Wed-Locked: Television and the Acceptance of Same-sex Relationships

Cory Albertson

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ABSTRACT

2011 was the first year the majority of the American public were in favor of same-sex marriage—a nine point (and largest year-to-year) increase from 2010. That year gave the LGBTQ community a crucial win in the hard-fought cultural war over government validation of same-sex relationships. Not so coincidentally, 2010 saw mass media, specifically network television, depict same-sex relationships like never before. New shows like Modern Family, Glee and The Good Wife hit their ratings zenith alongside stalwarts like Grey’s Anatomy, Desperate Housewives and House. But were the relationships depicted diverse in terms of roles, race, class and gender? Or did they resemble the heteronormative ideal of the white, upper middle-class relationship and family? Through a discourse analysis of popular, scripted network television shows from the 2010-2011 season, I found the depictions to powerfully create a “normal” same-
sex relationship towards a heteronormative ideal. Both the same-sex women and men’s relationships were heteronormative in that their statuses and roles within the relationship adhered to the classic masculine/feminine binary. However, the same-sex women’s relationships were queerer, exhibiting sexual fluidity and labels beyond gay and straight. Still, the women maintained Western, feminine appearances supporting Laura Mulvey’s male gaze. The same-sex men’s relationships fully supported Jasbir Puar’s notion of the “exceptional homosexual.” Beyond their roles, the men’s relationships were heteronormative by being same-raced/white, upper-class, and, in two out of the three couples, having children. Ultimately, all the depictions exemplified Monique Wittig’s frustration that historical “discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak on their terms.”

INDEX WORDS: Gay Marriage, Same-sex marriage, Heteronormativity, Visual culture, Television, Parasocial interaction
WED-LOCKED: TELEVISION AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

by

CORY ALBERTSON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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DEDICATION

For those who inspired me with their walks down the aisle:

Katie and Nick, Daniela and Didier, Stacy and Dave, Lorie and Greg

And for those who brought my earliest friends to life:

Jim Henson, Frank Oz,

Patrick Stewart, Marina Sirtis and Gates McFadden
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At its core, this project is about rebellion. It is about rebelling so as to find one’s unique voice amid societal pressures to “talk” a certain way. During my journey with this project, I have been lucky enough to be surrounded by a chorus of rebels, each of whom push against the “normal” boundaries of society in their own way. They have also pushed me, guided me and supported me in finding my voice. In committee member Dr. Jung Ha Kim I found compassion, thoughtfulness and intelligence. She has acted as a sort of “vocal coach,” inspiring me to become a sociologist 15 years ago. She continues to inspire me today. In committee co-chair Dr. Griff Tester, I found a kindred spirit in that we share a love of music, dessert, and “queerness.” More importantly, though, we’ve shared life stories and offered each other emotional support during our respective struggles. I am thankful for his friendship. Committee co-chair Dr. Wendy Simonds and committee member Dr. Anthony Hatch too proved integral to me honing my voice as both offered the greatest gift any sociologist could ask for: new tones and perspectives which elevated my message. In addition to my committee members, I am indebted to a chosen few who nurtured, supported and, in general, kept me safe and sane. My friends and colleagues Dr. Moon Charania and Dr. Amanda Jungels both pulled me back from the scary, dissertation ledge multiple times with their empathy—they always understood and were willing to endure my bouts of insecurity with me. And Katie Vesser, Philip Barnard and Alicia Anderson provided me with the stability of their unwavering friendship—my love for them is endless. Lastly, I have to thank my mother, father and stepmother who, in their unflinching acceptance and support of me, unknowingly fought against societal convention. All of these rebels form my family which, in itself, challenges heteronormative ideals. For their willingness to walk this path with me, they have my unending thanks and admiration.
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INTRODUCTION: OPPOSITES ATTRACT

“Everything is blooming most recklessly; if it were voices instead of colors, there would be an unbelievable shrieking into the heart of the night.” – Ranier Maria Rilke

On October 29, 2011, I stood at the foot of an old antebellum house looking out at a gathered crowd—friends and family. They were divided by a gravel walk, which, in a few moments, would be the center of attention. Dressed in a black suit and tie, I looked grown up, confident. Still, I felt nervous—I wanted everything to go smoothly, to be perfect.

Just as my anxiety reached boiling, six groomsmen appeared. Then, five bridesmaids followed. They all took their time reaching me, each offering a slight, knowing grin as they passed. With all of them standing behind me, it was time. I took a deep inhale as the first chords of a guitar and mandolin version of the Beatles’ “I’ve Just Seen a Face” began to play.

Then, the “face” myself and everyone else was waiting for appeared—Katie. She was dressed in a high-collared ivory gown. Watching her glide toward me, I was entranced.

As she stepped to my right, I realized I was entering into a situation I really knew nothing about. Regardless, I had to begin.

“Welcome everyone,” I said. “It’s nice to see all of you. It’s especially nice to see all of you here for this occasion—to celebrate the love between Katie and Nick…”

I admit the pomp and pageantry got to me that day—it was beautiful. However, I couldn’t shake a deep internal conflict. I had always been wary of romantic relationships, especially those that resulted in a wedding. I watched my mother do what was expected of her as a woman. She
entered into three marriages, which, at various points, made me, my father, two subsequent stepfathers, and her miserable.

Still, as Katie and Nick’s officiant, I felt that pressure to conform to “normal,” to want marriage for others and myself. Though Katie beautifully made the ceremony her own, the expected touchstones of a wedding were still there. And here I was one of those touchstones “officially” participating in an exclusionary, normalizing ritual I had rarely seen work.

Being a sociologist, I knew the culprit of my conflict: heteronormativity. Adrienne Rich’s treatise on lesbian existence first introduced the notion as “compulsory heterosexuality” which names heterosexuality as natural and obligatory (1980). Rich pushed heterosexuality beyond an identity, beyond the personal. She argued that it was an institution with its own regime of power (1980). Michael Warner broadened Rich’s discussion by formalizing heteronormativity into the lexicon. He defined the term as a “totalizing tendency” whereby “institutions, structures, and practical orientations [make] heterosexuality not only coherent—that is organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (Warner, 1991; 8; Berlant & Warner, 1998: 565).

Perhaps due to its roots in queer theory, heteronormativity is notoriously vague and fluid. Still, there are some central characteristics. At its core, heteronormativity hinges on the idea of two genders being necessary for all facets of life. Thus, romantic relationships should only exist between men and women. Implied here is that sexual activity requires a penis and a vagina. Also implied here is that gender results directly from sex assignment at birth, based on biological criteria. Gender standards stipulate that masculinity revolve around being active, aggressive and sexually assertive, while femininity should revolve around being passive, nurturing and emotional (Mulvey, 1975; Seidman, 2002). These roles then correspond with what Western society has long considered the ideal family: the passive, emotional woman is the caregiver and
homemaker while the active, aggressive man is the breadwinner. Implied here is that the man and woman have (ideally) biological children.

Heteronormativity, though its own institution, seeps into other institutions as well. Perhaps most broadly, religion and government have introduced and policed the heteronormative idea that marriage is the glorious summit of all romantic relationships and families. Wrapped up in that notion was the idea that women found “moral meaning” through marriage (Coontz, 1992: 164). In terms of heteronormativity’s intersections with race and class, the Jim Crow South maintained laws that kept blacks segregated and impoverished. Black women especially had little choice but to challenge heteronormativity and work outside the home. They could not afford heteronormativity’s breadwinner/homemaker model. But neither could poor whites. In fact, the only persons who could afford heteronormativity’s requirements were white, middle and upper middle-class couples (Coontz, 1992). By being an institution and through its intersections with other institutions, heteronormativity goes beyond personal relationships. It maintains race, class and gender divisions.

In short, all manner of heterosexual practices considered “normal”—from types of sex to the roles and arrangements within a (coupled) romantic relationship or family—herald heteronormativity. Consequently, heteronormative standards leave gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, the bicurious, queers and transsexuals, along with many different races and ethnicities, understood to be “abnormal.” Rich notes that any other sexual arrangement is thus labeled “deviant, as pathological or as emotionally and sensually deprived (1980: 652).

Like Rich, I think of heteronormativity as a spectrum. On one end lies the heteronormative ideal: a heterosexual, same-raced, middle class, married, monogamous couple with children living in the suburbs. Along the spectrum, any combination of those characteristics
can take place to make a romantic relationship heteronormative in some aspects and not in others. For example, “modern” relationships and families, though they have moved away from the conventional heteronormative paradigm, often tap into various aspects of gender normative practice. However, it should be noted that the claiming of heterosexuality, if nothing else, brings heteronormative privilege. As a sociologist interested in queer representation, I find myself closer to the nonheteronormative end of the spectrum—a white, middle-class, city-dwelling gay singleton who is unsure if he wants more characteristics from the opposing side.

1.1 A Shift and a Spark

On May 20, 2011, eight months prior to Katie and Nick’s wedding, Gallup released a historic poll. For the first time, a majority of Americans (53 percent) favored legalizing marriage for same-sex couples. Perhaps more interesting, though, is that the nine point increase from the previous year is the largest year-to-year increase since Gallup began tracking the issue in 1996 (Gallup, 2011). Because adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender are estimated to comprise only 4 percent of the U.S. population (with only 1.7 percent of that number explicitly identifying as gay or lesbian), any polls cited about sentiments toward marriage largely reflect the feelings of heterosexuals (Chandra et al., 2011).

At Katie and Nick’s wedding, I had not reconciled my place within the heteronormative structure of marriage. But it appeared, according to Gallup, heterosexuals had reconciled my place within the structure for me. Apparently, heterosexuals had dismissed their moral misgivings that marriage be between a man and a woman. They had opened the gates to their marital territory so I and all my queer brothers and sisters could participate in the ultimate spectacle of heteronormativity.
On May 27, 2011—six days after the poll about same-sex marriage—Gallup released another poll. U.S. adults, on average, believed that 25 percent of the population is gay or lesbian. Specifically, 17 percent thought gays and lesbians accounted for 20-25 percent while 35 percent thought the number lie above 25 percent (Gallup, 2011). About the findings, Gallup’s Lymari Morales (2011) said, “Combined with Americans’ record support for legal gay relations and same-sex marriage, it is clear that America’s gay population—no matter the size—is becoming a larger part of America’s mainstream consciousness.” Morales hints at an important paradox: minority representation stokes the moral panic around minority access to rights while it simultaneously sparks mainstream desire for greater minority representation. The catch, though, is that greater representation has to be palatable to the mainstream. With LGBTQ representation, same-sex relationships must assimilate within heteronormative standards.

But at what cost? Discussion about heteronormativity and its effects on same-sex relationships have been brewing in earnest at least since the 1990s. Before I delve into those discussions, though, it is important to note that scholars have found significant differences between same-sex romantic relationships and heterosexual relationships (Kitzinger and Coyle, 1995). Mostly, differences emerge in terms of living together, sexual practices and roles. Cohabitation appeared to be far less common for lesbian and gay male couples than for married, heterosexual couples (Kitzinger and Coyle, 1995). Also, gay men had greater sexual non-exclusivity than heterosexual couples. This accounted for more sex within and outside the coupled relationships. Lesbians, though, had less sexual activity than heterosexual couples (Kitzinger and Coyle, 1995). Lastly, lesbians and gay men typically rejected the heteronormative masculine/feminine roles in favor of equal status and power (Kitzinger and Coyle, 1995).
Of course, now, with same-sex marriage a reality in the U.S., there are new parameters for how same-sex couples define and discuss their relationships. Unfortunately, the effects of same-sex marriage have not been explored thoroughly. One study suggests that the U.S. LGBTQ community is more conflicted about same-sex marriage than is typically reported by mainstream media. By surveying 288 members of the Massachusetts LGBTQ community, Lannutti (2005) found consistent tension about same-sex marriage. Some respondents felt legalized marriage would make the community stronger, while others said it would weaken the community due to the assimilation heteronormativity requires. In the U.K., civil partnerships, which have afforded equal legal rights, have been in use since 2005. However, same-sex couples there felt considerable ambivalence stemming from concern over assimilation into heteronormative frameworks (Rolfe and Peel, 2011). Research from the U.K. also suggests that same-sex couples struggle in adhering to heteronormative standards, in not “selling out” to the heterosexual model, and in carving out their own unique relationships (Goodwin and Butler, 2009).

Theorists have also grappled with this conflict. In recent years, heteronormativity has created a theoretical web consisting of related concepts of homonormativity and homonationalism. Homonormativity, a concept articulated by Lisa Duggan, has arisen in tandem with the rise of the gay rights movement, specifically the marriage equality movement. Centrally, it refers to how members of the gay community have instituted a form of “politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative forms but upholds and sustains them” (2002: 179). In the aftermath of the AIDS crisis, Duggan argues that a new “gay moralism” has emerged with a central focus on “domesticity.” Now, “responsible” gay men and lesbians hold monogamous marriage as the aspirational social climax (2002: 182).
Jasbir Puar (2007) furthers the concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity and ties them to nation-states, specifically the United States. She asserts that there is an important “transition” taking place in westernized countries where gay, lesbian and queer subjects are moving from being associated with death (when the stigma of HIV/AIDS was at its highest) to being associated with “ties of productivity” such as gay marriage and family. This transition has created what she calls the “exceptional homosexual” or a form of nationalized homosexuality. “Homosexual sexual exceptionalism does not necessarily contradict or undermine heterosexual sexual exceptionalism,” says Puar. “In actuality, it may support forms of heteronormativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges they require” (2007:9). Here, the “exceptional” heteronormative model has merged with the exceptional homonormative model to create homonationlism. Homonationlism regulates gayness and queerness within the state.

By the time of Katie and Nick’s wedding, I was well aware of the shifting poll numbers, the studies highlighting conflict about state-sanctioned same-sex couples, and the fierce opinions concerning the pitfalls of homonormativity and homonationalism. Now, though, the information impacted me personally. But my thoughts went beyond personal reflection. My internal conflict latched onto society’s shifts and ignited an intellectual spark, bringing me broad questions: Why were heterosexuals now “in favor” of same-sex marriage? How are these changes connected to heterosexuals’ gross miscalculations of our numbers? Are visual representations of same-sex relationships intertwined with pollsters’ findings?

1.2 Theoretical and Methodological Courtships

Social movement scholars Roscigno and Danaher (2001) remind us that media serve a central role in conveying a movement’s ideas. They also contend that media influence is more central to the rise of social movements than previous theoretical models have acknowledged.
Thrall et al. concur. They write, “Mass media are part of political opportunity. Media attention simultaneously validates movement ideas and organizations and provides an opportunity for activist groups to affect political debates (2006: 539). While social movements, as a whole, seem to be moving toward more instances where media (be it music, fashion, film or television) impact politics, the gay rights movement too seems reliant on mass media to change attitudes. Within the television sphere alone, there are powerful tastemakers such as producers, editors, writers, actors and marketers. Often, tastemakers, who are themselves members of a minority group, are keenly aware of media’s intersections with social movements. Ultimately, tastemakers’ respective talents cull together to create a platform that provides greater exposure which leads to greater public awareness as well as greater public acceptance of a movement’s cause.

“Media contact” (such as through television) with gay, lesbian and queer characters has significant and positive effects on straight viewers’ attitudes towards members of the gay community (Riggle et al., 1996; Schiappa and Hewes 2006). But while there is some research on how television (mostly news-oriented shows) depicts real life same-sex relationships, (Gamson, 1998; Jensen, 1996; Laundau, 2009; Moscowitz, 2010; Saucier and Caron, 2008), scholars have talked little about how television depicts fictional same-sex relationships. What types of same-sex romantic relationships are being depicted? What are the institutional purposes of these images? How do the images of same-sex relationships serve as modes of satisfaction for both the LGBTQ community and the heterosexual community?

Through a series of examinations of popular, scripted network television shows, *Wed-Locked* answers those questions. My project situates itself at an important, temporal intersection of visual culture and the gay rights movement’s focus on marriage. Specifically, I focus on the
2010-2011 television season. This season is positioned roughly nine months before the release of the Gallup polls discussed above. This season is also important for another reason. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation’s (GLAAD) annual “Where We are on TV” report for the 2010-2011 season reported LGBTQ characters accounted for 3.9 percent of all series regulars across the five broadcast networks of ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and The CW. At the time, this was the highest percentage recorded in the report’s then 15-year history.

Using GLAAD’s 2010-2011 “Where we are on TV” report, I examine television shows that contained LGBTQ series regulars. Also, I use shows with 10 million viewers or more. Two of those shows in particular—Modern Family and Glee—were in the midst of saturating public consciousness. Both in their second seasons, they scooped up awards, graced magazine covers and reached ratings heights they would fail to match in subsequent seasons. I examine Modern Family and Glee as well as The Good Wife, Grey’s Anatomy, Desperate Housewives and House. 1990s shows Will and Grace and Ellen similarly captured public attention, but they revolved around gay characters who were largely single. By the 2010-2011 season, all the shows used in this project except one (House) depicted consistent same-sex relationships—a telling marker of acceptance in itself.

My criteria for determining the shows translates into a focus on eleven characters who are series regulars. However, it should be noted that, in a couple of cases, their romantic relationships are with characters who are only recurring or guest stars. One of the female series regulars has three relationships with guest stars while one male series regular has a consistent relationship with a recurring guest star. Thus, those guest or recurring characters are included in my analysis. Of the six female series regulars, one identifies as a lesbian, two identify as bicurious, and one as bisexual. The remaining two women do not utilize any labels and, thus, I
often refer to them as queer. All five male series regulars identify as gay. Unfortunately, no transsexuals were depicted. Typically, I use the terms LGBQ and same-sex relationships when denoting the grouping of characters/relationships as both terms are inclusive of the variety of the depictions. In the end, I watched a total of eight same-sex relationships across 137 episodes.

I consider *Wed-Locked* a queer research project. To queer means to “frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize, to camp up heteronormative knowledges and institutions” (Sullivan, 2002: vi). Thus, this project focuses on how heteronormativity weaves its way into the depictions. *Wed-Locked* is also a historical project in that I give a snapshot of the past so as to theorize about one of the causes of an important cultural change. Furthermore, the sociological, cultural and media studies spheres intersect with such history. To marry these spheres together, I situate this research within visual cultural studies.

Visual culture studies aims to look at the myriad ways the visual impacts our social life. Stemming from cultural studies (and its penchant for non-monogamous—or interdisciplinary—academic relationships), visual culture studies is refreshingly queer, emerging to counter more positivist intellectual frameworks. Amelia Jones writes, “Visual culture, from the beginning, has been aimed at breaking down disciplinary limitations defining what and how visual imagery is to be analyzed within a critical visual practice” (2003: 1). I use a visual culture approach because it espouses inclusiveness on disciplinary, methodological and theoretical levels.

Visual culture scholars argue that media are discursive and, thus, utilize discourse analysis (Rose, 2007). Utilizing Gillian Rose’s definition, discourse refers to “groups of statements that structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking” (2012: 190). In using discourse analysis, the emphasis is not on being statistically representative but rather how relevant the images are to the topic. And the decision of what is
relevant can lie solely with the researcher, the public at large or any combination of both. Rose states that discourse analysis “does not depend on the quantity of the material analyzed but its quality” (2012: 199).

Theoretically, I rely on queer frameworks surrounding heteronormativity, the terms and parameters of which I already discussed. Also, I rely heavily on visual culture studies’ mainstays: theories developed by Michel Foucault as well as psychoanalytic theories developed by Laura Mulvey. Though used for visual culture, both certainly lean queer and, at their core, seek to dismantle heteronormative foundations. Foucault acknowledged discourse’s importance when he discussed modern, western formations of sexuality. He said studying discourse is essential so as to “account for the fact that [something] is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about [something] and which store distributes the things that are said” (1978: 11).

Mulvey’s (1975) groundbreaking study of the U.S. cinema provides this project’s template. Mulvey insisted that, when viewing media, there is a “male gaze.” It binds women both in terms of objectification and heteronormative standards regarding them. Thus, the male gaze subverts women purely into an object of desire. But since the first use of the term, its meaning has broadened beyond men objectifying women. Mulvey teases out how the visual can serve as a mode of satisfaction that validates certain ways of living. She specifically focuses on how the spectator identifies with their “screen surrogate” in such a way that gives a “satisfying sense of omnipotence” (1975:48). Taking inspiration from Mulvey’s original use, I broaden the “male gaze” out to denote all ways the depictions show heteronormative “omnipotence.” This notion is
in keeping with Mulvey’s declaration to “discover where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns—” (1975: 44).

The institutions through which the “male gaze” dominates is where Foucault and his concepts become useful and complementary. Central to this project is Foucault’s use of discursive formation, which refers to any defined “orders, correlations, positions and functions, [and/or] transformations” within discourse (1972: 37). If a specific discourse dominates, then such “ordered” discourses exert what Foucault terms as “regimes of truth.” This truth emerges at the intersection of power/knowledge. Foucault believed that knowledge and power are connected because successful discourses depend on the assumptions and claims that their knowledge is true. Foucault situated his explanations of power/knowledge inside and outside the panopticon where prisoners were held and experienced surveillance. The visual, no matter where it is experienced, also showcases power in that it demonstrates authority and produces consent (Mirzoeff, 2013).

1.3 Many Marriages

Over the last few years, this “relationships” project and I have formed our own intimate relationship. And given the project’s subject matter, I felt it appropriate to divide Wed-Locked like the expected heteronormative life course of a romantic relationship. After the “courtships” in this chapter’s “introduction,” the following chapters illustrate how the shows’ depictions are paired (or married) to various theoretical concepts.

In Chapter Two, “‘I Want That:’ The Marriage of Government and Heteronormativity,” I discuss how the shows depict same-sex relationships’ connections with government. Using the three most salient markers of government depicted—marriage, adoption and school—I point to how levels of heteronormativity create government legitimacy and support. Highlighting the
importance of these relationships, this chapter explores how the shows display institutionalized heteronormativity and its impact on the same same-sex relationships.

In Chapter Three, “‘It Gets Better:’ The Marriage of Labels and Stability (or Instability),” I take the implications of institutionalized heteronormativity from Chapter Two and delve into the personal interactions of the relationships. In Chapter Three I explain the structure of each relationship with the purpose of discussing the connected sexual labels. Most importantly, I examine why some labels attract policing, while others attract privilege. I also examine what those privileges entail and whom the privileges ultimately serve. In discussing the policing of characters, I introduce the notion of a “societal surrogate.” Inspired by Mulvey’s discussion of spectatorship between characters, a societal surrogate functions as a stand-in for society, bringing reactions, questions and/or commonly held societal values to a situation.

In Chapter Four, “‘Growing Needy, Whiny Tomatoes:’ The Marriage of Heteronormative Roles and Same-Sex Relationships,” I discuss the shows’ depictions of everyday statuses and roles within the romantic relationships. Again, heteronormativity acts as a powerful lens. Specifically, I look at levels of emotionality, relationship goals and common narrative models such as the breadwinner/homemaker and protector/damsel. This chapter determines whether the same-sex relationships follow similar patterns.

Chapter Five, “‘Give Me Sensual, Give Me Sultry:’ The Marriage of the Male Gaze and Same-Sex Relationships,” takes the statuses/roles of the previous chapter and pairs them with the characters’ appearances and physical sex acts. First, I look at whether women and men are allowed greater gender fluidity in their appearances or if they—women, especially—remain bound to conventional notions of beauty. Second, I tie the women and men’s physical appearances to how the shows’ depict physical sex acts. Specifically, the “male gaze” leads me
to create a model for a multi-directional male gaze where a societal surrogate acts alongside the camera lens to objectify another character, cuing the audience to do the same.

Thus far, I have focused on how ideals regarding sex, institutions, labels, and heteronormative statues/roles form powerful marriages with same-sex relationships. However, every perfect heteronormative marriage yields a birth. And in Chapter Six, “‘A Little Bit of Me in that Princess Castle:’ The Birthing of Heteronormativity,” I examine how the same-sex couples consciously reproduce the heteronormative ideals heterosexuals have so fervently placed upon them. Specifically, I examine how the characters in same-sex relationships push heteronormative ideals about child-rearing and coupledom upon heterosexuals—a full circle moment.

Heteronormativity serves as the theoretical glue holding this project’s analysis together. First, it works its way into how society desires to see heteronormative images (the “male gaze”). Second, it works its way into the motivations institutions have to create “regimes of truth.” In the Conclusion, “Grounds for Divorce?” I engage with the effects of such power. I go beyond discussing the same-sex relationships to the equally personal relationships viewers have to the television characters. I ground that discussion in other scholars’ research (and a little personal experience) to explore whether we are all caged by an invisible, media version of Foucault’s panopticon—surveilled and policed, yet entertained.

I cannot explicitly establish causality between the television images and the public’s acceptance of same-sex marriage (or vice versa), and this is not my aim. I am trying to document factors that may provide insight as to why and how social opinion about same-sex relationships changed. Answering my initial questions regarding what types of relationships the shows depict and who those depictions serve are also chief goals. These images mark the beginning of
fictionalized, out, same-sex relationships on television. For many heterosexuals, they are the introduction to the workings of same-sex relationships. However, institutional and social pathways of seeming progression often have an ugly underbelly of oppressed voices. And oppression needs to be called out. Ultimately, the driving intellectual curiosity pushing this research is whether or not I find instances of Monique Wittig’s frustration that “discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak on their terms” (Wittig, 1978: 131).

2 “I WANT THAT:” THE MARRIAGE OF GOVERNMENT AND HETERONORMATIVITY

“Marriage is a wonderful institution, but who wants to live in an institution?” - Groucho Marx

A grey elevator opens in the grey hallway of the Seattle municipal court. Only a steel trash can next to the elevator accessorizes the hallway. With business men zipping past, Meredith Grey and Derek Shepherd emerge. He is dressed in an everyday dark grey suit and blue dress shirt. She is in a black blouse and pants with a navy pea coat, holding a practical hybrid purse/briefcase.

“You ready?” Derek asks coyly.

“I am,” Meredith shoots back.

“Ok, then, let’s get married,” he says smiling.

The next scene finds Miranda Bailey wringing her hands in nervousness as she walks toward an outdoor stage. White and pink flowers crowd anything that will hold them.
Complementing the flowers, lines of white and pink fabric hang behind the stage forming an artful backdrop. Miranda looks down a long pink aisle where she sees Arizona Robbins emerge, flowing blond hair settling on her shoulders. Miranda then nods to violinists and a cellist at stage right.

With the gentle, classical sounds of strings filling the air, Arizona glides past family and friends in her sleeveless, white mermaid-shaped gown. She’s clutching both a white and pink bouquet and the arm of her military father.

As Arizona reaches the front of the stage, Calliope “Callie” Torres appears. Her raven hair is up in a bun and draped by a buoyant, cascading veil. She too glides past loved ones, but in a sleeved, white princess-cut gown. She’s clutching the same white and pink bouquet and the arm of her best friend Mark.

Miranda smiles, looks to Callie and says, “Who gives this bride to this bride?”

“That’d be me,” replies Mark.

These two weddings serve as an important springboard for this project and particularly this chapter’s purpose. Institutions, chiefly the institution of government, impact romantic relationships in ways both blatant and covert. Even fictional romantic relationships do not escape government’s reach. Beginning with marriage and continuing with adoption and schooling, I aim to show how government impacts and legitimizes same-sex relationships for the (heterosexual) viewing public. To achieve government legitimization, same-sex relationships must interact with heteronormative ideals seamlessly.

Starting with marriage, the same-sex and straight weddings that appear toward the end of Grey’s Anatomy’s seventh season provide viewers with a romantic feast. Not only are the Meredith/Derek and the Callie/Ari zona ceremonies in the same episode, but crafty editing
merges and shifts back and forth between them to create one epic marital scene. For example, the judge presiding over Meredith and Derek’s marriage says, “Ok, this seems to be in order. I’ll jump right in: we are here today to participate in a marital union…” The statement then bleeds into Miranda’s voice, presiding over Callie and Arizona’s wedding, saying, “…to celebrate love, happiness, loyalty and a bit of magic.”

Brides, grooms and guests—fictional or not—tend to view weddings singularly and personally. However, imagery and language used for weddings (as with any rituals) rarely form in a vacuum. They almost always depend on comparisons to similar events and previous statements heralded as normal by society (van Dijk, 2008). In real life and in life on T.V., one romantic relationship (or one wedding) informs the other and vice versa. This process, known as intertextuality, occurs when the meanings of an image and/or words are impacted, altered and then formed for consumption by the meanings of another image (Hall, 1997). In the Grey’s Anatomy’s example, the wedding of Callie and Arizona is juxtaposed with Derek and Meredith’s wedding, as well as implicitly with the broader rituals and traditions of the heterosexual wedding. And such a juxtaposition has important historical and analytical implications.

The scene signifies where the U.S. population currently stands on the idea of marriage. At first glance, such a fictional marital extravaganza might be seen as reflecting society’s (i.e. viewers) love of marriage. In 2010 a majority (61 percent) of people who have never wed said they wanted to get married (Pew Research Center, 2010). Remembering that adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender comprise at most 4 percent of the U.S. population (with only 1.7 percent of that number specifically identifying as gay or lesbian), any polls cited about sentiments toward marriage are largely the feelings of heterosexuals (Chandra et al., 2011). Looking more closely at the 61 percent of persons in the U.S who definitively said they wanted
to get married, though, that number is not a large majority. More telling is the almost 40 percent of persons who were either “not sure” they wanted to get married (27 percent) or replied “no” (12 percent) (Pew Research Center, 2010). In addition, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2011) show divorce rates hovering around 40 percent while Eric Klinenberg (2012) states the number of singles, both who choose to be single and who are marrying later in life, is at an all-time high of nearly 30 percent of the total population.

Fictional heterosexuals’ interest in marriage seems to mirror society in that they showcase a general sense of ennui. In a scene just before the meshed marital scene, the context for Meredith and Derek’s wedding is set. They are shown filling out adoption papers and one of the characteristics that make them more “suitable” as parental candidates is marriage—a line on their checklist Derek says they can “cross off today.” Such casualness flaunts an ease of entering into marriage that signifies considerable heterosexual power. Meredith and Derek so take their heterosexuality for granted (the very notion exemplifying heteronormativity) that they do not even have to take the social implications of marriage seriously. Also, they do not have to value the marriage as a couple. In the end they do not do it for themselves. Rather, they do it for bureaucratic purposes which make them look better on paper for adoption officials.

A similar situation plays out on Glee, albeit without a wedding ceremony. On Glee, McKinley High School sophomore Kurt Hummel finds a gay kindred spirit in Dalton Academy student Blaine Anderson (who eventually becomes his boyfriend). Kurt finally has an outlet to discuss “gay” issues—something he rarely did with his straight friends and family. In one scene, Kurt and Blaine sit in a restaurant booth across from Kurt’s straight friend Mercedes. She sips her straw loudly, seemingly bored by Kurt and Blaine waxing poetic on gay issues. The
conversation has been going on for a while, but the first issue viewers hear about, which is
aligned with the gay rights movement as a whole, is same-sex marriage.

“I’m just saying that drunk people who get married to someone they met an hour ago by
an Elvis impersonator—I mean that’s a bigger insult to marriage than two gay guys getting
hitched,” says Kurt.

“Totally. It’s like, if marriage is so sacred, they should just outlaw divorce,” adds Blaine,
with Kurt nodding in agreement.

“What do you think Mercedes?” asks Blaine.

Startled by hearing her name, Mercedes starts talking about the now-illegal former
military policy “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.”

“Oh no, we’re on Prop 8 now,” Kurt says. Mercedes apologizes and admits she “blanked
out.” While Kurt and Blaine discuss marriage with rapid-fire intensity, Mercedes’ admission that
she “blanked out” could serve as a metaphor for the broader heterosexual public. Though the
character is only in high school, her privilege as a heterosexual affords her with the ability to
show indifference toward marriage. Mercedes on Glee and Meredith and Derek on Grey’s
Anatomy have the autonomy to choose marriage for themselves or not.

