Spring 2018

Between Precarity and Belonging: Mapping Queer Representations in A Heterosexual World

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Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Social Studies

of Bard College

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2018

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my advisors Robert Hardwick-Weston, Allison McKim, and Thomas Keenan.

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Introduction

This project explores the effect of the dominant hegemonic heterosexual culture and the management of the shared public space, through enforcing regulatory regimes that ultimately determine what sexualities are and aren't acceptable in the dominant public. The 1980s brought about a shift in the cultural and political climate. While the earlier generation of gay men and lesbians fought to achieve visibility, the queer community in the 1980s and 1990s were confronted with conditional visibility. In this project, I observe the intersection of three vectors: visibility, consumerism/ commodification, and politics. I go beyond the politics of representation and launch in to an examination of the cultural and social politics that defined America in the 1980s and the 1990s. Considering the AIDS crisis as a key constituent in the shaping of 1980s political and cultural climate, I explore the dominant heterosexual ideologies that detrimentally affect the social existence of queer people. I argue that the increase in queer representations was a positive shift, although I maintain that the production of homonormative bodies was harmful to queer community because it perpetuated heterosexual customs. Thus, while certain bodies were welcomed into the mainstream sphere, sexual minorities that could not conform remained in the margins of society. I argue that full inclusion is not possible until queer people are able to decide the terms of their representation.

The phrase *queer sexualities* is useful as an umbrella term to describe the various groups without negating the principle differences amongst them. I rely primarily on the term *homophobia* to comprise *biphobia*, *lesphobia*, and *transphobia*. I choose to include the word homophobia because for the majority of the project my research and writing fixates on experiences of gay men and lesbians. Furthermore, to repeatedly include specific reference to each instance of individual phobic occurrences would be cumbersome and potentially confusing. However, wherever I have deemed necessary, I provide more specific context

deviating from *homophobia*. Often I will employ the phrase *queer sexualities*, or *queer community* to indicate a more expansive group of individuals existing outside of heterosexuality. Additionally, I employ the terms *sphere* and *space* in reference to the invisible borders held in place by social and cultural customs.

This project is guided by queer theory, which conceptualizes sexuality as existing on a continuum of sexual possibilities. Queer theory positions itself in direct opposition to normalizing proclivities of hegemonic sexuality grounded in the notion of stable sexual identities and behaviors. In the context of queer theory, the subject is understood as being composed and contained by a myriad of cultural practices of signification and mandating that systematically marginalize and repress subjects conceptualized as deviant and "other."[1] I first consider how dominant forces function and impinge upon the queer community. In the final chapter I examine the production of a counterpublic through AIDS activism which carved a space in the dominant public for those aligned with a queer sexuality to freely express themselves. I focus on the 1980s and 1990s because queer theory experienced its most direct encounter with the physical manifestation of a queer politics through the dynamic activism unique to this period.

For the first chapter I focus on representations of gay men and lesbians in mainstream media and advertising. Considering the internal fracture within the gay and lesbian movement, I discuss the differing reactions to mainstream representations of gay men and lesbian women to illustrate the divergent political ideologies embedded within the Gay Liberation movement. Through an analysis of notable advertisements and magazines from the 1980s and 1990s, I illustrate how gay men and lesbians were made visible to the public

[1] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), [44-45].

by the media. I argue that tensions within the gay and lesbian movement correlate with the burgeoning representation of gay men and lesbians within mainstream spaces.

The second chapter addresses the construction of stereotypes as a "controlling image."[2] Applying Patricia Hill Collins' investigation of Black women's experiences of oppression as a result of dominant White and heterosexist dogma to the experience of the queer community. I consider how the heterosexism upheld by the dominant White population in America functions as a form of social management through the production of negative representations of different races, ethnicities, genders, and sexualities in the mass media. I apply Collins' theory of the controlling image to indicate how mass media and popular culture produced specific representations of lesbians and gay men within the context of a dominant heterosexual ideology. This ideology demanded negative representations of the Other in order to maintain heterosexuality as a stable category and the cultural norm. I consider how the epistemological closet is invoked in various moments in television to draw homosexuality out into the dominant mainstream while simultaneously invoking humor. Accentuating differences was a mechanism of repression. My intention in this chapter is not to suggest a causal effect between negative representations and harmful realities. Rather, I will discuss how members of the queer community are subject to cultural conditioning through these mediums and how televisual representations articulate the queer experience through a straight perspective.

The final chapter zooms in on the assimilationist and subversive politics of queer activism that are covered in the first chapter. In the third chapter, I discuss the cultural and political climate of the 1980s and consider the intersection of politics and activist art. I argue that the AIDS epidemic necessitated increased homosexual visibility in order to disprove the

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[2] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), [5,10, 27-28].

misinformation spread by the news media, the Government, and the conservative Christian Right. In reaction to government neglect, activists launched a counterpolitics through their collective theoretical and creative consciousness. They resisted the normalizing tendencies of hegemonic sexuality through subversive performance and dissenting graphic material. Conservatives appeal to the "silent majority" by proposing a set of moral values instead of addressing economic or political issues. This enabled neoconservatives to initially amass the majority consensus. The shift to an authoritarian populism accentuated the division between public and private.[3] In this chapter I illustrate how two activist groups, ACT UP and Gran Fury, challenged normative structures and urged people to recognize private matters as publicly relevant.

I was originally drawn to the issue of gay and lesbian representation in mainstream spaces. The division between public and private spheres influences how individuals conduct themselves and are regarded within social spaces. This project began with an interest in how the state prioritizes certain security issues over others. Security threats are evaluated on the distinction between public and private spheres. Focusing on visual media and popular culture as extension of the state has encouraged me to think more deeply about how the material we interact with daily plays a significant role in managing our cultural experience. Further, this project has pushed me to consider the discursive trends that underlie our cultural experience and how the images produced in mass media adhere to a dominant ideology that affirms heterosexuality as the cultural norm. Throughout the project I investigate how proponents of mainstream ideologies have strategically infiltrated the gay and lesbian community to produce a homogenized homosexuality that has an assimilationist appeal to heterosexuality. The construction of homosexual identities within assimilationist terms manifests in what

[3] Stuart Hall, "Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop Et Al," *The New Left Review* 1, no. 151 (May/June 1985): [117], accessed April 25, 2018, https://newleftreview.org/I/151/stuart-hall-authoritarian-populism-a-reply.

queer theorist Jasbir Puar refers to as homonormativity.[4] Puar argues that the State's inclusion of homonormative bodies allowed for the state to vilify queerness by connecting queer signifiers to terrorists. This defines queerness as a threat to the nation-state. I use Puar's theory to consider the exclusion of queer bodies as a result of normalizing certain members of the gay and lesbian community. The activist work of ACT UP and Gran Fury enormously contributed to the cultural climate of the 1990s. The AIDS epidemic demanded that activists catalyze the politics of gender and sexuality in order to divulge government injustices. The visibilization of queer sexualities was integral to this process. Without these advancements in queer politics, positive portrayals of homosexuality in the mainstream, would not have been possible in the 1990s.

[4] Jasbir K. Puar, "Mapping U.S. Homonormativies," *Gender, Place and Culture* 13, no. 1 (August 23, 2006): [72].

Chapter 1.

Mainstream Representations In Media and Popular Culture

In April of 1997, just a few weeks before the infamous "Puppy Episode"[5] was released on primetime television, Ellen DeGeneres debuted on the cover of *Time* magazine confidently proclaiming, "Yep, I'm Gay."[6] In the cover photo, Ellen is clad in a casual-chic all-black outfit, barring her loafers, which glean a pearly white. She is wearing a delicate necklace and a collection of diamond rings on each hand. Her makeup is more noticeable than usual, enhancing her femininity. This cover photo demonstrates a larger trend in representing lesbians in mainstream media (Figure 1). Ellen's amplified feminine appearance appeals to heterosexual standards of beauty. Her lesbianess is dulled by her feminine exterior and thus is more digestible for the dominant heterosexual audience. This cover photo indicates how homosexual visibility in mainstream media and popular culture has been an expression of tolerance, rather than acceptance.

While the political goal of the Gay Rights movement during the 1980s and 1990s might have appeared to have been reaching toward achieving a regularity in the representation of homosexuals in mainstream spheres, political agendas within the Gay Rights movement presented different and contrasting responses to the proliferation of images depicting lesbians and gay men. The depiction of gay men and lesbians in mainstream spaces, more often than not, were bent toward heterosexual norms. This discourse materialized through replicating heterosexual signifiers and superimposing these signifiers onto gay and lesbian bodies. While the inclusion of queer images and stories marked a positive shift in the public reception of non-normative sexualities, mainstream media persisted in maintaining an

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[5] *Ellen*, "The Puppy Episode: Part 1," episode 22/23, ABC, April 30, 1997, written by Ellen Lee DeGeneres, et al., directed by Gil Junger.

[6] Bruce Handy, "Ellen DeGeneres Explains Why She's Coming out," *Time*, April 14, 1997, accessed April 20, 2018, http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19970414,00.html.

agenda that reified heterosexual norms.[7] The inclusion of homonormative representations in the mass media made it more difficult for queer people to break into the mainstream space. Genuinely positive representations of queer people, cannot be fully achieved until queer people can determine the terms of their visibility. Once queer people have the autonomy to do so, homonormative images will cease to dominate the mainstream, making possible for other sexual identities to appear in these dominant public domains.

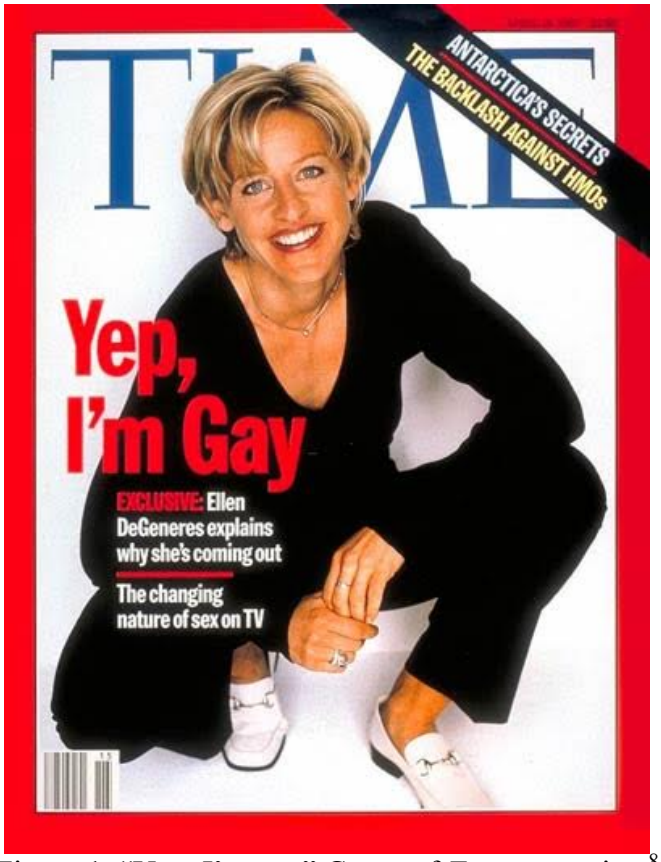

Figure 1. "Yep, I'm gay" Cover of *Time* magazine.[8]

In this chapter, I will explore how depictions of gay men and lesbians, and the targeted advertising toward the homosexual consumer market, illustrates an image of

[7] Janae Teal, "Homophobia without Homophobes: Deconstructing the Public Discourses of 21st Century Queer Sexualities in the United States," in "Sexuality in the Post-Marriage Equality Era," special issue, *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 1, no. 38 (2016): [14].

[8] *Ellen DeGeneres, "Yep, I'm Gay"*, photograph, Time, April 14, 1997, accessed April 28, 2018, http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19970414,00.html.

homonormativity. This tactic ultimately solidifies heterosexuality as the norm. Furthermore, I assert that the mainstream publications aimed at representing gays and lesbians concealed the agenda of reifying heterosexuality as the cultural norm under the guise of "liberal tolerance."[9] I will argue through the production of homonormative images in the mass media, the media was able to control gender and sexuality and inform how certain sexualities were made visible to the political public. In assuming the jurisdiction of mainstream spaces, the dominant media and popular culture influencers narrated a specific cultural landscape, giving an illusion of social liberalism, yet systematically denying queer bodies through the process of admitting homonormative bodies.[10] Thus, mainstream publications curated an "acceptable" image of homosexuality as a means of continuing the stigmatization of the "Other" and denying queer bodies as part of the social fabric. This form of cultural shaping emerged in an effort to secure a dominant heterosexual ideology that presented the United States as a majority wealthy, white and heterosexual population.

In *The Reification of Desire: Toward A Queer Marxism*, Kevin Floyd glosses the ways in which a neoliberal ethic permeated queer social spheres through the increased presence of syndicated businesses, the corollary being the extermination of privately owned small businesses. This particularly had an effect on queer social hubs, as businesses that catered to queer customers were pushed out. Floyd also touched on the effects of intensified zoning laws and public policing, as well as the contagious spread of homonationalism.[11] Focusing more on the social management of space, Floyd illustrates that social policies such as this zoning law, reinforce the privatization of sex intrinsic to the neoliberal rationale of

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[9] Teal, "Homophobia without," [14].

[10] Puar, "Mapping U.S.," [72].

