian civil rights activists in a post-gay era, only caters to the few, and further marginalizes those on the outskirts of mainstream gay and lesbian civil rights activism. Contrary to Melvoin's hope that the television show "reflected the reality" of military life post-repeal of DADT, instead, the show presented a post-gay fantasy, and a dangerous one at that.

CHAPTER TWO

Post(ing) Same-Sex Marriage: Discourses of Marriage Rights as they Circulate on and around ABC's *Modern Family* (2009-today)

Gay marriage is legal in thirty seven states as well as the District of Columbia, as of this writing. The first state to legalize gay-marriage was Massachusetts in 2004 through a court decision. The first day gay marriage was legal in Massachusetts more than one thousand gay couples purchased marriage licenses. Alabama is the most recent state to legalize gay marriage as of March of 2015. According to the Pew Research Center more than seventy thousand gay couples have exercised their newly granted right to legal gay marriage. Twelve states have rescinded bans on gay marriage including: Wisconsin, Idaho, Kentucky, Michigan, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Arkansas. In the remaining states that have implemented a ban on gay marriage there are lawsuits underway challenging those terms. Seventy-one percent of the U.S. population live in states in which gay marriage is legal. Polling results on the issue of gay marriage show a dramatic sea change between 1988 and today; gay marriage received a thirteen percent approval rating in 1988. Today it polls closer to fifty-eight percent or higher (Vedantam 2013). The issue of same-sex marriage rights is prioritized highly among today's most prominent gay and lesbian advocacy groups like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), Parents Families and Friends of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG), Pride at Work, Lambda Legal, Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD), among others.

I begin this chapter by laying out the immense political terrain that is occupied by advocacy on behalf of same-sex marriage. In doing so, I aim to detail the current state of

gay marriage as a policy issue. In identifying many of the key moments in the history of gay marriage I plan to capture the expanse of gay marriage as a phenomenon within the parameters of post-gay discourse. In addition, the policy issue of marriage has been taken up in various forms by media sites. The policy issue of marriage as well as its instantiation on television – in particular, the way the issue of gay marriage appears on and around ABC's *Modern Family* is the focus of this chapter.

I argue that *Modern Family* is one of the paradigmatic examples, both in what the text offers through its narrative, as well as the extratextual discourse surrounding the show, of how post-gay discourse on the topic of marriage rights materializes on television. *Modern Family* is today's *Will & Grace* (1998-2006); beloved by many, thought to tap into some notion of progressive politics, yet open to contemporary and no doubt retrospective critique. In the world of post-gay television, especially as exemplified by *Modern Family*, a heightened desire for marriage and family is espoused outwardly by gay and lesbian characters, as well as by their support network on their behalf. In the case of *Modern Family*, the legitimation of same-sex relationships on television is only made possible by the legitimation of same-sex marital relationships by the state.

Also relevant is what I call the fantasies of inclusion theme that I lay out in the introduction. Common among television featuring same-sex marriage is the eventual welcoming by family members who had previously disowned or at least expressed their homophobic beliefs in ways that had strained their relationship with their LGBTQ family member. Within the fantasy of inclusion motif it is common for disinvested family members to “come around” after some time has passed. Not coincidentally, the “change

of heart” tends to coincide with the celebration of a same-sex wedding. It seems as though as long as gays and lesbians (on television) aspire to heteronormative or homonormative ideals they are deserving of inclusion within their larger family units. In this way, post-gay politics and post-gay television align – showcasing a very narrow set of possibilities for what it means to be gay and lesbian as well as very narrow possibilities for what it means to present gays and lesbians on television.

Gay marriage has also become a focus of media broadly. The PBS series *Independent Lens: The New Black* looks at same-sex marriage within black communities during the 2012 presidential campaign in Baltimore, Maryland. As of this writing, HBO is set to release *The Case Against 8*, a documentary telling the story of two gay couples who took the case against Proposition 8 to the Supreme Court. Proposition 8, the California ballot measure that prohibited same-sex couples from marrying in California was repealed by the Supreme Court decision *Hollingsworth v. Perry* in the summer of 2013. Mozilla Firefox CEO Brendan Eich spent ten days in the position of CEO before being replaced when his one thousand dollar donation in favor of Proposition 8 was revealed to the press. The dating site OkCupid.com was instrumental in bringing attention to the controversy at Mozilla. On March 31, 2014 when OkCupid users accessed the site through Mozilla Firefox they were greeted with a message directing users to alternate browsers. As the site announced, “Mozilla’s new CEO, Brendan Eich, is an opponent of equal rights for gay couples. We would therefore prefer our users not use Mozilla software to access OkCupid” (Kelly 2014). During the 2014 Grammy Awards televised on ABC to an estimated 28.5 million viewers, Queen Latifah, a well-known performer

and actress, officiated a mass wedding for thirty-four same sex and opposite sex couples of varying races. Mass weddings have become a phenomenon of their own. In celebration of Pride week in Toronto in 2014 the city hosted a mass wedding that married one hundred and fifteen gay couples gathered from around the world – from places like Ghana, Australia, and Taiwan.

Television has capitalized on the buzz surrounding same-sex marriage, as gay marriage storylines have appeared on a number of shows in addition to *Modern Family* within the parameters of the post-gay era. While *Modern Family* coherently epitomizes post-gay television, the other television shows that feature same-sex weddings and/or marriages vary in their alignment with post-gay discourse from case-to-case. This often has to do with genre conventions. The sitcom is a site ripe for oversimplified dynamics to take place (common among post-gay television), but it also has to do with the show's particular historical moment, as well as the commitments of each television show's production team. The ABC drama *Brothers & Sisters* (2006-2011) featured a same-sex relationship between Kevin Walker (Matthew Rhys) and Scotty (Luke MacFarlane) that culminated in a civil ceremony on May 11, 2008, years prior to the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act. Kevin and Scotty also adopt a daughter, Olivia, and have a son, Daniel, by a surrogate. Dramatic tension is created by Scotty's parents, who refuse to attend the ceremony that they call "not a wedding" nor "a union recognized by church or the state" (*Brothers & Sisters* 2008). Inconsistent with post-gay television the show highlights the troubled family dynamics created when the groom's parents boycott the wedding due to their politically right-wing and conservative religious beliefs. However, the television

show aligns with post-gay ideology when the idea of family and family values, as well as the notion of “sameness” is mobilized by Kevin to defend his partnership. As Kevin says to Scotty’s reluctant and unsupportive parents, “We cherish family as much as you do” (Brothers & Sisters 2008).

The ABC medical procedural *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005-today) features the same-sex relationship of Dr. Callie Torres (Sara Ramirez) and Dr. Arizona Robinson (Jessica Capshaw) who also marry in a civil ceremony on May 5, 2011, also prior to the repeal of DOMA. Although aligning with post-gay television in certain ways including a commitment to a happy ending for the same-sex couple. The resolution of family conflict culminates in Callie’s father demonstrating his undivided support at her wedding. In other ways the show misaligns with the tenets of post-gay discourse. For example, the rejection of Callie’s mother is steadfast, and she does not have a last minute change of heart. Instead, she is absent at her daughter’s wedding.

Just months after the repeal of DOMA, ABC Family’s *The Fosters* (2013-today) featured the same-sex wedding of Stef Foster (Teri Polo) and Lena Adams (Sherri Saum) on August 5, 2013. The couple met their share of adversity in the lead-up to the wedding, including dealing with Stef’s homophobic and unsupportive father, and Stef’s own internalized homophobia that had been passed down through her father’s influence. The press was abuzz about Stef and Lena’s nuptials, as it was covered as “the first same-sex wedding after the repeal of DOMA” by sites like *The New York Times*, *Buzzfeed*, and *AfterEllen.com*. In a dual promotion for the show and GLAAD, viewers were asked to RSVP to Stef and Lena’s wedding on social media. GLAAD also took the opportunity to

inform viewers/respondents about the recent Supreme Court decisions on DOMA and Proposition 8. *The Fosters* is an unusual site in regard to the post discourses because it is one of the few television shows that has featured open conversations about the struggles of interracial same-sex relationships and has also presented some dissent, even offering queer perspectives, on the conversation of gay marriage. That *The Fosters* is able to complicate topics like race and marriage that are often presented without complication by television is probably due to its production team. In particular, *The Fosters* employs openly gay actor and writer Peter Paige, whose most recognizable credit is Showtime's *Queer as Folk*, as one of the show's co-writers. Yet, the show's partnership with GLAAD, whose primary investment is in celebrating "positive" images of gay and lesbian characters or critiquing "negative" images of gay and lesbian characters aligns the show with post-gay ideology.

On February 20, 2015 Fox's *Glee* (2009-today) fans watched the dual-wedding of fan-favorites Blaine (Darren Criss) to Kurt (Chris Colfer), as well as Brittany (Heather Morris) to Santana (Naya Rivera). As mentioned by the wedding officiant Burt Hummel (Mike O'Malley), the couples had to cross state lines from Ohio to Indiana in order to legally marry. Contrary to a straightforward post-gay ideological premise that would present same-sex marriage as devoid of struggle, *Glee* highlights the continued effort to nationally legalize marriage for same-sex couples. The episode also features the attitude reversal of Santana's politically right wing and conservative religious grandmother, who previously had refused to participate in Santana's life after she came out, let alone attend a same-sex wedding. Although Santana's grandmothers' sea change is not complete (in

that she still does not agree with same-sex marriage), she does attend her granddaughter's wedding and gives Santana and Brittany her blessing. The happy ending that resolves Santana's rift with her grandmother aligns the *Glee* wedding with post-gay discourse. However, the wedding itself is untraditional and resists comparing same-sex couples to heterosexual couples. The conventions of Ryan Murphy's (the show's openly gay male producer) quirky musical dramedy do not play neatly into post-gay discourse. As opposed to Arizona and Callie's wedding, which made little splash in the popular press, the *Glee* wedding spectacle was widely reported on by sites like *People.com*, *AfterEllen.com*, as well as a number of television blogs.

MODERN FAMILY PARTNERS WITH THE CITY OF NEW YORK

In a promotion for the *Modern Family* season six two part season finale, "The Wedding: Part 1" and "The Wedding: Part 2," ABC announced that on Monday May 12, 2014, two days before "The Wedding: Part 1" was set to air, the network would purchase marriage licenses for all of that day's marriage license petitioners in New York City. Eric Stonestreet and Jesse Tyler Ferguson, the actors who play Cameron Tucker and Mitchell Pritchett, the soon-to-be gay married couple on *Modern Family*, announced ABC's decision to fund marriage licenses in New York City on *Good Morning America* the same day. I argue that this unique promotional plug speaks to today's post-gay political climate, a politics that uncritically celebrates marriage as a universal value. That normative marriage partnerships ought not be upheld as the singular possibility for state and/or community recognized love partnerships in life or on television is particularly noticeable in comparison to the kinds of family and partnership dynamics that are

available (in life, in queer communities) but not made visible on television. For example, female “butch”/”butch” pairings, female “femme”/”butch” pairings, male “femme”/”femme” pairings, male “butch”/”butch” pairings, various configurations of transgender and/or genderqueer pairings, polyamorous or non-monogamous groupings, and/or pairings, among others. Many of these pairings are nowhere to be seen as representatives of advocacy groups for gay and lesbian issues (or held up as “model” gays on behalf of marriage equality in court) or on television. In this way, post-gay politics and post-gay television make invisible the bisexual, the transgender, and the queer in LGBTQ.

I argue that today’s post-gay political climate enables and encourages the public/private partnership between the city of New York and ABC network. This is demonstrated by the networks’ decision to fund citywide marriage licenses in the lead up to the wedding of Mitch and Cam. This promotional plug for the show brings marriage as a value center stage, at the same time that it erases the possibility of any kind of critical engagement with marriage as a societal value. The expression of a critical relationship to the value of marriage, especially as it relates to same-sex couples, in today’s post-gay political landscape, is nearly non-existent on mainstream television and in most mainstream media.

TRENDS WITHIN POST-GAY TELEVISION ON MARRIAGE

To talk about post-gay television is to talk about television that deemphasizes sexual identity (as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer) as primary to the identity of a LGBTQ character or narrative. According to Bernstein and Taylor there are two major tendencies within post-gay discourse. The first is an increased emphasis on LGBTQ assimilation into the mainstream and the second is an increased diversification of the LGBTQ community. In comparison to LGBTQ identities of the past, post-gay collective identity construction tends to be less oppositional and less confrontational. In other words, maintaining an LGBTQ identity within post-gay circles does not necessitate any kind of ties to political action or activism; whereas in the past, to identify as LGBTQ generally tied a person to political struggle. Importantly, the tendency to assimilate, or to hold post-gay beliefs, tends to be ascertained and reinforced in white, middle class, male, gender-conforming circles. In post-gay politics individuals who tend to have the most access to privilege are white, middle class, cis-gendered males. It is these individuals who are most likely to take advantage of the privileges of assimilation and normalization (Bernstein and Taylor 2013). Amin Ghaziani describes post-gay politics as politics that creates alliances between LGBTQ culture and dominant culture. Post-gay politics emphasizes perceived similarity between LGBTQ culture and the dominant culture, as opposed to emphasizing an “us versus them” mentality post-gay politics emphasizes “us and them” (Ghaziani 2011, 101). As Bernstein and Taylor note:

The use of post-gay identity claims to justify the campaign for same-sex marriage is reflected in the words of one of the activists who initiated the court case that resulted in the California Supreme Court’s March 2008 decision to open

access to same-sex marriage prior to the passage of Proposition 8: ‘With this ruling, in the eyes of the government, my family is finally normal.’ In the postgay context, LGBT organizations have the potential to become privatized and depoliticized social groups, rather than political groups based on shared and distinct oppositional identities. (Bernstein and Taylor 2013, 17)

This chapter takes seriously these political shifts in marriage because they are materializing on television in very particular ways within the broader cultural context of post-gay discourse. Post-gay politics, as opposed to a more defiant politics of the gay-rights movement that fought for the right to have public sex (see Berlant and Warner 1998) for example, focuses on normative issues such as marriage, adoption, and inclusion in the Armed Forces. I argue that post-gay television promises to resolve and simplify our contradictory contemporary cultural and political moment. The term post-gay helps facilitate our understandings of the state of contemporary LGBTQ activism and civil rights. Like the discourses of post-race and post-feminism – as articulated by Mary Vavrus, Catherine Squires, Sarah Banet-Weiser, among others – post-gay discourse is an important site for cultural analysis (and has had little currency in academic conversations, to date). This chapter examines ABC’s *Modern Family* (2009-today) as a case study to make explicit that link between trends in policy and decision-making and the often sanitized images of LGBTQ individuals on television.