The same cannot be said for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer characters. With regard
to Arizona and Callie specifically, Arizona, in an earlier episode, makes reference to this fact
when she complains with considerable force: "I want more. I want commitments. I want rings."
So, while heterosexuals (on Glee, Grey’s Anatomy and in real life) seem to be growing weary of
marriage—or at least becoming lazier about its implications—gays, lesbians, bisexuals and
queers are fighting hard for the right to take part in it. During Grey’s Anatomy’s meshed marital
scene, Miranda makes impassioned remarks about celebrating “love, happiness, loyalty and a bit
of magic” during the Callie/Arizona wedding while the Judge offers a business-as-usual attitude about “participating in a marital union” during the Meredith/Derek wedding. This is the specific scene where marriage’s ultimate implication is shown: marriage, with its explicit permission granted by government laws, serves as a legitimizing force for romantic relationships in the eyes of not only the government, but family, friends, and strangers. The laws, coupled with morals expressed through discourse surrounding marriage, all serve as salient examples of Foucault’s notion of institutional apparatus, the “strategies of relations” in which institutions espouse power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980: 196).

In a scene prior to the marital scene, Callie questions the purpose of the ceremony. Because she is in a same-sex couple, she doesn’t have a priest, and the marriage isn’t legal. She frustratingly asks Miranda, “What’s the point?” In Washington—the show’s location—at the time of this episode’s 2011 airing, same-sex marriage was illegal, but domestic partnerships had been approved by law and used since 2007. Callie and Arizona would have received all the same state legal rights (except calling their union “marriage”) after the marriage ceremony was over and the paperwork was signed. Paperwork connected to marriage is an example of what Foucault considered “institutional technologies.” Institutional technologies provide the physical, practical (and often bureaucratic) “bits and pieces” in service of the laws, morals and discourse (the institutional apparatus) (Foucault, 1977: 26).

However, such technologies are not shown during Callie and Arizona’s wedding. Still, Miranda presiding and using the word marriage, despite the non-legality of the union as marriage, demonstrates governmentality. Foucault (2003: 237) characterizes governmentality (in one of its many forms) as where the “finality of government resides in the things it manages and in the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the process it directs; and the instrument of
government, instead of being laws, now come to be a range of multiple tactics.” People are the “things” government manages. Then such “things” serve as the agents of carrying out and normalizing government practices and the precedents for the appropriate conduct it sets. In partaking in the ceremony of “marriage,” Callie and Arizona too participate in governmentality. They embody the range of “tactics” stemming from government and its citizens to show their “perfection.”

Striving for such “perfection” shows the importance of these discussions of marriage, namely in how we see marriage (as well as the romantic relationships themselves). What institutional technologies do governments use to guide viewers towards such legitimacy and perceived “perfection?” Both the Meredith/Derek wedding and the Callie/Arizona wedding show the arm of the state and, in the process, make important institutional statements concerning the legitimacy of same-sex relationships. Callie and Arizona’s wedding shows all of the markers of the traditional wedding ceremony (and thus traditional institutional technologies of government): beautiful flowers, an aisle to walk down, loved ones gathered who stand when the brides enter, men giving away the brides, and the brides themselves draped in white and symbolizing one of the most highly feminized stereotypes in Western culture, that of the pure virgin bride (itself a heteronormative construct that neither women uphold beyond their appearance). At the end of the ceremony, Miranda “pronounces” them “wife and wife” proclaiming their legitimacy in the eyes of those gathered but also their legitimacy in the eyes of the government as a domestic partnership. The only marker giving this wedding away as unique is that there is a “wife” standing alongside her “wife.”

When Callie asks Miranda “What’s the point?” earlier in the episode, the latter, who is straight, says lovingly: "If you are willing to stand up in front of your friends and your family
and God and commit yourself to another human being, to give of yourself and that kind of partnership—for better or for worse, in sickness and in health—honey, that is a marriage.” But is it? Meredith and Derek’s ceremony did not include those characteristics. Both weddings do intersect with a sentimental exchange of vows where they promise to be there “for better or for worse,” but the heterosexual wedding quickly lapses out of tradition when Meredith and Derek admit they “did not have time for rings.” Thus, Meredith and Derek’s wedding is legitimized not by technologies such as flowers or gowns traditionally attached to weddings but by the robed judge in his office. Further tokens of government appear when Meredith and Derek plop paperwork down on the judge’s desk which he stamps, signs and staples, ensuring their legitimacy in the eyes of the government—technologies absent from the depiction of Callie and Arizona’s wedding. The biggest token of all, allowing Meredith and Derek such ease in their path to legitimacy, is their heterosexuality.

A ceremony consisting only of direct interaction with government officials and documentation provides little spectacle and is the nontraditional avenue for legitimizing relationships. And, ultimately, the juxtaposition of Meredith and Derek’s straight wedding with Callie and Arizona’s same-sex wedding, makes the latter look even more traditional than if it were a stand-alone scene. To be taken seriously as a marriage—as a romantic relationship—the two persons in the same-sex relationship had to partake in the most spectacular, most traditional version of marriage, and yet their union is still not one legitimized by federal (or, arguably, state law). So, when Miranda talks about declaring undying love and willingness to support someone publically, she implies a ceremony full of pink and white flowers, pink and white drapes, white gowns, a father giving away his daughter, violinists and cellists. These characteristics themselves imply that such institutional technologies of legitimacy, intersecting as both social and
governmental, are necessary for same-sex couples. Otherwise, they truly are not experiencing “marriage.” Callie and Arizona are shown having to go big and go conventional (which means mirror heterosexual customs) if their marriage is to be taken seriously in any way.

The values espoused during such ceremonies seep in in other ways too. While Callie and Arizona have the ceremony and Blaine and Kurt discuss marriage, *Modern Family’s* Cameron Tucker and Mitchell Pritchett attempt to live marriage’s ceremonial vows, though they have not gotten married (yet). In one episode, Cameron gets sick and Mitchell struggles with whether he should stay home and take care of Cameron or go to a Lady Gaga concert they have tickets for. At the end of the night, Cameron wakes up from a cough syrup-induced sleep, with Mitchell reading a book next to him on the couch. Then Mitchell lowers the book, revealing a blinking rave necklace, giving away his night with Gaga.

“Thanks for staying home with me,” says Cameron slyly.

“Oh, you know, in sickness and in health, right?” replies Mitchell.

In this dialogue, Mitchell uses traditional wedding discourse to simultaneously cement his commitment and cover up his lack of commitment. Such discourse, serving as an arm of the state, exemplifies marriage’s reach beyond legally married couples to committed non-married couples.

Mitchell and Cameron as well as Callie and Arizona and Kurt and Blaine incorporate marital values into their daily life either through discussion or presenting their union to the public. Thus, they provide the first glimpse of Puar’s notion of the “exceptional homosexual” engaging in homonationalist ideals. An exceptional homosexual upholds various forms of heteronormativity, especially those sanctioned by government. This specific intersection of heteronormative values, government and same-sex relationships creates homontionalism, which
forms to regulate normative gayness, queerness and homosexuality within a state (Puar, 2007). Marriage is, perhaps, the most potent example of homonationslism. As Puar (2007) notes, wedding ceremonies and the use of the term “marriage” as well as the discourse surrounding a marriage ceremony has European roots. And the West—both their governments and their people—uses such boundaries as markers of what its various societies’ deem as right.

2.1 Wanting Legitimacy

Mitchell and Cameron’s use of “in sickness and in health” is the only time they invoke marriage during the season, though they would partake in a ceremony mirroring Callie and Arizona’s traditional nuptials three years later. Instead, they legitimize their relationship with another form of institutional apparatus that similarly involves the government: adoption.

In a sleek, 60s-inspired dining room, Cameron sits at the head of the dining table. Splayed out before him are scissors, twine, multi-colored and multi-patterned paper. As Mitchell walks in eating kale out of a bowl with chopsticks, he asks, “So, what are you doing?”

“I’m putting together a little scrapbook of how Lily became ours, you know her adoption certificate, some pictures of her from her village—all out in the open so she has nothing to be ashamed of,” replies Cameron. He explains that an episode of The Oprah Winfrey Show about a girl who found out she was adopted, felt betrayed and then become a stripper (“and not the Hard Gold kind, the by-the-airport kind”) inspired him. Cameron feels the need to take the “negative charge” out of Lily’s adopted-child status so she won’t be traumatized (and become a stripper) later in life.

But then Cameron picks up a piece of paper and gasps, “Oh my God!”

“What?” asks Mitchell, chewing his kale.
“Lily’s adoption certificate,” Cameron begins, his voice shaky. “Her name is Lily Tucker Pritchett, not Tucker *hyphen* Pritchett like it’s supposed to be. This is a legal document! She only has your last name! My name is just a middle name!”


“Nobody knows anyone’s middle name. Quick! What’s my middle name?”

“Scott.”

“Oh, of course you know mine; we’re a couple.”

Cameron discovers that Mitchell, a lawyer who doesn’t “make mistakes,” purposely did not hyphenate their respective last names out of fear of Cameron’s hyperemotionality—a significant quality of Cameron’s that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four. Before he found out the document was actually accurate, though, Cameron’s angst-ridden face said it all. As with the depictions of weddings with which began this chapter, Cameron and Mitchell, as a self-described “couple,” came face-to-worried-face with their legitimacy as a couple as well as a family unit with children.

In California, where *Modern Family* takes place, adoptive parent means “a person who has obtained an order of adoption of a minor child or, in the case of an adult adoption, an adult” (State of California Legislative Counsel, 2015). Just in this definition, there are multiple forms of institutional technologies serving the institutional apparatus of adoption. Both the “obtained order” and the word “adoption” are necessary technologies required for the adoption process. The word adoption in this definitional context not only refers to a specific process of family creation, it also refers, much like the word marriage, to the broader institutional apparatus of government. Ultimately, the purpose of the word “adoption” (like “marriage”) in the television shows is as discourse employed as an institutional technology guiding viewers.
Though I never see all the necessary steps involved (the “obtained order” for example), the mere mention of adoption and marriage fills in those blanks and cues government and the legitimacy it bestows.

Historically, the legal process has been spotty for same-sex couples. Same-sex adoption, while a personal issue for many gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and queers since the 1970s, became part of the national conversation in the late 1980s and well into the 1990s with newspapers, TV news magazines and talk shows that discovered (and sensationalized) this seemingly new familial form (Polikoff, 2008). Since then, there have been no uniformed, national same-sex adoption laws; wildly varying state restrictions make the process difficult in most states. Typically, restrictions revolve around specific institutional technologies in the form of bureaucratic semantics. For example, most legal barriers hinge on the category of second-parent adoption which is often attached to marriage (Polikoff, 2008).

Same-sex adoption is legal in California under all circumstances, whether filing as a single person, as a couple or as a second-parent. When the viewer first sees Cameron and Mitchell on Modern Family, they see a family already settled and solidified through this process. Various bits of dialogue contextualize how Cameron and Mitchell adopted Lily from Vietnam prior to when the series began. In Cameron and Mitchell’s favor, they chose to adopt Lily from a developing country often characterized as desperate to release children to Americans. Still, institutional technologies in the form of bureaucratic regulations, even in California, typically require a lot of work. And yet the only technology connected to the process (other than the word “adoption”) is Lily’s adoption certificate—a single piece of marbled, weighted paper. Other than obtaining the document, there is a lack of either showing ease with the process or showing struggle—a depiction echoed, albeit in a different way, on Desperate Housewives.
On *Desperate Housewives* we see gay couple Bob Hunter and Lee McDermott at the beginning of their adoption journey. Inside the sun-drenched dining room of their straight neighbor Gabrielle “Gaby” Solis’ suburban home, Bob compliments her on a delicious brunch. Lee exclaims, “Come on people, we need some bubbly! We’ve got to celebrate!”

“Celebrate what?” asks Gaby.

Bob looks at Lee and grins. “Ok, it’s kind of a long story,” Bob begins. “It all started last year…”

“We’re adopting a child!” interrupts Lee, his eyes bulging in excitement. “Meet Liza Hunter McDermott.”

“Liza?” asks Gaby’s husband Carlos as Lee passes a picture around the table.

“Guess who lost that coin toss?” prods Bob, asserting his displeasure with the gay stereotype of idolizing famed entertainer (and daughter of Judy Garland) Liza Minnelli.

“She’s beautiful,” Gaby concludes, looking at a smiling, light-skinned, curly-haired, racially ambiguous 10-year-old “found” at an orphanage.

“Well, we’re really happy for you guys,” adds Carlos.

Beyond the word “adoption,” Bob and Lee never reference any institutional technologies connected to adoption. Unlike Cameron and Mitchell, Bob and Lee never show an adoption certificate. They don’t even reference money. The only mention of the process is that it started “last year.” During the brunch, Lee mentions that “if all goes well, they’ll have her in a month.” And, low and behold, four episodes later Bob and Lee appear with their adopted daughter Jenny. Poor Liza, Jenny appears to have refused the name—a discussion never depicted. In that episode where Jenny first appears, Lee mentions that he’s 2 ½ weeks into “this parenting thing”—either TV time is faster than real time or the adoption agency was incredibly desperate to get rid of
Jenny. *Desperate Housewives* takes place on the fictional “Wisteria Lane” in the equally fictional “Eagle State,” but Bob and Lee might as well be in California with Cameron and Mitchell as the “Eagle State’s” adoption laws seem remarkably stress-free.

The showing of such a stress-free process is important in itself. Lee and Bob and Cameron and Mitchell are similar in that they are white, upper-middle class monogamous couples. They also follow a similar trajectory in how they construct a family with children. Both couples, who are not married, rely on the institutional apparatus of adoption. And even though we view one couple having achieved their adoption and another at the beginning stages, there is a general absence of any difficulty interacting with adoption and its resulting technologies. In fact, both depictions seem to scoff at any question as to why the process might be difficult for same-sex parents. Gone is any evidence of government stigma. Thus, the ease of the adoptions legitimize and normalize same-sex romantic relationships and their families.

The lack of government stigma seems to translate into a lack of social stigma. Such government recognition of their couplehood provides an unquestioning air of confidence as evidenced in Cameron and Mitchell’s day-to-day public activities, be they taking Lily to play dates with (always) straight families or creating a scrapbook. Lee too exhibits confidence by excitedly blurting out the announcement of his and Bob’s impending adoption. But the legitimacy does not impact just same-sex couples. The legal recognition of adoption provides legitimacy for heterosexuals witnessing the same-sex couple as well. Carlos’ immediate declaration of “happiness” and Gaby’s unflinching compliments on Jenny’s “beauty” show this best. Both comments relay support—something Bob and Lee receive unwaveringly from the rest of their neighbors as the news travels in subsequent episodes.
The resulting social legitimacy heterosexuals provide taken in tandem with the aforementioned government legitimacy creates a situation where sexual orientation is not a boundary to happiness and/or successful family formation. In the episode in which Cameron and Mitchell discuss Lily’s adoption certificate, Cameron uses the word “shame” and denotes that adoption tends to have “negative” feelings surrounding it. Every time the word “adoption” is mentioned, Cameron claps in order to take the “negative charge” out of the word while Mitchell dismisses Cameron’s actions as “flights of lunacy.” Mitchell’s dismissal plays into the narrative of their family being normative and no different from any other (straight) family. However, Cameron’s fears about adoption stigma, despite being based on data from Oprah, are not unfounded.

The reactions by the government and subsequently by the heterosexuals with whom Cameron and Mitchell and Bob and Lee come in contact validate the same-sex romantic relationships and families as “real.” However, this validation contrasts the actual sentiments of the U. S. population—again, mostly heterosexuals—concerning same-sex adoption and same-sex families. In 2011, when the latter half of these TV series’ seasons aired, 55 percent of respondents said it should be legal for same-sex couples to adopt—a majority, but barely so (Waldman, 2011). Similarly, in a 2010 study, only 60 percent of respondents felt “two men with children” were a family while 61.4 percent of respondents felt “two women with children” were a family. Predictably, at least 91 percent of respondents believed the categories “Husband, Wife, No Children,” “Woman with Children,” “Man with Children” and “Husband, Wife, with Children” constituted a family (Powell et. al., 2010).

The poll data is an important reality check—the unflinching acceptance depicted in media does not match the broader American public’s attitudes. Such attitudes are, perhaps, why writers
and producers of shows like *Modern Family* and *Desperate Housewives* make a blatant point of showing gay male couples experiencing unusual ease in their family formation. However, the characterization becomes problematic when the majority of the depictions of gay male couples fall into this model. As in the traditional depiction of marriage discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the families are traditional. Having two parents live in the same household with their children espouses heteronormativity, making the depictions homonormative. David Eng (2003: 1) sums up this point writing, “[Transnational adoption] is becoming a popular and viable option not only for heterosexual but also—and increasingly—for homosexual couples and singles seeking to (re)consolidate and (re)occupy conventional structures of family and kinship.” While Eng focuses on transnational adoption (like Cameron and Mitchell adopting Lily), his assertions can be extended to national adoptions such as the example of Bob and Lee adopting Jenny. By engaging with adoption on their own and perpetuating the “conventional structures” adoption espouses, both couples demonstrate governmentality. Here, government and heteronormativity merge, offering another example of couples who ultimately serve the narrative of Puar’s “exceptional homosexual” espousing homonationalist ideals.

The “exceptional homosexual” depends on “conventional family structures” which themselves depend on being middle class or higher. But embedded in the idea of the “exceptional homosexual” is a notable absence that is reified in the shows I examine. There are three families for a total of six parents. Only one parent is a person of color. Callie—who is Hispanic—gives birth to a girl at the end of *Grey’s Anatomy*’s seventh season. Beyond Callie, depictions of family are confined to gay, white, upper-middle class men. And these are also the families marked by government (through adoption) as legitimate. Heraldng the “exceptional homosexuals” looks eerily familiar to the heralding of white, upper middle class, breadwinner/homemaker models.
cemented in the 1950s (Coontz, 1992). Back then, society and the state used such markers to oppress racial and ethnic minorities by showing their “abnormality.” In this analysis, everything old is new again as that same hierarchy reasserts itself. Except this time, gay, white, upper-middle class families are the models to which members of the LGBQ community should aspire to. Gillian Rose reminds us that “absences can be as productive as explicit naming; invisibility can have just as powerful effects as visibility” (2012: 219). And as Duggan states, examples such as these further “a tendency to center prosperous white men as the representative homosexuals” (1994: 3).

All of the markers of being “exceptional” and “representative” are connected to government, the resulting validation given by the government and, then, how that validation is seen by heterosexuals. This process proves important because of the type of “media contact” the characters have with (mostly) heterosexual viewers. To give some historical perspective, Clark (1969) felt minorities experience a series of stages in media. He developed a scale to look at African Americans in film, but it has also been applied to a variety of minorities, including gay men. Using Clark’s scale as a template, Branchik (2007) found that print advertisements containing gay men exemplified various phases in society’s acceptance of gay men. The 1910s saw “target recognition” where the men in ads would not be recognized as gay to the mainstream. Rather the ads would contain subtle cues to clue in the “very small” gay market (Branchik, 2007: 47). During the 1920s, the ads shifted to blatant “ridicule and scorn.” But by the 1970s gay men were “cutting edge” because they were used as part of the broader advertising trend to push social boundaries. Lastly, gay men in ads gained “respect” from the 1990s onward. The last stage came about as more gay men infiltrated elite ranks such as cabinet-level positions and as gay male-centered television shows such as Will and Grace and Queer as Folk hit the
airwaves. But, as alluded to in my discussion of how media “discovered” same-sex parents with adopted children in the 1990s (Polikoff, 2008), the last stage is also where depictions of gay men as “legitimate, committed couples and even parents” began to appear (Branchik, 2007: 49).

Adults make up two out of the three gay male couples viewed in the TV series for this project: Cameron and Mitchell on Modern Family and Bob and Lee on Desperate Housewives. And both couples utilize the process of adoption. With their connections to the institution of government through adoption, both couples build a “traditional,” white, upper middle-class family to earn the “respect” of not just their fictional straight neighbors, friends and family but, more importantly, of straight television viewers.

2.2 Wanting Support

In a crowded hallway, Santana Lopez, cupping her hands nervously, walks up to Brittany S. Pierce who’s thumbing through a book at her locker. Santana is the self-described “bitch” of the glee club with a reputation for being promiscuous with men. Brittany’s reputation revolves around her childlike naiveté. But she too is known for being promiscuous with men.

“Can we talk?” whispers Santana, looking down.

“But we never do that,” replies Brittany, shocked because of Santana’s consistent reluctance to discuss her feelings.

“I know, but I wanted to thank you for performing that song with me in glee club because it made me do a lot of thinking. What I realized is why I’m such a bitch all the time. I’m a bitch because I’m angry. I’m angry because I have all of these feelings—feelings for you that I’m afraid of dealing with because I’m afraid of dealing with the consequences. And Brittany, I can’t go to an Indigo Girls concert, I just can’t.”

“I understand that.”
“Do you understand what I’m trying to say?”

“No, not really.”

“I want to be with you but I’m afraid of the talks and the looks. I mean you know what happened to Kurt at this school.”

“But honey, if anybody were to ever make fun of you, you would either kick their ass or slash them with your vicious, vicious words.”

The conversation between Glee’s Santana and Brittany is important in multiple ways. For the first time, Santana admits her “feelings” for Brittany, which simultaneously forces her to confront her sexuality as something other than heterosexuality—at this point in the season she “refuses to put a label on it.” Santana does come out as a lesbian by the end of the season but still continues to show sexual fluidity between men and women. Brittany, on the other hand, consistently identifies herself as “bicurious” and also engages with both men and women romantically and sexually. As I will discuss in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, Santana and Brittany engage with heteronormative values through their everyday roles within their relationship as well as in their hyperfeminine appearance. However, their relationship structure and their labels challenge heteronormativity. Neither Santana nor Brittany show traits of being the “exceptional homosexual,” which requires a set boundary as fully public and 100 percent gay while also partaking in a monogamous, coupled relationship. Santana, by her own admission, is “afraid” of publically declaring her sexuality. Unlike Kurt, the entire school never knows she is gay. She only tells Brittany and, later, football player Dave Karofsky, when they serve as each other’s “beards.” Also, both Santana and Brittany maintain their sexual fluidity throughout the season in one form or another. And, lastly, despite Santana’s “feelings,” her relationship with Brittany is never monogamous or committed at any point during the season.
Santana and Brittany’s challenging of heteronormativity (and also homonormativity) by “refusing to put a label on” their relationship also proves important when juxtaposed with Santana’s reference to “what happened with Kurt at this school.” Here, Santana explicitly connects Kurt to the institutional apparatus of education in its local form of a public school system. Kurt was repeatedly bullied both verbally and physically, with the altercations becoming so bad that his bully—the aforementioned closeted Dave Karofsky—threatens Kurt’s life. And yet the public school system—an arm of the institution of government—did very little to punish the bullying behavior or to help Kurt.

As Kurt, his father, his stepmother and acting Principal Sue Sylvester sit in an office discussing the bullying, Kurt’s father says, “This psycho threatens my kid’s life, and some school board made up of a bunch of people I’ve never met, tells me there’s nothing they can do about it.”

“Oh, they could do something about it, they just decided not to,” interjects Sue. “No one reported witnessing [Karofsky] being violent, and there’s no way to prove that he threatened [Kurt] with violence.”

In the conversation between Principal Sylvester and Kurt’s parents, Glee accurately depicts how schools are often hostile environments for LGBT youth. LGBT youth are more likely than their straight classmates to be in danger at school, and they are more likely to feel unsafe (Institute of Medicine, 2011). Most LGBT youth report being harassed or threatened while one in five report being physically assaulted (Kosciw et al., 2011). Also, Glee accurately depicts the institutional response where schools neither have nor utilize effective institutional technologies to benefit bullied LGBT students. In “reality,” only a third of students who report
incidents of victimization to school officials say those officials effectively handled the situation (Kosciw et al., 2011).

“What happened with Kurt at this school” (as well as with LGBT youth in “reality”) is an explicit interaction with the institution of government. But as has been the case with most of the government interactions with same-sex relationships shown thus far, viewer’s neither directly see nor directly hear from government. Rather, the shows reference government as some vague, nebulous entity wielding power far removed from the persons it manages. In Glee’s case, government is a referenced “school board” which made a ruling. And like any good bureaucracy, the school board employs its hierarchy of authority as a tactic to “manage” Kurt. Principal Sylvester, sitting behind a large, imposing wooden desk—an institutional technology signaling her power attached to the government—must still obey the school board’s ruling, keeping Karofsky enrolled with only a “verbal warning” to his record. However, the government tactics she employs prove ineffective and leave Kurt unprotected in his own school.

Since Kurt, Santana and Brittany are still minors, school (as opposed to marriage or adoption) provides the most common avenue for them to interact with government. For Kurt, this interaction with government explicitly affected his personhood, but not his couplehood, for he wasn’t in a romantic relationship at the time of the bullying. For Santana, though, such a government-by-way-of-public-school interaction is implicit and yet affects both her personhood as an eventual lesbian and her romantic relationship with Brittany. And in her discussion with Santana, Brittany makes an important point about that interaction. When Brittany comments that Santana will “kick the ass” of anyone bullying her, the statement implies the need for students to protect themselves and their relationships because the school will not. Unfortunately, LGBT
youth are more likely to be involved in physical fights as a method of coping with their harassment and the emotional turmoil the harassment causes (Institute of Medicine, 2011).

By discussing the tangible lack of rules and how Santana must protect herself, Brittany is also offering an example of governmentality. By Principal Sylvester carrying out government’s rules, government sends the message that it will only protect the sanctity of heterosexuality and its standards of heteronormative perfection. But Brittany and Santana defy heteronormative and homonormative “perfection.” Out of all the same-sex relationships who interact with the government, only Santana and Brittany do not achieve government validation. Brittany says she would be “proud to walk the halls” as Santana’s girlfriend (if and when she breaks up with her current boyfriend Artie). But Santana, in the face of a lack of institutional support and validation, shows crippling fear at the thought of entering into a public same-sex relationship. In her fear, Santana wants to protect herself, her reputation and her romantic relationship with Brittany. She sees the importance of governmentality all too clearly. Ultimately, she chooses to remain in the closet. And with that action, she becomes self-governing based on homonationalistic standards that penalize non-heteronormativity. Just as government would, she silences herself.

2.3 Wanting Heteronormativity

Callie, sitting in the passenger seat of an SUV, unhooks her seatbelt to reach into the backseat to grab her phone. But as she reaches, she stops, channels the future, and realizes Arizona, who’s driving, is about to ask her an important question.

“In a few seconds, you’re going to ask me to marry you, and then we’re going to run into a truck,” Callie says, her eyes wide with fear, seemingly at the thought of both events.

Callie is simultaneously experiencing a flashback and a hallucination. In “reality,” an ambulance has just rushed her to Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital not in her position as a
doctor there but as a patient. Their SUV has just collided head-on with a truck, leaving Callie with head and chest injuries. While in route to the hospital, Callie begins her flashback/hallucination. Her thoughts find her in the same SUV with Arizona but gliding through light-pink and blue sky, dotted with clouds.

At Callie’s premonition of a proposal and then a wreck, Arizona snaps, “Well, then, you better put on your seatbelt.”

“I didn’t answer you because I don’t know,” replies Callie, focusing more on the potential for a marital wreck than a car wreck.

“Put on your seatbelt!”

“I mean is that what love’s supposed to feel like? Is this what love feels like for other people?”

“You know I don’t really care about other people right now.”

“I mean other people can do it. Meredith and Derek, Christina and Owen, Bailey’s got Eli, Karev’s with Lucy, even Teddy’s got that tumor-patient husband.”

“Put your seatbelt on!”

Callie then turns to Arizona, calmly smiles and says, “I want that. I want us to be like that.”

More specifically, the “that” refers to being in love and having a coupled, preferably married, monogamous relationship, essentially heteronormativity for same-sex couples. In another instance of intertextuality where same-sex couples are compared to straight couples, the names Callie rattles off as her examples of “that” are all straight couples. The first two and the last one—Meredith and Derek, Christina and Owen and Teddy and her “tumor-patient husband”—have already experienced marriage in some form. She admires those couples’
seeming perfection, proclaiming her new goal of wanting her same-sex relationship to “achieve” what they have. And her admission of wanting what her straight colleagues have amid the backdrop of her literally appearing to be “in the clouds” creates an added element of idealism.

When writing about marriage specifically (and sarcastically), anthropologist Lionel Tiger notes, “It is astonishing that, under the circumstances, marriage is still legally allowed. If nearly half of anything else ended so disastrously, the government would surely ban it immediately. If half the tacos served in restaurants caused dysentery, if half the people learning karate broke their palms, if only 6 percent of people who went on roller coaster rides damaged their middle ears, the public would be clamoring for action. Yet the most intimate of disasters…happens over and over again” (Gilbert, 2010: 122).

The same-sex wedding between Callie and Arizona discussed at the beginning of this chapter is the only same-sex wedding (and marriage) witnessed in all six television series I watched. So, why is this depiction important? The reasons, like a marriage, are complicated. The first and easiest answer is that, as I write this sentence, same-sex marriage is the top priority for the gay rights movement. The second (and more complicated) answer lies with Callie’s discussion of “that” which makes her eyes glaze over with longing and excitement. It is also the same “that” which leads Cameron and Mitchell to adopt Lily from Vietnam and the same “that” which leads Lee and Bob to adopt Jenny from a U.S. orphanage. And the lack of having “that” is what leads Santana to be hesitant about going public with her feelings for Brittany. I acknowledge that if these characters were real, they would have very personal, individualistic explanations as to why they want to get married, adopt children or choose to make a relationship public. However, their relationships would still be structured by larger social forces. And, interestingly, the television characters and their relationships speak to this point. Viewed
together, these examples have one important “that” in common, which is the inescapable validation the institution of government has the power to bestow. And there is no better, more blatant, fantastic spectacle symbolizing such validation than a wedding. The validation weddings and marriages (and adoption and school) showcases as an arm of the institution of government is that of a legitimizing force so large it is taken-for-granted and rarely explicitly “seen” on such shows. Rather, it seems like a powerful god-like guiding hand.

Neither marriage, adoption, nor school singularly impact all the couples. But viewed together as examples of government, they directly impact half of the same-sex relationship storylines depicted. Callie and Arizona slightly challenge heteronormativity in their day-to-day activities (which will be discussed at length in Chapter Four). However, when they interact with the government by way of a wedding and marriage they are more traditionally heteronormative than the straight couple who are also getting married. Likewise, when the two adult gay male couples form a family, they perpetuate heteronormative stereotypes in their statuses and roles and their use of government to validate their family. Santana and Brittany, however, step outside the bounds of the “exceptional homosexual,” as their relationship never becomes monogamous and committed.

Foucault (1980: 119) noted that power “doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but…it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be thought of as a productive network which runs through the whole social body.” This “net-like organization” surveys, punishes and rewards us (1980: 98). With all these examples of the institution of government viewed together, I see same-sex relationships that partake in heteronormative activities and actions. I then see those activities and actions being rewarded by the government. Meanwhile, those showing non-heteronormative activities have a
lack of institutional governmental support. The institution of government, through marriage, adoption and school serves as the be-all-end-all vehicle for relationships to gain legitimacy. Foucault felt governmentality rested in the persons who espoused government (i.e. heteronormative) standards. When same-sex couples participate in the same standards, they themselves signal a willingness to become agents of governmentality whereby they espouse institutional heteronormative frameworks.