[11] While homonationalism became more apparent subsequent to the events of September 11th, with homophobic rhetoric and illustration being derogatorily attached to foreign actors, the desire to influence homosexual participation in society under the condition of homonormative representations and performance existed prior to September 11th. The dominant imagery of homonormative bodies in mainstream spaces is indicative of this.

lesbian and gay rights to property and consumption.[12] Floyd argues that the enforcement of zoning laws, do not threaten individual identity, but a culture of practices that contradict normative structures.[13] Policing of queer sexualities transcends management of physical space, equally affecting queer sexualities in social spaces, operating through branches of popular culture and media as a means of controlling the integration, or rejection of queer sexualities. Facilitating the expansion of mainstream spaces through the enforcement of zoning laws, assists in pushing communities deemed to be hindering the full potential of a city, to margins of society. This further limits the spaces minority communities are permitted to inhabit

Correlation Between the Policing of Physical Space and Ephemeral Social Spheres

Policing of queer sexualities has been extremely prominent, and arguably the most visible point of contact between Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) people and criminal law enforcement.[14] According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAP), the expression of violence and hate toward queer sexualities has grown exponentially in the past year, exceeding numbers calculated in previous years in half the time. This has caused the NCVAP to accelerate the release of their yearly report for 2017. This decision was made by the NCVAP in an effort to raise awareness concerning the shocking number of hate crimes and homicides committed against LGBTQ persons within

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[12] Zoning laws are enacted to guide urban growth and development. Urban landscapes are divided into different zones in which various uses of the space are either permitted or disallowed. Zoning laws often have negative effects on lower socio-economic classes and have previously been put in place to restrict certain business from functioning within any specific zoned section. The restrictions placed on sex shops in the West Village in NYC is an example of how zoning laws can be limiting and push certain individuals out of a public space.

[13] Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), [204].

[14] Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock, *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT people in the United States*, ed. Michael Bronski, Queer Action/ Queer Ideas (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), [47].

the United States.[15] A significant portion of the hate crimes reported against queer sexualities involve racial profiling and discrimination based off of archetypal narratives framing people of color, and non-normative sexualities as individuals whose sexuality demands informal control, regardless of whether the individuals in question have broken any laws. The persistent effort to control sexuality through state institutions, whether within the periphery of legal action, or from outside the realm of law enforcement, can be understood as a reaction to the heterosexual patriarchy experiencing a feeling of destabilization when confronted by non-normative sexualities and genders.[16] Systemic violence against queer sexualities can also be recognized as a reaction to the presence of non-gender conforming individuals, who through merely existing, challenge the stability of "known" identities which are integral to maintaining heterosexist culture.[17] In the same way that queer bodies have been denied from mainstream media, queer bodies are physically denied access to public spaces, or made to feel unwelcome in certain spaces through the implementation of both police and citizen violence, harassment, or discrimination.

It may seem extreme to draw a connection between the physical and harmful expression of violence against queer bodies to the monolithic representations of homosexuality within mainstream media and popular culture. However, it is important to consider the various spaces in which queer sexualities are denied access, the extent to which queerness is controlled in mainstream society, and how cultural shaping functions through both discursive mechanisms of control and physical acts of control.[18] While the external

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[15] Emily Waters and Sue Yacka-Bible, *A Crisis of Hate: A Mid Year Report on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Hate Violence Homicides* (New York City: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP), 2017), [Page #], accessed March 28, 2018, http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NCAVP-A-Crisis-of-Hate-Final.pdf.

[16] Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, *Queer (In)Justice*, [67].

[17] Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, *Queer (In)Justice*, [67].

[18] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, [33-34].

treatment of queer bodies in mainstream spaces has historically materialized in police efforts to force queer people out through developing legal justifications, such as the "quality of life regulations,"[19] which the authors of *Queer (In)Justice* consider to be rooted in "age-old vagrancy laws, which prohibit an expanding spectrum of activities in public places,"[20]and unfairly target queer people for banal acts, in which heterosexuals would not be placed under the same level of scrutiny and policing. These laws permit discriminatory targeting of non-normative sexualities and police are often found attending to sites known for attracting queer people, in a punitive effort to extinguish the presence of queer bodies from public spaces.[21] In 1994 the piers along Hudson River in New York City, a widely known meeting place for queers was closed off, subject to increased police patrolling, and a curfew was enforced. [22] The mainstream media and popular culture of the 1980s and 1990s exhibits another form of social control through the management of homosexual representations within conventional spaces. By routinely permitting representations of homosexuality that replicate heterosexual norms and figuring the homosexual represented as distinctly non-sexual, whilst simultaneously neglecting to represent non-normative sexualities and genders, mainstream media sources, such as *Mademoiselle* and *Cosmopolitan*, reified heterosexuality as the cultural norm. Through doing this mainstream media maintained a liberal facade, which insinuated a desire to be all-inclusive, despite covert rejections of queer bodies within this public space. Because queer people existed outside the process of determining how and what got represented, the media was able to take liberties in constructing how homosexuality was made visible.

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[19] Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, *Queer (In)Justice*, [48].

[20] Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, *Queer (In)Justice*, [48].

[21] Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, *Queer (In)Justice*, [48].

[22] Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), [155].

Targeting the Lesbian and Gay Consumer Market

In 1981, a decade after the Stonewall Uprising, (which Michael Warner refers to as the "hey-day of gay liberation"[23]), the Swedish brand Absolut Vodka released one of the first campaigns to openly target the gay and lesbian community. As gay men and lesbians began to assume a more prominent social presence, some consumers began to move away from "gay window advertising"[24]and toward openly targeting the gay and lesbian community. This shift in marketing culture, showed a positive progression in the fight for visibility. Many marketing companies remained averse to the idea of openly marketing to homosexuals.[25]

In retrospect, Absolut's campaign can be considered to be a gesture of support for the queer community, breaking with marketing norms during a period of dominant social stigmatization and dismissal of homosexuality. However, direct targeting of gay men and lesbians through two popular gay magazines, *The Advocate* and *After Dark*,[26] indicates Absolut's targeting of a class of gay and lesbian consumers who visually and financially appealed to normative structures. Both magazines were popular with an upper-middle class, white demographic of lesbians and gay men because they predominantly depicted this demographic. One need only look at the cover page of a few After Dark issues to obtain an idea of their target clientele. As non-normative representations increased in the 1990s, piggybacking on the events following the Stonewall Uprising, and as part of an ongoing fight to gain recognition within the public domain during the AIDS epidemic, activists within the gay rights movement fragmented. As the public was pushed further into recognizing

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[23] Warner, *The Trouble*, [50].

[24] Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," 1993, in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Barale, and David Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), [494].

[25] Karen Stabiner, "Tapping the Homosexual Market," *New York Times Magazine*, May 2, 1982, accessed February 26, 2018, http://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/02/magazine/tapping-the-homosexual-market.html?pagewanted=all.

[26] Stuart Elliot, "Absolut Celebrates Its 30 Years of Marketing to Gay Consumers," *The New York Times* (New York), October 26, 2011, Media/ Advertising, [Page #], accessed February 26, 2018, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/business/media/absolut-heralds-its-marketing-to-gay-consumers.html.

homosexuality as a legitimate sexual identity, mainstream publications and media began to acknowledge homosexual desire, producing informational culture pieces on lesbians and gays as a way of proving their liberal inclination and realizing homosexual desire as an alternative sexual identity to heterosexuality.

Despite progressive shifts toward accepting gays and lesbians in mainstream society, dominant ideology maintained heterosexuality as the expected cultural norm. Even though advertisements and articles depicting gay men and lesbians were appearing in the 1980s and 1990s with new eminence, the imagery accompanying the rhetoric on gays and lesbians continued to convey a message of heteronormativity. While "femme" lesbians were admitted into mainstream media spheres, the "butch" lesbian remained largely invisible. The femme lesbian, being indistinguishable from heterosexual women can be "de-lesbianized" and thus is made less offensive for the heterosexual audience. However, the butch's masculine appearance inevitably reveals her as a lesbian which prevents the media from making her lesbianism invisible.[27] Thus in her opposition to heterosexual culture the butch is deemed unacceptable for mainstream content. The butch's overt lesbian visibility, invokes in the heterosexual male spectator both a realization of the instability of his own masculinity[28] and the notion that lesbian existence is an attack on the male right to women.[29] The exclusion of the butch lesbian from mainstream spaces, depoliticized lesbianism in neglecting the history of butch and femme culture in lesbian communities. Butch-femme roles were performed by lesbians in the 1940s and 1950s as a way for lesbians to appear together in public without

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[27] Ann M. Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2001): [602].

[28] Butler, "Imitation and Gender," in *The Lesbian*, [312-13].

[29] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," 1982, in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), [239].

being identified as lesbians.[30] Considering how media and popular culture depoliticized queer sexualities through superimposing heterosexual signifiers, Absolut's advertisement did not radically break with conventional marketing strategies, but rather played into a dominant discourse which worked to create a monolithic imagination of homosexuality within the confines of homonormativity. This was achieved through affirming white, upper-middle class, well-dressed gays and lesbians, whilst denying the Other.[31]

Through exclusion of queer bodies from mainstream spheres, the dominant heterosexual culture performed a sort of cultural cleansing through the guise of a "liberal acceptance" and in accordance with neoliberal ethics. In "The Twilight of Equality" Lisa Duggan analyzes the effects neoliberalism has had on queer culture and gay politics, identifying how certain segments of the Gay Liberation movement aligned with neoliberal principles, which resulted in the perpetuation of an oppressive regime working against the inclusion of queer sexualities. The forging of a "gay mainstream" occurred both within the place of media advertisements, as well as in Gay Liberation. Duggan harnesses her discussion on contrasting gay politics to the same dominant group of gay male activists that Michael Warner's article "Media Gays: A New Stone Wall" focuses on. In the 1970s, Gay Liberation accelerated into queer politics:

> A rapidly shifting scene of contest over the meanings of public and private, and the related meanings of democracy and autonomy in collective and personal life. Following the 1969 Stonewall rebellion and the subsequent emergence of new organizations and rhetorics, gay politics began to interact intensely with feminist, countercultural, and antiracist rhetorics and strategies.[32]

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[30] Sue-Ellen Case, "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," 1988, in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), [297].
[31] Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 3 (1997): [438].
[32] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003), [52].

With the shifting social and political geography, various sectors within gay liberation began to emerge. In the early 1990s, and with the election of Bill Clinton, a new cultural ethic was adopted by the government and saw its reflection in the dominant public. The Government's interest in the neoliberal agenda influenced the public's political consciousness, as neoliberal organizations and politicians began to engage in an effort to separate themselves from "the moral conservatism of the religious right, as well as from the 'failed' politics of 'old' tax-and-spend-liberals."[33] With the rejection of more conservative politics, these organizations and politicians, now saw themselves through a more liberal lens, and alongside radical and progressive AIDS activism, a new variety of gay moralism had materialized.[34]

In lieu of this new social and political faction of gay moralists, Duggan notes that monogamous marriage was advocated as the responsible alternative to a risky "gay lifestyle." This caused the rise of a new group, The Independent Gay Forum, who began a homosexual political movement.[35] This gay liberationist movement appealed to heteronormative standards. They became a model of gay activism enveloped by the dominant social class. This marked the IGF as the crusaders of gay liberation in mainstream spaces. Duggan offers the opinion that, the IGF's adoption of neoliberal ethics within the context of gay sexual politics, because of its appeal to normative structures and neoliberalism "might be termed the new homonormativity."[36] With this new homonormative agenda in conjunction with the emergence of neoliberalism, the exclusion of queer bodies from conventional social spaces was bolstered, as members from within the gay rights movement partnered with state prerogatives to rid queer sexualities from mainstream spaces. This effort to eradicate queerness materialized in a myriad of ways; with the growing presence of corporate business,

[33] Duggan, *The Twilight*, [53].
[34] Duggan, *The Twilight*, [53].
[35] Duggan, *The Twilight*, [53].
[36] Duggan, *The Twilight*, [50].

privately owned business catering to the needs of the queer community and providing a site for queer socialities to occur, most noticeably located in major metropolises as part of the downtown scene, increasingly became obsolete with growing pressure from corporate actors and increased policing over public spaces.[37] Replicating the diminishing of queer space within mainstream spaces, the politics of the IGF, presents a significantly decreased public sphere and a "narrow zone of 'responsible' domestic privacy."[38]

In a critique of assimilationist aspirations to divide the gay community through a distinction of moral behaviors and standards of respectability hinged on public/private values, Michael Warner insisted that "Through such a hierarchy of respectability, from the days of the Mattachine Society to the present, gay and lesbian politics has been built on embarrassment. It has neglected the most searching ethical challenges of the very queer culture it should be protecting."[39] The emergence of the AIDS crisis became an influential factor in creating a platform for those opposing homosexuality to form new approaches to denounce queer culture. This attack was devised on the basis of a presumed "promiscuity" and "gay lifestyle," which was articulated as antithetical to the gay moralism assimilationist gay activists promoted. The presumed lascivious behavior negatively associated with queer culture, shifted from an attack on queerness lead by gay moralists, to becoming a tool implemented by conservatives on the Religious Right.[40] Warner combats this perspective, offering the opinion that "Gay political groups owe their very being to the fact that sex draws people together and in doing so suggests alternative possibilities of life."[41]

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[37] Floyd, *The Reification*, [Page #]. [203].

[38] Duggan, *The Twilight*, [51].

[39] Warner, *The Trouble*, [49].

[40] Michael Warner, "Media Gays: A New Stone Wall," *The Nation*, July 14, 1997, [16].

[41] Warner, *The Trouble*, [47-48].