One of the ways in which post-gay discourse tends to operate on television includes a heightened emphasis on marriage and family. This emphasis is encouraged outwardly by LGBTQ characters on television, as well as by their support network. Often, marriage and family is how these characters come to be seen as “normal.” In

addition, another common trend in post-gay television that circulates around concepts of marriage is an intensified emphasis on similarity between LGBTQ characters and their heterosexual counterparts. It is important, within post-gay television, that LGBTQ characters have the same interests, investments, and attachments (particularly to marriage and family) as their heterosexual identified co-characters. Another stable theme within post-gay television is that it negates sexual variation and difference. In post-gay television there are proscribed ways in which to behave and perform gayness. This tends to include a preponderance of upwardly mobile, professional, gender conforming characterizations of gays and lesbians. *Modern Family* is a good example of this – the gay characters Mitch and Cam are well-off, Mitch is a lawyer, and Cam plays at stay-at-home fatherhood and occasionally works as a music teacher. Mitch and Cam are both stereotypically feminized and campy and/or over the top. Although Cam has a fondness for sports (out of character for hegemonic understandings of gayness) there are very few other outlier characteristics that would challenge most people’s assumptions about gay male life. Mitch and Cam also fall into the age old stereotype where one male partner assumes the more “butch” role and one the more “femme” role – although these roles are at times interchangeable between Mitch and Cam, these two characters always embody one of these roles (always opposite each other, never both “femme”, never both “butch”). It is therefore made clear that in each interaction there is a “manly” or “womanly” individual present. This male/female frame allows Mitch and Cam, although a same sex couple, to be understood within a heteronormative or heterosexually-based concept of identity. This pattern, as it is articulated on television, creates a very safe, non-threatening

persona for the viewing public at-large to consume. The implications of the preponderance of post-gay images and themes on television to do with gays and lesbians cannot be overstated. By providing only limited options for how to embody variations of sexual identity, television tells viewers that only these limited options exist. The consistent erasure of difference in the form of sexual variation, gender variance, as well as those living inside and among the intersections of race, gender, class, ability, etc. makes invisible the wide expanse of what is possible and what is a reality for many living out queer lives in queer communities. The following analysis will detail the ways in which these limiting post-gay television trends play out in today's television landscape.

MODERN FAMILY AS POST-GAY TELEVISION

The title of the show *Modern Family* gives away much of what the show hopes to present – a legitimization of today's versions of family models that may or may not resemble families of the past. Importantly, the alternately conceived models of family that the show presents are meant to be no different than the “normal” heterosexual family model. In addition to the alternatively conceived same-sex relationship between Mitchell (Jesse Tyler Ferguson) and Cameron (Eric Stonestreet) the other outlier family model includes the cross-generational interracial relationship between the white older businessman Jay Pritchett (Ed O'Neill) and his younger Latina wife Gloria (Sofia Vergara). The show attempts to emphasize that these pairings are no less a “modern family” than the more normative makeup of the third family arrangement in the show of Claire (Julie Bowen) and her (buffoon-like and gender bending) husband Phil (Ty

Burrell), and their three kids Haley (Sarah Hyland), Alex (Ariel Winter), and Luke (Nolan Gould).

In the pilot episode of the series Mitch and Cam return from Vietnam with baby Lily, their adopted daughter. We learn that Mitch and Cam have been partnered for five years, at that point, but have not yet had a civil ceremony or any other kind of public commemoration of their partnership. The show is set in California, where gay marriage is a legal option as of 2014, coinciding with the show's fifth season. Viewers also learn in the pilot episode that Mitch has not told his family of baby Lily's existence or even that Mitch and Cam intended to adopt.

The show's investment in marriage also exists outside of the text as *Modern Family* actor Jesse Tyler Ferguson has used his celebrity status as one of the stars of the very popular show to fundraise on behalf of marriage equality. He launched a line of bow-ties (TheTieBar.com), a fashion statement donned frequently by the character Mitch on *Modern Family*, in which much of the proceeds go to an organization called TieTheKnot.Org. Tie The Knot collects funds and then redistributes the money to organizations working on the issue of same-sex marriage. Past beneficiaries include a \$50,000 donation to the Human Rights Campaign (an organization that in the recent past has had a single issue focus on marriage equality) as well as The Respect for Marriage Coalition (whose primary goal was to repeal DOMA). Jesse Tyler Ferguson also reportedly donated ten thousand dollars of his own money in support of gay marriage in Australia, a right that had been granted and then repealed five days later (Huffington Post 2014). Ferguson's co-star Ty Burrell has also lent his celebrity status to the cause of gay

marriage in Utah. Burrell headlined a fundraiser in Salt Lake City in support of those couples disputing Utah's same-sex marriage ban (Knox and McCombs 2014).

The way *Modern Family* both informs and reinforces post-gay rhetoric becomes especially clear when examining the way *Modern Family* is talked about in the popular press. As *USA Today* reporter Robert Bianco notes in "'Modern Family' Wedding is special for its normalcy: The marriage of the two main characters is just taken as a given, and that's a great thing:"

What's most notable and wonderful about *Modern Family's* wedding episode is that it's not trying to be special. But like most *Modern* episodes, tonight's finale (ABC, 9ET/PT) is more interested in its gold-standard family of characters and actors than it is in making any social statement. The marriage of two of the show's main male characters is just taken as a given. We've come a long way since the fuss over prime time's first gay wedding, the 1996 *Friends* 'very special episode' marriage of two female secondary characters. (Bianco 2014)

It is important to note that *USA Today's* television history is incorrect, as the first gay wedding held on prime time television was in the show *Roc*, which aired on Fox in 1991. The *Roc* episode titled "Can't Help Loving that Man" revolves around Roc's uncle coming out as gay to his family, the family's complicated relationship and reaction to his coming out, and at the end of the episode Roc hosts his uncle's marriage ceremony in his home (Roc 1991). It's hard to pinpoint exactly why *USA Today's* television history of gay weddings skips over *Roc*— but it is important to note that *Roc* features an African-American family. That *Roc's* family is black and that show features black characters might simply account for its erasure. There was also another gay wedding on prime time

television that aired before the *Friends* episode *USA Today* mentions that took place on *Roseanne* in 1995. The episode “December Bride” featured the same-sex wedding of recurring character Leon (Martin Mull) and his boyfriend (Fred Willard). The episode was a site of controversy for ABC, so much so that they pushed *Roseanne* into a later time slot than usual. ABC accounted for the time change by crediting the show as featuring “adult humor,” not quite admitting that the show’s gay content was the main factor in the decision-making. It seems not accidental that *USA Today* overlooks two shows that appeal to audiences in niche markets – *Roc* as a show featuring primarily African-Americans and *Roseanne* as a show featuring a working class family.

Another striking thing about the comments in *USA Today* is the celebration of *Modern Family*’s appeal to normal, “‘Modern Family’ Wedding is special for its normalcy” – a theme that is consistent with post-gay discourse. The wedding episodes are successful because they highlight the ways in which Mitch and Cam’s long term relationship and soon-to-be marriage is just like the heterosexual pairings in the show and beyond (in society at large). Also important is the claim that *Modern Family* rejects the idea that it would/should/could make a “social statement,” a philosophy that is repeated by the show’s producers in other interviews. That the display of same-sex marriage ought not to be overtly political begs the question then – what are we to make of the prime time wedding and ensuing marriage of the long-term partnered couple Mitch and Cam? Finally, I suggest that we also take seriously the idea that “we’ve come a long way,” a very pervasive yet somewhat misleading suggestion that same-sex marriage on television today signals “progress” of some kind. Rather than evaluating same-sex marriage on

television through the frame of the progress narrative, I argue that it is more useful to situate the appearance of same-sex marriage on television today through its historical, political and social contexts.

Modern Family was also a site of debate around the issue of same-sex marriage during the 2012 Presidential election campaign. In the lead up to the 2012 election Ann Romney (wife of then-Presidential candidate Mitt Romney) revealed on *Entertainment Tonight* that the popular ABC comedy *Modern Family* (2009-present) is her favorite show. According to a CBSNews report that aired in December of 2011 the favorite show of the entire Obama family is also *Modern Family*. In fact, *Modern Family* became so central to the 2012 presidential campaign that a *New York Times* article “Watching a Sitcom, and Seeing Undecided Voters” ties the candidate’s (as well as their families’) affiliations to *Modern Family* to the outcome of the presidential race. Although often touted as progressive by the popular press, the critically acclaimed ABC show *Modern Family* has quite a bit more in common with conservative ideals about “family values” than it resonates with progressive politics – evidenced by Ann Romney’s public support of the show. Bruce Feiler at *The New York Times* comments,

Therein lies the crux of the show. The particulars of the Pritchett-Tucker family may be different from those of the Huxtables, Bunkers or Cleavers. There are second marriages to immigrants, adolescent husbands who never grew up, gay dads. But the core values are the same. Perhaps that’s why a study last year listed ‘Modern Family’ as the third most popular among Republicans. In its fundamentally conservative vision, ‘Modern Family’ turns out to be not so modern after all. (Feiler 2011)

Co-creator Christopher Lloyd declared in an interview with *The New York Times* that the show tries to avoid political topics because they are divisive (Egner 2012). This chapter centralizes *Modern Family* especially in light of the Obama family and Ann Romney's common claim to love the show. In the case of Romney and Republicans more broadly, the contradiction that one can love the show but not necessarily be politically supportive of gay rights importantly marks one of the features of post-gay television.

Modern Family holds a unique place in the world of comedic sitcoms, in that the showrunners' decisions are tied closely to U.S. policy decisions – in ways that reflect the way the show is implicated within post-gay politics. *Entertainment Weekly* reports that the day the Supreme Court decided against upholding DOMA, the writers on *Modern Family* started to seriously consider writing in the legal marriage of characters Mitch and Cam. The explicit nature of the connection between the DOMA result and *Modern Family*'s narrative decision-making is revealed in the title of the *Entertainment Weekly* article, “DOMA reaction: ‘Modern Family’ considering gay marriage” (Rice 2013b).

Lynette Rice of *Entertainment Weekly* reports,

Modern Family co-creator Christopher Lloyd told EW that today's court ruling could impact the show's fifth season and whether Cameron (Eric Stonestreet) and Mitchell (Jesse Tyler Ferguson) finally tie the knot. ‘It's a real possibility,’ Lloyd said. ‘It's certainly something we are contemplating on the show in ways we wouldn't have in prior seasons.’ (Rice 2013b)

Although Christopher Lloyd admits that the producers and writers had certainly considered the possibility of a commitment ceremony for Mitch and Cam, they resisted it because the comedy “‘didn't want to make an overt political statement’ and risk

alienating viewers at the same time” (Rice 2013b). Lloyd credits a respectfulness to the “tone” of the comedy as to the resistance to make a political statement, and notes that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) campaign to persuade the show to marry off Cameron and Mitchell fell on deaf ears. Lloyd comments that it would be undesirable for the show to cave to public pressure. In May of 2013, just months before the Supreme Court was set to rule on Proposition 8 and *U.S. v. Windsor*, ACLU Executive Director Anthony D. Romero released a statement encouraging the ABC show to marry off Mitchell and Cam. “The freedom to marry is being advanced in American living rooms as much as in court rooms. As we wait for the Supreme Court to rule, we want to keep this issue on the minds and screens of Americans everywhere” (Rice 2013a).

Additionally, the ACLU, presumably under Romero’s leadership, launched a social media campaign asking viewers to pledge to watch *Modern Family’s* same-sex wedding. Romero notes, “The ACLU has been working since 1936 to guarantee the rights of lesbian and gay people, and we see sending Cam and Mitch down the aisle before 13 million American viewers as the perfect next step” (Rice 2013a). Although *Modern Family* producers did not comment on the ACLU’s petition, out gay actor and gay marriage activist Jesse Tyler Ferguson (who plays Mitch) took to twitter saying “Love this! Thank you ACLU! Maybe once Prop8 is overturned” (Rice 2013a).

The materialization of post-gay discourse on television very neatly plays out in the final three episodes of season five of *Modern Family*, all leading into the two-part season finale “The Wedding.” In the episode “Message Received,” Mitchell and Cameron’s soon-to-be marital bliss has to endure a number of major road bumps,

including discovering that everyone that had been invited to the wedding RSVP'd yes, leading Mitchell and Cameron to worry about how they are going to afford the extravagant ceremony that was underway. Throughout a sequence of comical disasters, Mitchell ends up dropping his first edition comic book that was estimated at \$5000 into a puddle. As the comic book meets its demise in front of Jay and Gloria's house, Mitch and Cam come running into the house in emergency mode, which prompts Gloria to benevolently offer up Jay's financial assistance toward the wedding. Jay, not-so-much rejecting the idea of his financial support, instead seems to reject the idea that Mitch and Cam should celebrate their partnership with such extravagance in the first place. As Jay comments, "Why are you having such a big thing anyway? I'm just saying, why do you have to make it into a spectacle? Maybe this is the universe's way of telling you to bring it down a notch. Why pay all that money for people you barely know?" (Modern Family 2014). It is during this conversation that Mitchell reveals his disappointment that Jay has not turned over his list of friends who plan to attend the wedding. This prompts Jay to defend his resistance to Mitch and Cam's wedding. "Everybody back off, I don't think I'm out of line suggesting my friends don't want to see a father/son dance at a gay wedding. I don't know how this plays out. This whole wedding thing is weird to me. I didn't choose to be uncomfortable. I was born this way" (Modern Family 2014). Mitchell balks at Jay's use of Lady Gaga's (essentialist) "gay anthem" "Born this Way," as Jay then insists that Mitchell knows how far he has come (in his views toward Cam and Mitch, as well as gay coupledness more broadly). This comment pushes Mitchell over the edge, as he says "You're right, you get to be you. If it really makes you that

uncomfortable, then don't come to the wedding!" (Modern Family 2014). This episode concludes by leaving Jay's participation during and/or attendance at Mitchell and Cam's wedding up in the air.