When these television shows demonstrate a specific intersection where government sanctions heteronormative practice within same-sex couples, the shows demonstrate the very essence of homonationalism. Puar states that homonationalism is a “facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality (2013: 337). Puar believes that western cultures are moving away from associating gays, lesbians and queers with death—a stigmatizing holdover of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Instead, western cultures are attaching markers of worthiness to “ties of productivity” such as marriage and family (Puar, 2007). The importance of this assimilation lies with the “policing of rigid boundaries of gender difference and the kinship forms most amenable to their maintenance” (Puar, 2007: 20). The referencing of such “upright homosexuals” is then used to other those who “refuse to properly assimilate,” a relationship played out not only in “reality,” but, as this exploration will continually show, in fiction as well (Puar, 2007: 20).

Ultimately, the ensuing exploration stems from the institutional heteronormative frameworks that government and the characters—heterosexual and LGBQ—seem to want to uphold. I examine what discourse the heteronormativity produces, what knowledge it produces and what pleasure it incites. But these notions are perhaps better encapsulated in the form of
Callie’s admission of “I want that,” and the questions it begs: how much of “that” have viewers gotten? And, more importantly, how does “that” impact society’s expectations of same-sex relationships?

3 “IT GETS BETTER:” THE MARRIAGE OF LABELS AND STABILITY (OR INSTABILITY)

“It ain’t what they call you, it's what you answer to.” - W.C. Fields

In a conference room at law firm Lockhart/Gardner & Bond, The Good Wife’s Kalinda Sharma canvases a piece of paper with a pencil. She’s trying to uncover a hidden message. Blake, her rival investigator at the law firm, walks in, arms folded, and asks, “What’s the case?”

“No case,” Kalinda replies in her usual flat tone. “It’s the folder I stole from your car.”

“Ahh, yeah, after you trashed it,” he says sitting down in front of her and propping his feet on the table. “So, you finding a lot in there?”

“Some,” she answers. “You take a lot of notes.”

In prior episodes, Blake has made it his mission to bring Kalinda’s mysterious past (including her sexuality) to light. Kalinda retaliated in an attempt to discover his past, as well as the reasons behind his pointed interest in her.

“Hey, do you know what ILEGAL is?” Blake asks. “It’s the Illinois Lesbian and Gay Law Association. They just rated Chicago law firms on their diversity in hiring gays and lesbians and transgenders and whatever. Anyway, Lockhart/Gardner & Bond did not do well, even
though I know for a fact that we have gay associates who just aren’t acknowledging that they’re gay.”

Kalinda keeps her head down focusing on the notebook, still rapidly moving her pencil back and forth.

“Now, in this day and age,” Blake continues, “why would someone not be upfront about their sexual orientation?”

Kalinda raises her head and calmly asks, “Are you coming out?”

Blake flashes his Cheshire cat grin and says, “You know the theory that I work under?”

“No.”

“It’s better not to keep secrets because then people don’t go looking.”

The battle between “secrets” and public knowledge serve as this chapter’s point of departure. Specifically, I introduce the television characters’ romantic relationships in service of discussing their sexual labels. Initially, I explore how the characters participating in same-sex relationships define themselves, as well as how other characters define them. But most importantly, I investigate how the characters’ labels—gay, lesbian, bicurious, no label—are attached to privilege or ridicule.

Kalinda provides an excellent launch into this analysis. She grounds herself in her work as a private investigator, typically to the detriment of her personal relationships—be they friendships or romantic relationships. Regarding her work, Kalinda is efficient, detailed, creative and driven to the point where she has few qualms about crossing legal and social boundaries to get the information she needs. Kalinda’s work takes the spotlight while her personal relationships remain mysterious. One common factor about Kalinda’s relationships, though, is that there is typically a lack of long-term commitment on Kalinda’s part.
During season two, she comes in contact with five people with whom she has or had some form of romantic relationship. She meets with Donna Seabrook, a public defense attorney, to discuss their past romantic relationship. Also relegated to the past, Kalinda meets with Peter Florrick, the state’s attorney, when their one-night stand comes to light and forces them to discuss it. In the present, she continues a casual, mostly sexual relationship with Sophia Russo, a private investigator who is married (to a man). Kalinda’s ongoing relationship to Sophia is similar to her ongoing relationship with Lana Delaney. Lana is an FBI agent who likes to be “wined and dined,” yet the relationship is still mostly sex-driven, where Kalinda's typical goal is to get information. Lastly, and also ongoing, is her relationship with Cary Agos, the assistant state’s attorney and Kalinda’s only male suitor. Her relationship with Cary is more emotionally-driven, evidenced by a one-time kiss, occasional flirting, mutual protection of each other’s careers, and brief allusions of a past sexual relationship. Continuing Kalinda’s penchant for ambiguity, she never defines what Donna, Peter or Lana are or were to her. She does casually refers to Sophia and Cary as “friends,” though those relationships routinely go beyond conventional notions of friendship.

Kalinda’s interaction with Blake in the scene described above provides a good example of what Lisa Duggan (1994: 4) characterizes as “the gap between the predominantly constructionist language of queer studies and the essentialist presumptions of public discourse.” Kalinda’s response to Blake when he tries to goad her into declaring her sexuality is decidedly queer. She follows a deflective pattern when it comes to labeling her personal life for the consumption of a straight white man. In this and other examples, she either responds by saying nothing or she turns the tables as when she asks Blake if he’s “coming out.” At her core, Kalinda challenges tradition and, more importantly, tradition as espoused by heteronormativity. She
refuses to confine herself to a long-term monogamous relationship, to being with any one gender and (most disconcerting to Blake) to a label regarding her sexuality. When Lana asks her why she “likes men,” Kalinda responds, "I don't distinguish. Italian, Mexican, Thai—why does one choose one food over the other?"

Lana clarifies Kalinda’s “likes,” but it is Blake, as a white, straight (and very masculine) man, who fully embodies what I term a “societal surrogate.” Inspired by Mulvey’s discussion of spectatorship between characters, a societal surrogate is a character who functions as a stand-in for society and whose reactions represent commonly held societal values. In this scene with Kalinda, Blake acts as a surrogate in three ways: first, for society and its ideals regarding labels; second, for the audience in terms of the questions they may have about Kalinda; third, for the male gaze found in both society and the audience. It is important to remember that at its most basic, the male gaze maintains the status quo or reinforces what Mulvey calls “pre-existing patterns” (1975: 44). And while Mulvey focused on the spectatorship and subordination of women, Blake provides a good (albeit more subversive) example of how male heterosexuality shows its power.

Through Blake’s surrogacy, two important notions arise regarding sexuality. First, Blake labels Kalinda as “gay” when he says he knows “for a fact” there are gay persons working for the law firm. With this accusation, Blake implies he knows about Kalinda’s past romantic and/or sexual relationships. Hypothetically, he knows of at least one of Kalinda’s same-sex relationships. But in a later episode, he explicitly refers to Kalinda as Cary’s “girlfriend” which means he also knows of her opposite-sex relationships. Blake’s male gaze maintains the sexual binary by instituting a one-drop rule where at least one same-sex relationship equates to a “gay” label and identity.
The second notion their exchange brings up revolves around heterosexuals understanding the politics of coming out. Blake, again acting as societal surrogate, admits he doesn’t know why someone “in this day and age” would not be “upfront” about their sexuality. Though Blake shows sexual interest in Kalinda in a later episode, his sexual orientation is never questioned, nor does he declare it or see a need to declare it. Admitting he doesn’t understand why Kalinda wouldn’t publically declare (or “out”) herself as gay showcases an ignorance indicative of white, heterosexual privilege. His privilege shields him from insight as to why a person might not want to be “upfront.” Also indicative of this privilege is how the question “why would someone not be upfront” works as a negative policing agent. Such a question chastises and others people who have not declared their sexuality label.

A similar scenario plays out with Santana and Brittany on Glee, but in a way that sheds new light on both theirs and Kalinda’s label plight. In the crowded halls of McKinley High School, Brittany bounds up to Santana’s locker, her face beaming. “Hey, do you like my shirt for glee club?” she asks. She unbuttons her jacket revealing a t-shirt emblazoned with the phrase “I’m with stoopid” complete with a black arrow pointing upwards at her fair-skinned face. In an effort to embrace aspects of themselves they’ve struggled to accept, the glee club members plan to perform Lady Gaga’s acceptance anthem “Born This Way” while wearing shirts with their respective personal struggles written on them.

“That’s perfect,” smiles Santana, nodding her head. “Check out mine.” Santana opens her hoodie to reveal her shirt with the word “bitch” on it.

Brittany looks at her blankly.

“What?” asks Santana. “This is perfect. Legend has it that when I came out of my mother, I told the nurse she was fat.”
“Well, I made a different one for you,” replies Brittany holding up a shirt with the word “Lebanese” scrawled across the chest.

“I’m Hispanic,” Santana says, her eyebrows furled in disbelief. “Wait, was that supposed to be ‘Lesbian’?”

“Yeah, isn’t that what it says? When you told me all that stuff the other week, it meant so much to me, to see you be so honest, especially because I know how bad it hurt. I was so proud of you."

“Yeah, well, don’t get used to it. And certainly don’t think about telling anyone.”

“Why not? You’re like the most awesomest girl at this school. Why would you try to hide any of that?”

“I’m dating [Dave] Karofsky now.”

“That’s gross,” replies Brittany, alluding to Karofsky’s bad reputation from bullying Kurt because he is gay.

“You don’t get a say in who I date anymore,” Santana shoots back.

“Why not, because I’m dating somebody? Because you’re Lebanese and I think I’m bicurious?”

“No, because I said I love you. You didn’t say you love me back.”

“I do love you. Clearly you don’t love you as much as I do or you’d put the shirt on and you would dance with me.”

Santana Lopez and Brittany S. Pierce are both Cheerios—McKinley High’s cheerleading squad. They are also both members of the New Directions—the school’s glee club. Beneath them “getting their cuddle on” (as Santana would say) and having “sweet lady kisses” (as Brittany would say) lies an emotional depth to their romantic relationship. Both eventually state their
“love” for each other. And yet the only label they ever explicitly give their relationship is “best friends,” with the caveat that “anything’s possible.” While the “anything’s possible” phrase refers to being together romantically, it could refer to their other relationships. Beyond their same-sex attraction to each other, both Brittany and Santana, like Kalinda, have romantic relations with men. Santana has brief emotional and (stated, but not seen) physical trysts with Noah Puckerman and Sam Evans. And as she admits in the scene discussed above, she “dates” Dave Karofsky. However, they are both using each other as “beards” to mask their being gay. Like Santana, Brittany has a reputation for having sex with many men at the school, but the only heterosexual relationship depicted proves more serious as Artie Abrams becomes her “boyfriend,” much to Santana’s chagrin.

Throughout the season, Santana evolves in terms of how she defines her sexual identity. At the beginning of the season she “refuses to put a label” on herself but by the end of the season she firmly embraces being a “closet lesbian.” The scene described above finds Santana smack in the middle of that evolution, showing how the labeling process is not exclusively her own. Though both Santana and Brittany engage in various forms of sexual relations with both men and women throughout the season, only Santana experiences someone (Brittany) deciding for her what her label is. Whether or not Brittany agrees with her, Santana chooses a characteristic of her personality—her “bitch”iness—as the aspect she most struggles with (and is comfortable sharing publically). But Brittany makes a physical label (in the form of a t-shirt) for Santana so she can out herself. Brittany, meanwhile, admits she “thinks” she’s “bicurious.” The word “think” hints not only at ambiguity but possible struggle. However, no one goads her into one category of the gay/straight binary. Brittany’s lack of experiencing policing possibly stems from her ease in
identifying as “bicurious” publically as well as the fact that she’s in a heterosexual, committed relationship with Artie.

Brittany and Santana’s interaction proves important with regards to two broader points about labeling. First, Brittany, acting as a societal surrogate, applies her own label to Santana, regardless of Santana’s history, feelings or her own self-labeling. And second, when Santana still does not fully accept the label given to her, Brittany (or society?) enacts informal social control by chastising her for not coming out. Brittany tries to make Santana feel bad enough to embrace her given label. This example proves more complex (and surprising) than the example with Kalinda because the *Glee* scene contains a sexual minority (Brittany) employing negative policing on another sexual minority (Santana). However, such interactions are not unprecedented. The gay and lesbian community has a long history of forcing labels on others who they think are gay. Gays and lesbians mostly used public “outing” for political purposes. It reached its zenith at the height of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1990s. Typically, gays and lesbians justify public “outing” as an attempt to wipe away any shame surrounding the label “gay” (Duggan, 1992).

Santana’s micro-level, personal experience with such pressure to come out differs again from Kalinda in that they have distinct reasons for not definitively declaring their sexuality. For Kalinda, not identifying herself as gay, bisexual, bicurious, queer or straight stems from a broader ethos beyond her sexuality. She consciously eschews all societal boundaries, be they legal, professional or personal. Though her colleague Blake pressures her to declare her sexuality, she doesn’t give in. Santana, on the other hand, feels the pressure—all of it. Her only story arc throughout the season finds her struggling with accepting her desire to be with Brittany.
In the end, Santana’s lack of declaration is pathologized by Brittany, presented as an emotional problem she needs to overcome. The depiction creates an important truth claim. Foucault felt that whether a claim is true is almost secondary to whether people believe it to be true. This latter aspect, he said, aided in producing “multiple forms of constraint” which are then used to produce such “truth” (Foucault, 1980, 131). Kalinda shares commonality with Santana here because, in Kalinda’s refusal to label herself, she too becomes pathologized. Blake doesn’t understand why she wouldn’t come out, while Brittany similarly doesn’t understand why Santana doesn’t do the same, ultimately diagnosing her as “not loving herself.” Historically, U.S. society marginalized and pathologized women if they declared themselves as lesbians (Duggan, 1979: 80). On television, at least, society now marginalizes and pathologizes women if they don’t want to declare themselves as lesbian. Both Santana and Kalinda experience other people—surrogates for society—trying to belittle them for having not declared definitive (i.e. gay or lesbian) sexual labels.

While society might not have historically accepted lesbians, it has typically allowed women to have greater sexual fluidity. However, this analysis shows that women on television whose labels signify sexual fluidity are met with a lack of acceptance. Akin to the idea of being post-racial, I theorize that we have entered into a period where heterosexuals have accepted sexual labels other than their own as long as they are fixed and offer clearly separate positions. One of the lynchpins of heteronormativity is its love of separation—of genders, of gender roles, of races, of classes and of sexualities. In the new, more cemented acceptance of fixed gay and lesbian labels, heterosexuals see the fluidity of bisexuality, bicuriousness and queerness as an encroachment on heterosexuality—a challenge to core heteronormative values. Thus, in the face of gay and lesbian’s new foray into normalcy, the fringe sexual groups experience greater
policing. Duggan notes, “The production of a politics from a fixed identity position privileges those for whom that position is the primary or only marked identity” (1994: 3). Typically, this process privileges white gay men (Duggan, 1994). As I discuss later in this chapter, white gay men do emerge ahead of their women counterparts. Among the women, though, the white lesbian shows the most privilege. In this analysis there is only one—Arizona on Grey’s Anatomy. And she is also the only woman whose identity is not challenged.

Unlike Kalinda and Santana, neither Arizona nor her girlfriend Callie on Grey’s Anatomy experience pressure to publicly declare their gayness. But just because they do not experience such pressure doesn’t mean the same truth claims that lesbian is a preferred identity and that one should declare it doesn’t appear.

Chief Webber sits on the edge of a conference table as Callie stands in front of him.

“…and that is why the future of ortho is in xenografting,” she says, hands outstretched to emphasize her point. She’s giving a presentation to win a million-dollar surplus Webber plans to award to the doctor with the best idea on how to use it.

But after she concludes, Webber rises up, grimacing and breathing heavy.

“You think I’m nuts,” smiles Callie, who then lowers her voice in an attempt to sound like him. “You’re thinking, ‘I don’t want some cow ligament in my leg. That sounds wacky.’”

“Is that supposed to be my voice?” he asks.

“No,” replies Callie, nervous and grabbing a glass of water. “That’s the voice of the average baby boomer.”

“I was hoping for something more inspirational. For example, Dr. Robbins suggested we take what little…”

“Oh, yeah, tiny humans.”
“What?”

“Arizona’s nicer than I am,” says Callie of her girlfriend who heads pediatrics. “She’s more patient. She went to Hopkins. She’s more renowned in her field. She’s a much better lesbian.”

Webber raises his eyebrows.

“I mean I was sort of a late bloomer in that area, but she’s got this whole circle of lesbian friends, you know, like this subculture,” Callie continues. “And I’m always just…I’m always just a little bit left out. Just a little bit talked down to because I have a long history of enjoying sex with men, which I don’t think is something I have to apologize for. Whatever. She’s just…She’s just better.”

This interaction does not take place between Calliope “Callie” Torres and Arizona Robbins. However, it is about Callie and Arizona’s relationship, albeit from Callie’s perspective. In her conversation with Chief Webber, Callie lays bare much of the dynamic between her and Arizona. Arizona, Seattle Grace Mercy West’s attending pediatric surgeon, bubbles with enthusiasm and optimism, making her relatable, well-liked and a favorite of the “tiny humans.” Callie, though, is competitive and cautiously pragmatic. She lights up when she gets to “break some bones” as the hospital’s attending orthopedic surgeon. The beginning of the season finds them in a “pretty and pink” “bubble”—terms Arizona uses to describe their stable, happy and monogamous romantic relationship. However, it wouldn’t be a drama if show creators didn’t throw some pins at their pink “bubble.” One such pin, in the form of Arizona moving to Africa, leads to a separation both physically and in terms of their relationship.

During their break from each other, Callie turns to old desires which she alludes to in the conversation with Webber. Compared to Arizona, Callie is more sexually fluid with regards to
her sex partners and her sexuality labels. She notes that she has a “long history” of having sex with men and, not just having sex with men, but “enjoying” it. However, when she says that Arizona is “a better lesbian than me” she makes two important points. First, she confirms Arizona’s status as a lesbian. Arizona confirms it herself in another episode in which she jokes that she tries to avoid interacting with men who “stare at my boobs” and that “biology” helped her out by “making me gay.” In addition to calling her a “better lesbian” in the scene above, Callie also refers to Arizona once as her “lesbian lover” and then once as her “lesbian fiancé.”

Second, Callie, with the “better lesbian” comment, indirectly labels herself as a lesbian. She does so again in the same scene when she admits to being a “late bloomer in that area,” meaning she now considers herself fully bloomed in that particular (lesbian) garden. Interestingly, while Arizona and Callie agree on Arizona’s label, they seem to differ on Callie’s label. Though Callie (indirectly) calls herself a lesbian in the scene above, Arizona, in a later episode, definitively declares Callie’s bisexuality. After finding out Callie had sex with Mark (who also is Callie’s best friend), Arizona states, “I know you’re bisexual”—a label which Callie doesn’t object to during the discussion. Showing frustration and jealousy toward Mark, Arizona says to Callie, "He gets most of you—the straight you, the Catholic you, the girl who loves baby showers. I just get, you know, the gay you, which is really only about 20 minutes a night.” Is Callie a lesbian as her roundabout self-identification suggests? Is she bisexual? Or is she 20 minutes gay and 1420 minutes straight? The three different examples themselves suggest a label-less fluidity, but, more importantly, they show the same struggle Kalinda and Santana endure—a struggle between how society (i.e. persons around you) labels you and how you self-identify.

While Callie doesn’t seem to struggle with actually being labeled a lesbian, she does seem to struggle with what the label means and whether she is living up to the meaning or not. In
her admission that Arizona is a “better lesbian,” Callie alludes to there being a right way of being a lesbian and, perhaps, a right way of being gay in general. Interestingly, the only criteria for being a good lesbian she mentions is being involved in a lesbian “subculture” which she also refers to as having “lesbian friends.” But throughout the entire season, Arizona never interacts with said friends. In fact, the only actions alluding to Arizona’s identification as a lesbian, much less a “better” lesbian, are her conversations and physical sex acts with Callie.

How these depictions justify “lesbian” and/or “gay” leads to cementing another truth claim. When Arizona calls Callie bisexual, it is only in response to Callie recently having sex with her best friend Mark while Arizona and Callie were separated. The same connection cannot explicitly be made for Kalinda, Brittany or Santana. However, it can be implied. Kalinda, like Callie and Arizona, never interacts with gay men, lesbians, bisexuals or queers as a community. Rather, she only interacts one-on-one with a lover either by talking about their relationship or by participating in physical sex acts. When Blake chastises Kalinda about her sexual orientation, he follows societal standards. He eschews being gay as a marker of the community; instead he hinges the label on emotions and/or sex acts. The same narrative plays out with Santana and Brittany. Brittany hinges Santana’s “lesbian” label on either the admission that Santana is only “in love with” Brittany and/or Santana’s consistent make-out sessions with Brittany. Brittany, meanwhile, makes out with Santana, has sex with multiple men and ends up loving one of those men: Artie. Her love for both Santana and Artie as well as her physical sex acts with Santana and Artie imply the justification for her bicurious label. The commonality among all of the women is their lack of participation within a gay, bisexual or queer community. In every storyline, the truth claim espoused is that the criteria for being gay or bisexual or bicurious rests on having strong
emotional feelings for a person of the same gender and/or participating in sex acts with a member of the same gender.

Using Callie’s comparison to her girlfriend as a catalyst for discussion, what does it take to be a “better” lesbian or any sexual minority? Except for Arizona, all of the women characters struggle with labeling in some form. How they respond and whether they respond varies. The important point is that they must grapple with it somehow. To be a “better” lesbian or bisexual—and just a “better” more mentally stable person in general—is to make one’s sexual orientation public. If they don’t do this, they are othered. Such othering offers a version of what scholar Michael Warner (1999) dubs “sexual shame.” For women, such shame depends less on their actual sexual fluidity between the pendulums of straight and gay and more on their ability or inability to put a label on it. Also, it depends, not on participation in community, but on their ability to participate in that label through sex and emotions. In the end, an individual, internal journey of coming to terms with one’s sexual orientation doesn’t seem like an individual, internal journey at all.

3.1 From “Better Lesbian” to “100 Percent Gay”

Kurt sits down in a busy Starbucks-like coffee house as “So Far Away”—singer-songwriter Carole King’s classic opus about separated lovers—plays softly in the background. Blaine, his Dalton Academy classmate, sits facing him. Blaine is ending a phone call from Rachel, Kurt’s straight former McKinley High School classmate.

“Rachel just asked me out!” Blaine says, laughing.

“That’s amazing. She’s got a girl-crush on you,” replies Kurt also laughing. But as Blaine stands up to get some condiments, Kurt’s laughing fades: “Wait a second, why did you say ‘yes?’ You can’t lead her on.”
“Who says I’m leading her on?” replies Blaine, relaxed.

Kurt’s mouth drops in disbelief: “You can’t be serious.”

“When we kissed, it felt good.”

“It felt good because you were drunk.”

“What’s the harm in going out on one crummy little date,” says Blaine shrugging his shoulders as he pours sugar into his coffee.

“You’re gay, Blaine,” Kurt shoots back.

“I thought I was, but I’ve never even had a boyfriend before. Isn’t this the time you’re supposed to figure stuff out?”

“I can’t believe that I’m hearing this right now.”

“Maybe I’m bi. I don’t know.”

“Bisexual is a term that gay guys in high school use when they want to hold hands with girls and feel like a normal person for a change.”

“Wait, wait, wait, why are you so angry?”

“Because I look up to you. I admire how proud you are of who you are. I know what it’s like to be in the closet and here you are about to tiptoe back in.”

“I’m really sorry if this hurts your feelings or your pride or whatever, but however confusing it might be for you, it’s actually a lot more confusing for me. You’re 100 percent sure who you are—fantastic! Well, maybe we all can’t be so lucky.”

“Yeah, I’ve had a lot of luck Blaine. I was really lucky to be chased out of high school by a bully who threatened to kill me.”

“And why did he do that?”

“Because he didn’t like who I was.”
“Sort of exactly what you’re saying to me right now, isn’t it?” Blaine then closes his eyes in frustration, gathering his breathe and composure. “I’m searching, okay? I’m honestly just trying to figure out who I am and for you, of all people, to get down on me for that; I didn’t think that’s who you were. I’ll see ya.’” Blaine gets up, grabs his bag and says, “I’d say ‘bye’ but I wouldn’t want to make you angry.”

The scene above offers an important moment in the relationship of Glee’s Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson—an interaction after their forged friendship but before their eventual romantic coupling. It also provides an effective snapshot of their individual characterization. Kurt begins the season a member of the New Directions glee club at the fictitious McKinley High School in small-town Lima, Ohio. Raised by his accepting, working-class auto-mechanic father after his mother’s death, Kurt showcases himself unabashedly as a theater-loving fashionista. He routinely provides a feast for the senses with gender-bending outfits, sharp comments and actions full of flair. But being the “only out gay kid” causes Kurt relentless bullying. So much so that his newly-married father and stepmother use their honeymoon money to send him to Dalton Academy, a seemingly idyllic oasis of acceptance due to their “zero-tolerance” bullying policy. It proves an oasis for romance as well as Kurt finds a kindred spirit in Blaine, a member of the Warblers—Dalton’s version of glee club. Blaine’s background is rarely discussed. He only admits to seeing himself in Kurt in that he too suffered from bullying before coming to Dalton. His main purpose seems to serve as a more masculine foil to Kurt’s flamboyance. And in the scene depicted above, Kurt admits “I admire” and “look up to you,” which suggests Blaine as a role model who is comfortable being gay. This assumption, though, is what leads to the tension over Blaine’s questioning of his sexuality.
Unlike his sexually fluid female classmates Brittany and Santana, Kurt’s gayness is omnipresent throughout the season. Nearly every storyline and, thus, every scene he’s in revolves around it in some way. The constant focus on Kurt’s gayness is reinforced when Blaine frustratingly congratulates Kurt for being “100 percent sure” of his sexuality. Blaine’s statement means Kurt’s not only “100 percent sure” of who he is but he’s “100 percent sure” he’s gay. Though Kurt mentions that he knows “what it’s like to be in the closet,” I never see him there. During this season, he never waffles in his sexuality much less engages in romantic and/or sexual behavior with the opposite sex. His characterization is as a done, case closed, Liza-has-left-the-building, kind of gay man. Blaine’s statement is important because, for all of Kurt’s struggles with how others react to his gayness, Kurt himself is so stable in his gayness, he hangs his black, feathered top hat on it. In fact, his stability lends him the strength (and the gall) to critique Blaine’s instability in his gayness. Blaine characterizes his new-found interest in a girl as “confusing,” justifying it because he’s “never even had a boyfriend before”—something Kurt has not experienced either and yet is still “100 percent” gay.

As with the examples of the more sexually fluid women discussed earlier, bisexuality is presented as a source of tension and conflict, where a member of the gay/straight binary tries to force the challenger to pick one box or the other. As already stated, the simple act of questioning sexual fluidity as well as the tension surrounding it positions sexual fluidity of any form as something to be othered. Kurt’s reactions showcase the same narrative, albeit more blatantly. As soon as Blaine utters the term “bi” Kurt becomes “angry,” admitting he “can’t believe” he’s even hearing the word. Then, he takes his statement a step further when he characterizes bisexuality as “a term that gay guys in high school use when they want to hold hands with girls and feel like a normal person for a change.” Whether it’s journalist Benedict Carey in the New York Times
suggesting that bisexuals are “lying” or the numerous studies (Herek, 2002; Klesse, 2011; Mulick & Wright, 2002) citing the negative responses bisexuals often receive from both the gay and straight community, society unleashes considerable biophobia. In fact, bisexuals experience more negative reactions than gay men or lesbians, and bisexual men receive more negative reactions than bisexual women (Eliason, 1997; Helms & Waters, 2013; Yost & Thomas, 2012). Kurt certainly mirrors those negative reactions. He diminishes bisexuality as nothing more than “a term” and ultimately a ruse used to fit in, which dismisses it as a long-lasting, legitimate sexual identity.

Unfortunately, any hope of exploring and ultimately pulling back the tattered red velvet curtain on male bisexuality falls flat. The storyline legitimizes Kurt’s words as a truth claim when Blaine’s “confusion” is depicted in one more scene in the same episode. With Carole King’s “I Feel the Earth Move” now playing in the background, Rachel kisses Blaine (this time, soberly), to which he promptly declares, “Yep, I’m gay. 100 percent gay.” Kurt never expands on his thoughts on bisexuality and Blaine, beyond two kisses, doesn’t demonstrate any prolonged rumination or struggle (and thus expansion) on his possible bisexuality. These two points provide examples of how absences create truth claims. Such absences of exploration of male bisexuality legitimize and reify male sexuality, in general, as polarized and rigid with male bisexuality, specifically, an inauthentic temporary condition.

*Glee* is not the only television show espousing a lack of sexual fluidity for men, though. In fact, none of the television shows’ men offer examples of bisexuality, bicuriousness or queerness. Unlike their female counterparts, the men (with the exception of Blaine for two scenes in one episode) also do not experience internal struggle with their sexuality and, thus, do not experience any outside pressures to change and/or declare their sexuality. These men, as
exemplified by Kurt and, ultimately, Blaine, are what I call the stable gays. And as both Modern Family and Desperate Housewives show, such stability becomes even more of a marker of being “better”—so cherished that their sexuality becomes an asset and, in the end, an important commodity.

At Wagon Wheel Preschool, colorful, but rudimentary drawings of boats, houses and other indeterminable objects dot the sides at the receptionist’s desk. The African-American female receptionist appears, walking out of a room and sitting down at her desk. “Joanie will be right out, she’s just finishing up another interview,” she says calmly. Mitchell and Cameron nod with multiple “thank yous,” their eyes wide with nervousness. Two-year-old Lily, who they’ve adopted from Vietnam, sits in Mitchell’s lap.

“I really like this place,” says Cameron, his arms moving wildly. “Look at all these drawings.”

“I know…” replies Mitchell.

“And did you see the duckies in the yard,” Cameron continues. “Lily loves duckies. I’m going to mention that.”

“Well, do, because that’s really going to set her apart from the rest of the kids,” retorts Mitchell sarcastically, the interaction now catching the eyes of the receptionist.

“Oh, we should also mention how she always perks up when we watch Charlie Rose,” adds Cameron.

“That was one time,” says Mitchell. “He was interviewing Elmo.”

“You boys ought to relax,” interrupts the receptionist.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” replies Mitchell. “We just really want to make a good impression.”
“Hmmm, gay adoptive parents with a minority baby; sugars, you can get into any school you want,” she assures them.

“Really?” asks Mitchell, grinning.

“Oh, you didn’t know that?” she says, laughing. “Oh, yeah. All of these schools like to brag about their diversity. You’re diverse times three. In demand. You’re like Jimmy Buffet tickets to these hybrid-driving, straight white folks.”

“Oh, I hear that, girl,” responds Cameron, trying to connect to her by appropriating her mannerisms.

She looks at him disapprovingly and replies simply, “Yeah.”

In its second season, Modern Family experienced a convergence of interest, hype and praise. It became cultural phenomenon. Garnering an average of 11.89 million viewers, Cameron Tucker and Mitchell Pritchett consequently became the most widely disseminated gay characters on television since Will and Grace (Zap2it.com, 2011). But Will on Will and Grace struggled with persistent singlehood and found his family in a motley crew of eccentric friends. Modern Family’s Cameron and Mitchell, however, come to the tube a fully formed, already long-term, monogamous romantic couple. And at the start of season two, they are in their second year as parents to their daughter Lily—they adopted (and introduced) her in the first episode of the first season. Together they form one of the trio of “modern” families depicted on the show; the other two families on the show are the families of Mitchell’s sister Claire and their father Jay (in his second marriage).

Cameron and Mitchell seem to be opposites in everything except their love for each other. Cameron, a larger man with consistent larger-than-life emotional outbursts, stays at home with Lily. Mitchell, the small-framed “breadwinner” (as described by his father Jay) becomes
Cameron’s foil with his more emotionally contained and practical demeanor. Together, Cameron and Mitchell provide a comedic slice of upper-middle class Los Angeles suburbia full of car rides, park play dates, outdoor market shopping and, yes, hard-to-get-into preschools.