The physical effects of AIDS presented a new and harmful imagination of homosexuality. Feeding into the mainstream public's consciousness, the association between queer sexualities and AIDS became an impetus for moral panic.[42] This association was utilized as a means of rejecting queer sexualities, whilst simultaneously affirming homonormative standards. At this time, mainstream portrayals of gay men and lesbians in magazines worked to create a chasm in the queer community through producing beautified images of lesbians and gay men that unequivocally resembled heteronormative traits. The images in the mainstream media resonated with assimilationist politics of visibility. While queer politics resisted the overwhelming homogeneity of mainstream images, assimilationist gay activists were satisfied with these representations.[43] Thus, while the images produced in magazines introduced important discourses concerning homosexual identities and culture, they simultaneously denounced queer sexuality through overtly excluding queer bodies from this space. With this new wave of mainstream acceptance of homonormativity, the dominant public gave the illusion of "acceptance," whilst maintaining a rejection of non-normative bodies from conventional spheres which contributed to the manipulation and control of society. Despite appearing to have reached a progressive place expressing a social acceptance of homosexuality, through neglecting queer sexualities, mainstream culture merely reaffirmed heteronormative standards within a new context of liberal tolerance.

Absolut Vodka Going Against the Grain: Advertising to the Queer Consumer

Given that Absolut's advertisement was released in two publications that catered specifically to a gay and lesbian readership who were promoted as upscale and educated, the

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[42] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Culture, Society and Sexuality*, ed. Peter Guy Parker and Richard Aggleton (Philadelphia, PA: UCL Press, 1999), [161].
[43] Warner, *The Trouble*, [53].

advertisement necessarily contributed to mainstream efforts to enhance media attention toward emphasizing the mainstream public's approval of homonormativity. Absolut's decision to begin marketing to the gay and lesbian community was possibly incentivized by the fact that "in 1980 *Advertising Age* noted that most large companies 'shy away from being identified with homosexuals' by including them in ad campaigns. At the same time gay publishers attempted to persuade advertisers that they were overlooking an attractive market … In San Francisco the publisher of *The Advocate* began promoting the magazine to advertisers on the basis of claims about its upscale, educated readers."[44] Given this invitation to advertise to what was sold as the untapped homosexual market, ready with affluent individuals, it is not surprising that Absolut launched their campaign in targeting the gay and lesbian community. Absolut was not interested in supporting a true queer identity, but rather interested in profiting off an untapped market while maintaining favor in other cultural spheres.

In the minimalist style of Absolut's aesthetic, the "Absolut Perfection" campaign pictured a spotlighted bottle and a translucent halo adorning the bottle's cap (Figure 2). The image of an Absolut bottle decorated by a halo, considered within the context of appealing to the gay consumer market, could be interpreted as Absolut's attempt at dislodging the biblical conception of homosexuality as sin by alluding to heaven through the insertion of an iridescent halo. This campaign launched Absolut's strong and still active career in marketing to gay and lesbian consumers.[45]The Absolut advertisements highlighted in the *New York*

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[44] Larry Gross, *Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), [235].

[45] I choose to use the word "queer" in this context, to refer to the larger community of non-heterosexual, and non-cis gendered individuals, outside the category of gay and lesbian identities, as I found the acronym, "LGBTQI" to be historically inapplicable, as it has been developed in more recent years as a signifier, and I will be speaking mostly to the experience of gay and lesbian individuals. Thus, when referring to "the Other," or "queer bodies," I intend to indicate toward those that have been historically excluded from the visibility the gay and lesbian community received in the three decades following the Stonewall Uprising. Additionally, my

Times article, "Absolut Celebrates Its 30 Year Marketing to Gay Consumers," include; "Absolut Outrageous," emphasizing "out" in a bold pink font, "Absolut Glaad," which was intended to honor the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, as well as a campaign which played on the epistemology of the closet, displaying the slogan "Absolut Out." The "Absolut Out" (Figure 3) advertisement exhibited three-dimensional closet doors, all open, inferring that everyone ought to be comfortable and open about their sexuality. Absolut is engaging with the notion that society had transcended homophobia and entered into an new era of acceptance. This commercial optimism engaging with the politics of representation, fundamentally ignores Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's profound insight concerning the closet as a malleable construct, enacted in different spaces depending on the social circumstance and threat to individual personhood reliant on whether they're honest about their sexual identity, or choose to maintain the illusion of a presumed heterosexuality.[46] In conjunction with the tenuous relationship homosexuals sustain with the epistemological closet, one might also consider how outing of prominent gay political figures was implemented as a political tool by queer activists as a component of the gay liberation movement. Michelangelo Signorile the pioneer of this public outing tactic. Reacting to a dominant partiality to heterosexuality and a zealous effort to deny homosexuality as acceptable and quotidian, Signorile's vigilante

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reference to the gays and lesbians that were offered a platform of visibility within the mainstream popular sphere, refers to the dominant presence of homonormativity which was paid credence, whilst other members belonging to the lesbian and gay community, due to non-normative traits were disbanded.

[46] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), [68]. —According to Sedgwick, every social encounter holds the possibility of erecting new closets. Specifically for homosexual individuals functioning in homophobic environment, revealing one's sexual identity, often comes with repercussions which Sedgwick suggests incontrovertibly influence an individual's relationship to the closet: "Even an out gay person deals with daily interlocutors about whom she doesn't know whether they know or not; it is equally difficult to guess for any given interlocutor whether, if they did know, the knowledge would seem very important. Nor – at the most basic level – is it unaccountable that someone who wanted a job, custody, or visitation rights, insurance, protection from violence, from 'therapy,' form distorting stereotype, from insulting scrutiny, from simple insult, from forcible interpretation of their bodily product, could deliberately choose to remain in or to reenter the closet in some or all segments of their life."

actions to out influential public figures was in response to the dominant denial of homosexuality, particularly by those who in fact were homosexuals. Pertinent to the discussion of homonormative representations in mainstream spaces, Signorile, in his book *Queer in America*, provides a castigating position on the mainstream media's negligence toward diverse representations, "By never offering images of homosexuals on billboards or television commercials—while endlessly depicting heterosexuals in states of bliss—the straight liberal advertising executive enforces the closet."[47]

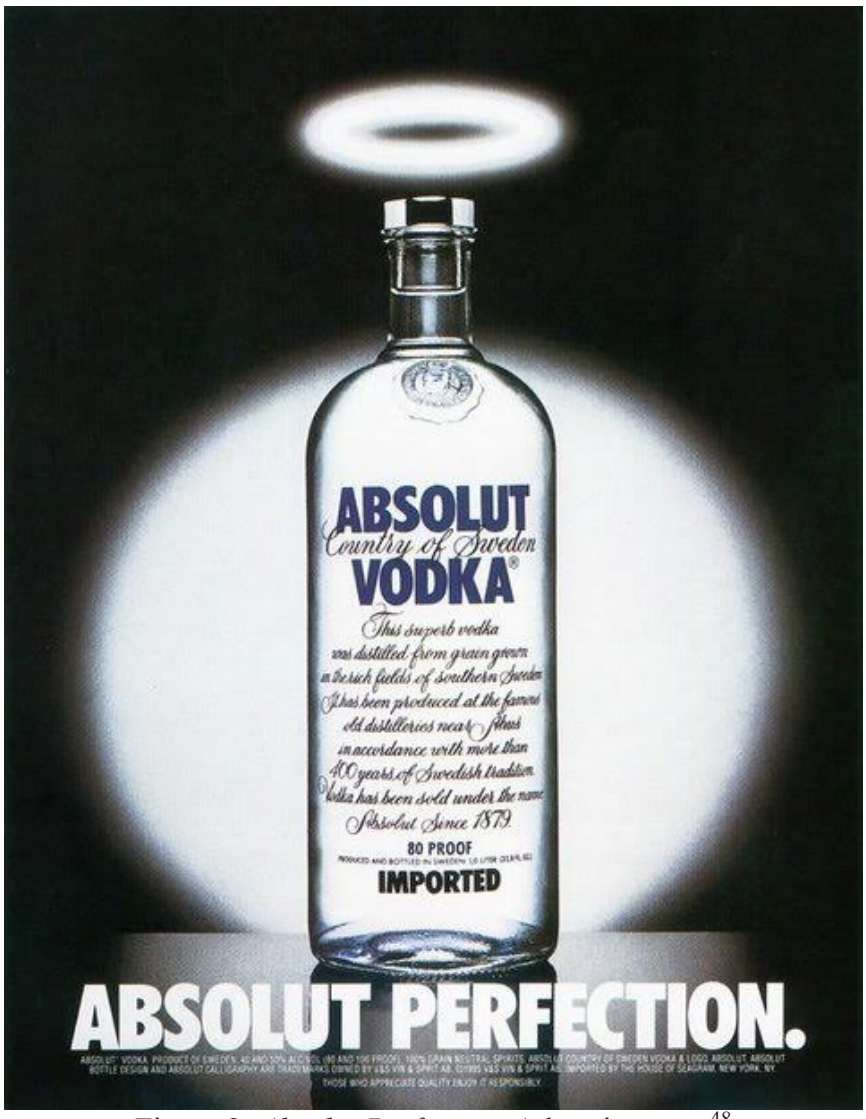

Figure 2. *Absolut Perfection*. Advertisement.[48]

[47] Michelangelo Signorile, *Queer in America* (n.p.: Random House, 1993), [*xiv*].

[48] Absolut Vodka, *Absolut Perfection*, 1980, photograph, accessed May 2, 2018, http://www.businessinsider.com/the-21-best-absolut-ads-2013-12.

Figure 3. *Absolut Out.* Advertisement.[49]

Signorile's guerilla inspired political gestures of outing leading figures toward achieving a more public recognition as part of the social fabric urges the following question: who is in control of outing? Does one out them self by choice? Or, does being out of the closet infer an external pressure determining whether someone is out of, or in the closet? What this really boils down to is whether being out is determined by choice or by force. Travelling beyond the personal decision to come out of the closet, it is important to consider how certain people might not have the same option of being closeted. This is constituent on physical appearance and an inability to appear heterosexual. Absolut's image of three open closet doors suggests a commercial optimism toward what happens when you're allowed to be visible and accepted for how you actually are rather than what happens when you're out of the closet. As Sedgwick reveals, coming out has a variety of implications. As a result of

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[49] Absolut Vodka, *Absolut Out.*, 1980-81, photograph, accessed May 2, 2018, http://www.josephmazzaferro.com/spirits/uokui37h40hwi4n4i6h2qqi8xvzhs5.

external influencers, one chooses --if afforded the possibility--whether to "remain in or reenter the closet in some or all segments of their life.'"[50] The symbolism of the closet doors that Absolut invokes act as an emblem of acceptance, mimicking the function of the rainbow flag hanging in the window of shops fronts that notify customers that the establishments is queer friendly. However, Absolut's invocation of the closet motif fails to acknowledge the complexity of closet politics and presents a more optimistic reading of gay visibility in America at this time.

The Closet in Advertising

The notion that homosexuals should be comfortable coming out was a common assertion in women's magazines covering stories on lesbians. A 1993 issue of *Mademoiselle* had an article titled, "Women in Love," in which one interviewee proclaims, "For many young lesbians, 'coming out' in a formal way is an artificial thing. We drift out and let people draw their own conclusions."[51] Both the statement made by the young woman interviewed in *Mademoiselle* and the insinuation that Absolut implies through their closet advertisement neglect to consider the societal obstacles surrounding coming out as a homosexual in a homophobic environment. The opinion on the closet imparted in *Mademoiselle* implies that as a result of queer activism, heterosexuality is no longer the assumed sexuality. The fact that people continue to have to declare their sexuality if they deviate from heterosexual desire, disapproves this statement. While some were able to come out and be "accepted" in mainstream society due to their seemingly conformist exterior, their queer counterparts were unable to pass as easily in mainstream society. Coming out was not always a viable choice when difference could engender severe consequences.

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[50] Sedgwick, *The Epistemology*, [68].

[51] Harris, "Women in Love," [181].

Absolut's lack of awareness concerning the politics of the closet revealed their failure in considering the ramifications certain individuals might experience upon coming out. However, the advertisement was ingenuous as Absolut's perceivable intention was to openly support and acknowledge the gay and lesbian community. While Absolut's engagement with the gay and lesbian market might have initially been inspired by the financial possibilities resting in the untapped gay and lesbian consumer market, their later advertisement ventures suggest an unwavering commitment to the LGBTQ community. Absolut's alliance with GLAAD is particularly indicative of their impervious commitment. Absolut's inaugural advertisement campaign targeting the gay and lesbian consumer market opened the door for other companies to discuss homosexual issues, thus further blocking the door of the queer American's closet. While the magazines producing articles dealing with lesbianism and gay culture often depicted voyeuristic accounts of homosexuality, the discussion of sexualities outside heterosexuality was a necessary step in broadening the cultural geography and informing the dominant heterosexual audience on issues pertaining to the homosexual experience.