Set in California, the legal option of gay marriage is a possibility in 2014, coinciding with the show's fifth season. In the episode prior to the two part wedding finale Mitchell's relationship with his father, Jay, is threatened, as Mitchell calls Jay out for not inviting any of his friends to the wedding. Jay admits to being uncomfortable with the idea of two men getting married at the same time that he admits to being uncomfortable with a father/son first dance. However, the very real hurdles that many gay and lesbian people experience are neatly resolved in the two part season finale. In "The Wedding: Part 1" Mitch and Cam's wedding ceremony is again threatened, this time by a forest fire that makes their original venue space unsafe. "The Wedding: Part 2" contains some of the same antics as the fire department evacuates the original wedding venue, their friend Sal goes into labor and renders Cam and Mitch in need of a new wedding officiate. The new venue that the wedding party moves to has been abandoned due to a "runaway bride" who then returns and claims the space hours later. The wedding party then relocates to Cameron and Mitchell's crowded apartment which is not an adequate sized venue to host their wedding. Disheveled, Cam and Mitch call off their wedding ceremony. The three part series of episodes comes to an end as Mitchell's father Jay "rescues" the fate of Mitch and Cam's wedding by arranging with his golf club to make available their space (at the last minute) in order for Mitch and Cam's wedding to continue. As Jay stands outside the final venue (his beloved golf club), and guests

meander by (both his friends as well as Cam and Mitch's friends) Jay loudly and proudly pronounces "My son's getting married today!" (Modern Family 2014). Jay then proceeds to walk Mitchell down the aisle.

Thus, all ends well for Mitch and Cam – Mitchell's father has a change of heart, consistent with the fantasies of inclusion theme common to post-gay television, and the partnership is celebrated and supported by all. The trajectory of Mitch and Cam's eventual marriage is important to track, as the celebration of their relationship comes up against many roadblocks, but of course, results in sort of this "fairy tale" ending. Viewers are left with the suggestion that the struggles of homophobia and/or violence against gay individuals and/or family alienation due to non-acceptance of one's sexuality are issues no longer experienced by "modern" gay folks (the post). Not only are these (still very common) issues framed as things of the past, but the resolution to gaining acceptance (by one's family, by one's community) is to buy into this very heteronormative model of long-term partnering (gay marriage).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MARRIAGE RIGHTS

In order to contextualize the marriage rights discussion as seen on *Modern Family*, and television broadly, in this section I trace the (abbreviated) history of marriage as an institution in the United States. The institution of marriage often goes unexamined. It is taken for granted as a legible and necessary part of contemporary society in the United States. The aspects of marriage that are most emphasized in casual conversation, the popular press, movies, television, and advertisements tend to be related to the ways in which marriage is a private decision fundamentally to do with a loving

partnership. Rarely is the public nature of marriage discussed. As historian Nancy Cott notes, “The monumental public character of marriage is generally its least noted aspect” (Cott 2000, 1). Marriage may represent love and commitment, but at the same time it participates in the ordering and structuring of public life. Public decision-making sets the terms of marriage: who is allowed to get married, who is allowed to officiate a marriage, what kinds of obligations and rights are attached to the marriage as well as the terms of the dissolution of marriage (Cott 2000). Heterosexual marriage has influence over the way in which differences between sexes are understood and emphasized. In this regard, Cott comments, “So far as it is a public institution, it is the vehicle through which the apparatus of state can shape the gender order” (Cott 2000, 3). Marriage is inevitably bound up with civil rights. It has been the purview of state actors, primarily legislators and judges, to make decisions about who is allowed or disallowed from the institution of marriage. This decision making has implications for the health, safety and welfare of U.S. citizenry. The granting of marriage rights also has ramifications for understandings and divisions to do with “race.” Historically, in states that held slaves before the Civil War, slaves were not granted access to legal marriage (Cott 2000). In the years after the abolition of slavery, a white person was prohibited from marrying a black person in a large number of U.S. states (this includes northern as well as southern states). Marriage was similarly prohibited between Asian people and white people wishing to marry in many of the Western states. These divisions based on race remained on the books as recently as 1967, when the U.S. Supreme Court overruled the illegality of interracial marriage in *Loving v. Virginia* (Cott 2000). The lines that have been drawn legislatively

to do with marriage have worked to define what kinds of sexual relations are permitted by the state and what kinds of families are viewed as legitimate. Both Christian doctrine and ancient common law of England has influenced the legality of marriage in the United States (Cott 2000). As Cott observes,

Political ordering began in the household and influenced all governance and representation inside the household and out. Marriage itself served as a form of governance. In the longer Western political tradition on which common law drew, a man's full civil and political status consisted of his being a husband and father and head of a household unit, representing himself and his dependents in the civic world. Wives and children did not represent themselves but looked to the male head of household to represent and support them, in return for which they owed their obedience and service. (Cott 2000, 7)

This division rendered the male head of household a participating member of civic life, whereas the female had minimal involvement in activities outside of the home. It is important to note that these understandings of marriage are also assumed to be monogamous pairings. As Cott describes, monogamy was not always the exclusive relational partnership that was assumed by the majority. When the United States was in its early years, Christian monogamists were the minority worldwide. In fact, most people around the world, in Asia, Africa, and Australia, for example, did not attend to the rules of strict monogamy.

It was not only the married woman that lost her public and economic persona upon marrying, but single women (seen as potential wives) were often treated as lacking civic voice. The discourse of what it means to occupy and support the idea of "traditional marriage" is drawn from the understanding that the male partner represents the wife in

the political sphere. The idea of defending “traditional marriage” is still prominent, and became a focus of the debate in 1996 when Congress passed DOMA, legislation that concretized into national law the exclusive legal right to marriage between a male partner and a female partner (Cott 2000). The discourse of choice is prominent as it relates to the way marriage is talked about in the United States. “The more that marriage is figured as a free and individual choice – as it is today in the United States – the less the majority can see compulsion to be involved at all,” Cott argues (2000, 8).

At the turn of the twentieth century, amidst large scale national shifts to do with industrialization, advances in technology, and the changing makeup of the American citizenry, the concept of marriage also underwent major shifts. In this time, women began to work outside of the home, and began to maintain life outside of the domestic sphere. Although not a simple cause and effect dialectic, this shift coincided with new conceptions about the institution of marriage. One shift was particularly noticeable, and that is the de-emphasis by governmental parties of the political and moral aspects of marriage. Instead the government emphasized the economic usefulness of the marriage partnership (Cott 2000).

Stephanie Coontz in *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage* unpacks the way in which marriage is understood today and argues that today’s popular understanding of marriage is unlike the way marriage has ordered family life historically. As she says, “When it comes to the overall place of marriage in society and the relationship between husbands and wives, nothing in the past is anything like what we have today, even if it may look similar at first glance” (Coontz 2005, 2). Her worldwide

study revealed that almost everywhere in contemporary society there is a perception that marriage is in crisis. Interestingly, what crisis means varies from place to place. For example, U.S. policy-makers might express concern about babies born outside of the confines of marriage. Whereas in Germany and Japan urban planners tend to be concerned about the increasing birth rate, with little concern for the family form in which the baby is born. Coontz noticed some common trends about marriage worldwide. She notes,

Everywhere marriage is becoming more optional and more fragile. Everywhere the once predictable link between marriage and child rearing is fraying. And everywhere relations between men and women are undergoing rapid and at times traumatic transformation . . . In fact, I realized, the relations between men and women have changed more in the past thirty years than they did in the previous three thousand” and it is likely that a similar transformation is happening with marriage. (2005, 4)

Marriage has played a pivotal role in people’s lives for centuries – to the extent that at certain times it played the same role that markets and governments do today. It served as a way to organize the production, distribution of people, and material items. Marriage established a framework that helped make sense of division of labor according to gender and age. It also played a role in structuring people’s personal rights ranging from sexual expectations to the inheritance of property. In most societies in which marriage played a key role in people’s lives, there were very specific rules about how people should “do” marriage (Coontz 2005). That being said, marriage contextualized historically and internationally is not stable and has no set standard for how it should be arranged and who should access it. This flexibility accounts for how and why marriage is a shifting

construct that adapts to its historical moment, and is helpful background for understanding how we arrived at the political terrain today in which same-sex marriage is a hotly contested topic. The widespread political shifts in the United States that have granted legal marriage rights to same-sex couples is occurring in a series of rapid wins that make sense in the context of today's post-gay era.

RECENT SHIFTS IN MARRIAGE POLICY

Marriage rights for LGBTQ individuals have shifted dramatically in the last fifteen years. In the summer of 2003, the politics of sexual difference captured national attention with what was hailed as a “blockbuster ruling” in *Lawrence v. Texas* (Becker 2006). This decision overturned Texas’ sodomy laws. Justice Robert Kennedy, representing the deciding vote, framed his decision as a matter of weighing majority rule versus minority rights. In overturning sodomy laws in Texas the Supreme Court decided that the majority cannot use laws to regulate behavior as it relates to the morality of the minority. This decision opened up the door for future decisions to do with marriage rights – a concern that was vehemently stated by Antonin Scalia in his dissenting opinion. In the dissent, Scalia warns that the Lawrence decision “effectively decrees the end of all morals legislation” (Becker 2006, 216). Following this decision representatives of the religious right were quick to jump on the many slippery slope type arguments that expressed concern that now the door would be open to the legal practice of bigamy, incest, prostitution, bestiality, and obscenity (Becker 2006). The decision-making in *Lawrence v. Texas* has proved to have very direct ramifications for future decisions to do with marriage. Scalia’s fears came to fruition. As Becker notes, “Scalia also warned that

Lawrence would pave the way for same-sex marriage by dismantling ‘the structure of constitutional law that has permitted a distinction to be made between heterosexual and homosexual union’ (2006, 216). During this same period of time there was movement in Canada to legalize same-sex marriage. In the following summer the Massachusetts state legislature moved in the same direction.

On June 26, 2013 the Supreme Court of the United States handed down two major rulings on the issue of same-sex marriage. The first case, *United States v. Windsor*, struck down much of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) enacted during Bill Clinton’s presidency. The decision grants federal benefits to same-sex couples married in states where same-sex marriage is legal. The ruling does not change the legal status of same-sex marriage where statewide bans have been implemented.

In the second case, *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, the Supreme Court decided that those who brought the contested ballot measure that had come to be known as “Proposition 8,” banning same sex marriage in the state of California, did not have any standing in order to defend that statute to the Supreme Court. In other words, marriage officials in the state of California, as a direct result of the Proposition 8 decision, now have no barriers to the legal issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples in their state. The decision, however, did not comment on or have any impact on similar bans of same-sex marriages in other states.

QUEER CRITIQUES OF MARRIAGE

There is a definite disjunct between the agenda of policymakers and activists espousing post-gay politics (most often associated with conservative issues such as

marriage rights and adoption) and the stance of queer theorists, scholars, and activists (who promote a Beyond Marriage¹¹ approach). Conversations about marriage rights for same-sex couples are situated very neatly within discourses of post-gay politics – however, and importantly, marriage rights for same-sex couples is not the issue that would be front and center for many queer theorists or queer activists.

Queer theorists, more often than not when accounting for the limitations of same-sex marriage, point to marriage's economic and neoliberal underpinnings. There are three major strands of thought within queer theory opposed to the way in which marriage has become the forefront issue for LGBTQ advocacy. The first is the liberationist arguments that began to take shape in the 1970s. Carl Wittman's "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto," best sums up the liberationist viewpoint. In it, Wittman argues that gays and lesbians should not attempt to replicate heterosexual marriage. He refers to the history of the struggle for gay rights, and cites events such as the Compton Cafeteria and Stonewall riots as pivotal moments in the struggle for gay rights. He notes that it would be an injustice to the legacy of gay struggle for marriage to be the be-all-end-all result. Key to Wittman's argument is that he considers marriage to be an oppressive heteronormative institution. "Marriage is a prime example of a straight institution fraught with role playing. Traditional marriage is a rotten, oppressive institution" (Wittman 1970, 161). Wittman also takes issue with the idea that gay individuals' might desire to replicate the pairings as modeled by heterosexual couples. "Gay people must stop measuring their self respect by how well they mimic straight marriages" (Wittman 1970, 161). Wittman again

¹¹ <http://www.beyondmarriage.org/>

emphasizes sameness, that gay couples desire to be just like heterosexual couples, when he says, “to accept the idea that happiness comes through finding a nice spouse and settling down, showing the world that ‘we’re just the same as you’ is avoiding the real issues, and is an expression of self hatred” (Wittman 1970, 161).