The preschool scene described above offers not only an indicative snapshot of Cameron and Mitchell’s relationship but of how the show uses their gayness (and thus their labels). Like Kurt, Cameron and Mitchell’s “gay” label is never in doubt. In fact, the show often uses their gay labels in scenes such as the one at the preschool. The scene at Wagon Wheel pairs gayness with a relatable marker of everyday life—interviewing at a pre-school. Similar everyday life situations the show utilizes include how “the gays took [Thanksgiving] over,” going out with friends to “get [their] gay on” and Cameron serving as “MacGayver” when he tries to fix an electric gate. The scenes use the label “gay” for laughs, which creates multiple consequences. On one hand, “gay” and gays are singled out, made to be different and made to be laughed at. On the other hand, attaching “gay” and gays to laughs inoculates the characters as a threat. Religious conservatives have long felt same-sex relationships threaten traditional notions of marriage and family. However, it’s hard to equate “MacGayver” to the conservative narrative that gays will topple the “ideal” heterosexual family structure.

However, there’s another, perhaps more serious (and arguably sinister), implication to how the show uses “gay” in such scenes. When the receptionist assures Cameron and Mitchell they “can get into any school [they] want” because they are “gay adoptive parents with a minority baby,” the label moves beyond comic fodder and the omnipresence of gayness. Now, “gay” is not only othered but othered with a positive bent, in service of heterosexuals in power. The preschool owners—assumed to be a member of the aforementioned group of “hybrid-driving straight white folks”—use gays to showcase their acceptance and diversity. Including gays
makes the “straight white folks’” preschool look better. Gays are so coveted, they’re practically “Jimmy Buffet tickets.” Now, “gay” is a commodity that barter and gets a “minority baby” into preschool. Interestingly, later in the same episode, Cameron and Mitchell feel so fueled by their high demand as gay parents, they try to use their “gay adoptive parent” currency again at Billingsley Academy, a more prestigious preschool. But a set of “disabled interracial lesbians with an African kicker” walks in and effectively trumps Cameron and Mitchell’s diversity quotient.

Cameron and Mitchell (as well as the “disabled interracial lesbians”) exemplify another important aspect. Organizations like Wagon Wheel don’t view just any “gay” so giddily. Rather, it is the very specific “gay adoptive parents.” And the phrase “gay adoptive parents” translates not only to the all-important two-parented household, but also the all-important monogamous (i.e.: not sexually promiscuous or sexually fluid) relationship. Both aspects utilize heteronormative structures to label the relationship as a stable household. Cameron and Mitchell’s engagement with heteronormativity ultimately makes them “exceptional homosexuals” in the eyes of the “hybrid driving straight white” owners and patrons of Wagon Wheel. Gayness, though, is not just used to better the appearance of preschools. On Desperate Housewives, gayness is used to better the psyche of children.

Lee sits at the kitchen bar in the home of his straight neighbor Gaby. She is on the other side of the bar shuffling around in her kitchen.

“Why would you let her watch something called Bloody Stranger 2?” asks Lee, furling his eyebrows almost up to his perfectly coiffed sandy blonde hairline.
“I know, I know,” responds Gaby, throwing her hands up before grabbing a ceramic pot of what appears to be tea or coffee. “I’m an idiot. Now she’s having nightmares and crawling into our bed every night.”

“When I was a kid, I had bad dreams like you wouldn’t believe—jumping out of bed, running down the hall screaming kind of dreams,” responds Lee, waving his arms for emphasis.

“So what’d you do?”

“I guess I outgrew them.”

“You did?” asks Gaby. Her gaze then shifts upstairs as she yells for her oldest daughter: “Juanita, come here!”

“What are you doing?” asks Lee.

“I figured you could talk to her. You know, give her one of those ‘It Gets Better’ speeches you gays love so much.”

Lee grins at Gaby’s “gay” rationale as he turns around to find Juanita coming into the kitchen, ready for her pep-talk.

This scene finds Lee McDermott having a relaxed chat with Gaby. But the relaxation between the two stems from shared knowledge of each other’s past, especially Lee’s relationship with Bob Hunter. Like Kurt and Blaine as well as Cameron and Mitchell, Lee and Bob begin the season (Desperate Housewives’ seventh) as already established gay characters. No storyline or even a scene shows them struggling with their identity or their gay label. So established is their gayness, they have moved beyond the novelty of simply being together in a romantic relationship. Instead, at the beginning of the season, they have broken up. Like Cameron and Mitchell, Bob and Lee seem to not share many personality traits. Lee is a Liza-loving real estate agent with no qualms about dressing in drag as Marilyn Monroe for Halloween. Meanwhile,
Bob, a lawyer, revels in beer and basketball, describing himself as not a “tired gay stereotype.” Heteronormativity (and, by default homonormativity) contends that monogamy begets loyalty. Even while separated, the show never depicts them with other men. This seemingly lingering loyalty eventually leads Gaby to conspire (and succeed) in getting them back together. A few weeks later they take further steps to complement the relationships and families of their fellow (mostly white) Wisteria Lane neighbors by adopting a child—10-year-old Jenny.

In addition to the lack of scenes of Bob and/or Lee struggling with their label or identity, there is another important absence in that their neighbors do not struggle with their sexuality either. Quite the opposite. Following in the same vein as *Modern Family*, *Desperate Housewives* uses the label “gay” for laughs. In one episode, Bob is referred to as “the gay” by his elderly, straight neighbor Roy. Then, in another episode, when Bob and Lee arrive at their straight neighbor Renee’s dinner party, she remarks “Thank God the gays are here!” Similarly played for laughs, the scene with Gaby references a specific gay online movement—the “It Gets Better” campaign.

In 2010, the “It Gets Better” campaign became a viral movement on social media when sex columnist Dan Savage and his husband Terry Miller uploaded an intimate testimonial on YouTube. Using their personal successes as evidence, the video’s (and resulting movement’s) purpose was to “give hope to LGBT youth” that they will eventually move beyond the trappings of adolescence, which often includes bullying and a general sense of not belonging (It Gets Better Project, 2010). However, the campaign quickly drew fire from many critics. *The Atlantic*’s Sady Doyle (2010) believes the campaign is “good” and “worthwhile,” but that “privilege does play a large and unspoken role in many of the project’s narratives.” In an essay for *The Guardian*, Jasbir Puar (2010) notes, “Savage embodies the spirit of a coming-of-age
success story. He is able-bodied, monied, confident, well-travelled, suitably partnered and betrays no trace of abjection or shame. His message translates to: Come out, move to the city, travel to Paris, adopt a kid, pay your taxes, demand representation.” Puar also notes that “queer people of colour, trans, genderqueer and gender nonconforming youth, and lesbians have not been inspirationally hailed by [It Gets Better] in the same way as white gay male liberals.” I would add bisexuals and the bicurious to those excluded.

Gaby reifies the campaign’s lack of label inclusiveness and its narrow visions of success. She assumes that Lee is ready to inspire through information she already knows about him—a prime example of context and its importance in informing discourse. Context includes information that might be assumed and that is helping to form the directly observed communicative events (van Dijk, 2008). Though not discussed in this scene, Gaby knows the contextual information that Lee does not struggle with his gayness—he is fully gay. She also knows about Lee and Bob’s reconciliation and their adoption of Jenny. Similar to Dan Savage and his husband’s “success story,” Gaby recognizes Lee (and Bob) as a white, partnered, middle class (fully) gay man with a child. Through her heteronormative lens, she sees a life that now mirrors her own with respect to relationships, family and class status. And for her (like with the It Gets Better campaign), achieving those heteronormative markers equate to being “better.” Also problematic is that she equates the campaign’s well-intentioned focus to her daughter’s nightmares after watching the fictional movie Bloody Stranger 2. This connection trivializes any good coming from the campaign’s initiative. More importantly, it trivializes the discrimination, bullying and general suffering of LGBT youth.

Though Lee doesn’t blatantly admonish Gaby, his mischievous grin hints at awareness of Gaby’s simplistic “gay” justification for using him to inspire her daughter. Lee’s awareness does
offer some slight hope in that his grin cues viewers to Gaby’s stereotypical and reductionist use of the “gay” label. Still, Gaby’s comedic, flippant connection of the campaign to Lee’s gayness is brushed off by Lee because Gaby pairs her disregard with responsibility. Lee can now use being gay to relate to Juanita and her nightmares, offering emotional support and inspiration. Like with the daycare scenario on *Modern Family*, Lee (along with Cameron and Mitchell) is experiencing—as a plot device—the last stage of Branchik’s (2007) version of the minority depictions in media model. As discussed in Chapter Two, Branchik outlined stages gay men in media have experienced from the 1910s through the 1990s. The last stage was “respect” tied to depictions of gay men with families. Similarly, *Desperate Housewives* and *Modern Family’s* straight characters show “respect” to their gay friends and neighbors. However, such “respect” comes with a price. And Lee succumbs to the same fate as his gay male counterparts on *Modern Family*. On *Desperate Housewives*, the straight character uses “gay” for her advantage, whipping it out with ease and when needed. In doing so, Lee’s gayness becomes a commodity as well.

The It Gets Better campaign also transforms “gay” into a commodity. And like the campaign, Gaby’s respect embedded in using Lee (and by default his partner Bob), like the interest Wagon Wheel preschool has in using Cameron and Mitchell, relies on his gayness being “better.” Earlier in the chapter, I theorized that bisexual, bicurious and queer women experience negative policing due to an encroachment on heterosexuality. The purpose of such policing is to maintain fixed sexual boundary lines. The commodification of gayness and white gay men in particular serves the same function. Transforming something as intangible as a sexual label into a commodity makes it a “thing” to be marketed, to be further made different, and to be further separated. Heterosexuals, again, maintain their boundary lines and their power. The gay men are clearly separated through the labels, hailed as “better” and then given rewards. But it is a fine
line of separation that the gay men must walk. Being “better” involves whiteness, class privilege and participating in heteronormative family structures. And lest we not forget, as Blaine briefly found out on *Glee* (and as most of the women characters found out), one has to be, from the start of it all clearly separated from heterosexuals by being labeled “100 percent gay.”

Scholar Lisa Duggan (1992: 19) writes: “From the first appearance of the homosexual/heterosexual polarity just over 100 years ago, ‘essentialist’ theories, both homophile and homophobic, have had to account for the observed malleability of sexual desire.” When pitting the women character’s experiences against the men’s, their differences seem to hinge on “malleability” versus full gayness. Full gayness depends on embracing and/or declaring the labels of “gay” or “lesbian” as much as it does on the biological sex of one’s romantic partner. The television shows depict all but one of the women as sexually malleable—having relationships with both men and women. Thus, the women (and their labels or lack thereof) experience more negative policing than the men. They are portrayed as unstable. Callie, speaking as a societal surrogate, encapsulates this experience when she makes the claim that Arizona is a “better lesbian” because she, unlike Arizona, has had relationships with men.

Meanwhile the men’s labels are almost exclusively policed to where they reap praise. Blaine, as the only recipient of negative policing during his quick foray into malleability, is scolded by Kurt. But then he quickly recalibrates and embraces the fact that he’s “100 percent gay” and the “confusing” issue is never spoken of again. The men characters are stable in their gayness and, thus, they achieve the various criteria to be “better.” Unlike the women, the men are the “exceptional homosexuals.” Also, the men’s explorations show the fruits of that exceptionality and stability, to the point where Cameron and Mitchell are now sought-after members of the pre-school community and Lee finds himself being trusted to give “it gets better”
speeches to (assumed) straight children. With regard to labels, policing sexual fluidity as
negative while lavishing praise on sexual constancy is indicative of societal ideals. Our society
pushes for everyone to be figured out and placed into tidy, non-fluid, binary boxes. The boxes
find themselves draped in the bows and wrappings of heteronormativity. Ultimately, the “better,”
more stable gay male relationships—fully gay, white, coupled, monogamous and with children
in suburbia—shine as faux presents of progression.

4 “GROWING NEEDY, WHINY TOMATOES:” THE MARRIAGE OF
HETERTONORMATIVE ROLES AND SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

“What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine
women is something masculine.” - Susan Sontag (1966: 279)

Chicago public defense attorney Donna Seabrook scurries through the drab cubicles of a
courthouse back-office.

“Hey Johnny, you got a fast one?” she asks, rushing up to her colleague. “I need to get
out of here by three.”

With no words and a blank stare, Johnny hands her a folder.

“Thanks,” Donna says. “Yeah, of course it’s the…”

Rounding a corner she stops dead in her tracks. Her eyes grow wide as she hears the
assertive, but flat voice of an as-yet-unseen woman: “Hey Donna.”

The voice belongs to Kalinda Sharma. She’s standing in front of Donna confidently,
chest out, shoulders back and arms hanging to either side. “What’s up?” Kalinda continues.
Donna walks passed her silently, opening the folder of her new case.

Kalinda rolls her eyes and follows her. “You’re talking to somebody,” Kalinda says.

“I’m talking to somebody?” Donna replies, raising her head in annoyance. “I’m talking to a lot of people.”

“Somebody from my office—an investigator named Blake.”

“Indecent exposure and public masturbation,” mumbles Donna, reading the charges of her future defendant.

Kalinda comes face-to-face with her and says, “Look, I need you to stop talking.”

“Kalinda, four months and this is what you come to talk to me about?” replies Donna.

“How are you?” offers Kalinda in an attempt at sincerity.

“Oh yeah. Humanitarian of the year,” replies Donna.

Donna then bursts into a courtroom, looking for her defendant. Kalinda follows her in and sits down to watch. In a scene detailed in Chapter Three, Blake approached Kalinda in an attempt to uncover the mysteries of both her past and her sexuality. Kalinda suspects Donna is his informant.

“Everything’s fine,” Donna assures Kalinda, standing with her outside the courtroom after successfully defending her case. “I didn’t talk to anybody. I didn’t tell anybody your secrets. And if this guy approaches me--”

“Blake,” Kalinda interrupts.

“I won’t tell him how heartless you can be,” Donna continues. “How insensitive. How self-preservation is your number one concern. And after four months, you can barely say ‘hello.’ I won’t tell him any of that, okay?”
The opposites-attract personality traits Kalinda and Donna show within their relationship serve as the central point of exploration for this chapter. Specifically, I examine the everyday statuses and roles within the same-sex relationships. Both the men and women same-sex couples reify the statuses and roles expected of men and women in heterosexual romantic relationships. But the reliance on the heteronormative gender binary proves more sinister for women as it is combined with long-held racist stereotypes.

Starting with Kalinda and her interaction with Donna, a one-time guest character on *The Good Wife*, the initial visuals of the two women hint at their gendered differences. Standing in front of Donna, Kalinda’s posture—shoulders back and chest puffed, arms to the side—is confident and confrontational or, at least, ready for a confrontation. Kalinda’s posture becomes more striking as Donna hunches over, her face in her work. She takes not only a silent, submissive posture, but initially exhibits dismissive and non-confrontational behaviors.

After Kalinda’s flat, succinct “What’s up?” establishes her as dominant and confrontational, she furthers her position with the accusatory statement “You’re talking to somebody.” Donna then loses her cool. She immediately launches into a rattled, emotional justification for her anger. She notes that Kalinda has not contacted her in four months, implying that they were in a consistent romantic relationship which ended four months ago. When Kalinda does finally contact her, though, it’s not about their relationship but rather about Kalinda’s business and, more importantly, her self-preservation. Immediately, Donna’s anger and her focus on what Kalinda did or did not do in nurturing their relationship paints Donna as emotional. She is the person who cared (and cares) most about their relationship, even four months later.

Kalinda, meanwhile, is a study in emotional subtlety. In this example, when she smiles (watching Donna defend a public masturbator), it is slight; when she laughs (again watching
Donna defend the public masturbator), it is a small chuckle. And when she expresses remorse (because Donna points out her lack of emotion), it is compulsory. Donna makes her feel a twinge of guilt, but not so much guilt to where she shows emotional vulnerability. Still, Kalinda’s physical presence and spare statements display her emotionless demeanor and lack of emotional commitment within her relationship. But Donna drives the point home when she audibly acknowledges Kalinda’s lack of emotion, describing her as “heartless” and “insensitive.”

Kalinda doesn’t just limit her “insensitivity” to Donna, though. Sophia, a female corporate investigator, echoes Donna’s sentiments. In her first appearance on the show, Sophia says, “it [isn’t] the first time” Kalinda uses her for sex to get information, implying an ongoing sexual relationship. In another example, Lana, an FBI investigator and Kalinda’s occasional lover, sees Kalinda after a long absence. Lana immediately proclaims, “I’ve missed you! How are you?” Kalinda replies with “good,” and then falls silent, prompting Lana to push for any emotion: “Have you missed me?” Kalinda responds with a succinct, “At times.” Meanwhile, Cary, a lawyer at the state’s attorney’s office and Kalinda’s sole male romantic interest, offers a similar characterization of her. He notes that, after all of the protection by way of inside information he’s provided her throughout the season, she still “freezes” him out emotionally. All four suitors—three women and one man—yearn for Kalinda romantically and express their emotions. Kalinda, though, in the words of Cary, remains emotionally frozen.

Kalinda prefers showing affection by doing actions. One way this manifests is how she continually provides Cary with inside information about a potential job move to the law offices of Lockhart/Gardner & Bond. She also puts in a “good word” for him with a partner at Lockhart/Gardner & Bond. Mostly, though, Kalinda shows her emotions and affection for someone by providing sex. Cary implies this, at one point, when he jokes that she is “good at
getting people off,” alluding to a sexual relationship between them in the past. His characterization comes to fruition multiple times during the season as Kalinda gets physically intimate with both Sophia and Lana. Kalinda herself acknowledges her lack of traditional feminine traits such as showing emotion and having emotional (and physical) commitment. In a conversation with Alicia—her close (platonic) friend—Kalinda says, “It’s not in my nature to talk.” A few episodes later, Alicia finds out that Kalinda slept with her husband Peter while they were married. Kalinda sparingly offers, “I slept with him once. I do that.” Throughout the season, the relationships between Kalinda and her lovers remain noncommittal—an indicative personality trait of Kalinda’s general mysteriousness.

Similar interactions take place between *Glee*’s Santana and Brittany, whose relationship changes throughout the course of the season. In one scene, Santana and Brittany lie intertwined on Brittany’s bed.

“Mmm, sweet lady kisses,” coos Brittany, her arm resting on Santana’s back.

“Mmmhmm, it’s a nice break from all that scissoring,” replies Santana, briefly rising off Brittany.

“We should do a duet together,” Brittany blurts out. “We should sing Melissa Etheridge’s ‘Come to My Window.’”

“First of all, there’s a lot of talking going on and I wants to get my mac on.”

“Well, I don’t know, I just…”

At Brittany’s insistence of talking about expanding upon their relationship in a more public, sentimental way, Santana stops kissing her and jerks up from her in frustration: “And second of all, I’m not making out with you because I’m in love with you and want to sing about making lady babies.”
Brittany turns on her side, props her head on her fist and stares at Santana coldly, her head tilted down in disappointment.

Santana begins putting her hair into a ponytail, implying she’s leaving. She continues, “I’m only here because Puck’s been in the slammer for about twelve hours now and I’m like a lizard—I need something warm beneath me or I can’t digest my food.”

The importance of the interaction described above does not lie with the fact that two women are kissing. Rather, it lies with how each views the embrace and what they want from it, which is wildly different. Brittany attempts to engage Santana in two ways. First, she takes the focus off of the physicality of kissing by offering something important she wants to talk to Santana about. Second, the something important is how Brittany wants to take their relationship beyond physical “duets” in the bedroom and into the emotional territory of an audible (and public) duet. Brittany wants the impassioned longing for romance of “Come to My Window” by singer-songwriter (and lesbian icon) Melissa Etheridge. But Santana rebukes her craving for emotional attachment. Santana says she does not “love” Brittany (which she will grudgingly recant in a later episode). Rather, Brittany, as characterized by Santana, is nothing more than “something warm”—a stand-in, disposable sex toy.

Roles within a romantic relationship function along a spectrum with fully masculine and fully feminine at each end. The bedrock of heteronormativity lies at each end of the spectrum, which, over time, have also become stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Western societal ideals stipulate that femininity revolve being passive, nurturing, and dependent (Lipman-Blumen, 1984). Implied in women’s “dependent” trait is submissiveness. Society ties women to submissiveness with the common traits of indecisiveness and communality, forgoing personal desires for group wishes (Buss, 1990). Also, a central stereotype of femininity weaving through
all of these traits is that women are hyperemotional (Mulvey, 1975; Seidman, 2002). Expectations of women and femininity require placing emotions above sex or at the very least, always attaching emotions to sex. Also, women can display any number of emotions freely and audibly much to the expected chagrin of men—the only emotion a man seems allowed to exhibit.

Meanwhile, western societal ideas stipulate that masculinity revolve around being aggressive, competitive, and independent. (Lipman-Blumen, 1984). Implied in the “aggressive” trait is the expectation that men be sexually assertive and focus more on sex than women (Mulvey, 1975; Seidman, 2002). Implied in the “independent” trait is dominance. Such dominance is exemplified by independent decision making, narcissistic self-assertion and self-protection. Where women more readily engage with emotions, expectations of men and masculinity demand a lack of longing, fear and/or frustration caused by romantic relationships (Buss, 1990).

In the examples discussed thus far, each couple finds at least one woman (Brittany, Kalinda’s lovers) conforming to feminine stereotypes by showing greater affection, commitment and emotion toward their partner. Meanwhile, the other partner (Santana, Kalinda) conforms to masculine stereotypes by focusing more on sex and not simply struggling with emotional connection but a blatant refusal of it.

Such clear, demarcated displays of heteronormativity with regards to emotions and affection appear, at first, to also be a part of Callie and Arizona’s relationship on Grey’s Anatomy. In one episode, Arizona gives up her position as head of pediatrics at Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital for a similar position in the African country of Malawi. Callie decides to move with Arizona, but, in moving, she gives up her position as the premier orthopedic surgeon at Seattle Grace Mercy West. Before their impending departure, Callie, moving box in hand,
canvases the shelves of a storeroom in the hospital. Arizona interrupts her, wearing a construction paper, crayon-colored crown. She’s holding a similar box but full of colorful drawings of flowers and an out-of-place cow.

“Callie! Check out all the great stuff the kids in [pediatrics] made me,” Arizona says smiling, her blonde hair flowing regally from her “crown.” “They want me to take pictures of all their crafts in Africa.”

Callie turns away from her and towards the supplies. “Oh wow, that’s awesome,” she replies flatly. “You’d be surprised how often you find yourself in need of a macaroni-face glued to a paper plate. No, I mean it’s way better than gauze, malaria pills, antibiotics.”

“Well, you are a delight this morning. Is there something that you’d like to talk about?”

“Um…no. No, I’m just…ahhh,” replies Callie shaking her head and looking overwhelmed.

As they walk out of the storeroom together (holding their respective fun and practical moving boxes), they run into Chief Webber. “Torres. Robbins. I thought you’d be halfway to Malawi by now,” he says.

“Well, we had some last minute paperwork, plus I promised the kids I’d come say goodbye,” replies Arizona.

“That’s good,” he nods. “The work you two will be doing there will reflect very, very highly on this hospital.”

Callie attempts to continue moving, but Webber continues talking. “Sure, it was a surprise to learn that I’d have to replace two excellent attendings as opposed to just the one. But then that’s the chief’s problem. No one wants to really hear the chief’s problems. It’s a shame though Torres. I had such big plans for you--big plans.”
Callie’s gaze follows him as he walks off, her mouth pursing as if about to ask “what plans?”

This one scene exemplifies much of the dynamic between Arizona and Callie. Arizona approaches their impending move (and radical life change) with sentimentality—remembrances of the children she worked with. Callie, meanwhile, showcases practicality, gathering materials useful in “doing.” More important, though, is how the emotional interaction is directed at each other and their relationship. Arizona, being more in touch with the emotionality of the situation, immediately notices Callie’s frustration through her snarky comments about the arts and crafts. Arizona also immediately wants to talk about it, asking her if there is “anything” bothering her. Callie, though, shakes her head with an emphatic, if unbelievable, “no.” Callie, like Kalinda and Santana, demonstrates an unwillingness to express emotion. Meanwhile, Arizona, like Brittany along with all of Kalinda’s lovers, shows a blatant, greater desire to emotionally engage with her romantic partner.

Chief Webber too alludes to these gendered traits, specifically with Callie. He passive-aggressively attempts to dissuade Callie from moving to Malawi with Arizona. And, knowing Callie well, he does so by tapping into her competitiveness. He mentions his “big plans” for her, which sounds like he wants to place her into a position of power. The show confirms these characterizations of both Callie and Arizona more blatantly when, in an earlier episode, the two women must create a proposal that would warrant Webber rewarding them with a million dollars to enact the initiative. Callie herself admits she loves a good “dogfight” and, then, attempts to intimidate her own girlfriend. Alluding to Arizona’s hyperemotional tendencies, Callie asks Arizona, “You’re not going to cry because you find the chief intimidating?” Later, Callie hands Arizona a bag of tissues before her meeting with Webber. Callie’s best friend Mark tells her she
has a “sickness,” confirming from a second person that Callie is extremely competitive. In their respective meetings, Webber admits to being surprised that Arizona didn’t cry and Callie, through a bout of oversharing, admits to using this opportunity to compete (and, for once, win) against her girlfriend.

Unlike the examples discussed from *Glee* and *The Good Wife*, Callie and Arizona sometimes offer a more nuanced role fluidity. In one episode when Callie is pregnant, the duty lies with Arizona to plan the baby shower. Arizona tells Callie she is “way too excited” about the shower. Mark insists Callie wants all of the “girlie stuff” like a scrapbook station, glitter pens and games. Arizona challenges Mark, seemingly relying on Callie’s masculinized roles within their relationship. Arizona says, “This isn’t a scrapbook station kind of shower.” But Callie surprises Arizona, confirming Marks “girlie” characterization. Simone de Beauvoir (1949: 3) famously writes that society thinks “woman is a womb” and Callie finds femininity connected to mothering, the sine qua non of feminine representation. When the show does allow Callie to have more feminine roles, it is only in “appropriate” ways such as motherhood. Arizona, meanwhile, finds showers “annoying.” At one point, Mark tells Callie that Arizona lost the gift list. Arizona then turns and retorts, “Yes Mark, I lost the list. I suck at this. Congratulations, you’re a better woman than I am!”

Out of the five same-sex women couples analyzed, only Callie and Arizona’s relationship shows the rare potential for greater well-roundedness in terms of their roles. Still, like with Santana and Brittany as well as with Kalinda and her various lovers, Callie and Arizona largely illustrate a strict masculine/feminine binary. Some might dismiss these caricatures as lesbian “butch-femme” relations because many of the daily roles and dynamics of butch-femme relationships do mirror heterosexual ideals. But, historically, butch-femme relationships also
focus on the butch’s pleasure being derived from giving pleasure to the femme. Heterosexuality, though, focuses on the man’s primary goal, which is his pleasure (Sullivan, 2003). The relationships discussed here differ from butch-femme relationships in two very important ways. As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, the women, while they may act more masculine, still maintain feminine standards of beauty. Also, while scenes intimately highlight the women’s sexuality, the depictions are not graphic. Thus, I couldn’t determine whether they continue their heterosexual caricatures in the bedroom or are, in fact, more butch-femme regarding who is pleasuring whom.

The issue I have with these portrayals is not with the specific attributes of the roles themselves—that I see sentimentality or self-protection or affection solely through sex. Rather, the issue lies in how these personality traits embody such strict gender stereotypes of what it means to be masculine and what it means to be feminine. Jack Halberstam argues that female masculinity is too often reduced as the “rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear the real thing” (1998: 1). He argues, though, that too often scholars fall into the trap of dismissing masculinized women as mere heteronormative puppets, that women who participate in female masculinity are not purposeful, nuanced actors of gender (Halberstam, 1998). When discussing “real” people, I wholeheartedly agree. Kennedy and Davis (1994) also side with Halberstam but note that pop culture, in its typical distilling of minority complexity, often stereotype masculinized women as “low-life societal discards and pathetic imitators of heterosexuality” (1994: 2). I believe pop culture—television, in this case—is doing the same to the characters in this analysis. Just looking at the example of emotionality, it is problematic (and “pathetic”) that I never see a pairing, for example, of two women who do not share their emotions in conventional ways or two women who want to discuss their emotions.
Also, I rarely see two women who embody a full range of gender where they can each be masculinized in some situations and feminized in others. Instead, the shows uphold strict gender lines where one person exhibits emotion while the other lacks emotional expression and/or sentimentality. When it comes to everyday roles, television, in this analysis, does engage in gender stereotypes. The relationships become an easily digested and relatable caricature of not just (female) masculinity but femininity.

This upheld feminine/masculine binary reeks of heteronormativity. However, when examining the connections of those roles with the racial and ethnic breakdowns of the couples, racial stereotypes become an added constraint. Within their respective romantic relationships, the three masculinized women—Kalinda, Santana and Callie—are all racial or ethnic minorities. Kalinda Sharma’s ethnic origins, like most all other facets of her identity, are never blatantly defined, but rather alluded to. Her last name—Sharma—is a common Indian surname matching the heritage of Archie Panjabi, the British-Indian actress who brings Kalinda to life. Similarly, actress Naya Rivera—who is part Puerto Rican—breathes life into the self-described Hispanic Santana Lopez. Mexican-American actress Sara Ramirez does the same for Calliope “Callie” Torres. These characters’ respective romantic interests are all Caucasian. And out of the five Caucasian women, three—Lana, Arizona and Brittany—exhibit the Western obsession with Aryan looks as they are pale-skinned, blue-eyed and blond-haired. The relationships showcase what Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 77) terms oppositional difference, where binaries such as male/female, black (or any racial minority)/white, reason/emotion serve to “other.” Historically, the “piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness” of white women were the feminine standard. Anything other than those virtues were cause for devaluation (Collins, 2000). Kalinda, Santana and Callie have a masculinized womanhood. But perhaps within the context of same-sex
relationships, their othering through masculinity plays into a comforting narrative. Already, they are not “real” women, but they are also not “real” Americans and, thus, not “real” persons of value.

Still, I believe the forces created by crafty heterosexual men in power find use for such depictions, albeit a bastardized usage. Ultimately, the racialized, heteronormative examples of two women in relationships create a new, more devious strain of the male gaze. The male gaze posits that women be depicted based on white heterosexual male standards (Jones, 2003; Mulvey, 1975). In terms of roles within a romantic relationship, the white heterosexual male, being the agent of power throughout history, has always made sure to display his indispensability. And yet, when two women form a romantic relationship, heterosexual men, and, more importantly, the masculine traits society has long required for a romantic relationship might lose what Raewyn Connell (1995) refers to as their “cultural centrality.”

But what if social institutions, as controlled by the white heterosexual man, can still make use of those traits and espouse men’s “centrality”? This notion is easily achieved by socializing, through media, the idea that, even if there are two women in the relationship, there must be a stereotypical “boy” and a stereotypical “girl” for it to be successful. Not only do same-sex relationships—two women in these cases—not challenge the norm of stereotypical heterosexual gender roles, they reify them. Then, what if the “boy” in the relationship—already the other because she doesn’t embody conventional feminine traits—is a racial or ethnic minority? The same-sex relationships uphold both the “necessity” of the heterosexual male (found in the racialized masculine female) as well as the “necessity” of whiteness as the feminine ideal.
Cameron steps inside his and Mitchell’s bedroom to find Mitchell lying on their bed, clutching an accent pillow and gazing down, away from Cameron.

“It occurs to me that I may have gotten a little too upset,” begins Cameron. “And jumped to some conclusions that were, perhaps, not true. I realize now that you would never intentionally do something so unthinkable, so I just wanted to say I’m sorry for accusing you.”