Following the precedent Absolut set, a plethora of culture pieces discussing homosexuality began to appear in popular magazines. These discussions often appeared in magazines targeting female audiences, such as *Essence*, *Mademoiselle*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Redbook*. Magazine's oriented toward a predominantly female audience, appeared to be more comfortable and straightforward in their acknowledgment and discussion of homosexuality, more specifically in the examples provided above, the discussion was focused on lesbianism.[52] This comfort around the discussion of lesbian sexuality might be due to the fact that lesbianism posed little threat to the heterosexual patriarchy, especially considering how

[52] Sherie A. Inness, *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (n.p.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), [52].

lesbians were depicted in these magazines toward heterosexual ideals of beauty.[53] Ultimately, the images of lesbian women in popular women's magazines favored the male gaze, neglecting to portray images of lesbian women who deviated from this image of "normalcy;" lesbians who troubled intrinsic gender norms through disrupting conventional fashion were seen as unfit candidates for women's magazines. Although other expressions of lesbianism were discussed, butch appearing lesbians were rarely featured. The instances in which lesbians inclined toward a butch sensibility made appearances in mainstream magazines were often presented as anomalies, K.D. Lang is an exemplar of this. While K.D. Lang embodied a more masculine style, her iconic personality eclipsed magazine expectations that lesbians appear glossy and femme. Lang's considerable popularity allowed her to become the exception to the rule. Despite Lang's appearance in mainstream media, her image did not inspire a mainstream cultural field of imitators.[54]

Defining "Lesbian"

The definition of "lesbian" was a point of contention in the early 1980s.[55] Theorist Annamarie Jagose for example, notes that From 1980 to 1982 a slew of articles focused on determining a fixed definition of "lesbian" emerged, many of which engaged with one another in an attempt to arrive at a conclusive definition of what it means to be lesbian.[56] The collection of texts participating in the theoretical negotiation toward solidifying a ubiquitous conception of "lesbian" expressed the notion that gender is not only produced through discourse but is also discursively reproductive. This perspective resists essentialist claims which figure women as the binary other within the patriarchal cultural structure.

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[53] Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)visible," [585].
[54] Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)visible," [588].
[55] Annamarie Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* (New York: Routledge, 1994), [10].
[56] Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, [10].

Consequently, this notion associates woman with negative characteristics, situating "woman" within the normative gender binary of "man" and "woman." This binary traditionally posits "woman" as passive as opposed to traits associated with "man" whose characteristics typically associate with active qualities.

Considering a collection of prominent feminist theorist's oppositional arguments concerned with determining what constitutes lesbian identity, Jagose procures a dialectic position on the functions of sex and gender in relation to the discussion of "lesbian" in feminist and Queer theory. In her analysis of complementary and contrasting approaches to understanding lesbian identity outside normative cultural constructs of gender and sex, Jagose notes, "While the commitment to producing a definition of 'lesbian' as the necessary ground for further political elaboration is never relinquished, each definition justifies itself through the demonstrable limitations of previous definitions only to be deemed itself insufficient and overturned by subsequent definitions."[57] Attempts to define "lesbian" often neglected to recognize the multiplicity of "lesbian" identity and instead presented monolithic or essentialist constructions of "lesbian."[58] Aligning with a Butlerian perspective, Jagose arrives at the opinion that the issue in defining "lesbian" is fastened to the inability to divorce "lesbian" from a fixed category located "within a system of interdependent genders and sexualities."[59]More specifically, lesbian-feminists demonstrating this opinion, sought to divorce "lesbian" from within the category "woman." Jagose argues that the theoretical emancipation of 'lesbian,' from the normative binary of "man" and "woman," as articulated by Monique Wittig in her seminal theoretical essay, "The Straight Mind," fixes the category

[57] Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, [20].
[58] Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, [14].
[59] Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, [21].

"lesbian" in relation to the heterosexual subjectivities and holds the category "lesbian" in relation to this established Otherness.[60]

Furthermore, Jagose maintains that essentialist arguments adopted by feminist theorists belonging to second wave feminism, rely on separatist notions which ultimately neglect to recognize intersectional issues. By focusing on lesbianism as "a profoundly female experience,"[61] as feminist theorist Adrienne Rich purports in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," is to risk homogenizing women's experiences, both in relation to their sexuality and other contributing cultural factors. Jagose notes that despite feminist efforts to secure a definition of "lesbian," contradicting arguments, such as Rich and Wittig's, preoccupied with defining "lesbian," have instead demonstrated its variability, as a result, "in spite of gestures towards fixity and definition, the instability and mobility of the category 'lesbian' indicates the extent of its indeterminacy."[62] The contestation over lesbian identity speaks to the variation in lesbian receptions of mass media representations of lesbianism. Clothing is an important element of self-identification, particularly for lesbian-feminists who resisted the dominant heteronormative culture through what Arlene Stein refers to as an expression of "anti-style—and attempt to replace the artifice of fashion with a supposed naturalness, free of gender roles and commercialized pretense."[63] Thus, with the rise of a new "lesbian chic,"[64] and the proliferation of femme lesbians in mainstream media, butch lesbians and lesbians who did not identify with femme lesbian culture, were made

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[60] Wittig, "The Straight," in *The Material*, [207].
"...and it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women" (1978).

[61] Found in Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, [12]. From Rich, Adrienne.,"Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" [650]

[62] Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, [12].

[63] Arlene Stein, "All Dressed Up, but No Place to Go: Style Wars and the New Lesbianism," *Out/look*, Winter 1989, [37].

[64] Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)visible," [578].

invisible by the overwhelming homogeneity of femme lesbian images in the mass media.[65] Furthermore, the older generation of lesbians came into their lesbian identity within a more hostile cultural environment. Resisting capitalism through counterculture movements was integral to lesbian-feminist dissenting politics. Thus, it is understandable that lesbian-feminists might view the younger generation of "lipstick-lesbians"[66] as trading in politics for aesthetic purposes.[67]

The Politics of Style

While representations of femme lesbians break with the dominant and stereotypical conception of lesbians as "mannish, makeup-less butch in boots and flannel,"[68] the homogeneity of femme lesbian representation in mass media spheres comes dangerously close to depoliticizing lesbian identity and makes those who are largely unrepresented virtually invisible in the public sphere.[69] It is necessary to have a broad spectrum of representation in order to allow for individual expression to combat rigid cultural constructions. Arlene Stein's article "All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go: Style Wars and the New Lesbianism" explores the concept of a "new lesbian," referring to the explosion of feminine chic attire, worn confidently by the "new" and younger generation of lesbians emerging out of the 1980s. The variance between lesbian style in the 1950s as opposed to the "new lesbian" belonging to the late 1980s and 1990s, indicates a divide in political ideology. Lesbians who demonstrated anti-fashion gestures, exhibited different standards and sensitivities to the function of fashion as a political tool. The "new lesbian" style similarly articulates a feminist politics through dress code, but instead of resisting binaristic

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[65] Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)visible," [597].
[66] Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in *The Lesbian*, [488].
[67] Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in *The Lesbian*, [488].
[68] Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)visible," [584].
[69] Stein, "All Dressed," [40].

categorizations of gender and style, embraces femininity as a way of reclaiming the female body. Stein suggests that the "new lesbian" style is not so much a careless rejection of lesbian feminist morals, but rather a new lesbian politics trying to get at the heart of dominant notions of gender and sexuality?[70] With this dichotomizing shift in lesbian feminist politics, the "new lesbian" emerged as a testament to identity as a personal choice. Lesbian style became about individual desire, as opposed to being a political obligation.[71] Lesbians of the 1980s were reconstructing sexual identities. Excavating the style archives of their lesbian seniors, the younger generation of lesbian were building their aesthetic and sexual identities from a medley of 1970s lesbian-feminism, 1950s butch-femme, punk, and various other cultural influencers.[72] Young lesbians in the 1980s, reinforced gender roles through their revival of the butch-femme aesthetic which was romanticized by the younger generations of lesbians.[73] While gendered roles were disapproved of by second wave feminists, Stein reports that, "roles *are* enjoying a renaissance among younger dykes, women who never fully parted with their butch and femme identities, and feminists who are finally recognizing the error in their ways."[74] While it might not have been as much of an "error" as Stein suggests, the unvarying conviction that lesbians should remain anti-fashion is a restrictive politics preventing individual expression that assumes there is a certain *type* of lesbian. This narrow perspective of feminist politics and the construction of a "monolithic lesbian"[75] echoes Monique Wittig and Adrienne Rich's intractable conjectures in respect to a unified definition of "lesbian."[76]

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[70] Stein, "All Dressed," [36].
[71] Stein, "All Dressed," [40].
[72] Stein, "All Dressed," [34].
[73] Stein, "All Dressed," [36].
[74] Stein, "All Dressed," [36].
[75] Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, [17].
[76] Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, [17].

Personal style and cultural codes are integral to embodying a queer identity. For butch-femme roles communicate a history of lesbian masquerades as necessary components to public appearance. And as is outlined above, butch lesbian style was integral to a lesbian-feminist counter politics to the dominant heteronormative mainstream. Similar to lesbians, gay men developed style trends as a way of communicating through visual significations. In an article entitled, "The Boy Look" featured in *Out/Look,* a lesbian and gay quarterly, Mark Leger provides the insiders scoop on the "boy look" which was popular amongst gay men in the height of the AIDS crisis.[77] The boy look was developed in response to the physical effects of AIDS, Leger reports that "The boy look emphasizes youth and health. It implies that the "boy" was just not around during the era of transmission. Features that would have read 'no AIDS here' are emphasized."[78] Given that weight loss was a sign of AIDS, the boy look took on a slightly plump appearance. The link to signification in lesbian and gay aesthetics, reveal the complex politics woven into the style trends particularly in the 1980s and 1990s when the dominant public was less accepting of lesbians and gay men. Stein notes that "Butch-femme roles, at least in their pre-feminist incarnation, linked sexuality, appearance, and, frequently, economic position in a highly ritualized way."[79] In the same vein, gay men developed coded styles that relayed specific messages to one another within the queer community.

While restrictive conditions have loosened with the development of gay liberation, butch-femme roles remain to be an important part of the lesbian experience. However, the permanence and reliance on these roles has evaporated. Reflecting on the shifting nature of butch-femme roles as a product of social circumstance, Stein inserts her analysis of 1980s butch-femme roles, "Eighties butch-femme—if it accurately can be termed as such—is a self-

[77] Mark Leger, "The Boy Look," *Out/Look*, Winter 1989, [44].
[78] Leger, "The Boy Look," [44].
[79] Stein, "All Dressed," [38].

conscious aesthetic that plays with style and power, rather than an embrace of one's 'true' nature against the constraints of straight society."[80] Given that lesbian-feminist energies were channeled toward necessary political and ideological fights concerning anti-pornography campaigns, pro-sex agendas, women's shelters, and other areas that demanded critical attention, vanity was "strictly taboo."[81] However, there is no longer a direct correspondence between fashion, lesbian-feminist politics and identity. Representation through fashion is malleable. Clothes have become "transient, interchangeable."[82]This shift in lesbian fashion may be an attempt at deconstructing rigid categorizations that restrictively cemented sexual and identity significations as well as a mechanism of denying male authority over female sexuality. However, the image of lesbians produced in mainstream spheres presented minimal variation in the depiction of lesbianism. The mass media actively participated in the depoliticization of lesbianism; divorcing lesbian identity from a sexual and political history of butch-femme roles. Confined representations of lesbianism that exclusively spoke to the new lesbian, made possible for the femme lesbian to be de-lesbianized through her indistinguishable aesthetic appearance from that of heterosexual women.[83]

Gay Window Advertising

In conversation with Arlene Stein's analysis of the material shift in lesbian culture and identity, theorist Danae Clark examines how the lesbian community was shifting during the late 1980s and 1990s. Drawing upon a 1990 survey featured in *Out/look*, polling the average annual income of lesbians who subscribe to the magazine, Clark notes the growing

[80] Stein, "All Dressed," [38].
[81] Stein, "All Dressed," [36].
[82] Stein, "All Dressed," [38].
[83] Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)visible," [578].

income of many lesbians.[84] The poll revealed that the average household income for lesbians was approximately $58,000.[85] With this information, Clark suggests that since the increased value of lesbians as a group was growing exponentially, lesbians were now placed in a position where they were able to afford luxuries that may have been beyond financial capabilities in the past.[86] As lesbian fashion sensibilities shifted, allowing for more expansive possibilities regarding personal style. The dominant media began to mimic the new feminine lesbian style, because this "new lesbian" suited the mainstream prerogative to maintain heterosexuality as the dominant cultural norm. In response to the rise in the average income of lesbians, Clark writes that "given the increasing affluence and visibility of one segment of the lesbian population—the predominantly, white, predominantly childless, middle-class, educated, well-dressed lesbian with disposable income—it appears that advertisers are now interested in promoting 'lesbian window advertising.'"[87]Clark's terminology "lesbian window advertising," is an adaption of what marketers refer to as "gay window advertising."[88]

Marketing strategies targeting lesbians correlated with "gay window advertising," often identified in advertisements depicting eroticized images of men and women with the intention of attracting both the heterosexual consumer as well as gays and lesbians. The companies employing this method were hitting two birds with one stone. Clark offers up the popular lingerie brand Victoria's Secret as an example of "lesbian window advertising," which finds its parallel in the Calvin Klein advertisements picturing half naked hyper-masculine bodies. Regardless of Calvin Klein's claims denying intentional targeting of

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[84] Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in *The Lesbian*, [488]. Found in "*Out/look* Survey Tabulations," Queery #10, Fall 1990.
[85] "*Out/look* Survey Tabulations," Queery #10, Fall 1990.
[86] Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in *The Lesbian*, [489].
[87] Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in *The Lesbian*, [489].
[88] Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in *The Lesbian*, [489].

homosexual consumers,[89]many of Calvin Klein's advertisements have an explicit homoerotic tone. A Calvin Klein advertisement that ran in 1985 shows how homoerotic imagery was deployed to engage both the heterosexual and homosexual market. The ad pictures an Adonis figure with his legs spread suggestively (Figure 3). The advertisement appears to be unabashedly communicating with the gay male consumer. However, the image equally speaks to the heterosexual market, both to the presumed heterosexual woman buying underwear for her husband and to the heterosexual male consumer, relaying the classic alluring marketing message that tells the buyer, "if you buys this product, you'll look as good as this." Similarly, a Victoria's Secret campaign titled "Angels" overtly targets heterosexual consumers while simultaneously appealing to lesbian desire (Figure 4). With the shift into the 1990s, Victoria's Secret discarded male models from their campaigns after receiving complaints that their advertisements had a pornographic tone.[90] Despite this, their campaigns maintained a seductive quality and with the exclusion of the male body, the Victoria's Secret campaigns adopted a Virgin Heroine aesthetic.[91] The coupling of women with men in Victoria's Secret campaigns from the 1980s, elided that the women were non-virgins and thus "used goods." The removal of the masculine figure diffused this issue and instead presented the female figure as a chaste heroine. With the removal of the male figure, the advertisements became more appealing to a lesbian audience. While pairing women with men was out of the question, coupling women together was not. Thus, the advertisements preserved their flirtatious quality, but the content became refocused onto a lesbian consumer audience. Victoria's Secret's ethos suggested their product was intended to engender women's personal sense of sexuality. This logic coincides with the ideology belonging to a

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[89] Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in *The Lesbian*, [486].