The second strand of queer theory that takes an oppositional stance in relation to the issue of same-sex marriage emerged in the 1980s and 1990s and is best summed up as a critique of homonormativity. In the HBO documentary *Public Speaking*, Fran Liebowitz, a well-known author and activist of the era identifies why she and her peers took issue with the idea of marriage as “progress.” As Liebowitz explains,

Do I think gay marriage is progress? Are you kidding me? This was one of the good things about being gay. I mean, I am stunned that the two greatest desires, apparently, of people involved in gay rights movements is gay marriage and gays in the military. Really? I mean, to me it seems like these are two of the most confining institutions on the planet. Marriage and the military. Why would you be like, beating down the doors to get in? Usually a fight for freedom is a fight for freedom. This is like the opposite. This is like a fight for slavery. I find it completely shocking. I mean, if it was on the ballot here I would vote for it because I know people want it, but personally, not me. Nor do I want to go in the Army. I mean, people used to pretend to be gay to get out of going to the Army. (Scorsese 2010)

In line with Liebowitz’s arguments, in *The Twilight of Equality?* Lisa Duggan defines both the shifting consumer practices of gays and lesbians in the 1990s as well as the political shifts within the gay and lesbian liberation movement as signaling what she calls a new homonormativity. Within these shifts sameness is emphasized between straights and gays, and heteronormative assumptions are upheld. As Duggan writes:

Following the national political culture to the right, and pressed by the exigencies of fundraising for survival, gay civil rights groups have adopted neoliberal rhetoric and corporate decision-making models. No longer representative of a broad-based progressive movement, many of the dominant national lesbian and gay civil rights organizations have become the lobbying, legal, and public relations firms for an increasingly narrow gay, moneyed elite. Consequently, the push for gay marriage and military service has replaced the array of political, cultural, and economic issues that galvanized the national groups as they first emerged from a progressive social movement context several decades earlier. (Duggan 2003, 45)

Homonormative gay culture is both demobilized and depoliticized – it is fueled by an overwhelming concern for domesticity (marriage rights, adoption rights) and consumption. Duggan suggests that with homonormativity comes shifts in the priorities of gay and lesbian equality movements including an emphasis on “access to institutions of domestic privacy, the ‘free’ market, and patriotism” (Duggan 2003, 51). As Duggan comments:

This new homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: ‘equality’ becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, ‘freedom’ becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, and the ‘right to privacy’ becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped. All of this adds up to a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life. (2003, 65-66)

Michael Warner takes a similar approach in *The Trouble with Normal* by noting that power tends to lean into what is considered “normal.” By that he means that those who capitulate to what is considered normal, in terms of LGBTQ activism, the more likely

they will access mainstream power. “The more you are willing to articulate political issues in a way that plays to a normal audience, the more success you are likely to have” (Warner 1999, 44). Importantly, Warner takes a critical approach to conceptions of normal, and asks readers to rethink what normal even means. As Warner argues,

Nearly everyone, it seems, wants to be normal. And who can blame them, if the alternative is being abnormal, or deviant, or not being one of the rest of us? Put it in those terms, there doesn't seem to be a choice at all. Especially not in America, where normal probably outranks all other social aspirations . . . But what exactly is normal? (1999, 53)

Key to Warner's argument is his dispensation with the idea that there are only two possible options in regard to normal: normal or abnormal. Instead, Warner's approach destabilizes the very idea of normal. As Warner puts it,

Just so, normal and pathological are not the only options. One of the reasons why so many people have started using the word 'queer' is that it is a way of saying 'We're not pathological, but don't think for that reason that we want to be normal.' People who are defined by a variant set of norms commit a kind of social suicide when they begin to measure the worth of their relations and their way of life by the yardstick of normalcy. The history of the movement should have taught us to ask: whose norm? (1999, 59)

Another theme present in Warner's work is that the problem with normal leaves all the people who live outside the parameters of “normal” to fend for themselves. As the circles of normalcy shift, so do the parameters of what is considered “outside” normal. As Warner observes, “What could be a better way of legitimating oneself than to insist on being seen as normal? The problem, always, is that embracing this standard merely throws shame on those who stand farther down the ladder of respectability” (1999, 60).

Warner's scholarship emphasizes the social constructedness of norms and why we ought to place a critical lens on concepts of normal.

Following Warner, queer scholars in this timeframe started to identify one of the greatest drawbacks of the mainstream movement for marriage rights for gay people: that marriage as an institution is exclusionary. Marriage rights held up as the number one priority for lesbian and gay activism inevitably continues cycles of exclusion so that those who are poor, or trans-identified, or incarcerated, for example, do not reap the benefits of marriage rights in the same way that mainstream gay individuals eventually would (if they chose to marry by the state). The contemporary instantiation of queer theory's opposition to marriage is summed up by the 2006 Beyond Marriage statement. The proposition of the Beyond Marriage movement is to reframe the marriage conversation, which they say is narrowly conceived. The proponents of Beyond Marriage are concerned that mainstream lesbian and gay activists have turned marriage into a stand-alone issue. This is a problem when compared to the agenda of conservative right wing politics that takes a pro-marriage "family values" stance that commits time and resources to things like abstinence-only education, the strengthening of state divorce laws, the promotion of marriage (often by coercive terms) to women on welfare, and the never-ending attacks on reproductive freedom. As such, Beyond Marriage supporters ask that activism on behalf of LGBTQ rights respond to the full-scope of attacks on the rights of disenfranchised communities. Beyond Marriage supporters argue that the legalization of same-sex marriage secures the rights and freedoms of some, and leaves other groups quite vulnerable. Additionally, the Beyond Marriage movement suggests that instead of

focusing on the single issue of legalization of same-sex marriage, LGBTQ activists ought to build alliances across issues and groups. In doing so, the hope is that the fight for marriage rights would become a segment of a much larger agenda that strengthens the security and stability of diverse households (Beyond Same-Sex Marriage n.d.).

In 2013 Dean Spade and Craig Willse published a manifesto on same-sex marriage titled “Marriage Will Never Set Us Free” that expands on the call from the Beyond Marriage movement. Spade and Willse commend activists of the movement for same-sex marriage for so successfully linking anti-homophobic sentiment to pro-marriage political stances. However, they argue that pursuing same-sex marriage is not at all a progressive cause and it not at all in line with left leaning projects such as economic and racial justice, decolonization and feminist liberation. Spade and Willse speak to the history of marriage in the United States as a system that has historically rewarded benefits onto those who participate in the state’s version of an ideal marriage partnership, while at the same time stigmatizing and criminalizing those who do not organize family in the same way. As they say,

The idea that same-sex marriage advocacy is a fight for the ‘freedom to marry’ or ‘equality’ is absurd since the existence of legal marriage is a form of coercive regulation in which achieving or not achieving marital status is linked to accessing vital life resources like health care and paths to legalized immigration. (Spade and Willse 2013).

The authors draw on Gayle Rubin’s article “Thinking Sex” to describe the way in which same-sex marriages newly found “acceptability,” is not a measure of “progress.” Rubin argues that systems that regulate and hierarchically rank sexual practices change – so people and ways of coupling may shift from being considered “stigmatized” to a more

“charmed” position within society (same-sex couples moving from being social outcasts to being more mainstream, for example). According to Rubin, ultimately this movement does not challenge the system that registers one set of couples as “charmed” and others as “unacceptable” (Rubin 1993).

Jaye Cee Whitehead’s *The Nuptial Deal: Same-Sex Marriage & Neo-Liberal Governance* discusses the issue of marriage from within marriage equality activist circles. She tracks the shifting politics within LGBT activism from the pre-1990s rejection of the institution of marriage to the post-1990s increased and sometimes sole focus on marriage. Using an ethnographic approach, Whitehead interviews marriage equality activists in order to document these shifts. She pays special attention to the everyday struggles, affective attachments and considerations of the marriage rights activists. Whitehead frames the shifts expressed by marriage equality activists in relation to political shifts. This includes the transformation of the U.S. from a welfare state to a neoliberal one in which families are tasked with the burden of facing and managing social problems on an individualized basis (Whitehead 2012).

CONCLUSION PART ONE: SPRINGFIELD IS FOR GAY LOVERS OF MARRIAGE

To conclude, I take the episode “There’s Something About Marrying” on the popular Fox network show *The Simpsons* (1989-today) as a case study to demonstrate the unfolding of a queer counter-narrative on television within the post-gay era. This episode highlights the neoliberal underpinnings of post-gay discourse from a critical perspective. The emphasis of same-sex marriage as an economic benefit to cities and states, much like *Modern Family*’s partnership with the city of New York, discussed earlier, demonstrates

the pervasiveness of post-gay discourse's influence on marriage. In the episode "There's Something About Marrying," Springfield, the fictional town in which *The Simpsons* is set, falls into economic disrepair. Tourism rates drop significantly, which prompts Mayor Quimby to host a town hall meeting where he solicits ideas for increasing tourism. Ideas presented at the meeting include: designing a stronger beer, offering gladiator fights, and a poetry slam night. But Lisa Simpson has a "real" suggestion, which is "Why don't we legalize same-sex marriage? We'll attract a growing segment of the marriage market and strike a blow for civil rights." Encouraged by Lisa's suggestion, local bartender Moe says, "Yeah them gay guys got lots of disposable income. I can serve fancy drinks and charge \$10 a pop – what's in a martini?" Mayor Quimby, resolving the matter, says "Then it's settled, we'll legalize gay money, er er, I mean, gay marriage" (*The Simpsons* 2005). From Lisa's mention of the "gay market" to Moe's (stereotypical) notion of gay people having more than an average amount of expendable income to Mayor Quimby mistakenly legalizing "gay money" the issue of same-sex marriage is framed by this episode as primarily driven by economic factors. This *Simpsons* episode exposes a set of ruptures that needs further exploration. While not named a critique of post-gay discourse at this moment, the episode operates in a way that does just that. It exposes the set of sensibilities within post-gay television that make invisible the persistence of homophobia – that tell viewers that homophobia is over and done with.

The episode continues with the decision to legalize same-sex marriage in Springfield. The town promotes their newly conceived website: www.springfieldisforgayloversofmarriage.com. The city also unveils its welcome sign:

“Springfield, Welcoming Gays Since 2005.” Reverend Timothy Lovejoy decides that he is unwilling to perform gay marriage ceremonies. “I can just as well marry two people of the same sex as I can put a hamburger on a hot dog bun. Now go back to working behind the scenes in every facet of entertainment,” Lovejoy remarks (The Simpsons 2005). Mayor Quimby retorts that with his choice not to marry gay couples Reverend Lovejoy will lose at least \$200 per couple. This leaves an opening for Homer, who overheard the conversation between Mayor Quimby and Reverend Lovejoy, and soon, Homer (clearly motivated by dollar signs) is licensed to marry (courtesy of the internet). Homer sets up a “L’il Chapel” over the garage and has a line out the door of gay couples waiting to be married. Tellingly, when Homer runs out of gay couples to marry in Springfield he begins to marry “outliers” – people who want to marry stuffed animals, for example. Homer’s willingness to marry anyone to anyone or “anything” exaggeratedly deemphasizes the civil rights component of same-sex marriage. Marge comments, “Homie, I’m so proud of you. You stood up for people to express love in its most perfect form. A binding legal contract” (The Simpsons 2005). This 2005 *Simpsons* episode knowingly previews and satirizes many of the common critiques of the political movement advocating for same-sex marriage rights influenced by post-gay ideology. It is a scathing critique of post-gay discourse as it relates to the debate over marriage rights. The episode dramatizes the way in which same-sex marriage advocacy is often bounded up in the economic. As this episode illustrates, political decisions about marriage were already contradictory in 2005. This episode of *The Simpsons* is anticipating the way the marriage rights movement has become fiercely tied to the logic of branding and the

pursuit of a loyal consumer base. This becomes evident through “real life” examples of regional and local politicians’ emphasis on the way in which gay marriage will increase revenue for their state.¹² This is not unlike much of the political terrain to do with marriage as it manifests in local politics, as I show in the next section.

CONCLUSION PART TWO

THE LOCAL CONNECTION: MAYOR R.T. RYBAK’S REGIONAL TOUR

The local Mayor of Anytown, U.S.A. launches an all-out publicity assault that encourages thousands of same-sex couples with assumed expendable income to come spend their money. “Come to our city! We’ll marry you! And you can have access to our hotels, our religious spaces, and our wedding planners!” The mayor welcomes gay and lesbian couples to marry in their town and possibly even relocate to said town. This scenario has been playing out across the country in states like Iowa, New Jersey, and Minnesota. The generic “anytown” publicity tour resembles almost exactly Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak’s 2013 publicity campaign to encourage same-sex couples to marry in Minnesota (the Freedom to Marry Act went into effect in Minnesota on August 1, 2013). To conclude, I map the publicity frenzy surrounding newly legalized marriage in Minnesota in order to explore the aspects of same-sex marriage that are emphasized on a regional level.

On May 13, 2013 Minnesota became the twelfth state to legalize marriage rights for same-sex couples by a 37-30 vote in the State Senate. The transformation in terms of public opinion on the issue of same-sex marriage in Minnesota was very quick. Six

¹² Mayor R.T. Rybak’s three state tour publicizing marriage in Minnesota is a good example of this, as discussed previously

month prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage Minnesota voters narrowly struck down a ballot initiative that would have concretized marriage as a right held only by a “man and a woman” in the state constitution.