In the previous scene Cameron found the birth certificate for his and Mitchell’s adoptive daughter Lily. Instead of having Cameron and Mitchell’s last names hyphenated for her last name, the certificate had Cameron’s last name as her middle name and Mitchell’s last name as her last name.

After Cameron’s apology for getting “too upset,” Mitchell, still clutching the pillow, looks off to the side and mumbles, “I did it.”

“I knew it!” yells Cameron. “You two-faced--”

“Let me explain,” interrupts Mitchell rising to sit up on the bed.

“There is no explanation, there is no excuse,” retorts Cameron, pointing his finger. “I just want to know why!”

“Ok,” begins Mitchell hesitantly. “You know how some women say that they forget how painful childbirth was, well I think that you are forgetting how panicked you were before we got Lily. You were freaking out.”

“I was not,” replies Cameron, resting the top of his hand on his hip.

At Cameron’s admission, Mitchell looks at him, mouth open in disbelief. Then, a flashback finds the two men in a room with pink walls, boxes and a half-made crib.
Cameron grimaces as he struggles with a tiny mattress, pushing and shoving it, turning it upside down and then right side up. Meanwhile, Mitchell calmly recounts the directions: “Okay, so it says we can put the mattress on one of three different levels. Which one should we do?”

“I don’t know,” replies Cameron, huffing.

“Well just think of how far down she should be.”

“I don’t know,” replies Cameron again, his voice getting louder. He then raises the mattress up in frustration and hits Mitchell in the face with it while yelling “I can’t do this!” A high-pitched half yell/half squeal follows as he runs out of the room, his hands waving wildly in the air.

Then, another flashback finds Mitchell and Cameron squeezed into the back seat of a car, fidgeting with a car seat. “Okay,” says Mitchell calmly, setting the car seat in place. “Oh, this latch system is great. What did people do before this?”

“I don’t know, stop asking me questions,” shoots back Cameron, his voice loud and rattled.

“Cam…” says Mitchell sternly in an effort to calm him down.

“I can’t do this!” yells Cameron, his voice, again, shrieking higher and higher. “I can’t!” Then, Cameron, again, runs away.

Back in the bedroom and in the middle of their argument, Cameron says defiantly, “Okay, well, I don’t see what that has to do with anything.”

“I was scared it was all going to be too much for you, and you were going to leave,” admits Mitchell. “And then I would be the one taking care of a baby and half of her last name would belong to the guy who left us.”
The interaction between Modern Family’s Cameron and Mitchell in this scene provides a truncated, but vivid representation of the roles each plays within the relationship. It also provides a good introduction to the patterns of the statuses and roles in the same-sex men’s relationships. Like the same-sex women’s relationships, displays of emotion serve as an important marker in distinguishing roles within the men’s relationships. However, the men go beyond emotionality in that they incorporate other classic heterosexual gender narratives as well.

Beginning with displaying emotions, Cameron, in his first words about getting “too upset,” taps into essentialist notions that femininity equates to emotionality. His heightened emotions are arguably justified due to Mitchell’s deception. However, Mitchell successfully defends his deceptiveness by further confirming Cameron’s emotional and, thus, feminized status within the relationship. First, Mitchell compares Cameron to a pregnant woman. The characterization refers to how women forget the pain of pregnancy. But the use of the words “pregnant woman” to explain Cameron’s mental state conjures unsaid (and unfortunate) tropes that pregnant women are more hormonal and, thus, hyperemotional. The comparison is also implicitly dismissive because of the common notion that the emotions experienced by pregnant women should not be taken seriously. Such ideas explain away heightened emotions as a side effect of pregnancy or, worse, as a baseline state-of-being a woman must experience before, during and after her pregnancy. Second, Mitchell then reinforces this comparison by reminding Cameron how he was “freaking out”—a phrase also constituting hyperemotionality. Beyond the audible statements confirming Cameron as hyperemotional, his physical actions vividly show his emotional instability as well. For Cameron, the life-change represented by seemingly innocuous objects, like a baby’s mattress and a car seat, warrants yelling, squealing and running away.
Completing the feminine/masculine gender binary, Mitchell, for the most part, acts as the foil to Cameron’s hyperemotional state of being. Though Cameron nor Mitchell call out the latter’s calm, collected personality (like they both do with Cameron’s hyperemotionality), it is depicted in spades. In admitting his action and then recounting his motives, Mitchell’s voice remains slow, calm and clear—no doubt bolstered by his training as a lawyer. In the flashback, Mitchell sternly says “Cam” when Cameron begins to “freak out,” which shows Mitchell’s awareness of the situation and his attempt to diffuse it. His efforts end up not working, though, because Cameron’s emotions are uncontrollable. Then, Mitchell explains to Cameron that he felt the need to make a practical decision that would legally protect himself and Lily, even if it meant hurting the feelings of Cameron in the future. In a rare glimpse of gender fluidity, Mitchell’s masculine calm and rationality combines with a “motherly” desire to take care of his child. Mitchell, in the end, appears thoughtful (in terms of protecting his daughter) as well as rational.

Some might argue Cameron too shows gender fluidity where Mitchell’s fear that Cameron will desert them casts Cameron as a potential absentee father—a common male stereotype. And, yet, Cameron’s leaving would have been caused by his feminine emotionality. To me, Cameron reads less like the absentee father and more like a woman abandoning her child due to experiencing post-partum depression. This characterization of Cameron continues the narrative set by Mitchell’s initial comparison of Cameron to a pregnant woman.

As it turns out, small glimpses of Cameron’s emotional state in earlier episodes seem to reinforce Mitchell’s decision. In other episodes, Mitchell refers to Cameron as “needy,” “sensitive” and “overly enthusiastic.” In one telling comment, Cameron again shows self-awareness when Mitchell comes home to find him reading to Lily about a “spray-tanned starlet [who] claims to be six weeks sober” in a National Enquirer-type magazine. Cameron’s dramatic,
hyperemotional response? “If [I have] to read The Very Hungry Caterpillar one more time, I will *snap!*” Meanwhile, the main criticism Mitchell receives from Cameron during the season is being called “insensitive”—the same adjective used to describe the masculinized Kalinda in *The Good Wife*.

While *Desperate Housewives*’ Bob and Lee do not depict the extremes seen on *Modern Family*, they do follow a similar masculine/feminine model. Like *Modern Family* with Cameron, *Desperate Housewives* explicitly confirms Lee’s feminized emotionality. In their very first scene together, Lee and Bob have been separated for some months. Lee cattily remarks, “So I see you let our tomato plants wither, just like you did our relationship.” Echoing Mitchell with Cameron’s interactions, Bob then says, “Well, that’s what happens when you grow needy, whiny tomatoes.” Interestingly, Lee’s “needy” and “whiny” personality traits are the only ones discussed. Bob’s calling out of these traits serve two purposes. First, he establishes himself as the opposite (where he is apparently independent and uncomplaining). And, second, he polices Lee for exhibiting a feminine trait because men are not supposed to be emotional (i.e. “needy” or “whiny”).

Though never explicitly said on the show, I will add “dramatic” to Lee’s personality traits list. For example, when they announce their adoption (a scene detailed in Chapter Two), Bob (who, like Mitchell, is a lawyer) begins to calmly set up what led to their decision. He tells their neighbors, “Ok, it’s kind of a long story. It all started last year…” But Lee’s eyes grow wide, and he almost bounces out of his seat before he interrupts Bob, blurting out, “We’re adopting a child!” Bob’s response—a frustrated side eye glance—offers further confirmation of Lee’s inappropriateness. Lee, like Cameron, shows a lack of emotional control, which, in this case, is excitement. In another episode, their newly adopted daughter Jenny performs the violin in a
school talent show. When Jenny is introduced, Bob is clapping calmly with a slight smile while Lee is clapping excitedly, bouncing up and down out of his chair. Then, as soon as Jenny finishes, Lee bounds out of his chair, rushes to the stage, kisses and hugs her, his eyes welling up. Meanwhile, Bob sits in the audience, more reserved in his response. He claps, smiles and then calmly tells his neighbor Gaby that he is “proud” of Jenny.

Out of the three same-sex men’s relationships, Kurt and Blaine on Glee provide the only nuanced (and only slightly nuanced at that) example in terms of levels of emotionality. When they first sit down to get to know each other, tears stream down Kurt’s face when Blaine (and two of Blaine’s classmates) explain Dalton Academy’s "zero tolerance harassment policy.” Blaine, sitting calmly and confidently, asks his two friends to leave so he can talk to Kurt privately about how he experiences bullying.

But while Kurt shows little hesitancy in expressing his emotion in this scene, he can also display a complete lack of sentimentality and emotionality. For example, with Valentine’s Day approaching, Kurt and Blaine find themselves at a coffee shop together, looking at Valentine's Day mementos. Kurt remarks that it is a “simple excuse to sell candy and greeting cards on a holiday.” Blaine, though, admits to being a “hopeless romantic” saying that Valentine’s Day is his “favorite holiday” because you’re encouraged to “lay it all on the line and say I love you.” Here, it is Blaine who advocates for expressing emotion (through holiday traditions), while Kurt sees little point.

Their emotional fluidity shows itself even more blatantly in a later episode that finds Kurt saying goodbye to Dalton Academy as he returns to McKinley High School. To mark the farewell, Blaine and the Warblers sing an impassioned version of rock band Keane’s “Somewhere Only We Know.” The gesture elicits crying from Kurt early on in the song with
Blaine joining in the tears by the song’s end. Neither Blaine nor Kurt hesitate to express their sadness through crying. Over all, Kurt more readily showcases emotion. But unlike Mitchell policing Cameron as “needy” and Bob policing Lee as “whiny,” Blaine never polices Kurt about his emotionality. Rather they show an acceptance of each other.

Unfortunately for all of the men’s relationships, any nuance is short lived. Beyond emotionality, all of the men participate in other tropes firmly grounded in the heteronormative gender binary. On *Desperate Housewives* for example, Lee’s neighbors assign him a classic feminine status. Gaby and Bree—two straight female neighbors of Bob and Lee—have to leave suddenly to search for Gaby’s husband Carlos. Gaby, rushing out of Bree’s immaculate suburban home says, “I’m going to see if Lee can watch the girls,” referring to her two daughters.

Later in the episode, Gaby and Bree roll into the driveway of Lee’s house. Lee rushes down his pristine white and grey front steps, not even bothering to shut his front door.

“Finally!” he yells. “Next time you drop your girls off for a few hours, you might mention you may not be home that night!”

“The roads were closed; we were trapped in the woods,” says Bree calmly.

“It could’ve been worse. You could’ve been at my dinner party when I tried to serve the tiramisu and the tira had been licked off,” replies Lee, referring to Gaby’s constantly hungry oldest daughter Juanita.

“Look Lee, I’m sorry, okay?” offers Gaby.

“My guests were another gay couple who were thinking of adopting a child. They’re not anymore,” he replies, shaking his head.

“Lee, cut me some slack,” retorts Gaby. “My husband is missing.”

“Don’t try to play me; Carlos called this morning.”
“He did?”

“Yeah, he asked if I could watch the girls for a few more hours while he drove out to Littleton. I said, ‘why not? I have very few breakables left.’”

Without saying a word, Gaby and Bree rush to the car and leave again with Lee yelling after them, “What?! No, wait! Gaby! Wait!” Lee turns around to face his house, his mouth open in disbelief. Then, Gaby’s two children walk out the front door. Juanita looks at Lee and says, “I’m hungry.”

Closing his eyes and taking a breath in an effort to keep his composure, Lee mumbles, “Of course you are.”

And “of course” Lee occupies, no doubt due to his greater emotionality, the archetypal feminine status of the caregiver. Domesticity (of which caregiving is a central component among many other duties) creates gender (Berk, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Hochschild, 1989; Brines, 1994). And societal standards have long held that women inherently care for others (Chodorow, 1978). Meanwhile, the man is off at work and, thus, not expected to participate in caregiving. Though only ever truly existing for middle and upper-middle class white families, U.S. history has enshrined this separation of gender roles as the “natural,” “real” traditional family (Coontz, 1992).

Interestingly, when Gaby mentions that she’ll “see” if Lee can look after her two daughters, the interaction of her actually asking Lee is never seen. Rather, and like the aforementioned public sentiment regarding women, his agreement to caregiving is simply assumed. Gaby does not say she’ll “see” if Lee and Bob can watch the girls; rather, she only mentions Lee. Both aspects highlight an important point regarding Lee. His status as caregiver seems either a commonly held piece of contextual information within the Wisteria Lane
neighborhood or an idea formed as a “natural” progression from his already feminized persona. Regardless of the reason, Gaby’s assertion proved correct. When she arrives at Lee and Bob’s house, Lee is the one who walks out to converse with (and scold) her about having to care for her daughters longer than she initially told him. Then, her daughters emerge hungry, leading them to have to relay that message to their primary caregiver. And where do they have to go to relay the message? They have to walk out of the house where Lee is standing to let him know. This means that either Bob is present in the house but not caregiving or that Bob is not present and thus not caregiving. Either way, Lee finds himself as the primary caregiver in this situation.

Lee and Bob’s own daughter Jenny is implied in this scene when Lee mentions how he and Bob hosted “another gay couple interested in adopting.” Out of all the season’s episodes, only one shows Jenny at home. In the scene (detailed in Chapter Six), Gaby sees Lee through the window of the home he shares with Bob. He is coaching Jenny on her violin—an activity he admits they do “two hours a day, five days a week.” And apparently, it is an activity Lee does alone as again, Bob is not present. These two examples, where Lee is solely caregiving for Gaby’s daughters and then for his own daughter, casts Bob, by default, as a shining example of the true patriarch. For it is in his absence from the home where his roles are defined: He is the primary breadwinner and not involved in caregiving.

Like Lee and Bob, Cameron and Mitchell on Modern Family maintain the same gendered family dynamics. Flashbacks show Cameron being hyperemotional, specifically “freaking out” over the arrival of his and Mitchell’s adopted daughter Lily. But what, at that point, was too much emotion, has now settled on the appropriate status of caregiver. Echoing 1950s sitcoms like Father Knows Best, Cameron, in one episode, helps Mitchell get ready for work by dutifully handing him his briefcase and zipping him into his clothes (in this case a Spider-Man costume.
he’s wearing for work-related Halloween festivities). And in a later episode, Cameron asks Mitchell if he “likes” the meal he prepared. In this example, Cameron looks for validation for his housework as he goes into how “the recipe called for a cup of water but I used milk instead to make the sauce creamier.” These examples allude to how Cameron does not work outside the home, which makes him not only the primary caregiver for Mitchell, but for their daughter Lily as well.

In the season’s first episode, the first glimpse of Cameron is him holding Lily on his lap, reading to her. Throughout the season, Cameron holds Lily when Mitchell comes back from a run, spends time alone with Lily at night before she goes to bed, and is the only parent calling their niece/babysitter to see if “everything is ok.” Also, Cameron apparently goes to the park during the day and hangs out with stay-at-home moms. So frequently does he go to the park that when Mitchell joins him on Mother’s Day alongside the other typically absent (and heterosexual) fathers, only Cameron is pulled into a Mother’s Day all-mothers group photo. Then, the mother who pulls Cameron into the picture audibly (and firmly) feminizes him as an “honorary mom.”

Mitchell, meanwhile, rarely does activities with Lily or holds her without Cameron being present. One time during the entire season, Mitchell is by himself with Lily when he is in the bathroom brushing her teeth. In terms of taking care of Cameron, Mitchell waffles spectacularly. In a scene detailed in Chapter Two, Cameron is sick on the same day they were supposed to go to a Lady Gaga concert. Mitchell struggles between staying at home to take care of Cameron and going to the concert. He ultimately chooses the concert. Such an absence of caregiving for Lily and for Cameron is explained when Jay, Mitchell’s father, calls Mitchell a "provider" for his family. Cameron himself references this point when he and Mitchell argue about allowing Lily to be in a commercial. Mitchell emphatically says “no,” prompting a retort from Cameron that
Mitchell is the "parent with the final say" because he "makes the money." This interaction reinforces Mitchell as the provider and head-of-the household (which Mitchell calls “technically my house” implying he solely owns it). Meanwhile, Cameron is characterized as the powerless homemaker.

The depictions of roles inhabited by Cameron and Mitchell, as well as Lee and Bob, too readily rely on heteronormative familial relations. But there is disagreement as to whether they are off base from what “real” same-sex romantic relationships and families experience. In his study of 52 lesbian and gay families, Christopher Carrington (2009) found that 38 (or roughly 73 percent) have one person who “specializes in domesticity.” However, Peplau and Fingerhut (2007) found that “most contemporary gay and lesbian couples in the United States share homemaking tasks and financial provider responsibilities, rather than dividing them such that one partner is the ‘husband’ and the other partner is the ‘wife’” (p. 418). Where the television depictions do deviate from “reality,” though, is with Cameron and Mitchell’s specific arrangement. In his study, Carrington found only one woman and two men who gave up employment to become full-time “homemakers” like Cameron.

As high school students, Glee’s Kurt and Blaine do not live together nor do they have children. Thus, the possibility of them participating in the breadwinner/caregiver model is less. And no hints of those roles play out when Kurt and Blaine are together. But there are glimmers of the future in Kurt’s relationship with his father. Kurt, whose mother died when he was young, shifts his roles in her absence. In one episode, Burt forgets his breakfast. Kurt then shows up at his repair shop with a brown-bag consisting of a healthy “egg white wrap” and a “green drink” because Burt “is not a kid anymore” and “has to start taking care of [himself].” Kurt’s fears turn out to be true when later in the episode Burt has a heart attack, which he survives. During Burt’s
recovery in the following episode, Kurt serves his father “heart-healthy vegan carrot soup with whole-grain croutons” and “hard to find” saffron. And while tucking a napkin into Burt’s shirt before eating, Kurt actually says, “I’m in charge of your care from now on.” His words flow so assuredly that, when coupled with his adeptness at enforcing nutrition and doctors’ orders, the impression is that Kurt slips into the typically feminized status easily.

Though this particular facet of Kurt’s young relationship with Blaine has yet to play out, Kurt does engage in another common feminine status with Blaine. In a stairwell at McKinley High School, Kurt and Blaine emerge from the first level and trudge up the steps. Kurt, clutching his shoulder bag/man purse, speaks softly (and inaudibly) to Blaine.

“Don’t worry about it,” says Blaine calmly and clearly. “Just let me do the talking.” They are attempting to confront Kurt’s bully Dave Karofsky about the latter possibly being gay. When Kurt confronted Karofsky earlier in the episode about his bullying, Karofsky, instead of punching Kurt, kissed him.

“There he is,” says Kurt nervously as Karofsky’s bullish frame bounds down the stairs.

“I’ve got your back,” says Blaine, stepping out ahead of Kurt to be the first one to speak to Karofsky.

“Excuse me!” says Blaine forcefully.

“Hey lady boys,” says Karofsky. “Is this your boyfriend Kurt?”

“Kurt and I would like to talk to you about something,” interjects Blaine, speaking for Kurt.

“I’ve got to go to class,” replies Karofsky, pushing them to either side so he can pass through.

“Kurt told me what you did,” says Blaine.
“Oh yeah? What’s that?” asks Karofsky, acting aloof.

“You kissed me,” says Kurt.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” replies Karofsky, his head and eyes darting around to make sure no one heard the accusation.

“It seems like you might be a little confused,” says Blaine calmly as Karofsky turns his back to them and walks away. “And that’s totally normal. This is a very hard thing to come to terms with, and you should just know that you’re not alone.”

Karofsky, breathing heavy, then stops, turns around and runs up the stairs. He pushes Blaine back up against the metal grading lining the stairwell. “Do not mess with me,” he threatens.

Kurt then grabs Karofsky’s shoulder and yells, “You have to stop this!”

As Karofsky walks away nervously, Blaine jokes, “Well, he’s not coming out anytime soon.”

Earlier in the episode, Blaine, in typical macho fashion, urges Kurt to “confront” Karofsky. So, by himself, Kurt follows Karofsky into the locker room, giving a verbal assault by calling him a “hamhock-ignoramus” and a “scared little boy.” Alone, Kurt uses his words instead of his body, but still shows he possesses the ability to handle his own issues. And yet the scene detailed above shows what happens when Kurt and Blaine deal with Kurt’s issues together.

The issue with Dave Karofsky’s bullying and subsequent kissing of Kurt remains Kurt’s individual problem. But Blaine, as a new friend Kurt met earlier in the same episode, literally steps in the middle. The physical positioning of the characters finds Blaine walking confidently, hands relaxed at his side a few steps ahead of Kurt. Kurt, meanwhile, appears physically tight and withdrawn, hanging on to his bag and looking timid behind Blaine. Once Karofsky enters the
frame from the top of the stairwell, Blaine stands between Karofsky and Kurt. This image alone paints Kurt as the physically smaller (and thus stereotypically feminized) figure standing behind his larger protector (and thus masculinized figure) Blaine. Reinforcing the damsel/protector dynamic is Blaine’s statement to Kurt, telling him “Let me do the talking.” While Blaine undoubtedly feels he needs to “do the talking” because he is more experienced at being gay than Kurt, the fact remains he dismisses Kurt from his own problem. In the scene, though, he tells Kurt “I’ve got your back,” implying he is supporting Kurt in confronting Karofsky. But it is Blaine who takes the lead with Kurt having his “back.”

A similar scene plays out a few episodes later when Kurt gives Blaine, who is now his boyfriend, a tour of McKinley High School. When Karofsky shows up to stop them from spreading their “fairy dust all over the place,” Blaine is the first to challenge him. “Will you just give it up?” asks Blaine. “You can live whatever lie you want, but don’t pretend the three of us don’t know what’s really going on here.” When Karofsky retorts, “You don’t know squat butt boy,” Blaine lunges at him, pushing him. Kurt stands by silently. Then, the masculinized Santana emerges, forcing her body in between them to break up the fight. When the fighting stops, Kurt tells Karofsky he’s “real brave when it comes to [his] fists, but [he is] a coward when it comes to the truth.” The “truth” of this scene, though, still finds Blaine the aggressor and protector. And Blaine’s (and Santana’s) actions cast Kurt again as the damsel, pushed to the safe fringes of his own problem.

The protector/damsel binary rears its archetypal head again with Lee and Bob on Desperate Housewives. When a neighbor wants to open a recovery center for “dangerous ex-cons,” Wisteria Lane residents join forces with nearby Hydrangea Circle residents to protest at the center’s grand opening. But when a gunshot (not connected to the protest) is fired, the crowd
turns into a riot, which eventually targets Bob and Lee who are in their car trying to flee. With people swarming on and shaking their car, Lee moves to the back seat to comfort Juanita—their neighbor Gaby’s daughter who’s stowed away in their car. Eventually joined by Bob, Lee tells Juanita “It’s going to be okay, it’s going to be okay,” just before a man with a baseball bat shatters the back window. Gaby then rushes over to pull Juanita from the car. Bob is somehow (through TV magic!) already out of the car pushing and shoving people away. As Lee emerges, a man throws a glass bottle, hitting him in the head, which prompts a loud “Owwww” from Lee. Then, their neighbor Lynette (mirroring Santana during the fight between Blaine and Karofsky) rushes over and, together with Bob, shoves people off of Lee. Lynette and Bob pull Lee to the safety of a nearby lawn of still pristine, manicured grass.

In this scene, words make less of an impact than images. Lee, after being hit and holding the right side of his head, appears a weakened, helpless figure. He needs rescuing by a more masculine protector. Bob, meanwhile, shows adeptness in the face of violence, having already emerged unscathed from the car. Now, he fully focuses on not only helping Lee, but also Juanita. He valiantly pushes angry men away from the car, creating a path for Lee and Juanita to exit. In the final image from the scene, Lee sits hunched over, clutching his head and looking out with wide, scared eyes. Bob and Lynette flank him on either side. They both hover over Lee, making him look physically small and in need of protection. Glee and Desperate Housewives walk a tightrope between comedy and drama, making dire circumstances such as Kurt’s bullying and Lee’s rescuing from a mob possible. As a 30-minute sitcom, Modern Family never broaches such seriousness. Therefore, it is unknown where Cameron and Mitchell’s roles would fit in more dramatic circumstances. Aside from the seriousness of bullying and riots, the characters’ feminine roles typically appear as comedic, especially on Modern Family and Desperate
Housewives. Ultimately, the comedic attributes all three shows share work to inoculate the seriousness of such roles as stereotypes of gay men, gay men’s relationships, and femininity.

Adding even more feminine fuel to the fire, Kurt, Lee and Cameron’s roles are often accompanied by feminine names or by physically being among women. When Lee accompanies Bob to a leadership conference, he finds himself with all of the female “plus ones.” The “plus ones” spend their time taking salsa lessons and making Japanese ikebana flower arrangements instead of meeting business leaders and inspirational speakers—activities Lee seems more than happy to miss. Kurt and Cameron, meanwhile, find such feminization insulting and upsetting. Kurt is repeatedly referred to as “lady” by bullies, friends and even coach Sue Sylvester. Also, at the end of the season, the student body votes him “Prom Queen,” prompting him to run out of the school auditorium crying. As described earlier, Cameron experiences similar branding at a Mother’s Day gathering, though it is played for laughs. Also, Cameron is referred to as “she,” “the wife” and “Mrs. Pritchett” by Mitchell. On Mother’s Day, Mitchell serves Cameron breakfast in bed, telling him, “today is your day.” But when Cameron realizes the holiday, he launches into a gendered identity crisis. Frustrated, he yells, “You think of me as Lily’s mother! I’m a wife! I’m a woman!”

Most of the examples above show other characters using feminine names for the feminized men. But when Cameron states “I’m a wife! I’m a woman!” he does so to himself. At first, Cameron’s apparent self-awareness of his gendered roles suggests the creators and writers of Modern Family are aware of their gender stereotyping. In the same episode, Cameron tries to refute being a “wife” and a “woman.” He briefly becomes masculine and does so by throwing a football. Unfortunately, the football hits a kid. Cameron then runs squealing, with arms flailing, to the kid’s aid. The stereotypical reliance on sport to show masculinity and Cameron’s almost
instant shedding of it afterwards sends his character (and the show) back into problematic simplicity. Once again, the show confines him to strict gender roles where he must worry about being a “woman.”

As discussed earlier, the same-sex women couples, through their opposing levels of emotionality, opposing levels of self-protection, opposing levels of competitiveness and opposing uses of sex, are presented with one masculinized partner. Interestingly (and differing greatly from the men), though, is the absence of domesticity to mark the roles of the female characters. *Grey’s Anatomy*’s Callie comes closest when she gives birth, but due to the event happening near the end of the season, there are few examples of caregiving. It could be argued that the lack of this one marker so identified with femininity makes the women more nuanced. However, I argue that within their relationships, one partner still proves more “domestic” by focusing on the emotional connectivity of her partner and the relationship as whole. Meanwhile, domesticity blankets the men’s relationships in multiple forms. Through their opposing levels of caregiving, opposing levels of emotionality and the damsel/protector scenarios, the gay male couples thoroughly perpetuate the model of having one person with opposite gender characteristics.

When comparing heterosexual and same-sex relationships, scholars have consistently said that men in heterosexual relationships have more power. Also there are gendered differences in decision making and emotional involvement. Same-sex relationships, though, are typically less gendered and value equality more than heterosexual relationships (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Felmlee, 1994; Kurdek, 2005; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997). Though Carrington (2009) found gendered roles concerning domesticity in same-sex relationships and Sprecher and Felmee (1997) found divisions concerning emotional
involvement and decision making, those are but a few types of gendered roles. And various research cautions against such oversimplification for both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. In fact, when taking in many different conceptualizations and measures of masculinity and femininity, studies indicate there is much overlap among gender roles for both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. The actuality of gendered roles is less important here than what people perceive to be true. Although findings indicate overlap, the public still stereotypically perceives men and women to have archetypal masculine and feminine traits (Buss, 1990; Buss & Craik, 1981; McCreary & Rhodes, 2001; Orlofsky & O’Herson, 1987; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979).

The “reality” of television follows more closely with the public’s perceptions of “real” relationships. When any minority achieves visibility through mass media they are subject to the biases of elites (Gross, 1991). Capsuto notes that most “shows about gay people [are] clearly for straight audiences” (2000: 70). And various research states that television has consistently engaged with this notion by portraying LGBQ characters and same-sex couples as gendered (Capsuto, 2000; Gross, 2001; Harrington, 2003; Tropiano, 2002). In their research on television portrayals of heterosexual and same-sex romantic relationships, Ivory et al. (2009) studied cable shows such as The L Word, Queer as Folk and Sex and the City. They found that same-sex couples were gendered where one person was more dominant and the other more submissive.

My analysis of primetime network television shows concurs. But network television arguably has even less nuance than cable. For example, Cameron doesn’t just specialize in domesticity, he is a full-time homemaker complementing his hyperemotionality. Kalinda isn’t just dominant, she is sexually aggressive, rarely expresses emotion and focuses solely on self-protection. Lee is shown as the sole caregiver of Jenny while Bob is the absent breadwinner.
With regard to this one aspect of heteronormativity—everyday roles—the television shows demonstrate that gender stereotypes are not waning. They are thriving. The notions of the masculine/feminine binary fold in a new group (same-sex relationships) with which to enact its confinement. And in doing so, the depictions reify the strict rules not just for this new group but for the tens of millions watching—society at large.

Historically, persons exhibiting gender characteristics opposite to their given gender bore harsh labels—women were “dykes” while men were “fags” or “sissies” (Seidman, 2002). And yet, no fellow characters ever call any of the queer female characters a “dyke.” Meanwhile, Kurt and Blaine on Glee are the only male characters who experience policing of their gender characteristics from fellow characters. Admittedly, there has long been greater discomfort with gay men, especially feminized gay men, than with lesbians. But aside from Kurt and Blaine’s on-show policing, I have also not found any evidence of public outcry from TV watchers directed at either the men or the women. So, with ratings all above 10 million viewers, why have audiences accepted these gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer characters?

I believe there is a heteronormative loophole that engages with, not the reality of everyday roles, but the perceptions of roles. Heteronormativity posits that the ideal relationship includes one person from the masculine end of the spectrum matched with one person from the feminine side of the spectrum to create the perfect romantic couple (Seidman, 2002). As Gross (1991) suggests, specific traits blatantly bait viewers to cue masculinity and femininity. And the more masculine lesbian, as long as she is with a feminine partner, and the feminine gay man as long as he is with a more masculine partner, seem to quash any potential for criticism and negativity. In a classic case of Mulvey’s articulation of a viewer identifying with their “screen surrogate” to create a “satisfying sense of omnipotence,” these depictions create the possibility of
straight TV viewers connecting with similar, comforting notions of what they perceive to be ideal male/female roles (1975:48). Thus, a symbiotic relationship emerges in glorious high definition, if not with highly-evolved gender role definitions.

5 “GIVE ME SENSUAL, GIVE ME SULTRY:” THE MARRIAGE OF THE MALE GAZE AND SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

“Sooner or later, happily or unhappily, almost everyone fails to control his or her sex life.”
- Michael Warner (1999:1)

Zack Florrick, the lanky teenage son of Lockhart/Gardner & Bond lawyer Alicia Florrick, opens their front door. In the doorway stands Kalinda, her phone to her ear. Her raven-colored hair is styled in her trademark updo. She’s wearing a fitted cranberry-colored leather motorcycle jacket, cinched to emphasize her small waist. The jacket is paired with her other trademarks: a black fitted mini-skirt, black pantyhose and black leather boots.

Zack, in boxers and a t-shirt, stands in the doorway speechless with his mouth open. His eyes move up and down over Kalinda’s petite frame.

He forces out a meek “Hi.”

“Your mom?” asks Kalinda.

Zack gathers his composure and motions for her to walk in. Kalinda, meanwhile, continues to talk on the phone.