[90] Jane Juffer, *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex, and Everyday Life* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998), [148].

[91] Barbara B. Stern, "Two Pornographies: A Feminist View of Sex in Advertising," *NA - Advances in Consumer Research* 18 (1991): [286].

new generation of lesbians coming into adulthood in the late 1980s and 1990s. Stein's conceptualization of a "new lesbian" style, referenced earlier in the chapter, was perhaps a reclamation of femininity. The Victoria's Secret campaigns purport to be working toward a similar goal.

Figure 4. *Calvin Klein Underwear.* Dual-Window Marketing Advertisement .[92]

[92] Calvin Klein, *Calvin Klein Underwear*, November 1, 1995, photograph, accessed May 2, 2018, http://archive.esquire.com/search/?QueryTerm=Calvin%20Klein&DocType=Ad.

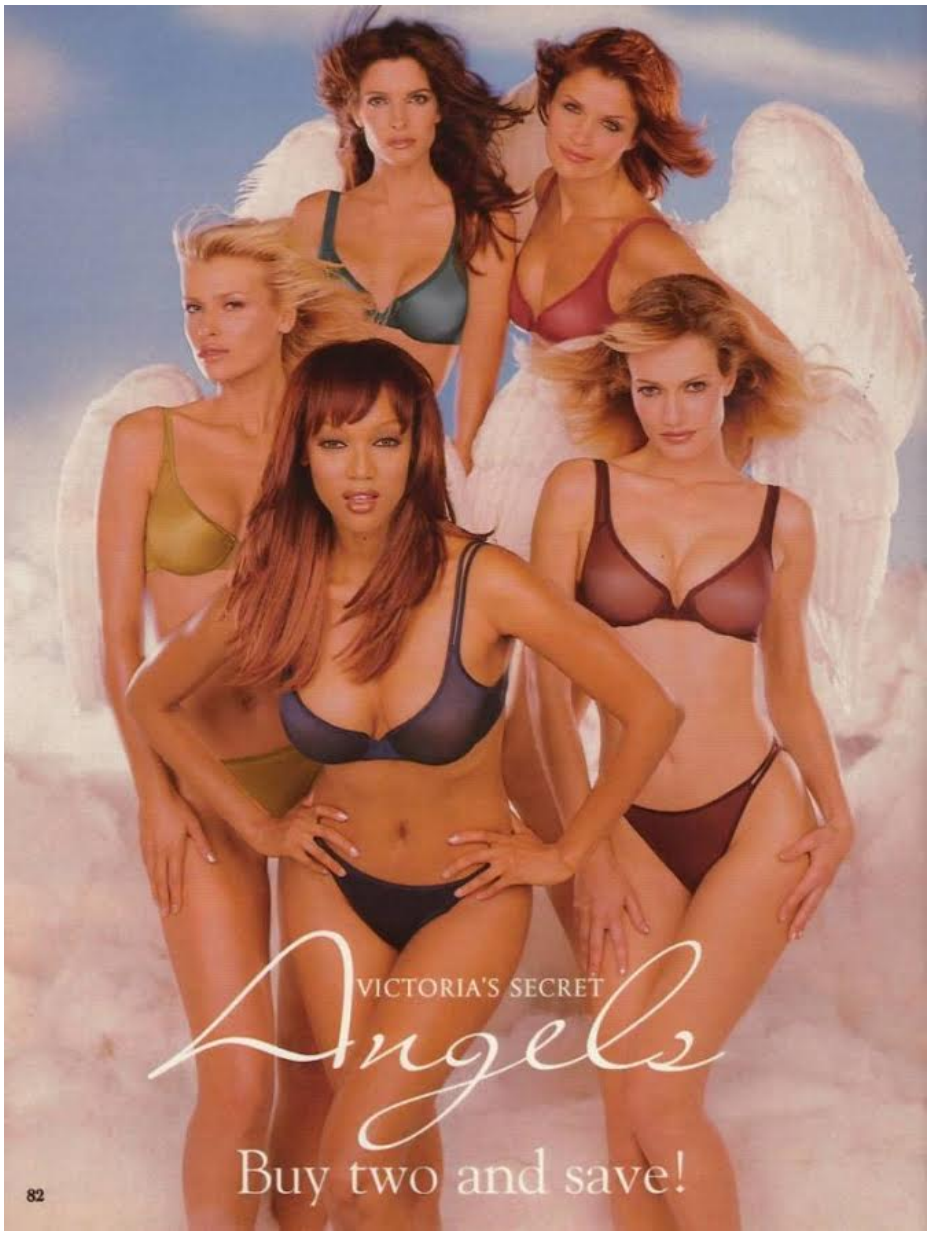

Figure 5. *Victoria's Secret Angels*. Dual-Window Marketing Advertisement.[93]

The disguised nature of dual-window-marketing differs from the representations of lesbians in mainstream magazines. While the depictions of lesbians in mainstream women's magazines display feminized depictions of lesbianism, representations of lesbians are generally removed from any sexual connotations. This desexualization of lesbian bodies in

[93] Victoria's Secret, *Victoria's Secret "Angels"*, 1997, photograph, https://www.racked.com/2016/7/25/12119174/victorias-secret-catalog-rip.

mainstream spheres neutralizes the lesbian subject, enforcing the private and public dichotomy demanded by the dominant heterosexual social structure. Whereas, the woman who identifies with lesbianism is desexualized, the presumed heterosexual woman featured in Victoria Secret advertisements is hyper-sexualized. The denunciation of lesbian sexuality and the hyper-sexualization of heterosexual female bodies enforces a dominant cultural ideology which approves of heterosexual expressions of sexuality. This denies the existence of homosexuality in the dominant public.

Media's Influence in Solidifying "Good-Gay" and "Bad-Queer" Archetypes

Returning to Lisa Duggan's discussion of the divulging ideologies embedded within the Gay Liberation movement will elucidate how by encouraging a separation between public and private values, the Independent Gay Forum (IGF) reinforces the states regulation of sexuality. Thus, the media's depiction of homosexuality parallels the notion of a privatized homosexuality that assimilationist activists advocated for in the peak years of the Gay Liberation movement. Theorist Michael Warner, argues that in promoting a restrictive criteria for homosexual visibility, the gang of gay activists affiliated with assimilationist ideology, played into a dominant social conception of "Good Gay" and "Bad Queer" archetypes.[94] The State's construction of homonormative bodies correlates with the conceptualization of the Good Gay. Warner articulates the Good Gay as somebody who desires monogamy, belongs to the upper-middle class, is white, and can be identified in mainstream representations of homosexuality, specific to early media representations of homosexuality emerging throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[95] Conversely, the Bad Queer, resembles members of the queer community, "whose immaturity can be inferred from his or her pursuit of sex, defiance

[94] Warner, "Media Gays," [15].
[95] Warner, "Media Gays," [16].

of propriety and willingness to build a collective way of life through promiscuity."[96]This ideological separation between the Good Gay and Bad Queer divided the Gay Liberation movement, ultimately working against a ubiquitous desire to achieve genuine visibility in a homophobic environment. By appealing to assimilationist standards of visibility, the moral conservatism of the Gay Right neglected to recognize the oppressive nature of a heterosexual structure. While passing as a lesbian or gay man in a heterosexual setting might have been an appealing route toward achieving a more prominent place in mainstream society, those who were unable to conform remained in the margins of the dominant American culture. By conforming to heterosexual systems, the conservative faction of the Gay Liberation movement reified heterosexuality as the norm. This furthered the prevalent supposition positioning homosexuals as the presumed cultural other.

In response to the powerful dissemination of conservative gay politics, Michael Warner discusses how assimilationist ideologies and oppressive categorizations converge in his essay, "Media Gays: A New Stonewall.[97] The homonormative image projected by assimilationist politics was not only a faction of gay liberation, but was part of a dominant neoliberal cultural conditioning.[98] Thus, burgeoning representations of lesbians presented as manicured feminized subjects (what Danae Clark refers to as "lipstick–lesbians")[99] and hyper-masculine portrayals of men in magazines like GQ appealed to the gay community through its highly eroticized images of men. Such characterizations illustrated in mainstream media sources became a component of neoliberal cultural shaping. The incorporation of homonormative bodies in mainstream spheres became a means of enforcing public exclusion

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[96] Warner, "Media Gays," [16].

[97] Warner, "Media Gays," [17].

[98] Duggan, *The Twilight*, [49].

[99] Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," 1993, in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Barale, and David Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), [488].

of queer bodies. The ideologies accompanying such homonormative embodiments displayed a message of moral respectability as opposed to the immoral behavior of the Bad Queer. By appealing to the sensibilities of conservative mainstream culture, the moral conservatism of gay politics carved a space within in mainstream society through appealing to dominant heterosexual values and cordoning gay sexuality off to the private sector.

The Dichotomy Between Assimilationist Politics and A Queer Politics

Modelling gay rights achievements off of the new platform of gay visibility in the mainstream arena, the dominant gay male activist-writers expressed ideological and political goals that catered to a narrow and considerably more privileged demographic of lesbian and gay individuals. In the fight for visibility, Michael Warner contends that these writers "repudiate the legacies of the gay movement—its democratic conception of activism, its goal of political mobilization, its resistance of sex and its aspiration to a queerer world."[100] Resonating with other queer activist-writers contributing to the discussion on visibility, Warner remarks on the dominant leaders of the gay rights movement assimilationist objective. Queer bodies that chose not to conform to normative structures by embodying heteronormative appearances and lifestyles, or were prevented from doing so due to physical, class, or racial limitations, were pushed out through this appeal to assimilation. Thus, by endorsing an image of the "gay future" as assimilationist, the dominant activist voices of the Gay Liberation movement created a divide within the queer community.

It is understandable that given the opportunity to gain acceptance in mainstream society, that members of the gay and lesbian community being provided with the chance would accept. However, some harmful ramifications of the assimilationist goal materialized

[100] Warner, "Media Gays," [15].

in the direct condemnation of queer culture. Linking neo-conservatism with the objectives of assimilationist gay politics, Warner outlines the ideological perspectives of the dominant elite of gay activist-writers. Summarizing the ideological and political movements of what Warner categorizes as the "Gay Right," he delivers a contemptuous insight into the Gay Right's latent political ventures and their effect on the larger queer community:

> They scorn queer subculture and seek the moral high ground by denouncing the sex lives of queers. They promote a vision of the gay future as assimilationist, and they willingly endorse state regulation of sex to end that. They are interested in sex only insofar as it lends itself to moral respectability and self-esteem; and forget unconscious desire, or the tension between pleasure and normalization, or the diversity of contacts by which queers have made a world for one another.[101]

Warner's conceptualization of the Gay Right highlights a salient tension within the Gay Liberation movement toward increased visibility. By appealing to assimilationist terms of homosexual visibility, queer bodies would continue to be denied from the dominant public. The insensitivity of this approach to queer visibility contributes to dominant heterosexist power over public space. Assimilationist politics are a problematic solution to increased visibility, because it allows the dominant public to give the illusion of acceptance, whilst maintain the negation of queer bodies as part of the social fabric. As indicated in an earlier section dealing with opposing reactions to the proliferation of homogenous homonormative representations in mainstream media, those who fit the criteria found liberation in the new visibility, while others found that the mainstream media and marketing companies pushed what was deemed to be unacceptable for mainstream consumption, to the fringe of society. Instead of experiencing an integration into society under the guise of public "acceptance," members of the queer community who continued to be underrepresented, remained an oppressed sexual subculture amidst the burgeoning homonormative images of lesbians and gay men in mass media. Warner notices how certain members of the gay and lesbian

[101] Warner, "Media Gays," [15].

community responded positively to mainstream representations, whilst forsaken queer sexualities, responded negatively.[102]

As a result of the dominant heterosexual ideology in America favoring assimilationist objectives of more conservative gay politics, the activist-writers that were granted the most exposure were those perpetuating an assimilationist agenda. Andrew Sullivan was a prominent activist-writer during the 1980s and 1990s who held an influential position in the Gay Liberation movement, and was a significant contributor to activist writing concerning the Gay Liberation movement. Rather than striving for a totalizing representation and acceptance of queer culture, Sullivan and other assimilationist activist-writers instead advocated for a public-private divide aligning themselves with the conservative Right's notion that sex should remain respectfully indoors.[103] The overt hostility toward the queer community reflected in the Gay Right's aspiration toward assimilation reinforces what Warner defines as the Good Gay and Bad Queer dichotomy.[104] The presence of homosexuality in the public mainstream, as imagined by the Gay Right, can best be understood within the purview of homonormativity. The visual and behavioral signifiers of homonormativity closely resemble heterosexual signifiers as well as the institution of heterosexuality as a culturally accepted norm.[105]

The aspiration toward an assimilationist visibility for gays and lesbians implicitly forces queer bodies out because it subscribes to an image of homosexuality that necessarily restricts sexual expression through what Warner regards as a "politics of sexual shame."[106] Endorsing a politics of sexual shame, manifests in denouncing queer subcultures by framing

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[102] "Once allowed to marry, the Good Gay will display virtue, respectability and maturity." See Warner, "Media Gays," [16].