In “A Midwestern Mayor Evangelizes for Gay Marriage – and Its Economic Bonanza,” *Time* magazine contributor Josh Sanburn chronicles Mayor R.T. Rybak’s regional tour. In late August and early September 2013, shortly after same-sex marriage became legal in Minnesota, Mayor R.T. Rybak embarked on a three state tour of the Midwest and the Mountain states, evangelizing to attendees at events covered by the local press that they are now able to marry in Minnesota and that Minnesota welcomes you (and your business). From April 2009 until August 1, 2013, Iowa was the exclusive Midwestern state that would marry same-sex couples. In the year following the legalization of gay marriage in Iowa, 866 Iowan couples married there and 1,233 couples traveled from out of state to marry in Iowa. According to the UCLA Williams Institute, the influx of same-sex marriage in Iowa brought in \$13 million to the state economy (Sanburn 2013). In the first month that same sex marriage became legal in Minnesota, 1 out of 3 marriage licenses were issued to gay couples, according to the Associated Press (Sanburn 2013). The Williams Institute estimates that same-sex marriage in Minnesota will generate \$42 million of revenue for Minnesota in its inaugural year. The dollar amounts are even higher in a state like Illinois (the fifteenth state to legalize same-sex marriage effective June 1, 2014) because the legalization of same-sex marriage could generate over \$100 million in state revenue in its first year. As Rybak says as he travels through Illinois, “Chicago is my kind of town, but it’s a second city for human rights. If

this city doesn't give the rights they deserve, come up to Minneapolis. We're happy to have you" (Sanburn 2013). Rybak's comment serves as a reminder that same-sex marriage politically serves not just to "right" the wrongs of history – as much of the marriage rights organizing would have us believe, but instead serves to bolster local and state economies. As such, it is important to keep in mind not only that marriage rights within a post-gay era are tied to economic imperatives, but also that marriage rights are partial in that they serve to legitimize some relationships, at the same time that they delegitimize others. The same thing happens on television, as I have demonstrated in the case of *Modern Family*, where the legitimation of wealthy, white, professional, gender conforming Mitch and Cam's partnership attempts to send the message that gays and lesbians are post-struggle, when the reality is that on television and in politics who is considered "normal" has shifted, leaving all the queers, the non-monogamous, people of color, the gender-nonconforming, and all other sorts of "deviants" to fend for themselves.

CHAPTER THREE

The Invention of the Bullying “Epidemic”: Fox’s *Glee* (2009-2015) as a Post-Gay Text

Fox’s *Glee* (2009-today) is a weekly one-hour musical “dramedy” with storylines that feature the lives of the “outcast” Glee club (a show choir) at McKinley High School in Lima, Ohio. The show’s premise has “misfits,” cheerleaders and football players of various races, ethnicities, sexualities, and genders coming together with the purpose of representing the high school’s Glee club. The show devotes itself to the exposure of “difference” in all sorts of its characters. This is apparent in the makeup of the Glee members. Rachel Berry (Lea Michelle), one of the primary female singers in the troupe, is Jewish and has gay dads. Mercedes Jones is black and has a non-traditional (for television) body-type. Quinn Fabray (Dianna Agron) is white and heteroflexible (she tends to date boys but has a short-lived fling with Santana, one of the other key female characters in the show). Noah Puckerman (Mark Salling) is a mixed-Jewish, mixed-undisclosed-other ethnicity male. Artie Abrams (Kevin McHale) is a Jewish male in a wheelchair. Santana Lopez (Naya Rivera) is a Latina lesbian. Mike Chang (Harry Shum Jr.) is an Asian American teenager. Tina Cohen-Chang (Jenna Ushkowitz) is an Asian-American, Jewish girl. Blaine Anderson (Darren Criss) is a white non-flamboyant gay male. Brittney Pierce (Heather Morris) is an airheaded bisexual math prodigy. The normative male heterosexual is represented by football quarterback Finn Hudson (Cory Monteith) and football player Sam Evans (Chord Overstreet). Becky Jackson (Lauren Potter) has Down’s syndrome. Kurt Hummel (Chris Colfer) is a white and tremendously out and proud flamboyant gay teen. Later seasons explore transgender identity in the

characters of Wade ‘Unique’ Adams (Alex Newell) and Coach Beiste (Dot-Marie Jones). The celebration of difference is apparent in the wide array of characterizations that *Glee* presents, however; the show uncritically espouses both the sentiment of liberal pluralism (understood as calling for the recognition of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups under existing power structures – rather than challenging existing power structures), and uncritically tackles issues of multiculturalism in ways that align with a post-gay ethos. I argue that *Glee* operates as a post-gay television text on a number of levels including its presentation of a white young gay man as the exemplar for LGBTQ bullying awareness in schools, as well as the show’s presentation of bullying as a peer-to-peer or individualized problem that resonates with the neoliberal underpinnings of post-gay discourse, rather than allowing for the possibility that homophobia and gender policing are entrenched structural and systemic issues in school settings that need to be addressed as such. Finally, the treatment of the issue of LGBTQ bullying in schools in *Glee* is consistent with today’s middle-class assimilationist and post-gay response to the issue that is found in most anti-bullying initiatives enacted in school settings.

Drawing upon media studies, queer theory, critical race theory, and feminist theory this chapter attends to the issue of bullying to better understand the discursive impact of anti-bullying measures implemented in schools and taken up by television. In particular, this chapter looks to the television show *Glee* as a case study on the issue of bullying. *Glee* is a fitting case because the show’s writers and creators have spoken of their rationale for developing a bullying storyline that is in direct response to news attention on the topic of gay youth suicide. In a sense, the show is making an effort to

directly respond to news coverage of gay youth suicide as well as potentially impact and alter the lives of gay youth viewers of *Glee* in a way that reaffirms their gay and lesbian sexual identities. Ryan Murphy, *Glee*'s showrunner, has spoken of the show's intention to present a persuasive message on the issue of LGBTQ bullying. Although the show did perhaps draw some positive attention (if any attention is positive) to the issue of bullying in schools, the exact take-away messages reinforce the problematic notion that bullying is a peer-to-peer issue rather than addressing heteronormativity, gender policing, and homophobia as structural and systemic issues. Further, in *Glee*, the public school administration at McKinley High, the fictional high school where *Glee* is set, fail to address bullying in any meaningful way. The resulting message is that bullying is a regular occurrence in school settings and that those bullied should stand up to their aggressors. The target of the bullying, Kurt, is left to fend for himself, encouraged to confront his bully by his new love interest Blaine, and bullying is handled (or not handled) by the administration at McKinley High School, as an individualized problem. *Glee* resonates with post-gay ideology on many levels, first by portraying the poster boy for gayness and the target of anti-gay bullying, Kurt, as a flamboyant white young man. That he is white is key, in that most of the well-documented news accounts of bullied gay teens also feature white males. If we were to follow the narrow version of bullying that is presented to us by the news and by *Glee*, we would believe that white male teens are the most susceptible to bullying and are also the most likely to commit suicide. Second, that the issue of bullying can be dealt with on an individualized case-by-case basis resonates most strongly with the neoliberal influences within post-gay ideology. Instead, inspired

by the approach of queer theory, I suggest that the issue of bullying is a structural and systemic issue that resides first and foremost in the culture of gender policing.

Dominant discourse widely understands bullying to be a relational and behavioral problem. Dan Olweus' research on bullying, from a social science perspective, has influenced many school programs aimed at curbing bullying. Olweus says that "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (1993, 54). This understanding of bullying is confirmed by other researchers (Lutzker 2006; Sanders 2004) who add that unequal power differentials are also a factor in the occurrence of bullying. A number of programs and policies understand bullying the same way. For example, the organization Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence defines bullying as "repeated aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the child who bullies and the child who is victimized" (PrevNet 2007). In the areas of educational research and public policy, bullying is thought of as relational aggression among children and youth (Walton 2011). Nansel et al. note that the "definition of bullying is widely agreed on in literature on bullying" (2001, 2094). Because bullying continues to be perceived as a problem in schools, even though many schools have implemented policies aimed at reducing aggressive behavior, in the last five years researchers from diverse fields have begun to question the efficacy of peer-to-peer bullying initiatives (see Walton 2011; Payne and Smith 2013; Pascoe 2013; Lythgoe 2013). Instead, this research suggests that a more appropriate response would be to address bullying as both structural and systemic, embedded in histories of homophobia

and rigid conceptualizations of masculinity that has resulted in perpetuating the cultural embrace of gender policing.

In this chapter, I explore *Glee*, along with other media that has attended to the issue of bullying in schools, like the much publicized *It Gets Better* project, to reflect upon the selective and partial lens prevalent in today's post-gay era. This project's stakes lie in the way in which the influence of post-gay discourse recasts the issue of bullying as resolved by anti-bullying legislative measures. Contrary to this, not only are nationalized anti-bullying measures tied to the tendencies of (limited) political action within a post-gay era, they are also dangerously propelling continued stereotypes about gays and lesbians as helpless victims in need of (state) protection, reinforcing the school-to-prison pipeline, and adversely targeting vulnerable populations for increased school surveillance and potential school expulsion. The inattention to structural violence prevalent among many anti-bullying policies pits the response to LGBTQ bullying squarely within an assimilative "equality" based neoliberal frame, as opposed to one that aligns with a "queer" vision that works to move beyond "equality" based movement organizing and instead focus on intra-movement organizing. Anti-bullying measures have been enacted in schools for a number of years now and violence against youth for difference has not lessened. From this, we might deduce that larger structural and systemic issues like heteronormativity, homophobia, and gender policing need to be addressed in order to secure the long term safety and security of those embodying sexual and/or gender difference. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to linking *Glee* and other media to

post-gay discourse and making a case for the rethinking of bullying initiatives in their current state because of their problematic alignment with post-gay discourse.

Post-gay ideologies often take the form of masking themselves as products of progress. On one level, the increased attention to the issue of bullying in schools is a sign of progress. However, these initiatives mask many of the more deep-seated problems embedded in school settings. The emergence of bullying initiatives in schools signal to some that continued advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ youth is no longer necessary (aligning with post-gay ideology), however, if we take a close look at these measures through the lenses of media studies, queer theory, critical race theory, and feminism, much work is yet to be done. Bullying policies enacted in schools align with post-gay ideology in that they fail to address heteronormativity, gender policing, and homophobia as structural and systemic issues. The same can be said of much of the media attention that has been granted to the issue of bullying in schools.

Common to the televised account in *Glee*, the *It Gets Better* campaign, as well as news reports of bullying instances is the assumption that bullying is “new” problem that needs to be addressed. I suggest, however, that bullying is not a “new” problem at all, but the newly invested interest in national attention drawn to lesbian and gay advocacy (see national campaigns for marriage rights and the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the central issues of my other chapters) combined with the overwhelming influence of post-gay rhetoric within those circles, have all come together to create the problem of “bullying,” as we know it today. That is not to say that gay youth and/or adults lived experiences and reports of bullying are untrue. Instead, I argue that it can be both true

that some youth and adults experience bullying due to their perceived or actual LGBTQ identities, and that the discursive formation that frames “bullying” as a new issue to be attended to as a behavioral problem is specifically tied to today’s post-gay historical context.

GLEE

At the time of this writing, *Glee*, which airs primetime on the Fox network, is in the early part of its sixth and final season. The show has received critical acclaim and has been a steady ratings earner for the Fox network. Ratings were particularly high at 12.5 million viewers when season two began to air in April of 2010 – the same season that brought attention to the issue of bullying in its storyline (Gorman 2010). The show has received numerous awards including Golden Globes in 2010 and 2011.^v The sixth season premiere episode opened to less than stellar ratings with 2.3 million viewers (Kondology 2015) as the show has seen a decline in viewership in the past few seasons. Notably, *Glee* has also been the recipient of awards specifically recognizing LGBTQ visibility including AfterEllen.com, AfterElton.com, as well as numerous GLAAD^{vi} media awards. Aligning with much of the early criticism of gay and lesbian television (see Capsuto 2000; Gross 2001; Tropiano 2002) within the evaluative paradigm these particular sites are still tied to ideas about positive or negative representations. GLAAD in particular tends to reward visibility as a prima facie good, and offers little in terms of contextualizing these television examples within their historical moment. These sites tend to present either denouncements of negative portrayals or advocate for certain types of positive depictions,

consistent with what Ellis Hanson has called the “moralistic politics of representation” (Hanson 1999, 5).

In 2010, as a response to the increased media attention in the national news devoted to LGBTQ youth suicide, *Glee* showrunner Ryan Murphy initiated a narrative response on the well-watched dramedy. Like post-gay discourse that render LGBTQ political issues as tied to individual and neoliberal concerns, *Glee* presents bullying as a behavioral peer-to-peer issue rather than structural or systemic. It is taken for granted that Kurt, the target of the anti-gay bullying, is responsible for drawing unwanted attention to himself – in the form of his flamboyant clothing and gayness. Kurt is not only responsible for drawing unwanted attention onto himself, he is also responsible for resolving his conflict with his bully (Dave Karofsky). That Kurt is not “the problem” – but rather his bullying is a consequence of Kurt performing outside of enforced ways of being and doing masculinity and sexuality – is never addressed. *Glee*’s bullying story-arc (that spans the length of thirty-one episodes) begins in the episode “Never Been Kissed” where Kurt, the white gay teen on the show, is slammed into a locker by Dave Karofsky. Kurt, after being attacked, comments that the school has failed in protecting him. Although Kurt is approached by Mr. Schuester, the director of McKinley High’s Glee club, Kurt dismisses him, insisting that “this is my hill to climb alone” (*Glee* 2010). It is clear from this interaction that the *Glee* storyline is pitting Kurt against Karofsky, victim against aggressor, in a way that parallels much of the existing anti-bullying measures enacted in schools, as if bullying is a peer-to-peer issue. However, it seems as though the fictional McKinley high-school is lacking the implementation of an anti-bullying policy. There

seems to be no rule-book on how to handle bullying available as a resource for students or administrators.

Kurt, looking for a resolution to his problem, visits Dalton Academy, the all-boy prep school and home of Glee club competitor team The Warblers that Kurt's soon-to-be-crush Blaine attends, and is told that the school has a zero-tolerance policy for harassment. During his visit Kurt meets Blaine, an out white gay teen, with whom he shares his travails of bullying that he is experiencing at McKinley. Again, the issue of bullying is framed as an individualized issue by Blaine, who tells Kurt that he has two choices. Either Kurt can enroll at Dalton Academy, a private school that may not be an affordable option for Kurt and his family, or Kurt can stay and "refuse to be a victim" (Glee 2010). Blaine shares with Kurt that he enrolled at Dalton to get away from bullies at his previous school, and that it is a decision that he regrets. Kurt's experience with bullying becomes more complicated (and oversimplified), when the subsequent interaction with his bully, Karofsky, ends in Karofsky kissing Kurt. Karofsky's actions are no longer those of a gay-hating teen but rather of a self-hating internalized homophobe. The treatment of Karofsky as a self-hating internalized homophobe is not unlike Stuart Hall's influential differentiation between inferential racism and structural racism. Inferential racism, defined as treating racism as an individualized problem, shares much in common with the individualizing tendencies within post-gay politics. The show then has Kurt and Blaine together attempt to reach out to Karofsky and assure him that he is not alone in his confused feelings, but this outreach only results in a return to the previous aggressive behavior. That Karofsky is now painted as a closet case plays into

the age old stereotype that all gay bashers are themselves gay (Tropiano 2002; Haggerty 2000). This decision deflects attention away from naming bullying as a complex problem that requires a complex set of solutions in order to mitigate it, and instead further simplifies a situation that has already been reduced to the lowest common denominator.