“You work with my mom?” interrupts Zack, now standing behind Kalinda as she unzips her jacket, revealing more of her lilac-colored blouse.
“Yeah, sure,” she responds flatly as Zack watches her from down the hall.

In this scene, Zack examines Kalinda’s appearance. With the same focused interest, this chapter looks at how the characters’ appearances overlap with the depictions of their physical sex acts. In Chapter Four, I discussed how both the men’s and women’s same-sex relationships maintain gendered roles where one partner is feminine and the other is masculine. But with sex and appearances, the male gaze sends men and women down different paths. The men’s path is one of desexualization where any femininity in their appearance warrants policing. Meanwhile, all the women, whether they are the masculine partner or not, must walk (in high heels) a path full of westernized beauty and hypersexualization. And there is no better example of that than The Good Wife’s Kalinda.

The roles Kalinda inhabits within her romantic relationships correspond with essentialist notions of masculinity. She tends to be career-driven and sex-driven with a lack of emotional expression (which is on spectacular display in the scene above with Zack). However, her physical presentation veers from such masculinity. And it does so in extremes. Visibly taken aback by what Mulvey (1975) calls her “to-be-looked-at-ness,” Zack sees feminine attributes. Present is the figure-hugging skirt, longish black hair in a ponytail, smokey (and, thus, striking) eye makeup and heeled leather boots. Because of her hyperfeminine presentation, Zack simply views her as desirable, but his view also signals that women, whether they are partaking in romantic relationships with men or women, obey traditional expectations of gender performance.

The importance of this single, short scene lies in the eyes of Zack. His response adheres to the archetypal appearance-focused (as in focused on the appearance of a woman) heterosexual male gaze that Mulvey (1989: 19) says “projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly.” Zack’s gaze is voyeuristic in two ways. First, his seeing is active and
recognizable to viewers. Second, his seeing serves to objectify and, then, distance himself from
the object (Mulvey, 1989; Rose, 2012). Kalinda, meanwhile, is aloof, seemingly recognizing his
objectification of her. She simply walks passed him (and his voyeurism), on the phone, toward
her work-driven goal. Her reaction suggests she finds his gaze inappropriate but not so severe to
where she would challenge it and/or try to stop it.

Mulvey originally characterized the male gaze as the camera lens, focused and trained to
view a woman as an object. Within the objectification, the camera viewed women as weak,
submissive, and in service of the man’s pleasure. The camera lens ultimately cued (and trained)
audiences to view women, fictional or not, the same way (Gledhill, 2009). But in this scene,
Zack is the dominant lens, not the camera. He serves as a societal surrogate for heterosexual men
and how they view women. However, the voyeuristic male gaze directed from the male character
to the female character has the potential to go beyond the screen. I theorize that Zack’s gaze
could instigate an interaction in another direction—from that of the television viewer toward the
female character. Zack, like a camera lens, cues viewers to focus on Kalinda’s body. Despite
Kalinda’s reaction signaling his ogling as inappropriate, his gaze still frames her as an object of
desire for the purpose of heterosexual males. And intertwined with his objectification, Zack’s
gaze sanctions Kalinda’s sexualized hyperfemininity as an expectation of women. Now, the new
iteration of the male gaze from the male character simultaneously takes place alongside the male
gaze of the camera lens. The relationship formed is a multi-directional male gaze that now
includes the heterosexual male societal surrogate alongside the camera lens (see Figure 5.1).
Zack, though, isn’t the only societal surrogate for the male gaze. On *Glee*, Santana and Brittany’s hyperfeminine appearances elicit similar responses from their heterosexual male classmates. As part of McKinley High School’s Cheerios, they have a uniform, but it is the uniform for the all-American feminine archetype of the cheerleader. For most of the season, Brittany and Santana bound around the halls in a blur of red, white and black—their school’s colors. The top is fitted and sleeveless, while the short pleated skirt bares most of their legs. Their long, thick hair is typically in ponytails with soft curls. Complementing the cheerleading uniform, Santana wears small stud earrings and a thin-chained necklace with a heart on the bottom. Brittany sometimes pairs her uniform with larger silver earrings.
In the season’s first episode, Santana, in her cheerleading uniform, briefly interacts with Jacob Ben Israel, the student editor of the school newspaper who’s interviewing his classmates. When he gets to Santana, his eyes (and then the camera frame) settle on her breasts as he asks her “How was your summer?” Santana replies, “My eyes are up here JewFro,” referring to his gaze and his curly red hair. Brittany endures similar ogling. The best example of her societal surrogate comes in the form of Artie Abrams, a wheelchair-bound member of the glee club. In one scene, he raises his head up from his bottom locker, eyes gazing up at the form of Brittany in her uniform. Her hands are clasped behind her, pushing her chest out. She tells him, “So, I just want you to know, I’m really into you.” His mouth opens in surprise (like Zack with Kalinda), and he nervously offers a drawn-out “Ohhhkkkkayyy.” After she tells him she wants to be his girlfriend, the camera settles on Brittany’s right hip as she moves her hand and places it there. Through the opening between her arm and her hip, Artie stares up at her, grinning.

On Grey’s Anatomy, Callie and Arizona’s appearance also maintains femininity but not the hypersexual femininity exhibited by Kalinda, Santana and Brittany. Callie and Arizona’s seeming demureness stems from the show’s main setting being in a hospital. When at the hospital, Callie and Arizona typically wear their gender-neutral dark blue scrubs with white lab coats. Still, they utilize natural-looking make-up matching their skin tones. And they have long flowing hair (though Callie does shorten hers to neck-length later in the season). Outside the hospital, more feminine expressions emerge. However, they are still more conservative compared to the other women’s appearances. For example, at a friend’s wedding Callie wears a steel-colored cocktail dress with shiny beading around the cleavage-baring v-neck front. Arizona, meanwhile, holds a purse complimenting her blue cocktail dress, also with a low-cut v-
neck. Both women wear earrings and have matching thin-chained necklaces topped off with a heart-shaped charm at the bottom.

Whether in their scrubs or not, though, Callie and Arizona are subject to objectification. In one episode, they have an argument about Callie’s straight “best friend” Mark Sloan. Arizona notes that “Mark stares at my boobs when we talk—he starts at my face but somewhere along the way he gets distracted and ends up on my boobs. I have tried my whole life to avoid the boob-staring guy.” Arizona expresses discomfort at Mark’s objectification, but Callie, sanctioning Mark’s objectification, says that Mark stares at Arizona’s breasts “because they’re good boobs!” In this scene, Mark is not even present, yet his male gaze is. Here, words cue viewers toward the bodies of the women (and, in this example, two women in a same-sex romantic relationship with each other). Callie is not immune to Mark’s gaze either. In a later episode, she becomes an object of desire for Mark when they have sex together during Callie and Arizona’s separation.

Seeing heterosexual male characters explicitly view Callie, Arizona, Brittany, Santana, and Kalinda as objects shows that the male gaze is alive and well. And as the men’s gaze also cues viewers toward similar ways of looking, a multi-directional male gaze directed at the women characters remains constant. In her groundbreaking treatise on the lesbian existence, Adrienne Rich argues that lesbians’ jobs hinge on masking their sexual identity through heteronormative characteristics of femininity. She says, “A lesbian, closeted on her job because of heterosexist prejudice, is not simply forced into denying the truth of her outside relationships or private life; her job depends on her pretending to be not merely heterosexual but a heterosexual woman, in terms of dressing and playing the feminine, deferential role required of ‘real’ women” (Rich, 1980: 642). These television shows provide a new iteration of Rich’s argument. In order for these lesbian, bisexual and queer characters to do their “job”—which is to
entertain—they must adhere to standards placed upon heterosexual women. This process hinges on celebrating Western beauty standards.

With lesbians depicted in popular media, a “femme” appearance in service of a heterosexual audience and the male gaze is not new (Ciasullo, 2001; Hantzis & Lehr, 1994). However, what is new, especially for primetime network audiences, is that such a process is now more complicated as the shows depict appearances alongside sex acts. Historically, lesbians in primetime, though femme, have lacked sexuality and have rarely been shown in sexually intimate situations (Hantzis & Lehr, 1994; Moritz 1994, Raley & Lucas, 2006). Not anymore.

A brown hand grabs at a blue comforter—underneath the comforter is a body the hand is trying to get to. Giggles and heavy breathing begin as the camera frame pans up the arm, revealing a brown elbow and then a brown shoulder. Lastly, just beyond the shoulder, disheveled black hair comes into view. A white hand wipes away the hair, revealing Callie’s face. She’s smiling, laughing and kissing Arizona, the crown of her blonde-haired head now in view.

Then a knock comes at their door accompanied by the gruff voice of Mark. “Torres!” he shouts.

“Awww, shoot,” says Callie as she stops kissing Arizona. “I told him we’d work out this morning.”

“But this is like working out; it’s just more fun,” replies Arizona, smiling.

“Come on, no pain, no gain!” yells Mark, again knocking on the door.

“Go away Mark!” yells Arizona back at him.

“Hey, be nice, he’s lonely,” says Callie to Arizona softly. They resume kissing with Arizona again grabbing Callie’s head.
“Did you just say my--” says Mark, barge in but stopping in his tracks as soon as he sees the two women in bed.

“Oh!” shouts Arizona, ducking under the covers while Callie sits up, holding the covers to her chest. Her bare shoulders are now in full view and allude to her being topless.

“All right, nice,” says Mark, nodding approvingly. “You finish; I’ll wait.”

Arizona lets out a frustrated sigh while Callie throws a pillow at Mark. He closes the door but not without sticking his head back in for one more peek.

On a basic, descriptive level, this scene proves important because of the sexuality it depicts. First, the body parts—mainly arms and shoulders—of Callie and Arizona fill the screen. And those arms and shoulders (with the rest of the body being obscured by the comforter) are intertwined, showcasing shared physical closeness and attachment. Furthermore, the image oozes passion beyond just the image of the intertwined bodies. The two women are holding each other’s heads and kissing with urgency. And as if more cues were needed, the sounds of giggles signal happiness and pleasure while the sounds of heavy breathing and rapid-fire lip-smacking signal intensity. Also of note is that Callie and Arizona are having sex in the morning before work. This creates an air of normalcy in that these actions are part of their routine. And perhaps more importantly, they indicate that such actions are integral to the health and happiness of their relationship. Unfortunately, though, the scene services the heterosexual male.

Mark’s response falls in line with the archetypal macho, sex-driven, appearance-focused (he’s the chief of plastic surgery at Seattle Grace Mercy West hospital) heterosexual man. Walking in on Callie and Arizona making out, his eyes grow wide at first. But then they relax and settle on an image long held as a heterosexual male fantasy—two women having sex with each other. Though further evidence isn’t necessary, Mark also provides audible confirmation in
the form of “All right, nice” which adds another layer of approval. Mark sanctions the normalcy of two women engaging in sex acts with each other. However, he also sanctions the women to be watched during sex. With a sly grin, he tells Callie and Arizona, “You finish; I’ll wait.” Though he closes the door, giving them some morsel of privacy, he is only a few feet away in the living room. The implication is that he’ll enjoy the image implanted in his mind as well as the notion that the two women are continuing his fantasy.

Callie seemingly recognizes this blatant objectification (and use of her and Arizona for his pleasure) and throws a pillow at Mark. But she does so with a wry grin. Callie’s reaction endorses Mark’s voyeurism and cements his objectification of her and Arizona as not a serious issue. Once again, Mark serves as the societal surrogate—the fictionalized manifestation of the male gaze. And once again, he cues viewers to form the same impressions he has where the sex acts between two women are normal and should be watched. However, a man does not have to be present to make this point known.

Throughout the season, Arizona and Callie are routinely physically affectionate with each other to varying degrees of intensity and without the physical presence of a man. In one episode, viewers see Callie rubbing the shoulders of Arizona and then the reverse a few episodes later. They routinely share kisses ranging from quick pecks to prolonged, passionate make out sessions. Another episode finds them busting into their apartment, giggling and kissing. This time, though, they are ripping each other’s shirts off to reveal their bras and bare stomachs. They also audibly vocalize their desire for physical affection when, in one episode, Callie says, “I’d rather rip your clothes.” Arizona then replies, “I’ll do the ripping.” Here, the original iteration of Mulvey’s male gaze is at work with the camera, cuing viewers to be voyeuristic toward the women.
Though she doesn’t have a man walk in on her during sex, Kalinda is similar to Callie and Arizona in that sex acts are common. In one example, Kalinda, in black bra and pants, is propped up against a light pink velvet headboard. The frame pulls away from her, revealing a topless Sophia laying on her stomach and showing her bare back. Sophia’s hands drape over the side of the bed. Kalinda’s phone rings and she debates whether to answer it.

“Work?” asks Sophia, her voice muffled by the sheets.

“Yeah,” responds Kalinda, smiling.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk, you used to be more fun.”

“Yeah.”

“Maybe it was me. Maybe I was the one that was more fun.”

“No, no, no, no, it was me,” responds Kalinda, leaving her perch. She climbs on all fours over her latest conquest, her breasts pouring out of her bra. Kalinda then nibbles on Sophia’s ear, which is covered by her disheveled mop of blonde hair.

“Miss me?” asks Sophia turning over, her breasts now conveniently shielded from view by Kalinda’s neck and arms.

Kalinda nods her head.

“Now you gotta kiss me,” smiles Sophia.

Kalinda grabs Sophia’s chin and neck, kissing her until a phone rings.

“Now that’s mine,” says Sophia. Kalinda hands her the phone. Kalinda then climbs on Sophia’s back again as Sophia turns over on her stomach to answer the call: “Yeah. Yeah. When? Ok, no I’ll be there. Love you.”

Kalinda, who’s been kissing Sophia’s back, rises up off her in shock.

“I have an hour,” says Sophia.
“Who was that?” asks Kalinda.

“That was my husband. I have to go pick him up at the airport. He was calling to remind me.”

Neither within this specific after-sex/before-sex sex scene nor in any of Kalinda’s other same-sex sexual encounters, does Kalinda audibly reference specific sex acts or body parts. Rather, the visual spectacle of such sex acts and body parts takes precedence. For example, this scene shows Kalinda’s full body propped against the headboard. Kalinda is not nude. However, her breasts are on display through a lacy black bra, especially once she moves her body to be on all fours, hanging over Sophia. Sophia’s breasts remain hidden, though she is obviously topless. Thus, the scene creates a situation where one can mentally fill in the titillating “blanks” as it were. Unlike Callie and Arizona, Kalinda’s sex scenes are slightly more explicit in that they show more skin. And with Kalinda not audibly discussing sex acts alongside the visual of sex acts, the emphasis lies in the sphere of objectification more than it does with the other women characters. Kalinda’s scenes reek of the heterosexual male gaze. However, the scene discussed above finds the camera lens solely serving as the male gaze instead of both the camera lens and a male character.

While not as explicit as The Good Wife or even Grey’s Anatomy, Glee doesn’t shy away from depicting same-sex female sexuality either. In one scene, the camera pans up two sets of bare, tanned legs that are tangled around each other. Eventually, the flesh tones morph into the red and white colors of Santana and Brittany’s cheerleading uniforms. Their uniforms blur together to form an extracurricular sexual show of McKinley High School team spirit. Santana, her black hair freed from its usual ponytail, lies on Brittany’s chest. Santana’s face is buried in Brittany’s neck. During this make out session, Brittany audibly draws attention to her sexual
relations with Santana by referring to their “sweet lady kisses.” In another episode, she tells Santana she likes “making out” with her. Meanwhile, Santana returns the favor, telling Brittany she “wants to get my mac on” while, in another episode, tells her she “wants to get our cuddle on.”

Santana and Brittany, Kalinda and her various female lovers, and Callie and Arizona have a lot in common in their appearances and in the depictions of their sex acts. One commonality is that the physical displays of affection are not for comedic purposes. If comedy does exist in the scenes, it lies in the dialogue, not in the visual depiction of the sex act. For example, when Mark walks in on Callie and Arizona making out, the scene ends on a comedic note. But the comedy does not lie (in bed) with the sex act. Rather, it lies with Mark walking in on the sex act. The sex act itself remains serious, as Mark’s reaction confirms.

Such seriousness bleeds over into the women’s romantic relationships where the sex acts are seen as integral (and normal) to the maintenance of their relationships. However, two traditionally “hot” (as Brittany would say) women getting their “mac on” (as Santana would say) also maintain important heteronormative relationships. All the women operate through their physicality—in both their day-to-day gender performance and in their depicted sex acts. These depictions have them being desirous to other women but also, and more importantly, being desirous to heterosexual men. In Chapter Four, I theorized that the masculine roles in the same-sex female relationships were a way for heterosexual men to maintain their indispensability in relationships. If that is the case, then the objectification of the same characters adds another layer. The focus on women’s bodies maintain something else historically attributed to heterosexual men: power. Although the roles of one partner are masculine and the other partner are feminine, all of their bodies and sex acts, regardless of their roles, are confined to femininity.
Women are kept objectified and, thus, weak. And women’s same-sex relationships remain in service of heterosexuals and, specifically, in service of the heterosexual male.

Some may dismiss such depictions’ lack of nuance as partial to the oft-characterized more traditional and family-friendly network television model. But the oft-characterized more groundbreaking and risky cable television model utilizes lesbian bodies in the same way (Farr & Degroult, 2008). Even though the characters are lesbian, bisexual or queer, their femininity serves the same functions as their straight counterparts. Scholar Chris Jenks (1995: 150) encapsulates this best when he says, “Women do not look, they are looked at.”

5.1 From Sexualized Queer Women to Desexualized Gay Men

The camera frame focuses on two sets of fingers—one black and one white—tickling the keys of a piano. Then, the camera frame rises up to see Glee’s Kurt with Mercedes, his straight female friend. Kurt is wearing a camel-colored sweater. It has a wide neck showing a white dress shirt and black tie underneath. Emblazoned on the front of the sweater is a drawing of a woman with glasses. Below the woman’s face—continuing her outfit on the sweater—is a flowing black bow with white polka dots.

Mercedes looks quizzically at Kurt’s sweater, which is fitted and extends down to his mid-thigh. With her eyebrows furled, she asks, “So is that a men’s sweater?”

“Fashion has no gender,” replies Kurt sharply.

Rachel, their fellow glee club member, then interrupts the fashion tutorial. Slamming the piano’s fallboard down, she tells them, “Ladies, we have a problem.”

Rachel’s problem lies with a rival glee club member who may steal her spotlight. However, the important “problem” with this scene lies in how Kurt’s appearance subjects him to negative policing. As discussed in Chapter Four, Kurt’s roles—through his emotions and
actions—situate himself firmly on the feminine end of the gender binary spectrum. Meanwhile, his boyfriend Blaine is more on the masculine side. Kurt’s typical appearance, with the particular outfit described in the scene above being a good example, actually places him in the middle of that binary. Though Mercedes insinuates that his sweater is a woman’s sweater, Kurt pairs it with a very masculine white dress shirt and black tie. He effectively makes the outfit have “no [clear] gender.” That is how Kurt reads his physical appearance. But as Mercedes exhibits, that is not how others read it. Perhaps due to his feminine roles, Kurt’s outfits typically elicit jabs as being totally feminine even if they are only partly feminine. However, Mercedes’ question could also stem from femininity’s general devaluation. Similar to the racialized one-drop rule, any femininity equates to total femininity.

Though the male gaze typically refers to women serving as objects of desire, it is also useful to showcase all other heteronormative characteristics. The entire heteronormative structure, created by heterosexual men in power, hinges on looking at life through a heterosexual male gaze. Thus, Mercedes, though a straight African American woman, acts as a societal surrogate for the male gaze similar to straight men looking at women. Both police the norms of masculinity and femininity. However, Mercedes’ male gaze does differ from her previously discussed male counterparts. They explicitly use their male gaze to cue their (and society’s) desire for women. Mercedes’ gaze, though, cues a norm violation, which devalues and desexualizes Kurt. Her gaze shows him as a feminine man and, thus, as not desirous.

Kurt does become an object of desire to Blaine, who often stares at Kurt lovingly. However, the context for that desire always stems from Kurt’s singing talents or what Kurt is discussing. Blaine’s desire never comes from viewing him as physically desirous, as is the case with the same-sex female couples. By contrast, Kurt’s boyfriend Blaine never faces such
scrutiny. He is almost always seen in a classically masculine suit—his navy and red suit and tie uniform of Dalton Academy. But even when not at school, he dresses conservatively. When he goes to a party, he is in jeans, a maroon-colored sweater vest and black and white striped t-shirt—basic (Western) masculine pairings. Blaine typically looks like a conservative minimalist especially when juxtaposed with Kurt’s consistently flamboyant accessorizing.

None of the other man in the television shows match Kurt in terms of inventive fashion statements. But the rest do follow his example in matching their appearance with their everyday roles. However, they usually work within the parameters of masculine expectations. For instance, in Bob and Lee’s first scene together on *Desperate Housewives*, Lee’s compact frame is in jeans and a bright red polo shirt with yellow stitching. Then, Bob walks up, towering over him dressed in dark slacks, a blue dress shirt and a blue and steel tie. Lee is within masculine gender norms in terms of types of clothes. But he does challenge those norms. He typically opts for brighter colors and patterns that complement his femininity and his (stereotypically gay) flamboyance. Bob is the more masculine partner. Thus, his clothes literally follow “suit” as he is typically seen in suit and tie going to work as a lawyer. Outside of work, he tends to be dressed in solid colored (and darker colored) sweater vests and dress shirts.

Outside of the everyday routine, though, Lee has no qualms going full force feminine. At a Halloween party, he arrives as Marilyn Monroe complete with blonde curls and the iconic white dress from her film *The Seven Year Itch*. Lee’s representation is admirable and his straight female neighbor Lynette jokes, "JFK would be all over that." Unlike Mercedes policing Kurt’s melding of feminine and masculine fashion, Lynette, as the societal surrogate, sanctions Lee’s use of feminine gender performance. Though never explicitly said, her support most likely stems from two aspects. First, Halloween provides an appropriate context for anyone to dress up in a
costume. Second, Lee’s already established feminine roles allow him to utilize Halloween’s appropriateness and dress as a woman. It is doubtful Lynette or anyone else would support an appearance by “Marilyn” outside of Halloween. Either way, Lynette’s comment provides the only example of anyone (even Bob and Lee toward each other) connecting the physical appearance of Bob and/or Lee to sexual desire. It is telling that Lee only becomes sexualized through his appearance when dressed up as a woman (and not just any woman, but one of the most sexualized women in history).

Modern Family’s Cameron and Mitchell also mirror their gay television neighbors in how they pair their appearances with their romantic roles. In one scene, Mitchell, dressed in a dark purple sweater and jeans, sits on a couch in the middle of a men’s clothing store. He’s smiling, looking at his daughter Lily. Cameron then busts out of a dressing room, rolling up the sleeves of a white dress shirt with a blue paisley pattern all over it.

“Okay, what do you think?” asks Cameron, posing with his hands outstretched to his side.

“I like it,” responds Mitchell.

“But you don’t love it?”

“No, I do, I love it.”

“As much as you loved the other one?”

Mitchell purses his lips and lets out an “Ooooohhh,” which prompts Cameron to turn around and go back into the dressing room.

Mitchell leans back on the couch in frustration and mouths “Oh my--” but is snapped back to attention when Cameron reemerges.
“Okay,” says Cameron, now holding a grey striped dress shirt. “The house is on fire; I only have time to grab one shirt. Which one do I take?”

“The correct answer is take Lily,” retorts Mitchell.

“After that.”

“Okay, the blue one.”

“Because the grey one washes me out,” says Cameron, his head down, showing his insecurity.

Mitchell rises up from the couch and walks toward Cam. “Cam, you can’t go wrong here,” he says. “Everything you’ve tried on looks great. I love you in both of them.”

“Awww, you’re so nice to me,” responds Cameron, leaning in to give him a kiss. But as the blurred image of a man walks past, Mitchell jerks away. Mitchell then half-smiles awkwardly, pats Cam on the shoulder and walks away toward Lily. Cameron stands there, his mouth open in disbelief.

This scene is important on multiple levels. As with Kurt and Blaine and Bob and Lee, viewers get a good sense of how Cameron and Mitchell’s appearances complement their roles. Mitchell, who exhibits more masculine roles in the relationship, finds much commonality with his masculine mirrors of Glee’s Blaine and Desperate Housewives’ Bob. Because Mitchell works at a law firm and is the sole financial provider for the family, he is more frequently shown in suit and tie. Outside of work, Mitchell typically opts for darker colors, solid fabric, sweater vests and dress shirts paired with jeans as evidenced in the scene above. Meanwhile, Cameron dresses similarly to Lee, his feminine counterpart on Desperate Housewives. Cameron’s typical outfit finds him in jeans and a dress shirt. His shirts typically consist of brighter colors, softer colors and bold patterns. This complements his emotionally dramatic (and, thus, feminized) personality.
Like Kurt on *Glee*, Cameron expends considerable energy dressing himself. In the one short scene detailed above, he goes through many emotions—happiness, uncertainty, frustration and insecurity—due to his appearance. Such actions ultimately only feminize him further.

While appearance is important, there’s another, more pressing implication of this scene that exemplifies an issue found in all the show’s depictions of gay men’s relationships. Not once in this scene, which explicitly focuses on Cameron’s body, does physical appearance connect to sexual desire. In fact, the scene succeeds in disconnecting the two concepts. This disconnection takes place in two ways. First, Mitchell, a gay man acting as the societal surrogate for the male gaze, finds common ground with Mercedes questioning Kurt’s sweater. Mitchell’s mouthed “Oh my” conveys frustration at the tedium of watching Cameron try on shirt after shirt after shirt. Cameron, like Kurt, is not an object of physical desire. Rather, he is desexualized by becoming an object of confusion, frustration and annoyance. Though Cameron does not see Mitchell’s frustration, viewers do. Mitchell’s reactions police Cameron for caring too much about fashion (and, thus, for being too feminine). The second way appearance is disconnected from sexual desire lies in the botched kiss. Mitchell tells Cameron he “can’t go wrong” with either shirt and that he “looks great” in everything. But then Mitchell suddenly refuses to reinforce his statements about Cameron’s appearance with the physical expression of a kiss. Later in the same episode, Cameron, in his private confessional, pathologizes Mitchell by admitting that “[He] has problems with public displays of affection.” Then, at a family gathering, the root of Mitchell’s problem is brought to light. His father Jay never expressed emotion when Mitchell was a child and, thus, Mitchell too finds expressing emotion difficult. With a hug and a kiss from his father Jay, Mitchell then gives Cameron a quick peck on the lips. The “problem” appears resolved.
Still, Cameron and Mitchell continue to show a disconnect between their feelings and physical displays of affection and/or desire throughout the entire season. In one episode, Mitchell and Cameron have a fight over Cameron’s insistence on wearing spandex bike shorts because he is “working out again.” When Cameron wears his bike shorts, Mitchell looks repulsed. And in his solo confessional Mitchell faces the camera and says, “Maybe there’s a person in this world that looks good in bike shorts, but my boyfriend is not that person.” Mitchell goes so far as to enlist his straight-talking straight sister Claire for help. He wants her to have a conversation with Cameron about his larger body type and how he shouldn’t be wearing spandex. Following a fight about the issue, Mitchell backtracks and calls Cameron “handsome” while Cameron refers to Mitchell as “amazing looking.” Then, they seal their reconciliation with a split-second, benign peck on the lips that can’t actually be seen because Mitchell’s face is covered in shaving cream. He’s shaving his beard because Cameron tells him he “hates” it in retaliation for Mitchell criticizing his wearing the spandex bike shorts. Discussions of their bodies remain confined to generalizations like “amazing-looking” and “handsome.” They never go further to say what parts of each other they like.

These examples also indicate how Cameron and Mitchell utilize physical displays of affection. Their kisses (which almost always take place after resolving a disagreement) are quick pecks. And the kisses never venture into passionate territory. In fact, out of the five times Cameron and Mitchell kiss, three are on the cheek. Aside from some tepid and stationary cuddling on a couch (as part of a brief, episode-ending montage), the pecks offer the only insight into how Mitchell and Cameron might engage with each other sexually. Unfortunately, Modern Family is not the only show that presents gay sexuality as absent. Desperate Housewives too skirts gay men’s sexuality.
Gaby, Lee’s straight neighbor, pushes Lee into the immaculate, mod foyer of Bob’s house.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” yells Bob.

“Gaby called to say that you were lonely and depressed. And once I stopped laughing, I actually felt bad for you,” retorts Lee.

“We only broke up four months ago, how did you gain this much weight,” Bob fires back.

Lee gasps loudly.

“Okay, okay,” yells Gaby, stepping in between them to stop the verbal missiles. “Now that we’re done saying ‘hello,’ let’s talk about this fabulous weekend.” Gaby is referring to a weekend golf getaway Bob planned to go to with her husband Carlos. Instead, she wants him to take Lee.

“Did you seriously think I would take him? We broke up!” yells Bob.

“And it’s time to put the pieces back together,” says Gaby. “Let’s be honest. You’ve been miserable without Lee. And you’ve been miserable without Bob—that’s why you’re getting so fat. You may not think I’m your friend, but I am.” Turning to Bob, she continues, “And I’m smart enough to know that you need something more in your life than a straight guy to go play golf with. You need somebody to love.” Gaby then takes Lee’s arm and pulls him toward Bob.

“And you need somebody who will you love you back,” she says.

“Gaby, I appreciate what you’re doing and I think Lee knows I still love him, but--” says Bob, now looking at Lee.

“But there are still huge issues between us,” interjects Lee.
“Maybe it’s time to work those out,” says Gaby. “I’d hate to see that fabulous resort weekend go to waste.” She then takes them both by the shoulders: “Oh, come on. Talk to each other. Do it for me, as your friend.”

Gaby then scurries out the door leaving Bob and Lee standing shoulder to shoulder. They are awkwardly quiet and their eyes dart around the room at everything but each other.

Gaby gets no further than the front steps before she turns around and walks back in. “Oh, I forgot. One more thing--” She stops mid-sentence, her eyes wide. She sees Bob and Lee holding each other by their heads and kissing passionately.

“Okay, nevermind! I’m good,” says Gaby rushing back out.

Gaby, the ever-intruding self-righteous straight female neighbor, takes it upon herself to literally push Bob and Lee back together. Lee, in stereotypical feminine fashion, has been coping through eating. Bob, in stereotypical masculine fashion, grudgingly accepts his feelings and admits to being lonely. The solution? Reconciliation of their coupledom. And though Lee honestly admits there are “huge issues” yet to be worked out, they are conveniently thrown to the series’ storyline wasteland, never to be dealt with in this episode nor in any of the season’s remaining episodes. Instead of talking, they opt for a make out session. Their kissing signals to Gaby they are, one again, committed to being together. This scene’s kissing provides the only physical display of affection between them in all of the season’s 23 hour-long episodes. And the image, where viewers actually see them kissing, lasts exactly two seconds. Not only does the image suffer from blink-and-you’ll-miss-it editing, the cinematography finds the view shot from behind Gaby’s head. Her head takes up much of the right side of the frame. From her (and the viewers’) vantage point, Bob and Lee are far away as the shot shows them from their calves up. For the women’s sex scenes, though, the frame was a “tight shot” where the camera appears
close to the subjects. Only their bodies filled the frame. By being shot so far away, and then only being shown for two seconds, much of the importance and intensity of Bob and Lee’s reconciliatory moment seems lost.