[103] Jesse Helms, Homophobia and AIDS," Clip of AIDS Care Bill video, 01:48, *www.c-span.org*, posted by C-Span, May 14, 1990, accessed April 13, 2018, https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4593809/jesse-helms.

[104] Warner, "Media Gays," [16].

[105] Puar, "Mapping U.S.," [72].

[106] Warner, "Media Gays," [16].

the queer "lifestyle" as the antithesis to the moral respectability the more conservative class of lesbians and gay men pride themselves on. Despite approaching the production of homonormative bodies as a form of social manipulation enacted through the state, Puar's analysis of the production and presence of homonormativity is applicable to the exclusion of queer bodies within mainstream media and popular culture. Puar's articulation of homonormativity and its dissemination is apt in capturing how the mainstream media of the 1980s and 1990s, produced carefully constructed homonormative bodies within a bracket of "liberal tolerance."[107]This concomitantly worked to enforce normative cultural trends and control what exactly was deemed "acceptable" in the political public and what belonged on the fringe. Puar explains:

> While queer bodies may be disallowed, there is room for the absorption and management of homosexuality—temporally, historically, and spatially specific—when advantageous for US national interests. As homonormativity is one of a range of 'compartmental sexualities that are tolerated or encouraged', this management is not consistent and is often only directed towards certain audiences.[108]

The dominant mainstream "acceptance" of homonormative bodies as an appropriate expression of homosexuality in the public sphere and the undisguised rejection of queer bodies illustrates the underlying cultural prejudice toward people of color, queer sexualities, and people belonging to different socioeconomic classes. Puar's observation of "acceptance" as a means of social management indicates toward an important piece in the process of accepting homosexuality into what can be considered dominant cultural circles. By openly accepting homonormative bodies, the dominant heterosexual culture allows homosexuals to exist in mainstream territories on the condition that the visibility assumed is established within the bounds of homonormativity. The inclusion of homonormative bodies shows that there are different types on inclusion. Homonormative inclusion is a negative solution to the

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[107] Teal, "Homophobia without," [13].

[108] Puar, "Mapping U.S.," [73].

acceptance of queer sexuality into the mainstream, because it relies on dichotomizing the queer community and pitting the Good Gay against the Bad Queer.

Conclusion

It is important that a revised imagination of lesbian and gay experiences were made visible in mainstream spheres. The introduction of "new lesbian" style assisted in breaking with stereotypical notions concerning lesbian identity. However, it is necessary to consider how the rhetoric of an image affects the lived experience of those both represented and those who remain in the periphery. The coded message that mainstream depictions of lesbians and gay men conveyed was one that endorsed homonormativity as culturally acceptable. Through neglecting to consider queer sexualities and offering confined representations of lesbians and gay men, the mainstream media and popular culture trailblazers reified the dominant cultural norms embedded in heterosexist ideology. The creation and perpetuation of a homonormative body replicating heterosexual signifiers enabled these mainstream actors to flaunt a "liberal tolerance" without destabilizing the institution of heterosexuality. While certain lesbians and gays embraced homonormativity, often due to their ability to pass as heterosexual, those who were unable to conform to a heterosexual image remained outside "accepted" circle of gays and lesbians. The introduction of a neoliberal ethic assisted in perpetuating this conditioning of homonormative bodies and in the exclusion of queer sexualities from public spaces. While it is necessary to have diverse representation of queer sexualities, the mainstream focus on homonormativity prevented the emergence of queer sexualities in these spaces. This necessitated reactionary movements with a purpose centered on challenging the dominant public assumption of heterosexuality. Contestation over the representation and social integration of gays and lesbians in the 1980s and 1990s manifested in the moral high ground that assimilationist activists took against queer sexualities and the resultant dissatisfaction of

queer activists in respect to the confined visibility on offer. These opposing ideological views divided the gay liberation movement, making it more difficult to create a unified front against the dominant heterosexual order. The Gay Liberation movement is in a continual state of development, adjusting to new discoveries pertaining to sexuality and personal identity. Without considering the fluidity of sexuality as a cultural construct, heterosexuality will continue to dominate mainstream culture. This will further suppress the queer sexualities and immortalize a hostile environment for non-conformists.

Chapter 2.

Stereotypes: A Mechanism of Social Management

"Gay visibility has never really been an issue in the movies. Gays have always been visible. It's how they have been visible that has remained offensive for almost a century."
—Vito Russo

On April 28th, 2017, the *Ellen DeGeneres Show* celebrated the twentieth anniversary of Ellen's coming-out episode. "The Puppy Episode" was written and performed by Ellen DeGeneres in 1997. The episode opens to a living room scene where an intimate group of friends are waiting on Ellen while she gets dressed in a separate room. After a few moments Ellen's friend calls out impatiently, demanding, "Ellen, are you coming out or not?!"[1] This remark is closely followed by another, affirming the insinuation to the figurative closet. This is referring to the commonly known concept of "the closet" that gay people are trapped in until they publicly "come out" as homosexual. The second friend insists, "Yeah Ellen, quit jerking us around and come out already!"[2] These two consecutive statements launch the viewer directly into the issue of closeting. They directly invite the audience to realize that Ellen's friends are referring to the figurative closet.[3] The fact that Ellen needs to come out of the closet indicates that heterosexuality is the unspoken and thus presumed sexual identity.[4] This scene immediately underscores the dominant heterosexual ideology disseminated by mainstream media. Ellen has to declare her sexual proclivity to the public in order to be recognized as a lesbian. The overt reference to the closet in the skit turns the act of coming out into a comedic event. The obviousness of Ellen's friends remarks suggest that everyone knows that Ellen is a lesbian. Her inability to perform a straight role is a comedic trope

1 *Ellen*, "The Puppy Episode: Part 1," episode 22/23, ABC, April 30, 1997, written by Ellen Lee DeGeneres, et al., directed by Gil Junger.
2*Ellen*, "The Puppy," episode 22/23.
3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), [3].
4 *Sedgwick, The Epistemology,* [3-4].

throughout this two-part episode. Despite the playful tone of "The Puppy Episode," Ellen's public performance of coming out made history. Ellen became the first person to come out on primetime television in America.[5] The episode grossed a striking 42 million viewers and pushed gay visibility into the private living rooms of people from diverse and contrasting political, social, and cultural backgrounds.[6] ABC cancelled the show the following year.[7] While the network claimed that the cancellation had nothing to do with the content, a *New York Times* article covering the cancellation reported that Ellen DeGeneres had clashed with ABC executives after they requested that "not every episode be on a gay theme and at one point ordered that a special viewer's advisory about the content be included."[8] According to the *New York Times*, Ellen contested this request, emphasizing that the depiction of heterosexual relationships on other programs did not require content warnings.[9] While media representations of gay men and lesbians were becoming more prominent in the 1990s, discrimination against sexual minorities persisted. This episode of *Ellen* is emblematic of the treatment of homosexuality in television and film during the 1990s. In this chapter, I will argue that representations of gay and lesbian sexuality in the media have contributed to the perpetuation of homophobic ideology. While representations of homosexuality on beloved programs like *Ellen* should condition acceptance, these representations were controlled and limited, thus reinforcing heterosexuality as the cultural norm.

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[5] "Ellen: The Puppy Episode," *www.peabodyawards.com*, last modified 1977, accessed December 14, 2017, http://www.peabodyawards.com/award-profile/elllen-the-puppy-episode.

[6] Kathryn Shattuck, "14 TV Shows That Broke Ground with Gay and Transgender Characters," *New York Times* (New York City, United States of America), February 16, 2017, Television, accessed December 15, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/arts/television/14-tv-shows-that-broke-ground-with-gay-and-transgender-characters.html?_r=0.

[7] Bill Carter, "ABC Is Cancelling 'Ellen,'" *New York Times* (New York City, NY), April 25, 1998, Arts, accessed April 25, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/25/arts/abc-is-canceling-ellen.html.

[8] Carter, "ABC Is Cancelling," Arts.

[9] Carter, "ABC Is Cancelling," Arts.

The 1990s brought increased representations of gay men and lesbians into the public sphere. Riding on the progress made by activists in the three decades preceding the 1990s, mass media had begun to more openly depict gay men and lesbians. While "The Puppy Episode" appeared toward the latter end of the 1990s, gay men and lesbians were being increasingly featured in popular magazines at the time. Despite these shifts toward accepting gay men and lesbians in the dominant public arena, the representations maintained a heterosexual tone. The majority of representations assumed an image of homonormativity which reified the dominant heterosexual ideology. The 1980s and 1990s were influenced by a monopoly capitalist economy which sought to align citizenry and the nation-state around a dominant ideology adhering to one religion and one ethnicity.[10] America in the 1980s and 1990s can be characterized as a time of increased privatization where the poster image for American culture glorified the heterosexual couple. This chapter explores how heteronormativity informs various areas of social and national culture.[11] A heteronormative culture frames queer people as atypical and denies queer bodies as part of America's national body. Throughout this chapter I consider how homonormative bodies have been invoked in mainstream public spaces, as the dominant culture moved toward acknowledging gay men and lesbians in the public sphere. I analyze the nuances of this cultural shift toward acceptable homosexual visibility as dominant heteronormative institutions struggled to uphold the project of normalization that reifies heterosexuality as the dominant sexuality.[12]

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[10] Helen Anne Molesworth et al., *This Will Have Been: Art, Love, and Politics in the 1980s* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2012), [139].

[11] My use of the word *heteronormativity* indicates toward the institutions, structure of social and political knowledge, and cultural organizations that convey heterosexuality as an organized sexuality that assumes privilege over other expressions of sexuality. Heteronormativity operates through discrete illocutionary instances, and within discursive spaces. For a more concentrated analysis of the functions of heterosexuality and heteronormativity, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

[12] For a more comprehensive meditation on the function of heterosexuality and heteronormativity interacting with American culture, see Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, nos. 2, Intimacy. (Winter 1998).

Stereotypes in Television and Film

In an effort to positively affect Hollywood and other major television broadcast networks, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) has periodically released comprehensive reports monitoring the presence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) characters in these mainstream entertainment arenas. The research GLAAD has provided is a part of a continuous project which has been running for over twenty years. GLAAD's goal is to affect positive change in the entertainment industry's representation of LGBTQ characters. Since GLAAD's initial engagement with this line of research, the entertainment and cultural landscape in America has shifted considerably. GLAAD's findings positively indicate that the current entertainment climate has demonstrated the highest percentage of LGBTQ individuals.[13] Further data suggest that there has been an increase in transgender characters and that these roles are being played by transgender actors who can translate their genuine experience onto the screen. Such new developments are a significant advancement for the entertainment industry, which previously catered unilaterally to a heteronormative demand. While there have been significant advancements in the LGBTQ community regarding cinema and other cultural mediums that progressively work to increase LGBTQ visibility, GLAAD astutely illuminates that stereotypes continue to persist in harmful ways. GLAAD found that despite an increase in LGBTQ representations in dominant broadcast networks, more than 25 queer female characters were killed off on scripted television and streaming series. GLAAD observed that the majority of these deaths served no other purpose than to enhance the narrative of a more

[13] Sarah Kate Ellis, *Where We Are on TV: GLAAD's Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion*, comp. Zeke Stokes, Ray Bradford, and Megan Townsend, research report no. 12, accessed December 15, 2017, http://glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT_GLAAD_2016-2017.pdf.

central (typically straight and cisgender) character.[14] The GLAAD report expresses concern regarding the treatment of LGBTQ characters on screen. This indicates that despite increased inclusion in mainstream media, LGBTQ characters continue to be regarded as worth less than their cisgender costars.

Considering the minimal number of lesbian and bisexual women on television, killing these characters off in large numbers sends a virulent message concerning the worth of queer female stories and queer bodies. To propose a more inclusive progression in light of this study, GLAAD argues that LGBTQ characters should be treated equally to their straight and cisgender counterparts. However, in reflecting on recent depictions of LGBTQ characters in television, GLAAD asserts that "this means having the same opportunities for romance, nuanced motivation, developed backstory, and the same odds of death."[15] Drawing on the numbers pulled, GLAAD remarks, "When the most repeated ending for a queer woman is violent death, producers must do better to question the reason for a character's demise and what they are really communicating to the audience. Moreover, it is not enough for LGBTQ characters simply to be present on screen; they must be crafted with thought, attention, and depth."[16] The failure to represent LGBTQ characters in an equal light to straight actors suggests an underlying heteronormative ideology infiltrating the mass media. GLAAD's dismay shows how television and film remain to be important sites of social and cultural information. How LGBTQ characters are depicted on screen can have lasting and detrimental effects that significantly influence the perspective of the viewer. The effort to include more LGBTQ characters in television and film is a positive development. However, images that perpetuate stereotypical depictions of LGBTQ characters continue to contribute to a

[14] Ellis, *Where We Are on TV: GLAAD's*, [3-13].
[15] Ellis, *Where We Are on TV: GLAAD's*, [3].
[16] Ellis, *Where We Are on TV: GLAAD's*, [3].

hegemonic discourse centered on masculinity and heteronormativity. Looking at how characters have been portrayed on television and pushed through Hollywood's lens reveals an underlying state prerogative to maintain a hegemonic heterosexist order. Mass media has been utilized as a tool for cultural manipulation toward reifying a hegemonic masculine and heterosexist agenda.