In the episode “Furt” Karofsky continues to bully Kurt, and this time a number of the members of the Glee club attempt to come to his defense, with the exception of his soon to be brother-in-law Finn, who worries that stepping in to defend Kurt would threaten his role as quarterback of the football team. Kurt’s father approaches the principal of McKinley, Sue Sylvester, and tells her of Karofsky’s threats against Kurt’s life. Sue expels Karofsky, only for the school board to reverse the decision. In distress, Kurt’s family decides to divert what was to be money for a honeymoon to enroll Kurt at Dalton Academy. That the resolution to Kurt’s problem with bullying lies (temporarily or not) in him enrolling in a costly private school speaks also to issues of class. That one has to have money in order to be free of bullying behavior seems to be a key aspect of the message here.

Many episodes later the bullying storyline returns in the episode “Born this Way.” This time fellow Glee member Santana schemes to get Kurt to re-enroll at McKinley, and thus return to the McKinley Glee club, which she imagines would make her a hero in the eyes of her peers. In order to do this, Santana first confronts Karofsky. She tells him that she knows of his secret (that he kissed Kurt) but that she will not tell anyone as long as he agrees to play her “beard.” Santana is also in the business of concealing her lesbian identity at this time, so she understands this scheme to be to her advantage as well. Along

with Santana's plot to cover up their "true" sexual identities, comes Santana's requirement that Karofsky agree to form a new club at school devoted to protecting potential bullied students at McKinley. Named the "Bully Whips" this newly conceived McKinley club involves Karofsky and Santana dressed in "anti-bullying" attire, stopping bullies in their tracks. The newly conceived "Bully Whips" are so over-the-top it would be comical, if not for the seriousness attached to this bullying storyline as well as bullying in general – this narrative is supposed to be in response to "real life" gay teen suicides. That student representatives dressed in faux superhero costumes in the hallways is offered as a "real" solution to targeted violence against perceived gender or sexual nonconformity is a testament to the failure of this show to address this issue in any significant way.

This story arc comes to a close the following season in the episode "On My Way" when we learn that Karofsky has enrolled in a new school and is now the target of bullying behavior. Karofsky has the word "fag" graffitied on his football room locker, and receives bullying messages via his social media accounts. The show frames this sequence of events as what leads to Karofsky's attempted but not complete suicide, as his dad finds him. Interestingly, Kurt visits Karofsky in the hospital, and in what seems to be a counter to the prevailing message at the time (*It Gets Better*), tells Karofsky that "I'm not going to say it's going to be easy . . . Some days are just gonna suck" (Glee 2012). Yet, as Kurt asks Karofsky to imagine what he would want for himself in the future, if he were to get there, the fantasy they both conjure up matches the promise of *It Get Better*. In Karofsky's imagined future, he has a partner, a kid, and some sort of professional

work-life. The future aspirations, what both Kurt and Karofsky hold up as the best-case-scenario in terms of their future selves, is imbued with post-gay ideals.

In an interview with the *New York Times* showrunner Ryan Murphy talked about the reasoning behind bringing the bullying storyline to *Glee*. Murphy expressed recognition of the social significance of the bullying narrative as it appeared on the heels of the rash of news reports about LGBTQ suicide. He claimed that he wanted Kurt to put a face to the issue of bullying. As Murphy states, “We wanted to do a story line where the abuse pushed him to the edge and he was like, ‘That’s it, I’m not going to take it anymore’” (quoted in Itzkoff 2010a). In addition, Murphy noted that there was an intentionality to framing the story as Kurt fighting back against his bully. Even though Murphy noted that many of the national school policies regarding bullying “are wrong” it is unclear how the storyline worked to rectify the “problem.” Additionally, what exactly is the problem with bullying policies as they exist goes unsaid. Instead, Murphy asserted a straightforwardness about the issue, as if there was some “truth” about bullying that the show presented. As Murphy notes, “Hopefully it’s just showing the truth and people will talk about it” (Itzkoff 2010a). When questioned about his choice to introduce Blaine as what some might see as Kurt’s savior, Murphy says that was not the case at all. Murphy says Blaine was specifically not introduced as some story of “We’re Here, We’re Queer hero” (Itzkoff 2010b), but instead as a way to rescue Kurt from the perils of gay isolation (a common trope in the history of gay film and television). Interestingly, he distanced the show and the show’s ideological underpinnings from the recognizable “We’re Here, We’re Queer” motto made famous by the 1990s queer activist group Act Up. Murphy’s

disavowal of the “We’re Here, We’re Queer” motto reinforces the show’s alignment with post-gay ideology, at the same time that it highlights the distance between *Glee* and queer radical potential. The emphasis Murphy puts on insisting Blaine’s relationship to Kurt is not about queer radical politics situates the show squarely within post-gay discourse – where bullying is a privatized issue dealt with on an individualized level, where gay marriage is the end all aspirational goal, and where increased visibility for LGBTQ individuals on television signals a decreased need for continued advocacy on behalf of gay and lesbian civil rights.

The television show’s ethos resonates so strongly with post-gay ideology that the new season has introduced the tongue-in-cheek self-identified “post-modern gay” character, Spencer Porter (Marshall Williams). Kurt’s efforts (as the new coach of the *Glee* club) to recruit Spencer under the auspices of the common gay identity they share are rebuffed by Spencer. For Spencer, their shared gay identity is not enough to bond him with Kurt. Further, Spencer rejects the idea that he should be known in high school in terms of his sexuality at all. Spencer comments, “I know that when you were in high school, being gay was how you identified yourself, but, that’s not my thing. When I told people I was gay only two people had a problem with it, and Beiste [the football coach] kicked them off the team” (*Glee* 2015). Spencer’s disavowal of his gay identity signifies his desire to move past the history of struggle that has been a reality of gay life in the United States. Spencer’s disidentification with queerness is so profound that when Kurt notes that the reason Spencer can be a “post-modern gay” (meaning, he is able to walk through the halls without drawing attention to his gayness) at McKinley High now is

because of the past struggles of other gay and lesbian students, Spencer's reply is "Please, I owe *Modern Family*" (Glee 2015). On the one hand, this comment speaks to the awareness of the showrunners and writers of *Glee*, in that they know they are setting the terms for how gay identity is being portrayed today. But, it also speaks volumes that the "post-modern gay" character credits his ease as an out gay high-schooler to one of the more emblematic post-gay television shows in existence, *Modern Family*, (as I explore in chapter two).

IT GETS BETTER (?)

Glee is like other celebratory media driven narratives about bullying including the *It Gets Better Project* that miss the structural and systemic aspects of the issue of LGBTQ bullying. The *It Gets Better Project* was initiated by well-known sex columnist Dan Savage. Savage, in an interview on "All Things Considered" said that he made the initial video, posted to YouTube on September 21, 2010, in response to the media attention that had been given to LGBTQ youth suicides earlier that year. Perhaps nothing matches up so succinctly with post-gay ideology as Savage's initial video. In the video, Savage and his partner tell stories of their well-off, auspiciously happy life together. "Savage and Miller's now familiar video is filled with reminiscences of some of their favorite moments in their lives and it undoubtedly indexes a level of privilege many may never experience" (West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy 2013, 50). Savage and Miller are monogamously partnered and are raising an adopted son. The message is that if you wait it out, your life will get better. The video implies that gay identified adults are on an equal footing with everyone else, so "just stick it out." The tenets of post-gay ideology

resonate here in that Dan and Terry represent white, upwardly mobile model gay subjects who aspire to many of the lifestyle norms common among mainstream heterosexual pairings. Dan and Terry's lives are not different than the heterosexual norm – and for them, that is the point. However, the initial video was met with much controversy, especially from queer scholars, who have argued that the message sent to LGBTQ youth through that initial video is both partial and misleading. In 2012, *It Gets Better* was featured on MTV with a two part special with the same name. In addition, Google Chrome initiated an ad campaign with the *It Gets Better* message. It is no coincidence that *It Gets Better* is easily packaged as a consumer product. That *It Gets Better* and *Glee* are ideologically aligned is evidenced by Google Chrome's ad first airing during an episode of *Glee* in 2011. The one minute Google Chrome ad is a compilation of videos that have been posted to the *It Gets Better* YouTube site. In that one minute, only one of the videos selected by Google Chrome features a black man. Numerous white faces come together to sell the message that *It Gets Better* to presumably white youth. Google Chrome's address, like Dan and Terry's original message, is a raced and classed message that suggests that selectively, *It Gets Better*.

Jaspir Puar, J. Jack Halberstam and Tavia Nyong'o are a few of the queer scholars that have taken particular issue with Dan and Terry's original *It Gets Better* (IGB) video. Puar goes so far as to comment that in fact the *It Gets Better* campaign might contribute to "making things worse" (Puar 2010). As she states, "Projects like Savage's risk producing such narrow versions of what it means to be gay, and what it means to be bullied, that for those who cannot identify with it but are nevertheless still targeted for

‘being different’, It Gets Better might actually contribute to Making Things Worse” (Puar 2010). At issue in particular is what they see as IGB’s “mandate to fold oneself into urban, neoliberal gay enclaves: a call to upward mobility that discordantly echoes the now-discredited ‘pull yourself up by the bootstraps’ immigrant motto” (Puar 2013, 179). Halberstam says, “The real conversation that needs to go on in this country is around guns, manhood and masculinity. And we have extracted this term ‘bully’ out of that matrix of social phenomenon and then tried to resolve it separately from resolving all these other things. It’s just not going to work. So that’s why I had the negative reaction to the ‘It Gets Better’ campaign that went from being not a very smart idea to being a national band-aid” (quoted in Bennett 2013, 182). Halberstam continues, “The original video is truly offensive – to have two guys who are upper-middle class, have adopted a son, have gotten married, sitting there reminiscing about their days spent in Paris. How lucky they are. The taste of a croissant next to the Seine. It’s obscene really” (188). In this same interview with Jeffrey Bennett, Halberstam takes particular offense to the clichéd aspect of the IGB message. Halberstam says he is particularly mistrusting of the sentiment, the feel-good message that IGB carries. He gives the comparison to the slogan, “Violence Begins at Home,” which he argues would never have captured national attention in the same way IGB did. He cautions us to think about the power of clichés and, since they do so much discursive work, it seems that the onus is upon us, as thinkers and activists interested in real social change, to unpack the sentiment behind the message. Finally, Halberstam also takes issue with the message of hope, noting that for many it is misleading. “One can rarely say this to youth of color, to teenage moms, or to victims of

sexual abuse and, for the most part, unless one is talking to silver spoon in the mouth gays, one cannot promise to most queers that ‘things get better’” (quoted in West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy 2013, 53).

In addition to the single contribution from Dan and Terry that started the IGB campaign, there are now over 50,000 contributions to the YouTube channel. This series of videos has come to be known as the IGB archive. Putting critiques of the initial video aside for a moment, there is something to be said about the outreach made by this mass of contributors. West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy take a queer rhetorical approach to analyzing the *It Gets Better* campaign that takes issue with the queer “critical” responses. Instead, these scholars name IGB as “vernacular videos” that they say are implicated in the process of queer worldmaking (West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy 2013). Even Halberstam notes that at this point IGB contains within it a multivalent archive (Bennett 2013). Puar also gives some leeway to the IGB project when considered in its whole. Tim Gunn of *Project Runway* fame posted a video that recounts his own suicide attempt as a teen that is thought of as a touching addition to the collection, and the teen produced videos that began the Make It Better campaign are testament to the multiplicity of voices that the original campaign inspired. Another interesting initiative that came out as a response to IGB is the “We Got Your Back Project” which like IGB, encourages LGBTQ people to share their stories, but includes in the mission statement the explicit notion of inclusion addressing “biphobia, transphobia and racism” and “mobilizing the LGBTQIA in support of anti-bullying and anti-violence legislation” (Doyle 2010). As Puar comments, “the IGB project should hardly be dismissed out of hand. Quite the

opposite: it's virality in itself is interesting" (Puar 2010, n.p.). That said, the response and participation within the IGB campaign necessitates consideration on its own terms. "I never doubt the ability of people to transcend a cliché anymore than I doubt the ability of the cliché to take hold in the first place," Halberstam comments (Bennett 2013, 188). That the video collection has the potential to comfort and speak to people is a possibility. Lynne Joyrich offers a more optimistic approach, if also cautionary, when she says that IGB is, "bringing more and more people into the conversation, forging more and more connections, creating more and more activity, even activism" (quoted in West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy 2013, 53).

BULLYING AS A WIDESPREAD PHENOMENON

Since 2010, the implementation of anti-bullying initiatives in U.S. schools have become commonplace. These initiatives are in response to the media attention given to youth suicides said to be due to homophobic bullying – including the high profile deaths of adolescent white males like Tyler Clementi, Eric Mohat, Carl Billy Lucas, Jadin Bell, among others. Less high profile was the coverage of two similar incidents occurring around the same time involving African-American male 11-year-olds Joseph Walker Hoover and Jaheem Herrera. The coverage of these incidents is selective, and thus raced and gendered. Anti-bullying has been named a social problem, or "epidemic," that needs to be addressed as a cultural and social issue in the United States. Anti-bullying laws have become the norm across the United States (as well as in the U.K. and Canada) – many of which specify LGBTQ students as a protected class. As of this writing, every U.S. state (with the exception of Montana) has anti-bullying legislation (Bully Police

USA n.d.). In the last fifteen years the popular press has taken an increased interest in the topic of bullying. For example, bullying was mentioned in the *New York Times* 160 times in 2000, and 6,730 times in 2012 (Pascoe 2013). Many books have been penned advising schools about how to implement anti-bullying initiatives, a number of them written by individuals with little formal training in either education or the social dynamics of serving marginalized populations (Payne and Smith 2013). Television talk shows and news exposés have recently put a spotlight on how schools should handle the issue of anti-gay bullying. For example, *Without a Trace*, *The View* and *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, have segments or full episodes directed at the issue of bullying in schools. *The Ellen DeGeneres Show's* website also serves as a resource for directing interested parties to additional information about advocating on behalf of bullied students.