*Glee*’s Kurt and Blaine provide the most nuanced glimpse into the sexual workings of gay men’s relationships. But they do so only slightly and only relatively more than the other gay men characters who provide so little. Throughout the season, the emotional connection between Kurt and Blaine has built up. Kurt has wanted to have a romantic relationship with Blaine while Blaine has hesitated and treated Kurt like a friend. That dynamic changes after the death of Pavarotti, the Dalton Academy Warblers’ canary mascot, whose care was entrusted to Kurt. To honor the fallen bird, Kurt sings the Beatles’ “Blackbird.” Later in the same episode, Blaine places his hand on top of Kurt’s and admits, “Watching you do ‘Blackbird’ this week, that was the moment for me about you.” Kurt remains silent, his eyes wide in shock. Blaine then confesses, “You move me Kurt.” And with that confession, Blaine leans in and passionately kisses Kurt. The kiss proves groundbreaking: it is the first between openly gay teens on network television (Vargas-Cooper, 2013). When they stop kissing 10 seconds later, Blaine states that they should “practice” their upcoming duet. However, they look at each other and launch in for another intense kiss (so also racking up the second gay teen kiss on network television).

Unlike Bob and Lee’s kissing scene, Kurt and Blaine have a “tight shot”; the frame shows them from their waist up, their heads just to the right of center. The tight shot and the considerable length of the scene adds gravitas to the moment and to their relationship. Yet, the scene provides the only physical display of affection (aside from some brief, one-time hand holding) between the two men out of the season’s 22 hour-long episodes. The scene also
provides the only substantial depiction of sexual activity within a gay male relationship out of all of the episodes in all the series I watched.

Why is Blaine and Kurt’s one scene the only substantial scene where two men are engaged in physical displays of affection? In a scene with Blaine from earlier in the season, Kurt unintentionally sheds some light on the subject.

Blaine sits shoulder to shoulder with Kurt in Kurt’s bedroom in front of a mirror. In order to compete with rival schools’ glee clubs, the Dalton Academy Warblers have decided to inject more sex appeal into their performances. But Kurt needs practice.

“All right, so give me sensual, but don’t make fun of it. Like, really try,” says Blaine.

Kurt focuses his eyes, knocks his head to the right and then to the left, all the while biting his bottom lip.

“All right, now give me sultry,” responds Blaine.

Kurt looks down, knocks his head back and begins the same routine: eyes focusing, head swishing and biting lip.

“Um, Kurt, they’re all sort of looking the same,” chuckles Blaine.

Rattled, Kurt fires back: “It’s because the face I’m actually doing isn’t comfortable.”

“This is pointless Blaine! I don’t know how to be sexy, because I don’t know the first thing about sex,” says Kurt, rising up from his seat in frustration.

“Kurt, you’re blushing,” says Blaine, grinning.

“I’ve tried watching those movies,” Kurt admits. “But I just get horribly depressed and I think about how they were all kids once, and they all have mothers and—God, what would their mothers think? And why would you get that tattoo there?”

“Well then, maybe we should have a conversation about it. I’ll tell you what I know.”
Kurt’s eyes grow wide as he shakes his head: “I don’t want to know the graphic details. I like romance. That’s why I like Broadway musicals, because the touch of a fingertip is as sexy as it gets.”

“Kurt, you’re going to have to learn about it someday.”

“Well, not today. I think I’ve learned quite enough for today, thank you. I think you should leave.”

Obliging Kurt’s wishes, Blaine silently rises from his seat and walks out.

In this scene, Kurt’s reaction implies he is a virgin. And though Blaine clearly “knows” more about sex than Kurt, it is unclear whether he is a virgin as well. It is interesting that the gay men with the sexiest scene might both be virgins. Except for his kiss with Blaine later in the season, though, Kurt seems to be a virgin in every sense. In the scene above, he tries his hardest to be “sensual” and can’t do it. He is not alone. In this regard, the adult gay men characters might as well be virgins too. In fact, there is no evidence that the adult gay men are not virgins. As examined throughout this chapter, there is much focus on men’s bodies through discussions of clothes. However, no one consistently displays “sensuality” and/or pairs it with discussions of traditionally sexualized male body parts, unlike Grey’s Anatomy’s Callie and Arizona discussing “good boobs” and, in a another episode, a “beautiful mouth.” No one ever refers to a gay man’s “nice mouth,” “nice chest,” or “nice abs,” much less a “nice butt” or “nice package.” The only hint of gay men’s sexuality lies with the rare (and usually quick) kissing. When Blaine talks to Kurt about sex, Kurt becomes frantic and uncomfortable. Like Kurt, the shows in general display frantic discomfort about how two men might physically express their sexuality. Gay men’s sexuality appears confined, or, to use the popular metaphor, closeted. Why? And more importantly, why is this problematic?
The problems lie in who these shows affect and how the shows depict the men as well as their juxtaposition with their female counterparts. And the answer lies with a familiar, but manipulative bedfellow: the male gaze. Historically, the male gaze has had a symbiotic relationship with the straight male audience member. It has mirrored and spoken for them. So, is the male gaze important if straight men are not watching these shows? Straight men may watch these shows less than, say, straight women. The shows may, in fact, be supported mostly by lesbian, gay, bisexuals and/or queer audiences. Without having access to networks’ demographic information, it is hard to now the audience make-up for sure. However, whether or not straight men are watching the shows is less important than the fact their male gaze is present.

Racial stereotypes and prejudice can seep into the minds of people of color, which they then use (Nosek et. al., 2002). Similarly, gender and sexual stereotypes can seep into the minds of straight women and sexual minorities. All have the potential to serve and use the narrative of the male gaze these shows subject them to. Throughout this project’s analysis, I have shown how straight women characters, bicurious women characters and gay men characters espouse the male gaze. It is not farfetched to speculate that audiences, no matter their gender or sexual orientation, may do the same. The crux of my argument is that the white, straight male gaze—both the camera lens and the societal surrogates—control a narrative where everyone then sees queer women and gay men as these shows depict them.

When Kurt—a gay man—cringes at discussing sex, he acts as the ultimate societal surrogate/male gaze, speaking for the broader heterosexual public. Though the heterosexual public and its male gaze can now handle the idea of two men in a romantic relationship, they still don’t want to see (much less “learn about” as Kurt says) the full expression of gay men’s relationships. Instead, metaphorical wincing ensues in the form of two-second kisses, kisses on
the cheek and Kurt speaking for society when he says “not today.” In all the television shows I watched, gay men are desexualized. Through such desexualization, the men (and their relationships) are devalued and, thus, disempowered, establishing a truth claim that gay men’s sexuality is somehow wrong.

The masculine/feminine roles in each relationship uphold the normativity of heteronormative breadwinner/homemaker and protector/damsel models. However the value of the gay men’s masculine and feminine roles become “inappropriate” when sex is involved. The masculine gay man is not used to objectify or have sex with women. And the feminine gay man is also not used to objectify or have sex with women. Either way, the appearance and bodies of gay men are useless to heterosexual male desire as espoused by the male gaze—the dominant lens through which media are created.

This paradox doesn’t exist with the women characters. As recently as the early 2000s, 15% of television programs contained sexual content involving lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and/or queers. Within those programs, the number of occurrences were low (Fisher, 2007). In my analysis, lesbian, bi and queer women have burst out of such seeming bondage, regularly displaying their sex lives and their bodies. Seeing lesbian, bi and queer women nourish their relationships sexually in primetime is a feat. Superficially, the images seem positive, a sign of progression. Where gay men’s sexuality is wrong, lesbian, bi and queer women’s sexuality is “right.” As evidence of this truth claim, the shows sexualize the appearances of women across all examples. Also, the shows depict women in more explicit and more revealing sex scenes than their male counterparts. But “right” means that women characters experience greater objectification and, thus, continual subordination. Ultimately, our patriarchy lubricates the male
gaze, allowing it to spew its dominance not just over women’s sexuality, but gay men’s sexuality as well.

6 “A LITTLE BIT OF ME IN THAT PRINCESS CASTLE:” THE BIRTHING OF HETERONORMATIVITY

“The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge…and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements” – Michel Foucault (1977: 304)

Cameron and Mitchell sit and face the camera, ready for their confessional.

“We are building a princess castle for Lily,” Mitchell says smiling and looking at Cameron with pride. “It’s something every father wants to be able to do for his daughter.”

And what a princess castle it is! It fills up what looks to be the majority of a fenced-in courtyard next to their apartment building. It is square with a castle tower, spire and flag on each of the two front corners. The door acts as a fake drawbridge with white chains on either side. The left, larger castle tower hosts a painting of a pale-skinned girl with two long golden blonde braids flowing from under a crown fixed keenly on her head. She evokes Rapunzel, the fairy tale maiden stuck in a tower, waiting for her prince to gallantly rescue her using her lengthy hair to climb up the tower.
“My great, great grandfather helped build the Brooklyn Bridge,” Mitchell says in a later confessional. “And I heard that until the day he died, every time he passed it, he was filled with such pride. He’d say ‘There’s a little bit of me in that bridge.’”

As Mitchell continues his confessional, viewers see him grimacing as he struggles to lift the roof made of pink and purple tiles over his head. He places it on top of the castle as the finishing touch. “I know I’m not the handiest guy,” he admits, “but I’m still a man and I want to be able to look out into my yard and say ‘There’s a little bit of me in that princess castle.’”

This chapter focuses on those “little bits”—lessons and teachings in the form of socialization—everyone passes on to those around them. Fictional characters, like their real-life counterparts, are not exempt from this crucial part of the socialization cycle. In fact, they perform their duty spectacularly. However, they take heteronormative ideas about what it means to be “normal” that were imposed upon them and then turn around and impose the same ideas on heterosexuals. Heterosexual girls and women bear much of the brunt. The same-sex characters and couples socialize their daughters to be princesses, to be emotional and to stay in the private sphere. They then socialize women with the idea that coupledom is necessary. Lastly, marriage rears its head again; but this time, same-sex couples christen it as the social pinnacle of romantic relationships for everyone.

There is no better metaphor for the building of this “normal” structure than Cameron and Mitchell’s building of a “princess castle.” Mitchell’s statement of wanting to have “a little bit” of himself remembered by building the princess castle is meant to refer to his legacy as a man. The juxtaposition of masculinity and manhood is a subject Modern Family tackles routinely, but only in simplistic extremes. In this example, the show depicts masculinity and manhood as “building” structures. And such masculinity is even more blatant and comedic when juxtaposed with the
building of the hyperfeminine “princess castle.” Still, the “little bit” phrase leads to another, more important point. The “little bit” he is leaving behind also serves as a symbol for socializing his 2-year-old adopted daughter Lily through the white, blonde princess culture embodied in the princess castle.

Princess culture rightly stokes the ire of many critics. Most cite Disney and its immense marketing machine as the instigator and purveyor of a princess culture that has a stranglehold on young girls’ socialization. Critics mainly take issue with how the various princesses’ statuses and roles (within the context of romantic relationships) are rooted in patriarchy (Giroux, 2001; Wasko, 2001; Zipes, 1995). In the scenes described above, Cameron and Mitchell do not engage with such issues explicitly. Instead, they do so implicitly in two ways: first, with the very use of the word “princess” and second, with the physical depiction of a presumed princess painted on the play castle’s tower.

The use of the word “princess” in conjunction with the word “castle” is meant to evoke one of the most feminine mental images possible—second, perhaps, only to the virginal bride. The term “princess” immediately brings to mind icons like Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora from Sleeping Beauty, and Ariel from The Little Mermaid—all of whom stem from European fairytales. The most famous iterations of such famed literary characters are Disney’s versions. More recently, Disney has introduced racially diverse, independent heroines like Pocahontas, Mulan and Merida from Brave. However, their more iconic white, European forbearers still hog most of the “princess” limelight. And these more famous, pervasive princesses tend to show women and girls with little to no agency in constructing their lives. Second, the princess characters typically showcase their femininity by being beautiful according to Western standards. Third, they showcase their femininity by being emotional, focusing on love and marriage. Lastly,
they show that girls always need a man to rescue them or to change their circumstances for the better; typically, princess’ stories culminate in marriage (Do Rozario, 2004; England, 2011).

This mental image of a princess is only reinforced by the physical image of the presumed princess Rapunzel on the castle tower. This physical depiction finds the girl to be White-European with the aforementioned blonde braids. She wears a jeweled crown atop her head complemented by an ornate light-purple gown. Disney owns the television network ABC that airs Modern Family. Perhaps in a bit of cross-marketing, the girl painted on the castle tower bears a striking resemblance to Disney’s iteration of Rapunzel in the movie Tangled, which hit theaters November 24, 2010—approximately two months after the episode aired. Though Tangled showcased a feistier princess than most of the Disney princesses of the past, still present were the heteronormative ideals regarding women needing love and marriage to express their womanhood. The physical depiction on Lily’s castle takes the expected, heteronormative ideals regarding women’s roles and statuses and then pairs them with traditional, western ideals of beauty—mainly that the most beautiful girl be white, blonde, and thin. So, before 2-year-old Vietnamese-born Lily can even say the word “princess,” the statuses and roles attached to “princess” sprinkle over her like a form of fairy dust thrown from the hands of her gay male parents.

Mitchell and Cameron actually address this issue, albeit flippantly. The princess castle built in the season’s first episode becomes a centerpiece for Lily’s princess-themed third birthday party 14 episodes later. With the party in full swing, the princess castle is surrounded by pink and purple balloons, crown-wearing partygoers and a live-action princess interacting with guests. With her honey-blonde hair in a bun and a glittery powder-blue gown accented by a black choker, the princess looks noticeably similar to Disney’s version of Cinderella—no doubt more
cross-marketing taking place by parent-company Disney. Earlier in the episode, Mitchell, who just wants Cameron to “be a parent,” dashes Cameron’s hope of being the party’s entertainment as Fizbo the clown. Thus, Cameron scans the party and the princess disapprovingly.

“Stop eyeing the princess! You’re going to freak her out,” says Mitchell, carrying a tray of finger-food.

“I don’t know. I think the whole idea of needing a prince to come along and make you happy sends the wrong message, Mitchell. I really do,” says Cameron, his hands waving in frustration.

“Really, and a grown man pulling boxer shorts out of his mouth doesn’t?” retorts Mitchell, referring to Cameron’s Fizbo routine.

Cameron, by stating that the princess theme sends the “wrong message,” confirms the power of the princess image to evoke ideas of traditional statuses and roles. However, Cameron’s acknowledgment of the pitfalls of princess culture seems to stem only from his jealousy of the princess. So blatant is Cameron’s jealousy that Mitchell, acting as a societal surrogate for what viewers are also supposed to think, completely dismisses his objection. Mitchell thinks Cameron is only making negative statements about the princess because he really wants to be the “entertainment” instead. When Mitchell further dismisses any seriousness surrounding problematic princess tropes, comparing such ideas with clown antics (“pulling boxer shorts out of his mouth”), it is clever, but incongruent. The clown shtick may be vulgar, but it holds little power for pervasive socialization, except for maybe the clown population.

Princesses are not the only methods of espousing such traditionally feminine tropes for girls, however. On Desperate Housewives, Bob and Lee walk down a hallway in their house with
Renee, their straight female neighbor. They’ve hired her to decorate a bedroom for their newly adopted daughter Jenny, who is expected to arrive in two weeks.

“Now, it’s not exactly finished yet,” prefaces Renee before she shows them the room. “I’m still waiting on a few pieces, and the curtains are on back-order.”

“Don’t worry. I’m sure it’s amazing,” Bob assures.

“But you did keep the receipts, right?” adds Lee, nervous because Renee has been characterized as not maternal.

When the door opens, an avalanche of feminine cues assault viewers. The light-pink walls surround a bed full of white stuffed-animals. The room also includes curtains of various shades of pink, an ornate glass chandelier, and butterflies adorning a white desk lamp.

“Oh my God,” Lee blurts out with Bob smiling. “It’s exactly the room I wanted when I was growing up. The only thing that’s missing is a--” He stops mid-sentence, his eyes wide with excitement. He gasps. “Baby unicorns!” he blurts out, hands outstretched and rushing to pick up his now-completed childhood dream.

“So you like it?” asks Renee, standing in the white-trimmed doorway.

“Awww, thank you, Renee,” says Bob. “It’s everything we’d hoped for.”

Earlier in the episode, Lee told Renee that he and Bob wanted the room to be “pink and nurturing.” Renee came through for them, giving her clients exactly what they asked for. Bob and Lee’s discourse, using the words “pink” and “nurturing” to describe Jenny’s new living space, proves important. First, the room and its adornments, like the princess castle discussed with Cameron and Mitchell, are all meant to cue femininity by using the color pink. Although today’s color dictate of pink for girls and blue for boys wasn’t established until the 1940s—a result of Americans’ preferences as interpreted by manufacturers and retailers—it has taken hold
and become the marker cementing gender (Paoletti, 2012). Thus, pink represents the truest, most pure, 100% assured expression of femininity. But if anyone had any doubt as to Jenny’s gender, there are other feminine cues: pink walls, a bed that complements the walls’ dark pink trim, butterflies adorning lamps, and, of course, unicorns adorning bed stands.

The importance of the color pink lies in the meanings that have been attached to it. Before the 1940s, retailers often considered pink as more appropriate for boys because it was a stronger color than the dainty (and apparently weak) blue (Paoletti, 2012). Because pink now signals girls and femininity, it bears the meaning of “weakness.” It and the other symbols also connote an attachment to conventional heteronormative feminized statuses and roles. Bob and Lee confirm this when they say they want the room to be “pink and nurturing.” Though they are referring to wanting Jenny to feel comfortable in their home, they still play into the female stereotype that femininity be connected to emotionality. After all, decorating 10-year-old boys’ rooms as “blue and nurturing” is rarely an initiative. “Nurturing,” instead, focuses on the care girls experience and then the process that women are stereotypically saddled with without having the choice or expectation of whether they want to be saddled with it or not.

Three episodes later, Lee (and, by default Bob) confines Jenny to the private sphere where “nurturing” typically takes place. Gaby, the straight neighbor once so supportive of Lee and Bob’s “beautiful” adoptive daughter Jenny, looks into their front window smirking. She sees Jenny, dressed in a blue dress and yellow sweater, playing a hot-pink violin. Lee, wearing a “World’s Best Daddy” T-shirt stands over her, coaxing her. Gaby stops and knocks on his door for a “little chat.”

“Hi,” Gaby begins. “I see Jenny is practicing again.”
“Two hours a day, five days a week,” Lee replies smiling, no doubt proud of his consistent parenting.

“Wow, she is really into that violin,” says Gaby.

“Sometimes,” says Lee shaking his head. “Mostly I have to force her to do it.”

“Ohhhh, big mistake,” Gaby retorts.

“Really? Seems like you have an unsolicited opinion.”

“Look, I know you’re new to this parenting thing, so I’m going to tell you how it works. You can’t force a kid to do stuff because then it just leads to a lot of door-slamming and name-calling, and then the kid gets angry too!”

“Well, here’s the way I think it works. Jenny told us she wants to play the violin, so it’s my job to make sure she sticks with it.”

“By pushing her.”

“I’m not pushing her.”

Then Jenny yells to Lee in Mandarin, and Lee replies back to her, also in Mandarin. At the sight of them speaking a second language fluently after they’ve only had her for two and a half weeks, Gaby leers at Lee judgmentally again, suggesting that Lee is pushing Jenny too hard with learning a second language.

“What?” asks Lee, “She wanted to learn Mandarin!”

Using “force” to get a “kid to do stuff” is a specific parenting philosophy which I will not weigh in on. However, I will focus on the act of Lee admitting to having to “force” his daughter Jenny to play the violin. Society often considers creative endeavors, such as playing the violin, as feminine and more appropriate for girls than boys. Meanwhile, outdoor activities like sports are considered boys’ domain. When these expectations of girls merge with the expectations that
come with being a “princess” or with being “nurturing,” the private sphere is cemented as the
domain of girls and, later, women. Though Lee says Jenny wanted to learn, Lee no doubt wants
her to learn, at least in part to bolster his confidence as “World’s Best Daddy.” His shirt declares
a level of cockiness and insecurity regarding parenting. The insecurity suggests a need to be the
“perfect” family. And he and Jenny play into this notion, which hinges on the specified roles of
women, men, girls and boys. By itself, and coupled with her impressive mastering of Mandarin,
playing the violin seems almost harmless. However, when juxtaposed with Lee and Bob’s
emphasis on pink and emotionality, they are wholly socializing Jenny to be the perfect
heteronormative girl.

Out of the six television shows I viewed, three same-sex couples were raising children—
girls of various ages. Viewers see Lee and Bob raising 10-year-old Jenny; Cameron and Mitchell
raising 2-year-old Lily; and Arizona and Callie raising their newborn, Sophia, who Callie
birthed. There is less to say about the latter example of Callie and Arizona because the birth took
place in episode 18 (out of 22); their parenting is rarely on view in the last four episodes.
However, we do see Callie take her baby home. Guess what color the receiving blanket is? Of
course, it’s pink! With the substantive examples of parenting seen with the two sets of gay
fathers, though, the color pink is combined with roles and expectations that raise princess-loving
(thus, hinging-your-livelihood-on-marriage-loving), arts-loving, pink-loving (down to a violin),
nurturing girls. These images supply all the familiar cues for heterosexual viewers of what
society says a well-adjusted girl should be. Not only do they cue a “normal” girl, they also play
into the argument for marriage equality that says, “See, gays can raise normal kids who look and
act just like yours.” Unfortunately, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer (LGBQ) characters don’t
simply confine such ideas of gender normalcy to their daughters.
6.1 Creating Normalcy through Coupledom

In a hospital room at Princeton–Plainsboro Teaching Hospital, Remy “Thirteen” Hadley switches out a medicine bag for her patient, performance artist Afsoun Hamidi, played by then 59-year-old Shohreh Aghdashloo.1 Hamidi has an unknown sickness, a cancerous growth later revealed that she actually knew about. She deliberately induces additional symptoms unrelated to her cancer. Her goal is to turn the diagnostics department’s medical scavenger hunt into her new and final masterpiece. She secretly films the entire process. The masterpiece takes a Picassoesque sharp turn when the team discovers her plan and her incurable cancer turns out to be a rare but treatable disease—treatable with a price.

“Did I make the wrong choice?” asks Hamidi, looking longingly outside her room windows. She’s referring to her decision to refuse radiation treatment that will save her life but has the possible consequence of leaving her mind too “fuzzy” to make her art. She has people around her who love her and want her to live. The most important person to her is her assistant, Luca, who she was briefly romantically involved with and who wants to be with her long-term. Frustrated by her decision to refuse treatment, Luca leaves her side because he can’t watch her die when she can “knowingly save” herself and be with those who love her.

“Five years, through every opening, every installation, every day and every night, he was there the whole time,” Hamidi continues, referring to Luca.

“Except when you were [first] diagnosed,” Thirteen reminds her, pointedly. “You broke up with him and you had to go through all of that alone. Maybe that’s the real reason you’re doing this piece, so that this time you can have him with you. You still could.”

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1 Remy Hedley’s nickname “Thirteen” is first used during House’s fourth season (2007-2008) after she is assigned the number during a competition for her position at the hospital.
The scene above appears in FOX’s medical drama *House*, during the finale of the 23-episodes-long seventh season. Though actress Olivia Wilde (“Thirteen”) is billed as a series regular (a requirement for which shows were examined), the character only appears in seven episodes. Thirteen leaves after the first episode and returns in the season’s eighteenth episode—explained by the plot twist of her having been in jail for euthanizing her brother who was suffering from Huntington’s disease. Up until this point, the show characterizes Thirteen as similar to *The Good Wife’s* Kalinda. She is sexually ambiguous, tough and smart, as well as “hot” in the words of her colleague Taub. *House’s* Thirteen has not been discussed until the end of this analysis because she occupies a rare space, both practically—in terms of the data gleaned from her television show—but also representationally—in terms of the type of queer spectacle she embodies.

Her importance, though, lies in that she shows a relationship form that no other gay, bi or queer character has shown in this analysis: singlehood. In fact, her level of independence scales all *House’s* male characters who are seen searching, flailing and failing in romantic relationships. This independence seems to exhibit a deeper feminist ideology. For instance, while all the men denounce Hamidi as “crazy” in an attempt to take away her credibility as a performance artist, Thirteen reprimands them, advocating for the importance of her work because she explores “gender politics and self-image.” Interestingly, in the scene described in detail above, Thirteen eschews Hamidi’s and her own independence, chastising her for going through an illness, not just alone, but alone in the form of being without a romantic companion. Then, Thirteen looks for meaning in—“the real reason for”—Hamidi’s current choices. The meaning she deduces is that Hamidi “could” be in a romantic relationship with Luca. By telling her “this time you could have him with you,” Thirteen—a woman who has achieved incredible levels of self-sufficiency,
independence and success as doctor—blatantly urges Hamidi—a woman of even higher self-sufficiency, independence and success as an artist—toward living her life coupled.

Another push for coupledom plays out on *Grey’s Anatomy*, though the reason nowhere near matches the seriousness of facing death. In fact, quite the opposite. Straight cardiothoracic surgeon Teddy, played by then 42-year-old Kim Raver, walks down a crowded hallway. Arizona, her friend and colleague at Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital, runs up beside her and fires off an important request.

“Oh, hi! You need to start sleeping with Mark again,” she tells her. Earlier in the episode, Mark, who is Callie’s straight best friend, former lover and current roommate, interrupted Callie and Arizona making out in bed.

“I do?” replies Teddy, eyebrows raised.

“Yep, for my sake, you do. He won’t leave us alone. At the apartment, at work, in our bedroom, I mean it’s like I’m dating Mark against my will. Come on, twice a week—that’s all I’m asking.”

Here, Arizona finds herself with a conundrum where the friend of her girlfriend, Callie, intrudes on their relationship to the point that she feels a lack of quality time with Callie. Her solution is coupledom for the intruding friend. Admittedly, Arizona only recommends “sleeping with” Mark, not being in a serious relationship with him. However, coupledom comes in many forms, including (but not limited to) persons who meet only for sex; to friends who occasionally have sex; to relationships where both love and sex occur. However, Arizona implies, in her nonchalance, a specific form of coupledom long held as a heteronormative value—compulsive coupledom. She asks Teddy so casually and matter-of-factly, as if she assumes Teddy—another woman of high levels of self-sufficiency, independence and success as a doctor—would agree.
Here, the heteronormative truth claim, as espoused by a lesbian, is that when faced with any form of aloneness that one would jump at any chance for any form of coupledom, successful doctor (or artist) or no. When faced with aloneness, which is apparently an almost always crippling state in which to find oneself, how can one turn down a relationship—any relationship?

In the two previous examples, lesbian and queer characters push coupledom onto middle-aged adult women ranging from their 40s to late-50s, but as *Modern Family* depicts, the need for coupledom for heterosexual women has no age limit. At an outdoor mall, Cameron and Mitchell shop for a birthday gift for their nephew, Manny. Ever the feminized gay man, Cameron stops to try lotions and talk to people while Mitchell hurries him, telling him to “stop stopping to smell the roses.” Cameron notices a short elderly man named Donald standing at the railing of the second level of the mall where he is attempting to get the attention of a grey-haired elderly woman on the first level. After Donald—with Cameron’s help—makes overtures that “he’s always loved her,” the woman, identified as Helen, walks off. But Cameron devises a plan to go after her while Mitchell stays with Donald.

“I, I, don’t know what to say to him,” Helen says in a quivering voice after Cameron has tracked her down and brought her back.

“Just open your heart and listen Helen,” says Cameron taking her by the arm.

“I can’t. I just can’t,” she tells Cameron as he pulls her onto the escalator to try and reach Donald.

“Helen, you have to try,” Cameron urges. “I once almost let my own fears stop me from embarking on a relationship, and I would’ve lost the love of my life.”
As Cameron and Helen ride the elevator up, Mitchell and Donald pass them riding down. Cameron then picks up the petite Helen and walks her down to be with Donald. Reunited, Donald stretches his arms out wide and urges, “Helen, Helen, at least just give me a chance.”

“Give him a chance!” Cameron yells, thinking her hard-of-hearing.

“She’s right here,” Mitchell reminds him. “Cam, come on, we’re running out of time.”

“We’re running out of time?” Cameron counters. “Sensitive.”

Cameron then gestures to Donald and tells Helen pointedly, “Go to him.”

Looking at Cameron, his smiling face bursting with pride at his romantic good deed, Helen says, “It’s nice that you care so much about us.”

“Without love, we’re nothing,” notes Cameron.

“But what about his wife?” she asks.

“It was a pleasure meeting you both,” says Cameron, scurrying off.

Two important heteronormative notions intersect in this interaction between Cameron and Mitchell, and Donald and Helen. The first, like with Thirteen and Arizona discussed above, focuses on Cameron explicitly telling Helen to “just open your heart” and then even more blatantly to “go to [Donald].” As with the two previous examples, Cameron espouses coupledom as a status everyone should strive for if given the opportunity. He takes the discourse a step further, by pairing it with physicality. He physically places Helen, seemingly against her will, next to Donald. Cameron audibly and physically forces Helen to be with Donald. Though he appears frustrated, constantly hurrying Cameron, Mitchell too participates in the action, though his intentions are hard to discern. He may secretly agree with Cameron, he may be trying to resolve the situation faster or he may be trying to appease Cameron. Mitchell’s intentions may also be a combination of all of these possibilities. Cameron’s intentions, though, couldn’t be
clearer—one should try to “embark” on a romantic, coupled relationship and if they don’t, they are pathologized because they have “fears.”

The second important, less blatant, takeaway from this interaction is the assumption that coupledom is always needed and that coupledom will remedy any situation, making it, ultimately, idyllic. Initially, Cameron doesn’t know anything about these people’s situation. He especially isn’t thinking about the possibility of Donald being an adulterer, yet Cameron’s knee-jerk reaction (symbolically emblematic of the broader heteronormative society’s knee-jerk reaction) is that “without love,” which here means without romantic coupledom, “we’re nothing.” So, to play with antonyms and Cameron’s own discourse, “with love,” which means with romantic coupledom, “we’re something” or “we’re everything.” Whether “something” or “everything,” either choice refers to the heteronormative fairytale reliance on romantic love as a savior for one’s life.

In all three of these examples, the persons urging such savior, princess narratives are LGBQ characters for straight women of varying ages. For women, according to these examples, romantic love will ease the pain of a difficult disease, help one’s friend spend time with their (romantic) loved one, and conquer fears and give you “everything.” This is a tall order for romantic love and coupledom, but the LGBQ characters discuss the expectations with ease, assumption and force. Such fervency only adds to the historical “truth claim” of romantic love and coupledom as the highest emotional inducement one can achieve for one’s life.

6.2 Creating Normalcy through Heteronormative Roles

Connected to the idea that coupledom should always be the highest goal, viewers also see same-sex couples explicitly maintaining heteronormative roles within the coupledom of others. For an example, I turn to Lee and Bob from Desperate Housewives where Lee and his straight
neighbor Lynette are attending a high-profile leadership conference (“It’s one of [Oprah’s] favorite things!” according to Lynette). The event organizers instantly label them as “plus ones” to their male romantic partners who are the “business leaders.” This means that instead of attending business leadership talks by the likes of Warren Buffett or Oprah, they must attend yoga sessions, salsa dancing lessons and Japanese “Ikebana” flower arrangement classes.

“Ikebana is all about bringing together nature and humanity,” says the presumably Japanese instructor soothingly as she glides past woman after woman. All the women have long hair and are wearing floral or pastel-colored dresses. The instructor passes by Lee, who is dressed in a peach-colored sweater, blending in with the women. Lynette, however, looks more business-like in a dark-green patterned shirt and black pants. Everyone has a variety of twigs, leaves, flowers and moss splayed out before them. The instructor continues: “The three main branches, or shushi, represent ‘chi’ (earth), ‘ten’ (heaven) and ‘jin’ (man).”

“Interesting, nothing to represent woman,” retorts Lynette as she frustratingly shoves her third branch into her metallic square vase. “How about this?” She holds up some light green moss. “An insignificant clump of moss. We could stuff it down at the bottom where it will only speak when spoken to.”

“Does my ‘chi’ look a little droopy?” asks Lee, in an attempt to deflect Lynette’s frustration.

“Did you hear me?” asks Lynette.