In this chapter I intend to examine how visual media forms have been utilized as a tool of societal manipulation to advance a heteronormative agenda. By embracing a homonormative image of gay men and lesbians and reifying negative stereotypes of LGBTQ individuals, mass media further oppressed queer sexualities in the public eye.[17] This was achieved by repeatedly integrating gay and lesbian characters into mainstream spaces under the condition that they appear and behave in a heteronormative manner. Through accepting homonormative bodies, the mainstream media operates under the guise of "acceptance" of non-normative genders and sexualities to further oppress queerness. Through framing queer sexualities in direct conflict with the moral respectability demanded in public spaces, the dominant public solidified heterosexuality as the cultural norm.

[17] I use the acronym "LGBTQ" and more recent formulations of the term "LGBTQI" and the most recent adjustment "LGBTQIA" in instances where the text I am referencing employs this modern rhetoric. However, as my project focuses specifically on representations of gay men and lesbians, and the majority of works cited have been written within the space of the 1980-190s, I revert back to referencing just gay men and lesbians. Although I recognize that a myriad of sexualities existed alongside gay men and lesbians in the political period of the 1990s and 1990s I predominantly discuss. While I take into consideration that the intersections of race, ethnicity and class are relevant and extremely important issues that require acknowledgement in analyzing systemic patterns of discrimination against sexual minorities, the focus of my project concentrates on representations of gay men and lesbians. Though I reference the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, and gender, I neglect allocate significant space within the project to discussing and unpacking the various levels of discrimination as my research has been largely centered on representations in dominant spaces which tend to depict upper-middle class, white, gay men and lesbians. Additionally, I want to point to that fact that although I use the acronyms LGBTQ etc., I am predominantly referencing gay men and lesbian experiences.

The Effects of Stereotyping

Because gender identity is constructed within a highly regulatory framework, sustained by various social means, the images available are strictly oriented toward heterosexual imaginations of gender and sex. As a result of this, the visual representations that mimic queer sexuality, have been largely constructed by the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression.[18] Thus, the images available in the mass media conform to these regulatory fictions of gender. For many people the images produced in the mass media inform ideas of social customs and sculpt individual understandings of social trends. For queer people who have limited access to a queer network or positive and diverse queer representations, stereotypes of gay men and lesbians in the media inform notions of queer identity, which people then might feel they have to adopt when they "come out" of the closet. In "Lesbians and Film: Some Thoughts," Caroline Sheldon asserts that the preformulated roles that are perceived to be inherent to homosexuality typically depict lesbians as "butch" or "femme" without considering the complexity of sexuality and sexual identity. While such stereotypes may resonate with some members of the gay and lesbian community, the categorizations defining gay men and lesbians in mass media fail to represent the broad spectrum of sexual and gender identities. The stereotypes associated with gay men and lesbians create binding expectations that risk narrating the development of sexual identity.

In determining specific "types" of people, society places constraints on individual identity. The assumption that heterosexuality is the dominant sexual identity contributes to normative structures that inform a system that necessitates a public declaration of one's

[18] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), [33].

sexual identity if that identity deviates from the heterosexual norm.[19] My use of the word heteronormativity, refers to both localized practices and the dominant institutions which legitimize and privilege heterosexual relationships as primordial and "natural," which dominant society inherently preferences.[20] The assumed "naturalness" of heterosexuality over that of homosexuality is due to the procreative possibilities of heterosexual relations. The public sphere is governed by heteronormative ideologies that influence the construction of homosexual identities within the larger cultural framework. This holds gender and identity rigidly within a system that works to serve heteronormative standards. According to queer theorist Cathy J. Cohen, the 1990s saw the most prominent emergence and regularity of the term "queer."[21] Queer politics symbolized a radical reimagination of sexuality in resistance to dominant constructions of race, gender, and sexuality pursued by the dominant public in an attempt to regulate society through normalizing processes of heteronormativity. Queer politics trouble the stability of heterosexuality, calling into question the multiple and intersecting forces of power that narrate our social and cultural experience.[22] In "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Judith Butler argues that the label "lesbian" is inherently tied to a heterosexual definition of lesbian.[23] Thus, to "be" a lesbian would conform to a heteronormative ideology. Butler argues that the cultural titles of lesbian and gay men are defined within the heteronormative imaginary. As a result, these identities are shaped by heteronormative expectations.[24] Butler's theory brings into question the representations of gay and lesbian identities through imitative forms like film and television. While the

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[19] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), [111].
[20] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, [33].
[21] Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers," [438].
[22] Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers," [440].
[23] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, [308].
[24] For a more concentrated analysis of the functions of heteronormativity see, Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 1991, in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), [308].

increased representation of lesbians and gay men is a positive advancement, the nature of the images produced offers limited visibility. Furthermore, while specific groups of lesbians and gay men more frequently appear in mainstream spaces, there remains to be an absence of queer sexualities. This shows us that despite the increased representation of lesbians and gay men, the cultural field in America continues to be informed by heterosexual ideology.

The Role of Language in Signification

The discursive modes deployed in the mass media shapes a significant portion of our social and cultural experience. Academic Richard Dyer specializes in words of representation that have specific relational value in respect to gender and sexuality. Dyer emphasizes the different variations and relations between social spheres, subcultures and the effect the entertainment industry has on American culture. He argues that the entertainment industry frames ambiguous categories through an often biased and narrow lens.[25] Examining the power of the visual image within popular culture, Dyer explores how the reproduction of political ideology through television can have a significant effect on society and is capable of subtly shaping individual principles. In his article, "Stereotyping," Dyer demonstrates how dominant forms of stereotyping contribute to self-oppression.[26] Additionally, Queer theorist Patricia Hill Collins' approaches the issue of stereotyping through her theory of the "controlling image."[27] Collins observes the multiple and intersecting powers of dominant practices of normalization and cultural oppression structured around binaristic gender differences.[28] She addresses how the hegemonic heterosexist ideology upheld by a dominant

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[25] Richard Dyer, *Stereotyping*, 1977, in *The Columbia Reader on Lesbians and Gay Men in Media, Society, and Politics*, ed. Larry Gross and James D. Woods (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), [297].
[26] Dyer, *Stereotyping*, in *The Columbia*, [298].
[27] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990). [28].
[28] Collins, *Black Feminist*.

White culture reproduces negative representations of racial, ethnic and sexual minorities to ensure the stability of heterosexuality as the cultural norm as well as the superiority of White men.

Depictions of gay men and lesbians in mass media illustrate elements of Collins' conceptualization of a controlling image. The production of homonormative models functions as the development of controlling images. While heterosexual characters are seldom defined by their sexuality, gay and lesbian characters seem to be characterized entirely by their sexuality. Representations of gay men and lesbians in film offer inclusion only on the condition that the visibility assumed assimilates through adopting signifiers of straight culture or is cast in a negative light. Through the proliferation of homonormative images imbued with assimilationist values, it is clear that the mass media consciously neglects to incorporate queer representations. The absence of queer representations communicates the mainstream rejection of queer sexualities. The appeal to gay men and lesbians on the condition that they assimilate into straight culture or conform to stereotypes restricts opportunity for visibility.[29] While some members of the gay and lesbian community responded to this mainstream appeal, those that did not assimilate remained on the periphery of American culture.[30] Negative representations of homosexuality tend to rely on harmful stereotypes that reify the

[29] For the political need to homogenize the cultural/ social experience through the manipulation of representational codes and through oppressive structures, see David Lloyd, "Analogies of the Aesthetic: The Politics of Culture and the Limits of Material Aesthetics," *New Formations* 10 (Spring 1990): [111-12].

[30] Andrew Sullivan, is just one among a gang of gay activist-writers and theorists supporting assimilationist politics. This kind of politics neglects to challenge heteronormative structures such as marriage and instead appeals to these structures on the notion that homosexuals are capable of domestic partnerships. In essence assimilationist appeal to the dominant public through projecting a message that assures the public, don't worry we're just like you. Assimilationist gay activists view marriage as the "most central institution to the nature of the problem"[185]. For Andrew Sullivan's synopsis of the different fronts of gay and lesbian politics see, Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.,, 1995), [182-185]. For a critique of assimilationist politics see, Michael Warner, "Media Gays: A New Stone Wall," *The Nation*, July 14, 1997, [15-16].

construction of the Bad Queer as opposed to the Good Gay which signifies an assimilationist embodiment of homosexuality.[31]

A consistent trope in Hollywood film has been to cast gay and lesbian characters in demeaning or villainous roles. The 1992 film "Basic Instinct" portrays four menacing seductresses, that are either bisexual or lesbian identifying.[32] Their sexuality is portrayed as a hobby and interchangeable when it suits. Depending on whether a man is around, the characters "choose" what their sexuality is. Regardless of these semantic nuances, the women assume negative stereotypical roles. The fact that they are vicious man-killers supports the anxiety that lesbians hate men.

"Basic Instinct" centers on the investigation of a sadistic murder of a prominent rock star. Catherine Tramell, the primary suspect, is a single woman driven by sexual desire. Painted as an untamable and serial seductress, Catherine's resistance to domestic partnerships marks her as unpredictable and ultimately untrustworthy. Despite the ambiguity of her participation in the murder, her villainy is unchallenged from the beginning. Her relationship to sex and intimacy is intended to indicate this. It is typical of Hollywood to portray glamorized unrealistic figures. Catherine's hyper-feminine beautified appearance fits this standard but also adheres to assimilationist values of lesbianism. The femme, straight-appearing, white woman, is what queer theorist Danae Clark references as a "lipstick lesbian."[33] Catherine's character negatively portrays lesbianism. This suggests that any deviance from heterosexual norms leads to an immoral life filled with random and meaningless sex.

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[31] Michael Warner, "Media Gays: A New Stone Wall," *The Nation*, July 14, 1997, [16].
[32] *Basic Instinct*, directed by Paul Verhoeven, screenplay by Joe Eszterhas, TriStar Pictures, 1992.
[33] Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," 1993, in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Barale, and David Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), [488].

In reproducing stereotypical representations of homosexuality in film, the media industry has given rise to categories and definitions of homosexuality that contradict the lived experience of many gay men and lesbians. The constant reinforcement of stereotypes in mass media and film engenders a subconscious absorption of dominant heteronormative ideology. The simplification and categorization of homosexuality are inherently restrictive and can detrimentally affect how an individual understands their identity. Social expectations and representations obfuscate the process of defining oneself and especially one's sexuality. It is difficult to determine sexuality unaffected by images produced in the mainstream or sustained through popular culture. This effect is ubiquitous. For Dyer, the majority of our evidence about any individual we are unacquainted with is constructed within the categories to which we are accustomed. Dyer denotes that television and film narrate how we regard others in their implied "social role."[34]

Dyer implements a sociological model to locate where assumptions about communities emerge. He explains, "sociological theory suggests four different, though interrelated ways of organizing this information: *role, individual, type and member.*"[35] Dyer claims that "dress, speech, and gesture" are the key factors that contribute to a first impression.[36] These actions are subject to an individual's performance in a specific moment and do not provide a comprehensive or accurate depiction of their identity or sexuality. Such perceptual cues require a certain level of inference to be drawn from stereotypes that can be applied broadly. They lead a viewer to assume that a person who fits a certain social model is a "type."[37]The effects of these deductions have lasting impressions that contribute to the reproduction of an inaccurate conceptualization of the other. Unable to render true-to-life

[34] Dyer, *Stereotyping*, in *The Columbia*, [297].
[35] Dyer, *Stereotyping*, in *The Columbia*, [297].
[36] Dyer, *Stereotyping*, in *The Columbia*, [297].
[37] Dyer, *Stereotyping*, in *The Columbia*, [298].

character depictions, the film industry continues to reinforce stereotypes that are recognizable and as a default "relatable." However, such confined representations remain to be problematic in their cementing of hegemonic standards that limit the possibility to introduce alternative identity categories and digress from stereotypical renderings of queer sexualities.

Conditional Visibility

The exclusion of queer people from mainstream cinema is one mechanism employed by the dominant heterosexual culture to ensure that heterosexuality remains the prevailing cultural norm. The proliferation of heterosexual relationships in film and other pop-culture mediums is a product of the heteronormative agenda. Through designating heterosexuality as the cultural norm, homosexuality is determined as the social other. Through the dissemination of homophobic representations that mock and stigmatize homosexuality, the film industry reproduces a homophobic discourse through coded imagery.[38] The coded discursive trends and imagery deployed by the film industry inform the dominant public's conception of homosexuality as deviating from social normalities.

The Celluloid Closet[39] is a 1995 documentary about homosexual representations in film and the problematic typifications of the "Other." It reveals that gay and lesbian (in)visibility in Hollywood and negative stereotypes are an expression of homophobic sentiment. Asserting that gay and lesbian characters are designed to conform to a filmic allegory that is necessarily informed by the dominant heterosexual culture. Filmic representations of gay men and lesbians often occur as inferior to their heterosexual counterparts. Heterosexual relationships repeatedly are portrayed as the ideal partnership. In

[38] Dyer, *Stereotyping*, in *The Columbia*, [298].
[39] *The Celluloid Closet*, directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, narrated by Lily Tomlin, produced by Rob Epstein, et al., Sony Pictures Classics, Tristar Pictures, 1996.

this sense, heterosexuality is culturally and ideologically maintained as the dominant and "superior" sexuality.