The U.S. Department of Education hosts annual bullying summits, during which officials name the way in which the problem of bullying ought to be understood, including trying to identify how bullying particularly impacts LGBTQ students. In 2010, October was named National Bullying Prevention Month and is recognized in schools and communities nationwide. The White House hosts a website dedicated to the issue of bullying (stopbullying.gov). Celebrities and pop culture icons have joined the anti-bullying movement, including Lady Gaga who started the Born this Way Foundation to “promote kindness and resiliency” (Pascoe 2013, 88). Dan Savage and his partner Terry Miller initiated the *It Gets Better* campaign as a response to gay youth suicide; the project has generated over 50,000 videos as well as much scholarly attention. The IGB archive includes a number of contributions from The White House, including Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton, Vice President Joe Biden and President Barack Obama. Celebrity backed non-profits such as Stars Stand Up Against Bullying, Stomp Out Bullying, and United Against Bullying have formed to address the issue. The 2011 documentary *Bully* puts a spotlight on the issue of peer-to-peer bullying in schools. The documentary also inspired The Bully Project, where a wide range of resources and materials are available on the topic. In 2013 Jessie Klein wrote *The Bully Society*, an academic book that claims that we live in a society that is characterized by bullying. Bullying registers so directly to the plight of LGBTQ youth that the term has even been co-opted by conservative groups rallying against LGBTQ protections. For example, in Idaho, conservatives advertised with the slogan “Add No Words: Stand Up to Bullying” against 2015 legislation that would have added “gender” and “sexual orientation” protections into the state’s Human Rights Act. All of these discursive sites come together to present bullying as a “recent” phenomenon. Not only is the issue of bullying not “new” but the resurgence of an interest in addressing the issue of bullying is tied to today’s post-gay politics.

BULLYING POLICY UNPACKED

The issue of bullying is complex. On one level, as a queer scholar and educator, I am in favor of advocating on behalf of LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming students in school settings in whatever form that may take. Although uneven, in the last ten years many changes have been implemented in U.S. schools that have altered the lives of LGBTQ students in positive ways. These include anti-bullying measures in schools; an increase in school commitment to Gay Straight Alliances (GSA’s); an increase in social media spaces designed for pro-queer advocacy; the *It Gets Better Project* archive;

policies that support “out” LGBTQ teachers; LGBTQ inclusive curriculum; and policies that support trans-student lives, including the establishment of gender neutral bathrooms (Quinn and Meiners 2013). In a culture permeated with homophobia and transphobia, the implementation of anti-bullying laws and hate crime legislation are seductive with their claim to protect the marginalized and disenfranchised student and punish aggression in the classroom setting. However, there is another consideration to be made in the enactment of anti-bullying measures and hate crime legislation and that is whether these solutions make an attempt to get at the root of the problem (Quinn and Meiners 2013). When anti-bullying legislation is framed as necessary to protect youth in schools, it is hard to disagree. Although anti-bullying protections have drawn positive attention to the struggles of LGBTQ youth, they should not be taken for granted as a universal good (much like same-sex marriage and gay and lesbian participation in the military, as I have elaborated on in other chapters). There is no question that in a certain sense, many of these changes as well as the additional attention placed on LGBTQ youths’ lives are positive. However, these shifts come amidst increased privatization, increased surveillance, and criminalization in today’s schools – thereby making these “successes” more ambiguous.

The increased privatization of schools – the closing of public schools and the opening of charter schools – has had an impact on the school labor force. Particularly relevant is that the move from public schools to charter schools brings with it fewer unionized teachers and more and more teachers whose jobs are less secure. This has a dramatic impact upon school culture. “Schools are increasingly sites of unprotected and

temporary labor” (Quinn and Meiners 2013, 162). The protected or non-protected status of teachers has implications for the resources teachers feel able to give their students. Quinn and Meiners’ research suggests that teachers and other adults are less likely to advocate on behalf of queer youth working in a school system that does not have due process procedures for teachers in place. In these circumstances, teachers are also less likely to be “out” in the classroom, concerned that their contract will not be renewed as a consequence. The shifting terrain that educators and administrators face under increased privatization and less job security significantly factors into their ability (or lack thereof) to be advocates for and provide adequate resources to LGBTQ students.

According to the 2009 School Climate Survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) 84.6 percent of LGBT students reported being harassed verbally, 40.1 percent reported physical abuse, and 18.8 reported being physically assaulted in a one year timespan because of their sexual orientation. The numbers are equally high for LGBT students reporting harassment, abuse and assault because of their gender expression. The high rates of interpersonal violence are not unrelated to the dispensation of structural and state violence. In 2009 GLSEN released another report that focused on LGBT students of color. Called *Shared Differences: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students of Color in our Nation’s Schools*, this study identified how the erasure and marginalization of LGBT youth of color is endemic to school culture:

Few LGBT students of color had access to LGBT-inclusive curricular resources in school. Less than a fifth of students had been taught about LGBT-related people, history, or events in their classes, or had such information available in

their textbooks (14% each). Furthermore, only 38% reported that they could access LGBT-related resources in their school library. Less than a fifth of all LGBT students of color (18%) reported that their school had a comprehensive policy to address in-school harassment and assault, which provided specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. (quoted in Quinn and Meiners 2013, 155)

This research calls attention to the role of the state in creating the conditions that exacerbate the possibility for interpersonal violence (Quinn and Meiners 2013). “Lack of access to LGBTQ adults, teachers, and administrators who have been educated about LGBTQ rights and lives, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and other resources create environments in which interpersonal acts of homophobia or transphobia are rife” (Quinn and Meiners 2013). That there are important linkages to be made between interpersonal violence and structural violence is almost always missing in both media representations of anti-gay bullying as well as legislative interventions.

Since anti-bullying measures have become commonplace in schools, and some time has passed since their enactment in order to evaluate the impact of these measures on LGBTQ students’ lives, increasingly, the scholarly response has been critical. Quinn and Meiners, for example, equate anti-bullying laws with gay marriages, and note that both are a call for assimilation when the queer activist movement should be advocating to move “beyond ‘equality’” (Quinn 2013, 150). The “beyond equality” movement is a counter to post-gay ideology in that equality and assimilation are not the end goals. Rather, a “queer future demands that the public, and queer critiques of the private, have the potential to challenge neoliberal agendas while also imagining and building a future in which youth are not harmed for difference” (152). As is common within LGBTQ

social justice movements within the post-gay era, anti-bullying legislation is assimilative in its response. The concern for legitimation, rather than liberation and collective transformation, is consistently found within the tenets of mainstream LGBTQ organizing today. The prioritization of inclusion in the military and the institution of marriage speak to this as well. In the realm of school culture, the acceptance of many of the LGBTQ anti-bullying measures as they exist are a de facto acceptance of the status quo. Rather, anti-bullying measures as they stand, and understood as resolving the problem of bullying in schools, distract attention away from, as Meiners and Quinn put it,

Frontal assaults on teacher's unions, bipartisan support of the privatization of schools through charters, consistently 'disproportionately' high suspension and expulsion rates for Black and Latino students, LGBTQ educational justice movements are being officially invited to partially participate, and to de facto legitimate this 'new normal' in education. (Quinn and Meiners 2013, 165)

Quinn and Meiners point out that interpersonal violence against LGBTQ youth and gender non-conforming youth is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the increased attention and interest the popular press has taken with the issue of bullying. As they state:

These acts of interpersonal and structural heteronormativity or transphobia are neither new nor surprising. Just as misogyny and White supremacy shape the institution of schooling, heteronormativity, the structures and systems 'that legitimize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and 'natural' within society,' is pervasive in most institutions, including schools. Fear of the queer, or all the meanings and associations attached to nonheteronormativity, leads schools to suppress teachers and creates cultures that facilitate harm toward gender nonconforming and nonheteronormative youth. Trans- and homophobic

cultures are persistent, and largely still normalized. (Quinn and Meiners 2013, 151)

In addition, there are many problems with the way in which anti-bullying measures are framed, including naming the issue as a peer-to-peer, or individualized problem. As Payne and Smith argue,

These public dialogues around in-school harassment and the marginalization of LGBTQ youth reduce the complexities of peer-to-peer aggression to ‘anti-social behaviour where one student wields power over [a victim],’ and conceptualize ‘the problem of bullying in terms of [the] individual or family pathology’ of a singular [aggressive] student. This definition of ‘the problem’ reproduces bullying discourses, which, as Ringrose and Renold argue, ‘are now so accepted . . . in schools that they have gained hegemonic status. (Payne and Smith, 2013, 2)

The linkage made in anti-bullying discourse between lesbian and gay identity and the notion of victimhood collapses those two categories until they are indistinguishable. The constantly reinforced idea that bullies are “bad” – often with blame placed on students’ poor social skills or home circumstances – and that those that are bullied are the innocent “victims,” distracts from the role enforced heteronormativity plays in these interactions.

As Bennett writes,

Bullying becomes intelligible through a multitude of discourses including, among others, heterosexism, homophobia, masculinity and gender conformity. We do a greater service to these lost voices by attending to these complexities, not simplifying them. As Halberstam notes, few people blame heterosexuality for suicides. (Bennett 2013, 179)

Halberstam brings up an interesting point. Suicide is not singularly a LGBTQ youthful occurrence. People of all sexual identities, including heterosexuals, commit suicide. Yet,

it would be unthinkable to attribute a straight-identified person's suicide to their sexuality. That this is true, points to the already-deviant status of sexual otherness. It is reductive to attribute suicide to one's sexual identity status – and further marginalizes and isolates already deemed “deviant” individuals.

Puar situates the rhetoric common among the reporting of the rash of gay youth suicides in the fall of 2010, as well as the confluence of factors that made these deaths worthy of reporting on at all, along with IGB, within what she calls queer neoliberalism (not unlike post-gay discourse). Puar's work on the assumptions about and limits of bodily capacity requires a rethinking of normative assumptions regarding health and life. Puar also calls for a rethinking of suicide itself. She asks, “Why is suicide constituted as the ultimate loss of life” (2011, 152)? As a faculty member at Rutgers, the school where Tyler Clementi attended, one of the more well reported gay youth suicides, Puar had an inside look at the local circumstances as well as the local reporting of his death. Puar has written direct responses to both the media attention granted to gay youth suicide in the fall of 2010, as well as her take on the *It Gets Better* campaign, which I mentioned previously.

Bullying should not be framed as a peer-to-peer or individualized issue, rather, it is a product of institutionalized and systemic forms of heteronormativity and gender policing – often found embedded in school curricula or in teacher's own worldviews. The constant reification of the aggressor/victim model fails to address the complexity of youthful lived experience, and continues to frame LGBTQ people as those whose lives are necessarily filled with struggle and oppression. Rather than continue to assert this

fatalist understanding of LGBTQ lives, we might consider bringing forward celebratory stories of LGBTQ youth. As Bennett argues, “Although struggle and domination are certainly parts of many of our everyday lives, enabling more liveliness and celebratory discourse can generate ways of being not yet imagined” (2013, 180). Part of the work of queer worldmaking, then, is to break the cycle of the way stories of LGBTQ lives get told. By highlighting the celebratory moments, we might participate differently in what seems to be a deterministic cycle. By participating differently, we leave open the possibility that the stories LGBTQ lives might get told differently, and thus understood not as victims of oppression but as complex human subjects. As Payne and Smith note,

We propose (as have others) that bullying behaviors are not anti-social but rather highly social acts deeply entrenched in the perpetuation of cultural norms and values – significantly, those norms that require a fixed relationship between (hetero) gender, sex and sexuality and the maintaining of ‘gender-coherence’ through this ‘constellation.’ (Payne and Smith 2013, 21).

Jessie Klein’s thesis in *The Bully Society* is that there are three key factors in everyday school culture that are not often talked about. The first is the issue of gender policing, whereby students are pressured to conform to gender expectations by their peers, teacher, and administrators. The second norm in schools that goes unsaid are masculinity imperatives, or the insistence of hypermasculinity as the dominant gender norm that is enforced by the gender police. The third is that bullying is a norm unto itself. She argues that bullying itself is a way in which students elevate their social status over others – in ways that permeate our society as a whole, inside and outside of the classroom. Klein interestingly pairs the values associated with masculinity and capitalism together as

factors that contribute to what she calls the bully society. Relatedly, Klein's research reveals an unnamed trend among perpetrators of extreme violence in schools (school shootings) in that more often than not the aggressors were bullied themselves – often for not conforming to societal standards in terms of masculinity or for being targeted as homosexual, regardless of the way they identify themselves. Seemingly, to alleviate the issue of bullying in schools, the demands of hypermasculinity as well as the school conditions mandated by regular gender policing must be put into the mix.