“Yes!” he replies, annoyed. “Yes, Lynette, I heard you. I heard you during yoga, during the fashion show, all through salsa dancing: ‘Life is unfair—olé!’”
“Well, I’m sorry,” she shoots back, pulling her sticks out of the vase and slamming them on the table. “But I came here to learn new things and meet interesting people, not to pretend that putting sticks in a vase is art.”

In Chapter Four, I discussed Lee’s feminized roles in his relationship with Bob. They perpetuate heteronormative ideas by giving viewers their comforting pseudo male/female binary. In this interaction with Lynette and the broader structure of the fictional Weisman Leadership Conference, Lee takes such heteronormative perpetuation and participates in the maintenance of not only his feminized status but also the oppressed roles attached to femininity the conference espouses. First, the women (and Lee) are given lanyards—a prime and confining example of Foucault’s notion of institutional technology. The lanyards indicate their status as “plus ones.” They also serve the broader institutional apparatus surrounding economy that encompasses the belief that business is for men. So, the only relevant identity of the “plus ones” is their attachment to their male business “leader” husbands who are interacting in the public sphere.

The private sphere consists of dancing lessons, yoga and the “ikebana” flower arranging, over which Lee shows continual excitement. In fact, earlier in the episode, he admits he “wept” over the beauty of the arrangement he made last year. Ultimately, Lee shows contentment in his role. When Lynette exposes the sexist aspects of such separation, Lee shows annoyance in the form of his sarcastic “hearing” of her complaints through every activity he enjoys and wants to enjoy without her feminist commentary.

A similar instance can be found by following Glee’s Kurt and his wedding planning initiatives. Kurt’s father, Burt, has recently proposed to Carole, the mother of Kurt’s straight schoolmate and fellow glee club member Finn. Kurt has taken it upon himself to plan their wedding. Here, instead of ikebana flower arranging instruction, viewers see dancing instruction.
“Thank you both for attending the Kurt Hummel wedding dance seminar,” says Kurt proudly and with authority, hands on his waist. His audience in the glee club’s classroom are two straight men: his soon-to-be stepbrother, Finn, and his father, Burt.

“Dad, you’re going to have to pull off the first dance with Carole and if Uncle Andy’s 40th birthday party was any indication, you’re going to need some work,” Kurt continues in his rapid-fire assessment.

“What are you talking about? My moves were great, okay. It was the damn sangria,” replies Burt.

“Okay,” interrupts Kurt, taking his father’s arm and pulling him from his chair to the middle of the classroom. “We dance to the beat and not to the words.”

In dancing position, Burt attempts to hold Kurt’s hands out to either side. Kurt corrects him, taking Burt’s right hand and placing it on his hip. Kurt then places his left hand on his father’s shoulder.

“Have you chosen a song yet?” Kurt asks.

“Ahh, yes, we’re thinking ‘Stairway’ or some Bublé”

“Okay, great, so it’s basically one, two, three, four,” says Kurt with a nod to the pianist who begins playing.

“All right, follow me,” Kurt then commands. “Gentleman leads on the left, opposite of me.”

Like with Lee, Kurt has in previous discussions appeared to have a lack of gender fluidity, situating himself on the feminized end of the gender spectrum. Not surprisingly, he does so again in this example, although more blatantly. By referring to his dad as the leading “gentleman” and then referring to his dad as the “opposite of me,” he implicitly means the
opposite of masculinity, which is femininity. Kurt also physically makes this so by grabbing his father’s hand and placing it on his hip, which is where one is “supposed” to hold a woman while dancing. Kurt confirms his level of comfort with his femininity when he physically and audibly places himself into a well-established gender status and role: the female half of a dancing couple. Kurt, like Lee with all of the “plus one” women, not only places himself in the female status complete with “appropriate” roles, he perpetuates the secondary, heteronormative roles of heterosexual women. In one seemingly harmless moment, he refers to how the gentleman (i.e. the heterosexual male) “leads” when dancing, which has long served as a metaphor for how the straight male “gentleman leads” in most aspects of life. Meanwhile, the straight female “follows” in her supporting role.

Kurt and Lee maintain the strictest forms of heteronormative roles where “leaders” are men physically leading women (in a wedding dance or in the dance of life). In Lee’s example, men engage with ideas that shape business and the world, interacting with fellow leaders who shape those ideas. Meanwhile, the nurturing, caregiving, (ikebana) flower-loving supporters of those leaders are the bride and/or the “plus-one” women. To use Lynette’s term, the plight of the “insignificant moss” seems lost on Lee and Kurt. Through their apathy, they show support for heteronormative traditions of oppressing women. Kurt and Lee’s support for such ideas, coupled with their actual participation of such feminine gender performance, cements their maintenance of all the government, business and familial institutions that advocate such heteronormative (and, thus, oppressive) ideals.

6.3 Creating Normalcy through Marriage

The pale-skinned bride is wearing a not-very-revealing princess-cut gown and a veil hanging from the back of her head. She holds a white bouquet of flowers and the hand of her
eerily equally pale-skinned groom, who is wearing a tuxedo. They are not smiling. They look like they are contemplating the seriousness of their life-long vows. Their lack of expression is what one might expect from plastic figurines.

Still, the couple—a wedding cake topper—radiates so much promise, especially when juxtaposed with the drab, harsh metallic high school locker in which they are sitting. Kurt, holding his schoolbooks, stands staring at the unmoving couple, his eyes glazed and mouth wide. He’s soaking up the promise of the marital life they represent: in sickness and in health, till death do they part, cheaper tax rates thou shalt receive. But Finn interrupts Kurt’s matrimonial daydreaming.

“Hey, so I’ve been reviewing this [wedding] itinerary, and I don’t really get it,” Finn says nervously. “Are you sure we should release 300 live doves indoors? Won’t that get kind of messy?”

“That’s why we feed them glitter, Finn,” Kurt snaps back, annoyed at Finn’s lack of understanding wedding festivities.

“Oh!” Finn replies, his face relaxing. “Well, I’ve been thinking about it, and I really want to do something special for the wedding and I want to take this opportunity to sort of remind everyone that I’m a leader.”

“I have the perfect idea,” says Kurt, eyes wide with excitement. “After you walk your mom down the aisle and give her away to my dad and give your speech to the newlyweds which I will write—although you are free to suggest overall themes—you and Carole will have a lovely mother-and-son dance in front of everyone.”

“That’s a terrible idea. Everyone knows I’m the worst dancer.”
“Finn, trust me on this. I have been planning weddings since I was two. My power rangers got married and divorced in so many combinations they were like Fleetwood Mac.”

In Chapter Two, I discussed the same-sex marriage of Callie and Arizona on Grey’s Anatomy. I explored how, through their marriage, they were espousing and perpetuating the idea that government is needed as the legitimizing force for romantic relationships. Like that example, Kurt’s use of the word “married” (and “divorced”) and Finn’s use of the word “wedding” evoke government and, thus, Foucault’s (2003) notion of governmentality. And, once again, heteronormativity snakes its way in, omnipresent but taken-for-granted and not overtly discussed. Here, Kurt references walking the bride down the aisle, speeches, and a mother-son dance. Apparently, glitter-shitting doves are also normal in Lima, Ohio. Ultimately, the traditional wedding spectacle heralding legality is forefront.

Perhaps most telling is Kurt’s interaction with the wedding topper. After a commercial break, the returning camera shot focuses singularly on the wedding topper, the icy stares of the “couple” filling the frame. Still in the same shot, the camera pans to Kurt staring at it. First, we have an example of the camera acting as the heterosexual male gaze acknowledging the image of the white woman and man dressed in white gown and tux as “marriage.” Then in a theoretical twist, the camera shot is reinforced with the heterosexual male gaze, yet is depicted through the gaze of a gay man. Mulvey (1975) focused on the perceived differences of the genders, the subordination of women and the traditional heteronormative relationship and all the roles that accompany that. But I believe the male gaze can also be applied in upholding the status of white, heterosexual men through the gaze of white, gay men. Here, such a view serves as a mode of satisfaction for not only the heterosexual community, but for the gay community as well. This example shows how domination can come not just from the heterosexual man, but from gay
persons espousing heteronormative ideals. In this specific example with Kurt, domination comes from the relationship heterosexual men have, through media, with the gay man. This is a new juxtaposition and a possible contemporary example of the male gaze where “curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition—“ (Mulvey, 1975: 46).

I have already discussed the tendency for Kurt to be feminized through his clothes, his roles with everyone around him (most importantly with Blaine), as well as his interests as a Broadway-loving super-fan. So, at first glance, Kurt’s jumping to play event planner for the wedding places him in another not-so-surprising stereotypical gay male status. By explaining the logistical technicalities of creating the perfect wedding, Kurt positions himself as the purveyor and expert of all things theater, especially the theatrics of a wedding. More important is his relationship to the government institution of marriage. Unlike Callie and Arizona, Kurt occupies an interesting space in that he is not simultaneously experiencing heteronormative marriage and perpetuating it, but rather, his sole responsibility is the latter. As seen through his (male) gaze, he strives to maintain the heteronormative ideals of romantic relationships by planning his father and future stepmother’s wedding. In a later episode Kurt remarks that marriage is illegal for same-sex couples where he lives. However, the irony of him maintaining such an exclusionary institution seems lost on him. His eyes show as much blankness to his conflicting role as the wedding topper he worships. Kurt’s reactions also exhibit a very important, yet unsaid, truth claim about romantic relationships: marriage is the pinnacle and final cementing act of romantic relationships.

Kurt doesn’t say it explicitly, yet he perpetuates the notion of marriage as the social pinnacle. We see it in his eyes while staring at the wedding topper, and we see it in the forcefulness in which he doles out commands to Finn regarding the ceremony. Here, marriage
requires seriousness. Marriage is something one longs for. And marriage, as a final act as it were, evokes intense emotions not previously seen in a relationship, an intensity that is supposed to carry the relationship over the proverbial threshold.

Though Kurt seems unsure if and when marriage may impact him personally, the scene with Finn implies that part of that longing gaze is that he wants it for himself someday. Specifically, he references how his “power rangers got married.” His “playing” shows he was cognizant of marriage’s importance as a young child and enjoyed creating a ceremony he valued and admired. This notion is echoed on *Desperate Housewives*, where we see the same truth claims about marriage but in reverse.

Inside her immaculate, mod living room, Renee lights candles preparing for a house party. A hired bartender picks up a photo of her with her ex-husband, for whom she has recently divorced. The bartender is flabbergasted that she was married to the fictional baseball player “Doug Perry from the Yankees.” Just then, Lee busts through her front door, his energy and dramatic posture declaring that he be seen. Bob nonchalantly strolls in behind him.

“Oh, good, the gays are here. Let the fawning begin!” shouts Renee, throwing her hands up in the air.

“Heavens to Cher, you look amazing,” declares Lee, providing the expected aforementioned fawning over her cleavage-baring leopard-print dress.

“It’s good to see you holding up so well,” adds Bob.

“What are you talking about?” asks Renee.

“Your ex-husband getting remarried. It’s all over ESPN,” replies Bob.

Renee’s mouth drops, and her eyes bulge in surprise.
“Which you obviously do not watch. Oh, my God, I am so sorry. We thought you knew,” says Lee.

Lee then turns to his more masculine partner, Bob, and says, “This is what comes from watching sports.”

Renee, visibly rattled, excuses herself and then plunges into alcohol, bad singing on top of a piano and, eventually, the bartender—a downward, liquor-soaked spiral from which Lee continually tries to rescue her for the rest of the evening.

Like Kurt, Bob and Lee hold marriage as the definitive marker of a relationship. Bob and Lee exhibit this idea from opposite ends of the social relationship spectrum, though. Bob and Lee approach it in terms of how the feelings of their straight friend are impacted when she learns of her ex-husband’s remarriage. When Bob says, “It’s good to see you holding up so well,” they afford marriage (and not divorce) with not only the power to fully cement and legitimate a relationship, but also the power to fully end a previous one. Their statement suggests that they believe that only her husband’s remarriage is what signals the true (nay real) death of her romantic relationship with him. Thus, Bob and Lee know that Renee’s emotions will be impacted negatively.

The allusion Kurt and then Bob and Lee make to marriage as the ultimate, most powerful form of romantic relationship is why the gay community has made marriage its priority “rights” issue above all else. For intertwined in marriage is legal legitimacy, as well as social legitimacy. Society often views couples who are not married, gay or straight, no matter how long they have been together, as somehow not finished, not real even.

Now, though, same-sex characters, through their governmentality, maintain that marriage is the social pinnacle for all to strive for. The same-sex couples espouse this in the raising of
their daughters to partake in the marital-overload found in princess culture. This socialization simultaneously teaches girls and future women to focus on their emotionality. It appears that the LGBQ individual characters and couples have a love affair, not so much with heterosexual women themselves, but with maintaining traditional heteronormative ideas about heterosexual women. Namely, heterosexual women’s identities should be that of the “plus one” in service to their male partners, and women should be urged toward coupledom. Unfortunately, the LGBQ characters and couples situate themselves firmly on the extremes of the gender spectrum, which houses (in their respective princess castles) the most basic and confining characteristics of heteronormativity. This is the very epitome of the male gaze that confines heterosexual women to their traditional, heteronormative shackles.

I began this analysis by exploring how these characters are subject to institutional control. Their validation and legitimacy from the government depend on whether they conform to heteronormative ideals. As discussed in this chapter, they do not simply partake in such confinement within their personhood or within their couplehood, they turn the same heteronormative restrictions around to police others. Foucault writes, “A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life” (1978: 144). With LGBQ characters socializing heterosexuals as they have been socialized by heterosexuals, the LGBQ show just how such “historical outcomes” come to pass. This process provides perhaps the most potent instance yet of LGBQ characters and couples being “normal.”
7 CONCLUSION: GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE?

“Family, school and television are the most important factors in raising children. Of these, television has the least sense of responsibility.” – Jim Henson (1970)

My parents divorced when I was three. The shift changed my mother to a single-parent, my father to a less-present parent, and my maternal grandparents to surrogate parents. With my mother working, my father not always around, and my grandparents lacking the energy to keep up with a precocious child, the divorce made television the go-to babysitter.

I don’t remember watching kids’ shows, though shows like Sesame Street were all the rage in the early 1980s. Rather, I gravitated to shows like Laverne & Shirley, Mork & Mindy and Too Close for Comfort. My mother would later tell me the only time I cried was when the shows ended. And, according to her, I saved the majority of my tears for Jim Henson’s The Muppet Show. Vastly different in tone from Henson’s creations used on Sesame Street, The Muppet Show specialized in walking an always-fun crooked line, shifting back and forth between adult humor and childlike naiveté. I sat in rapture as Miss Piggy waxed poetic on “interspecies dating” and as Kermit kept the unruly group of “cows, pigs, chickens and whatevers” on task with his infectious optimism. Without many neighborhood kids my age to play with and little time for playdates somewhere else, the television characters became who I played with, laughed with, and missed when we weren’t together. They were my friends.

These relationships are not uncommon for kids. There is considerable evidence that children form affective attachments to television characters (Hoffner, 1996; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). Often, kids participate in the process of “parasocial interaction.” Coined by Horton and
Wohl (1956), parasocial interaction refers to an intimate bond developed with a television character in much the same way an intimate bond is developed with a real person. Horton and Wohl state, “They ‘know’ such a persona in somewhat the same way they know their chosen friends: through direct observation and interpretation of his appearance, his gestures and voice, his conversation and conduct in a variety of situations” (1956: 216).

That it’s just kids who have such relationships is a common, if unfortunate misconception. Parasocial interaction takes place in adolescents and adults in much the same way (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991, Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Kanazawa (2002) contends that the human brain struggles to distinguish between real friends and people on TV. I experienced this acutely during my adolescence as isolation resulting from family dynamics shifted to the fact that I was gay in a small, conservative west-Georgia town. As often happens with friendships, I saw the characters on _The Muppets_ less as we went our separate ways, me growing up and them leaving the airwaves. In their absence, though, new friends like Captain Picard, Counselor Troi, Data and Dr. Crusher on _Star Trek: The Next Generation_ emerged to keep me company during my teens.

Whether it was the scientists and aliens on _Star Trek: The Next Generation_ or the various “whatevers” on _The Muppet Show_, both shows’ characters espoused inclusivity and acceptance. Thus, not only did I become friends with them, I became exposed to new ways of thinking embraced by these characters. Such exposure proves especially important for reducing prejudice toward minorities (Tropp, 2000). In one study, Schiappa and Hewes (2006) exposed 245 university students to _Will & Grace_. The 1998 groundbreaking television series follows Will, a single gay man, and his adventures with his roommate Grace, a single straight woman. When the show ended in 2006, 18 million viewers tuned in for the finale (Kissell, 2006). Using Herek’s Attitudes
Toward Gay Men and Lesbians scale, Schiappa and Hewes found that increased viewing frequency and parasocial interaction was correlated with lower levels of “sexual prejudice.” More importantly, that relationship was most pronounced for the students with the least amount of social contact with real lesbians and gay men. Here, parasocial interaction didn’t just form relationships, it changed attitudes.

### 7.1 Rocky Relationships

Schiappa and Hewes’ study shows the implications of media in making the public more comfortable with people they don’t know and, in many cases, whom they fear. The goal of this project has been to fill in the historical gap between the watching of a television show and the change in attitudes. *Wed-Locked* is unique because its focus lies not with singular characters, but instead with their romantic relationships. I set out to examine the depictions of same-sex relationships and theorize what, how and who they serve. Do the images intersect with characteristics the straight television-watching public find ideal in relationships? And in what ways do the images of same-sex relationships provide “modes of satisfaction” for both the LGBTQ community and the heterosexual community?

Through a show of governmentality, same-sex relationships displayed considerable markers of commonality with which heterosexuals could identify. *Grey’s Anatomy’s* Callie and Arizona received support from government and their community through an elaborate wedding display that mirrored traditional heterosexual ceremonies. And *Desperate Housewives’* Lee and Bob and *Modern Family’s* Cameron and Mitchell received validation from their community through adoption and the creation of a very heteronormative, white, two-parent, suburban, breadwinner/caregiver family. Here, institutional technologies connected to marriage and adoption cemented the relationships and families as legitimate. Out of the four relationships that
explicitly interacted with government, the one relationship that did not follow heteronormative
ideals—*Glee*’s Santana and Brittany—lacked government support, which, in that case, was
public school.

One way Santana and Brittany challenged heteronormative ideals was that they were not
“100 percent gay.” However, it wasn’t just government that did not support such sexual fluidity.
The community of people interacting with the same-sex couples followed suit. Four out of the
five women discussed were sexually fluid, having relationships with both women and men. And
they also bore the brunt of negative policing. Santana, Callie and *The Good Wife*’s Kalinda
experienced their colleagues, friends and lovers pathologizing them and/or challenging what it
takes to be a “better” lesbian. I termed the characters who policed “societal surrogates.” Societal
surrogates function as stand-ins for society, bringing reactions, questions and/or commonly-held
societal values to a situation or character. Meanwhile, the men were largely what I call “the
stable gays” in that they did not question or struggle with their same-sex attractions. This one-
dimensional depiction upheld the binary-focused sexual rigidity society places on men. This was
especially apparent when *Glee*’s Kurt got angry at Blaine for his brief foray into bisexuality.
Ultimately, the societal surrogates with whom the men interacted rewarded the sexual rigidity
(nay, stability). In two of the three gay male relationships, the societal surrogates commodified
the men’s gayness. Lee and Bob’s gayness was used to uplift a heterosexual child and Cameron
and Mitchell’s gayness was used to diversify a heterosexual business.

While women experienced negative policing for not serving the sexual label binary,
heteronormative power expanded its reach to ensure women and men conformed to
heteronormativity in other ways. How the shows displayed everyday roles, appearances and sex
acts kept the same-sex relationships comfortably within heteronormative standards. Both the
same-sex male relationships and the same-sex female relationships maintained a relationship model where one partner was masculinized and the other partner was feminized. Callie, Santana and Kalinda embodied the masculine roles by having a lack of emotional expression, espousing self-protection and independence, and focusing on “doing,” especially through sex. Meanwhile, their explicitly feminized partners—Arizona, Brittany and all of Kalinda’s lovers—sought greater emotional connection, more readily expressed emotion and were more focused on the well-being of their relationship. The men proved even more rooted in this gender binary. Kurt, Cameron and Lee’s roles found them easily expressing emotions while being depicted as caregivers and damsels in distress. Meanwhile, their masculine counterparts—Blaine, Mitchell and Bob—were more emotionally reserved and practical, as well as the providers and protectors.

Appearances intersected with the displays of physical sex acts and, ultimately, kept women, though they were in same-sex relationships, bound in service to the male gaze. Kalinda, Brittany and Santana demonstrated hyperfeminine caricatures adhering to western beauty standards. Callie and Arizona, too, when not in scrubs, opted for a traditional feminine appearance. These appearances coincided with prolonged, intense sex scenes that displayed the objectified women further. Interestingly, the women interacted blatantly with an iteration of the male gaze different than the camera lens. With almost every woman character, a heterosexual man acted as a societal surrogate and explicitly looked at them as objects. I argued this interaction creates a multi-directional male gaze where the straight man is acting as voyeur to the objectified queer woman, and his gaze cues viewers to look at the women in the same way. Meanwhile, the gay men’s sexuality, or lack thereof, consisted of barely-seen pecks on the cheek, two-second kisses and, in the case of Kurt and Blaine, two passionate kisses in one scene where both men remained fully clothed.
Throughout my analysis, I discovered how the couples maintained heteronormative standards through government, their daily roles, appearances and depictions of sex. Thus, I was not surprised when, in the end, the same-sex relationships forced heteronormative ideals onto heterosexuals. In typical heteronormative fashion, heterosexual women proved the receivers. Cameron and Mitchell’s daughter Lily experienced princess castles and princess parties while Bob and Lee’s daughter Jenny stayed in the home with a gender-appropriate hobby. Both girls also had numerous infiltrations of emotionality, as well as the color pink, and its connections to femininity (i.e. weakness). Adult heterosexual women did not escape unscathed as both men and women LGBQ characters pushed the idea of coupledom on the women to save their lives to varying degrees.

Throughout this exploration, heteronormativity’s power could not be denied. It seeped into virtually every aspect of these characters’ lives, from the institutional to the intimate. Heteronormativity’s pervasiveness fortifies Rich’s (1980) argument that heteronormativity itself should be viewed as an institution. She argues, “The failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness” (1980: 135).

7.2 It’s Complicated

Some may dismiss television sitcoms and dramas as being solely entertainment. However, any time a minority voice is involved, the purpose changes. Gamson writes, “To speak for and about yourself as a gay man or a lesbian on television, to break silences that are systematically and ubiquitously enforced in public life, is profoundly political” (Gamson, 1995). For Gamson and others during this time, visibility and being “political” revolved around the fight
to be deemed worthy of care and support during the HIV/AIDS crisis. As Sears notes, “The movement calculus was clear: silence = death, action = life” (2005: 101). Though Gamson specifically focused on daytime talk shows and reality television during the 1990s, I believe his statement is relevant now for fictionalized LGBQ men and women. As I write this conclusion, same-sex marriage is now legal in 36 states. And in just a couple months, the Supreme Court plans to take up the issue in what many pundits predict will definitively declare same-sex marriage legal in all 50 states. Beginning with that pivotal year 2010, public attitudes in favor of same-sex relationships have continued to swell. Through their visibility, *Modern Family*, *Glee*, *The Good Wife*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, *House* and *Desperate Housewives* were political whether they wanted to be or not. But as Foucault states, “Visibility is a trap” (1977).

The LGBQ community has experienced visibility in many forms: from the HIV crisis in the 1980s, to pride parades on the news to television shows like *Will and Grace* and now *Modern Family*, etc. Before such visibility, sexual minorities experienced condemnation. But paradoxically, there is often freedom in condemnation. And for the LGBQ community, they did not bind themselves to traditional parameters of romantic relationships, because, in most instances, they couldn’t. And yet the visibility so craved, the acceptance so desired, when achieved, has masked a reinvigoration of the heteronormative status quo.

That status quo forces truth claims about our most intimate connections and subjects them to oft-described “natural” instincts of right and wrong when human emotion and relationships prove far more complicated. First and foremost, such as status quo confines everyone to coupledom—coupledom for life through marriage. Polyamorous relationships, open marriages, strictly sexual relationships and remaining single—relationships historically embraced by the sexual minority community—are less than. Second, the status quo confines that
couple to traditional notions of family where children prove essential markers of normalcy. Here, any configuration without children translates to a romantic relationship unfulfilled. Third, with children in tow, one adult must be feminine while the other must be masculine—a binary that often encourages a caregiver/breadwinner and/or damsel/protector model. This scenario harkens back to the 1950s “ideal family” which devalued femininity in all its “ideal” forms while keeping everyone from exploring the range of gender expression. Fourth, and related to gender binary roles, women and femininity continue to be held subservient to men both in demeanor and through their bodies.

Lisa Duggan argues that the politics of the gay rights movement (along with other neoliberal political agendas) have brought a “broad call for normative, respectable presentations” (2000: 855). With its relentless love affair with all things binary—be it roles, gender expression or sexual labels—the heteronormative status quo breeds restriction, othering and struggle. Duggan writes, “These normative, respectable worlds of enforced Unity, Maturity, and Pragmatic Efficiency are nothing like any left or queer movement I ever wishfully imagined. They define either a faux, faintly authoritarian populism or a narrow elitism, founded on cultural conformity and exclusion; they make my nightmares” (2000: 855). Heterosexuals have been brandishing this conformity with deftness for the last hundred years. But as discussed in Chapter Two, they now seem to be abandoning such conformity in multiple ways: embracing singlehood, continuing to divorce at a rate of about 40 percent, and cohabitating longer. Yet, through their simply being heterosexual, they still wield privilege and power over others. Speaking to this point, Gamson states, “If you speak, you must be prepared to be used” (1995). Thus, through various forms of media such as television, there seems to be an attempt to reclaim heteronormative power through same-sex relationships. I theorize it offers heterosexuals a
warped sense of not only power but also nostalgic pleasure. Though most heterosexual relationships and families have never looked like the ideal 1950s family, there is still a nostalgia for its “rightness” and, thus, its comfort. A key component of that nostalgia is the sense of pleasure and comfort heterosexuals derive from various heteronormative binaries. But those comforting binaries have a dual purpose in that they simultaneously assuage heterosexuals’ guilt with the belief that they are accepting “difference.”

Throughout this process Foucault’s notion of the panoptic gaze merges with Mulvey’s male gaze. Peggy Phelan argues that Foucault’s use of the panopticon can be applied to modern mass media, especially television. She argues that the television producers (and I would extend that to television creators, writers and actors) act as the “guard” while the individual television viewer is the prisoner (1996: 240). I would add to the metaphor that depictions of binary labels, binary gender roles, coupledom, monogamy, parentage, suburbia, and objectification of women each form a cell. Thus, these cells taken together construct a prison built brick by heteronormative brick. Phelan says, “As Foucault and Freud have, in their different ways, shown us: law needs invisibility to survey the visible; visibility inspires surveillance and submits to the gaze of the panoptic authority” (1993: 139). Television, as a significant megaphone heralding such powers, comes into many spaces—living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, cars, subways, planes. And yet, even in all those disparate spaces, the depictions of sexual minority characters suggest we are all subject to the same prison.

The gay rights movement that formed after 1969’s Stonewall Riot stemmed from the broader 1970s movements that rejected change through conventional institutions. The 1970s gay movement did emphasize visibility by coming out, but it also fought to end gender inequality, sexual regulation and the emphasis on typical family structures as “right” (Sears, 2005). This
form of “bawdy politics,” as Sears terms it, proved crucial, forming the foundation for the inventive and necessary militancy the movement would use for the approaching HIV/AIDS crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Sears, 2005).

Thus, the implications of this media panopticon are broad. While it appears to have aided in shifting public consciousness with the achievement of same-sex marriage on the near horizon, the entrenchment of specific relationship ideals has been set. Where the 1970s’ “bawdy politics” created a sense of “freedom” and acceptance in being social bandits and sexual renegades, the current process for “freedom” to marry has bound same-sex relationships by the same troubling powers heterosexuals have subjected themselves to. Ultimately, the ideals change what was a historically diverse, inventive, “bawdy” sexual community into the “nightmare” Duggan rightly feared: a pervasive brand of homonormativity. Now, our prison confines us to only being gay (as opposed to bicurious, bisexual and/or queer), and second, a right way to be gay.

I started this project not to critique others’ art and creative expression for the sake of criticism. Nor did I set out to definitively show a causal relationship between mass media and attitudes; unfortunately, despite my intricate knowledge of Star Trek, the inability to travel back in time frustratingly prevents me from determining that. However, what I have done with Wed-Locked is offer a snapshot—a moment—of the history of gay rights and the same-sex marriage movement. Media has been undeniably essential to the movement’s mainstreaming. And with television in particular, this project offers one piece of the puzzle for that historic fight for equality.

I opened this project with me as the officiant for my good friend Katie’s wedding. Five years later, Katie and Nick are still married. In those five years, I have married three other straight couples—all good friends and colleagues. As for me and my personal relationship to
marriage? I am happily not married. I am also happily (on most days) single. However, I would be negligent if I did not admit that this project and my parasocial interaction with the characters gave me pause. As sappy as it sounds, watching *Glee’s* Blaine admit “You move me” to Kurt and then watching them slowly, steadily develop an exciting, deep bond, particularly “moved” me. Their scenes grudgingly spurred some buried aches for love, romance and companionship. But how that all would look in real life, how my future boyfriend and I would choose to legitimize our relationship, I have no idea. This project, if anything, made me more queer and rebellious against heteronormativity. While I certainly do not know how my beliefs will play out for me in the “real” world, this project’s queerness has helped me grow comfortable with that uncertainty.

Despite this projects’ critical stance, I did develop one long-lasting relationship though. In the comfortable space of my apartment—mostly my couch—I uncontrollably slipped back into the habits of my youth and connected with these characters. I found myself wondering (and worrying) how their relationships would turn out in later seasons and, in some cases, when the series’ ended. Would Cameron and Mitchell get married? Would Callie and Arizona’s differences pull them apart? Would Kurt achieve his dreams with Blaine? Would Kalinda ever bow to the pressure to conform?

Not surprisingly, all but one of the couples rooted themselves deeper in heteronormativity. In 2014, Cameron and Mitchell cemented their relationship with a wedding that, despite their best efforts, included a series of comical mishaps. Their *Desperate Housewives* counterparts Lee and Bob continued to thrive as parents to daughter Jenny and live happily (if uneventfully) on Wisteria Lane. When Archie Panjabi left *The Good Wife* in 2015, her alter-ego Kalinda never did acquiesce to a label. However, she did unexpectedly focus her attention on
Cary, her lone male suitor. Still, even that became a casualty as Kalinda, facing harm for turning evidence on a drug dealer, skipped town, taking her “secrets” with her. Though not seen much on *House*, Thirteen took her own heteronormative advice and eventually eschewed her singlehood for coupledom with a woman by the time the series ended in 2012. Kurt and Blaine left Lima, Ohio, for New York City. The Big Apple tested their relationship, though, and they eventually broke up. Their classmates Brittany and Santana continued an on-again/off-again relationship with Brittany eventually going to MIT and Santana moving to New York to pursue acting and singing. However, as *Glee* wrapped up its last season in 2015, both couples reconciled and they had a lavish double-wedding. A glimpse five years into future found Kurt and Blaine having a baby via surrogate. Lastly, Callie and Arizona proved the exception to heteronormativity. They struggled with resentment and infidelity in the years following their wedding. They are currently separated.

In the end, it wasn’t just me who developed relationships with these characters. Millions of people developed relationships with them too. Like most relationships, one never really knows what goes on behind closed doors. Still, I have little doubt that these shows’ audiences took vows, of sorts, to accept and support a narrow brand of same-sex relationships—for better or for worse, till death do they part.
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