Along with anti-bullying measures, in many schools “gay days” have become mainstream in the academic calendar. “Gay days” are often an annual event where schools celebrate their commitment to diversity by highlighting and recognizing gay students as a marginalized identity group. Often, these events are promoted under monikers of “appreciation,” “celebration,” or “tolerance” of those outside the “norm,” as in, varying from heterosexual, White and American born (Payne and Smith 2013). The “gay days” celebrations have been critiqued for raising awareness of certain groups without offering critical examination of concepts like “diversity” and “multiculturalism.” Sara Ahmed's thoughts on multiculturalism and diversity open up an important critical discussion. Ahmed talks about multiculturalism as a fantasy, whereby the institution or organization claims to be multicultural but in doing so masks the power structure at work under the “illusion of friendship and civility” (2008). She notes, “The multicultural organisation wants to be seen as diverse; as bringing everyone together; as respecting difference, as committed to equality. Such an organisation would use brochures of colourful faces; diversity would be a sign of the very qualities or attributes of the

organisation” (Ahmed 2008). There are consequences to approaching diversity and multiculturalism uncritically. The institution or organization that claims to be diverse or multicultural is able to mask racism, violence and inequality under the guise of: “how can you experience racism when we are committed to diversity” (Ahmed 2008)? Whiteness becomes hegemonic as the discourses of diversity and multiculturalism persist.

“Diversity as an ego ideal conceals experiences of racism, which means that multiculturalism is a fantasy which supports the hegemony of whiteness” (Ahmed 2008).

The same can be said about concealing homophobia amidst discourses of multiculturalism and diversity in the form of annual “gay days” celebrations. In this way “gay days” celebrations “leave oppressive structures intact, and neutralize the harsh realities of education, economic, and political disempowerment” (García 1999, 303). As Wendy Brown argues, these measures of tolerance do little to shift existing power dynamics:

When, for example, middle and high schoolers are urged to tolerate one another’s race, ethnicity, culture, religion or sexual orientation, there is no suggestion that the differences at issue, or the identities through which these differences are negotiated, have been socially and historically constituted and are themselves the effect of power and hegemonic norms, or even of certain discourses about race, ethnicity, sexuality and culture. Rather, difference itself is what students learn they must tolerate (Brown 2009, 16).

Acceptance or tolerance should not be markers of progress. In this framework someone must always be accepted or tolerated, and the dominant group is the one naming those that are allowed acceptance or tolerance.

Suzanna Danuta Walters' book *The Tolerance Trap* emphasizes the extent to which the end goal of tolerance is a disservice to the cause of LGBTQ equality. "We tolerate . . . that which we would rather avoid. Tolerance is not an embrace but a resigned shrug, or worse, that air kiss of faux familiarity that barely covers up the shiver of disgust" (Walters 2014, 2). In addition, while the events that "celebrate" difference, tokenize all groups, there is an additional level of isolation for LGBTQ students because of the types of events that are often chosen for commemoration. Often, the kinds of events that commemorate LGBTQ lives have to do with tragedy and death – common tropes include HIV/AIDS, violence against gay individuals (a production of The Laramie Project, for example), or memorializing LGBTQ suicides. The focus on disease, death, murder, and violence works to emphasize LGBTQ people as both deviant and victims (Payne and Smith 2013).

The organization Gender JUST has been working to contextualize anti-bullying measures within larger narratives about urban development and the move to privatize public schools (Gender JUST). Along with researchers like Payne and Smith, Gender JUST is also concerned with separating the issue of bullying from larger systemic and institutional narratives about school violence. Part of their hesitation has to do with the increase in surveillance that the implementation of these anti-bullying measures require. Gender JUST argues that reporting on bully behavior, and victim status, is akin to initiating criminal records for juveniles, in a way that is "marking students much longer than their school lives" (Gender JUST 2013, 46). In this frame, the end result of many of

the bullying initiatives is an increased tracking of bullying in schools, but not a decrease in the incidents themselves. As Gender JUST argues,

Although youth violence is a very serious issue, the real bullies we face in our schools take the form of systemic violence perpetrated by the school system itself: sex education that either ignores, insults, or criminalizes queer and trans* sex (or punishes youth for even advocating for queer and trans* sex ed in the first place), alongside a curriculum that denies our history, with the country's most militarized school district, a process of privatization that displaces us, increasing class sizes, and the shutting down of schools. All of this undermines both our education and our safety. The national calls to end the violence against queer and trans* youth completely ignore the violent nature of our educational experience. (Gender JUST 2013, 47)

In addition, the anti-bullying measures as they are implemented right now solve the problem of violence with increased violence as a solution. For example, schools have implemented increased zero-tolerance policies and/or Hate Crime penalties to remedy aggressive behavior, however; these measures reinforce the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Gender JUST 2014, 47). Gender JUST defines the “school-to-prison pipeline” as the system that punishes students for aggressive behavior or acting out punitively, pushing them into the prison-industrial-complex. The increasing number of zero tolerance policies implemented in schools is one factor that has contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline (Harvard Educational Review 2012). As Payne and Smith put it, “Reduction [of bullying] is a measurable outcome . . . [that] merely *contains, regulates, and manages* violence rather than addresses it” (Payne and Smith 2013, 10). Another problem with anti-bullying measures as they are currently implemented, as identified by Gender JUST, is that they target already vulnerable students. For example, in the instance that a gender non-

conforming student or a transgender identified student is bullied and uses some form of violence to protect themselves, under a zero-tolerance policy the bullied student is expelled. As Gender JUST argues:

It is critical to remember that we face violence as youth, as people of color, as people living in poverty, as people with disabilities, as queers, as trans*, and gender nonconforming people. We can't separate our identities, and any approach to preventing violence must take our multiple realities into consideration. (Gender JUST 2013, 46)

West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy come to similar conclusions when they note, “Looking at bullying as the interactional reproduction of larger structural inequalities indicates that current popular and academic discourses about bullying might be missing some important elements, resulting in responses to bullying that are largely individualistic and symbolic rather than structural and systemic” (West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy 2013, 89). Lythgoe’s research on Michigan’s anti-bullying law known as Matt’s Law also reveals “the necessity for a promiscuous approach to public policy among LGBTQ scholars, activists, and allies; putting an end to the violence of bullying demands that we embrace systemic critiques of identitarian public policy as a viable tool for social justice” (Lythgoe 2013, 132). Matt’s Law is a particularly interesting case in that it originally passed in the Michigan legislature with an amendment attached that protected religious freedom. The amendment was met with an array of response from a number of national media sources including *Time*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Colbert Report*. The negative attention prompted Michigan legislatures to reopen the bill and the attached “license to bully” amendment was eventually removed. Lythgoe argues that this series of events made it seem as though the passage of Matt’s Law

without the religious freedom amendment attached was a progressive victory. However, as Lythgoe argues, “Matt’s Law is at best a pyrrhic victory for those advocating on behalf of LGBTQ young people, and it therefore runs the risk of assuaging the public’s need to ‘do something’ about bullying while offering students, schools and educators little in the way of substantive interventions” (Lythgoe 2013, 133).

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT RACE, GENDER & NEOLIBERALISM

Bullying is not only a gay issue, it is also a raced and gendered issue – the suicides reported by the media are often those of white boys, and bullying itself is often deployed by boys at often straight boys with the aim of naming someone as lacking masculinity. “Perhaps not surprisingly, 90 percent of random school shootings have involved straight-identified boys who have been relentlessly humiliated with homophobic remarks (West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy 2013). Pacey and Flynn’s research suggests that white males are disproportionately portrayed in the news as “victims” of school-based bullying (Pacey and Flynn 2012). Based on news reports, it would seem that white males, gay or perceived to be gay, are the most likely target of in-school bullying and most susceptible to severe mental health consequences (like suicide).

Another issue at hand is the potential uneven distribution of consequences meted out to those named bullies or aggressors. As Quinn and Meiners put it, “it is not a stretch to predict that anti-bullying laws will be unevenly implemented and that certain students will continue to be disproportionately targeted and punished” (2013, 159). In addition, it seems as though Black and Latino students in particular feel the consequences of the implementation of anti-bullying measures.

With stalled and impoverished conversations of the state's abandonment of any form of wealth redistribution for K-12 public education, frontal assaults on teacher's unions, bipartisan support of the privatization of schools through charters, consistently 'disproportionately' high suspension and expulsion rates for Black and Latino/a students, LGBT educational justice movements are being officially invited to partially participate, and to de facto legitimate this 'new normal' in education. (Quinn and Meiners 2013, 165)

Not only is the unequal distribution of punishment a raced issue, it also pits LGBTQ advocacy against other forms of difference. However, often LGBTQ struggles are intersectional, in that many LGBTQ students are also Black or Latino or otherwise identified. In other words, LGBTQ advocacy cannot advance in a bubble, but must consider our multiple and overlapping identities. As Audre Lorde so eloquently states, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (quoted in Quinn and Meiners 2013, 165).

CONCLUSION

During the 2012 presidential inaugural ceremonies, *Glee* performers Darren Criss, Amber Riley, and Naya Rivera were invited by the First Lady to perform at the Kids' Inaugural Concert. The public partnership with the presidency came two years after *Glee*'s anti-bullying storyline. The centrality of the issue of bullying to Obama's presidential platform makes these two likely partners. This example demonstrates *Glee*'s centrality as potential influencers in the youth market. The larger message of liberal pluralism present in *Glee* also makes the show's singers a likely fit for the inauguration ceremonies. *Glee*'s group of misfits are called upon by the presidency not just as performers, but as purveyors of a specific targeted message of liberal pluralism and

“acceptance.” The multiple platforms that *Glee* accesses – the inaugural stage, the television show, social media, comment boards, and iTunes – additionally intensify *Glee* fans’ relationship with the brand. For example, each week songs from the show make their way to gleethemusic.com as well as iTunes for purchase. On pop culture sites, comment boards, twitter, and Facebook, *Glee* has a social media presence. Fans of *Glee* also run a number of fan forums online. On gleeforum.com, for example, one can do everything from comment on the previous night’s episode, chat with fellow *Glee* fans, or follow the future pursuits of cast members. During the series finale *Glee* cast members took to twitter to live tweet using the hashtag #Glee. Amber Riley, who played Mercedes, tweeted using the hashtag #goodbyejee. By providing multiple opportunities for *Glee* fans to interact with the show *Glee* succeeds in gaining fan investment in the show and in its multiple alternate ventures.

Glee is a complex cultural texts. On one level, *Glee* purports to be pro-gay, antiracist and pro-feminist. It also attempts to normalize difference. Yet, in doing so, it reproduces age-old stereotypes about sexuality. For example, that gay bashers are always closet cases or that gay people are inevitably victims of oppression. It also reduces the issue of bullying down to the simplest common denominator – and sends the unequivocal message that bullying is an individualized problem. In this way, *Glee* ultimately aligns with post-gay politics. All of the *Glee* members, as disparate as their identities are, are presented as though they have equal opportunity and access privilege similarly. Kurt is framed as a unique person who faces specific challenges because of his sexuality. The show glosses over the possibility that Kurt’s life is altered because of structural

inequalities. Oppression itself is normalized, as each of the Glee kids face their own unique circumstances, and the show thus suggests that oppression is an everyday part of one's teenage years. Thus, overcoming bullying, or overcoming homophobia, is likened to growing up. This is the same message as the original *It Gets Better* video by Dan and Terry. Yet, neither addresses the normalized culture of gender policing or enforced hypermasculinity in schools that ought to be put front and center of the solution to "bullying." The post-gay fantasy that *Glee* presents, where anti-bullying student representatives roam the halls seeking out potential aggressors, ultimately does a disservice to the complex issue of bullying in schools.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation my primary objective was to trace the emergence of post-gay discourse on television. In the introduction, I laid out the political and historical context that allowed for and encouraged the emergence of post-gay television. In chapter one, I used *Army Wives* as a case study to investigate the emergence of post-gay television to do with the military. In chapter two, I used *Modern Family* to examine post-gay television on the topic of same-sex marriage. In chapter three, I used *Glee* as a case study to get at the way in which post-gay television had taken up the issue of LGBTQ bullying in schools.

In each of these instances television was responding to or providing a commentary on policy shifts or social issues to do with gays and lesbians. In *Army Wives* the lesbian storyline emerged on the heels of the repeal of DADT. In *Modern Family* Cam and Mitch wed directly after the repeal of DOMA. Although Cam and Mitch were a featured couple for four seasons it was only after the repeal of DOMA that the show considered hosting a wedding. In *Glee*, the narrative story arc on bullying in schools was a response to the rash of gay teen suicides that were widely reported on in the fall of 2010. In each of these cases we also saw post-gay discourse intersect with the trends of privatization under neoliberalism. Television as a private entity had taken to filling a public service role. In *Army Wives*, the public/private partnership between the Pentagon and the television show served as a public relations ploy to demonstrate that the U.S. Army is a welcome place for lesbian soldiers. In this case, the soap opera genre was mobilized as a recruitment tool for the U.S. Army. In the case of *Modern Family* the

show and the network combined efforts to provide widespread outreach on behalf of marriage equality. In *Glee*, the television show intervened in what they perceived to be the problem of LGBTQ bullying. Understanding the relationship between LGBTQ policy decision-making and television is at the heart of this dissertation. By unpacking the ways in which post-gay discourse takes shape on television my hope is that this project assists scholars and television viewers in deciphering the post-gay fantasies that television provides.

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Appendix

ⁱⁱ Roland's wife is Captain Joan Burke. Roland is an Army wife in that he is enmeshed in the friend's circle of the Army wives.

ⁱⁱⁱ Television made for premium cable or internet based television such as Netflix and Amazon have recently started to introduce masculine lesbian characters including later seasons of *The L Word*, *Transparent*, and *Orange is the New Black*.

^{iv} The character of Shane (played by Katherine Moennig) is talked about as the most "butch" of the central characters. However, I agree with Moore and Schilt when they note that Shane is only contextually "butch" when compared to the lack of masculinity in the remainder of the main cast. Instead of registering as butch, I agree with Moore and Schilt when they name Shane as a "soft-butch/inbetweener," with the term inbetweener attempting to capture her slippage between butch and femme (2006).

^v *Glee* received a Golden Globe in 2010 for "best musical or comedy television series," and in 2011 Chris Colfer (Kurt Hummel) won for "best supporting actor" and Jane Lynch (Sue Sylvester) won for "best supporting actress."