The 1993 film *Three of Hearts*[40] is a movie about the complexity of desire and relationships. However, it presents a narrow conceptualization of these themes. *Three of Hearts* centers on a lesbian named Connie who is trying to get back together with her bisexual ex-girlfriend, Ellen. A desperate Connie hires a male escort to seduce Ellen and break her heart. She believes that once Ellen understands the cruelty of men, she'll come running back to her. The film reduces the complexity of sexuality and casts the heterosexual male as the authority on women. Joe, the hired escort, falls for Ellen and vice versa and at the end of the film heterosexuality wins out. *Three of Hearts* reinforces the notion that heterosexual relationships are more fulfilling and thus the logical choice. The narrative of *Three of Hearts* affirms the theory of *The Celluloid Closet*. The film suggests that the same-sex relationship pales in comparison to the heterosexual relationship. *Three of Hearts* reinforces the dominant heteronormative ideology by inferring that heterosexuality is the "superior" sexuality.

Judith Butler's seminal book *Gender Trouble* offers an incisive critique of heterosexuality. Butler argues that gender is a concept. She asserts that gender is the material concentration of a set of regulatory hegemonic heterosexual social practices that gives the illusion of a physical form, that appears as a natural being.[41] Butler provides a reticulation of gender identity aimed at revealing how the body is shaped through various cultural significations that an individual manifests through a series of repeated acts to materialize

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[40] William Baldwin, Kelly Lynch, and Sheryl Flynn, *Three of Hearts*, directed by Yurek Bogayevicz, screenplay by Adam Greeman, New Line Cinema, 1993.

[41] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), [33]. This text comes up later in the third chapter of the project. Since this application of Butler centers on the performative

oneself into a predetermined cultural possibility.[42] In "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Butler argues that the process of repetition is a strategy of survival and those that fail to do their gender right are regularly punished.[43] Butler notes "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief."[44]The construction and performance of sexuality can be understood as a continuation of the performative enactment of gender. In the same way that gender is controlled and constructed through legislative sanctions and social prohibitions, sexuality is policed in the political public and consequently through television and film. An example of regulating lesbian sexuality on screen is the relationship of Callie and Arizona on ABC's popular show *Grey's Anatomy*.[45] The lesbian couple is monogamous and the two get married at the end of season seven. However, lesbian sex is not shown on the show while heterosexual sex features prominently throughout the series. The discrepancy in television and filmic representations show how minority sexualities are regulated in mainstream spaces. The absence and regulation of gay and lesbian representations in mass media perpetuate the invisibility of lesbians and gay men in the public sphere.

The Ironic Dismissal and Ironic Homophobia

The strong emphasis on heteronormative relationships and romance in mainstream cinema is a culturally imposed mechanism of social management. The entertainment industry facilitated the production and perpetuation of narratives driven by hegemonic masculine

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[42] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, [33,44].
[43] Butler, "Performative Acts," [522].
[44] Butler, "Performative Acts," [519].
[45] *Grey's Anatomy*, "White Wedding," episode 20, ABC, May 5, 2011 (originally aired March 27, 2005), performed by Jessica Capshaw and Sara Ramirez.

ideals of heteronormativity. When characters who embody or express homosexual desire are included in film, television, and pop-culture, the role is often connected to comedy. By aligning gay and lesbian narratives with comedy, scripted television reinforced gay and lesbian characters in opposition to the cisgender straight characters. The comedic inflection accompanying representations of homosexuality in film and television acts as a mechanism for disseminating dominant heterosexist ideology and inserting subtle homophobic rhetoric. The "ironic homophobia"[46] and the "ironic dismissal"[47] work to denounce homosexuality and signify that homosexual desire is inferior to heterosexual desire. "Ironic homophobia," is the supposition that the audience will find jokes centered on stereotypical representations of LGBTQ people amusing because homophobia presumably no longer remains a cultural issue. Thus, having become a token of the past it is assumed that homophobia can be revived through humor.[48] As a result, ironic homophobia minimizes instances of real homophobia that remain ubiquitous.

The ironic dismissal is most common in sitcoms from the 1990s. However, it continues to bear its head in modern contexts. The celebrated 1990s sitcom *Friends*[49] repeatedly invoked ironic dismissals as a prominent theme throughout the series. Chandler Bing's character is continually referred to as gay, and his intimate relationship with Joey is a standing joke revolving around ironic dismissals.[50] The ironic dismissal defines specific

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[46] Janae Teal, "Homophobia without Homophobes: Deconstructing the Public Discourses of 21st Century Queer Sexualities in the United States," in "Sexuality in the Post-Marriage Equality Era," special issue, *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 1, no. 38 (2016): [20].

[47] Margo Miller, "Masculinity and Male Intimacy in Nineties Sitcoms: Seinfeld and the Ironic Dismissal," in *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television: Essays on Recent Programming*, ed. James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), [147], previously published in *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television: Essays on Recent Programming* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.,, 2006), 147-59.

[48] Teal, "Homophobia without," [20].

[49] *Friends*, Warner Bros. Television, Bright/Kauffman/Crane Productions, May 1, 1997 (originally aired September 22, 1994), performed by Jennifer Aniston, et al.

[50] *Friends*, "The One Where Nana Dies Twice," episode 8, NBC, September 22, 1994 (originally aired November 10, 1994), directed by James Burrows.

behavioral traits as being inherent to homosexuality. It is most commonly invoked when two heterosexual males find themselves behaving in what mainstream society deems to be a homosexual manner as they become overly familiar and affectionate.[51] The ironic dismissal is invoked then to deflect the possible inference of homosexuality by either immediately quitting the act or retroactively declaring a heterosexual identity. Margo Miller explains this clearly: "ironic dismissal defines intimacy between straight men against homosexuals."[52] Ironic dismissals reinforce negative stereotypes that designate feminine behavior as inherent to gay men. Such stereotypical depictions work to inferiorize same-sex desire and delegitimize homosexuality through denying gay men the possibility to be masculine.

The early 1990s brought an increased presence of queer politics invading the dominant public space.[53]As queer culture unapologetically inserted queer sexualities into the public domain through activism, art, and subversive performance, the dominant public was pushed to recognize minority sexualities. An expanding market for independent queer cinema ushered the mainstream to adopt a more willing engagement with queer representations in film. The economic potential of appealing to queer sexualities further incentivized the entertainment industry to include queer cinema in the mainstream.[54] However, the portrayals

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[51] *Friends*, "The One Where Nana Dies Twice," episode 8, NBC, September 22, 1994 (originally aired November 10, 1994), directed by James Burrows.

[52] Miller, "Masculinity and Male," in *The New Queer*, [148].

[53] In the early 1980s, the AIDS epidemic emerged. Government inaction and religious opposition to sex education, caused the epidemic to increase exponentially in a condensed period of time. AIDS had an extremely harmful effect on the queer community and IV drug users, as well as less minoritized races and ethnic groups. With Jesse Helms in the senate and Jerry Falwell on the pulpit, the boundary between government and religious was blurred. Restrictions on health and sex education were in place, which contributed astronomically to the increase in deaths related to AIDS. In response to government inaction and the proliferation of homophobic sentiment, claiming AIDS was God's retribution on homosexuals for their sins, gay and lesbian activists retaliated, literally fighting for their lives. No longer relying on the methods of previous Gay Liberation methods of past generations, the new wave of activism took on a militaristic method. Sexuality was key to the movement, as queer activists insisted on sexuality as a site of fluidity and always susceptible to change. Through pushing queer sexualities into the public domain, queer activists created a counterpublic, which enabled queers to freely express desire both outside and within the dominant heteronormative public domain. For more information See, Michael Warner, *Public and Counterpublics* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2002).

[54] Larry Gross, *Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), [74].

of minority sexualities in film and television continued to inferiorize non-heteronormative forms of desire by stereotyping and casting queers in inferior or negatively portrayed roles. Subtle deployments of homophobia and a general ignorance surrounding categories of sexuality appear in the popular television series like *Sex and the City*. Despite how the title might indicate knowledge on these matters of sexuality, the show is surprisingly negligent to the diversity of a metropolitan city. Ignoring both the multiple intersecting forces of power and the cultural diversity that makes New York City unique.

Discussing Queer Politics in *Sex and the City*

Sex and the City portrays glamorous stories of dating and living in New York City intended for a heterosexual audience. The popular show was unique in emphasizing female sexual pleasure. The main character, Carrie Bradshaw, plays a writer who distributes her amateur wisdom through a weekly sex column based off of stories woven from her repertoire of sexual encounters and failed relationships. Each character embodies a different variation of the modern female New Yorker as they bravely embrace the rocky dating terrain in the City. While appearing to manage their sexuality and embody female empowerment in the process, all three women maintain the desire for male affirmation.

The women portrayed in *Sex and The City* represent various expressions of heterosexual desire, ranging from promiscuous uninhibited sexual relations to deeply emotional encounters that explore the nuance and intersection of classic heterosexual romance. While the show positively affirms unbounded female sexual expression, it only vaguely engages with sexual identities outside heterosexuality. Despite producing content that works to normalize and celebrate female sexual expression, *Sex and The City* refutes feminist prerogatives through maintaining heteronormativity. The show also trivializes the few homosexual characters that do appear. *Sex and the City* denies the legitimacy of

homosexuality and other sexual minorities by failing to provide the gay and lesbian roles with any real significance.

The two recurring gay characters in *Sex and The City*, Stanford Blatch and Anthony Marantino, appear sporadically and rarely have their own storylines. Both characters remain tethered to the female leads as they assist in their pursuit of the perfect man. Both Stanford and Anthony's characters are deployed as abstract representations of the stereotypical effeminate gay man. Their participation in the television series works to fill the role of the sensationalized "gay best-friend" and as a fashionable accessory to the single, heterosexual female.

The third season of *Sex and The City* featured an episode about bisexuality. The main character, Carrie Bradshaw says, "I'm not even sure that bisexuality exists. I think it's just a layover on the way to Gay Town."[55] Carrie's privilege as a white, upper-middle class, cisgender heterosexual is highlighted by this remark. Her dismissal of bisexuality adheres to an expression of sexual morality. This applies to Cathy J. Cohen's idea that people on the political left adhere to assimilationist ideology, thereby neglecting to consider intersectional issues that affect marginal groups.[56] In this instance, Carrie conceptualizes sexuality as being fixed, rather than existing on a spectrum in which sexuality can move between or outside of the binaristic categorizations that affix desire to gender roles.[57] Carrie's comment neglects to recognize the advancements made by queer politics that prioritize and encourage the fluidity of sexuality and stress that sexual expression is always subject to change.[58] While Carrie's comment lacks educated awareness, a newly celebrated Instagram account, "@everyoutfitonSATC," has wittily generated corrections to comments on *Sex and the City*

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[55] *Sex and the City*, "Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl...," episode 4, HBO, June 25, 2000 (originally aired June 6, 1998), performed by Sarah Jessica Parker, et al.
[56] Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers," [443].
[57] Sedgwick, *The Epistemology*, [2].
[58] Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers," [439].

(*SATC*) like Carrie's opinion on bisexuality. Lauren Garroni and Chelsea Fairless have been running the popular Instagram account since 2016. They have turned Charlotte's character into a politically correct ambassador, renaming her "Woke Charlotte."[59] In doing this, "@everyoutfitonSATC" is bringing the show into the modern arena, retroactively imbuing the characters with political correctness specific to the current political and social climate.

"@everyoutfitonSATC" reformulates Charlotte's response to Carrie's remark, providing her with authority to astutely lambaste the politically incorrect nature of the comment. The caption reads, "Bisexuality is a real sexual orientation. It's not "just a phase," and as a sex columnist you have a responsibility to educate yourself on queer issues."[60] Without "@everyoutfitonSATC's" interjection, *SATC* reduces the complexity of sexuality. However, the Instagram attempts to put a new spin on the conversation to diminish the repercussions of such a remark and correct a potentially harmful comment. Digging into the archives of *Sex and the City*, "@everyoutfitonSATC" has questioned the show's offensive and ignorant treatment of LGBTQ issues.

Homosexual Visibility on Talk Shows

While television series present scripted narratives that enhance the fictionalization of real-life events, the talk show acts a direct window into the private lives of others. Representation of individuals on talk shows present a unique form of visibility that often hinges on the sensationalization of social abnormalities. Particularly in the case of sexual minorities, the talk show offers a façade of "acceptance," drawing people onto the stage under the pretense of increased visibility and recognition. Instead, the spectacularization of

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[59] Kelly, Tiffany. "'Woke Charlotte' Turns a 'Sex and the City' Character into a Social Justice Warrior." The Daily Dot, December 14, 2017. Accessed December 15, 2017. https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/sex-and-the-city-instagram-account-woke-charlotte/.

[60] everyoutfitonsatc. "#WokeCharlotte." *Instagram,* November 16, 2017. Accessed December 15, 2017. https://www.instagram.com/p/BbkIH55jAIq/?hl=en&taken-by=everyoutfitonsatc

atypical subjects reinforces normalities capitalizing on shock value. Rosemary Hennessy explains, "the visibility of sexual identity is often a matter of commodification, a process that invariably depends on the lives and labor of invisible others."[61] In light of Hennessy's observation, the talk show is a perfect site for commodifying the lives of sexual minorities. Particularly as cultural visibility prepares the ground for gay civil rights protection, positive representations of queer sexualities in the mass media, and contributes to the legitimization of queer sexualities within the dominant culture.[62] Given the desire to be culturally visible, it is understandable that those seeking such forms of affirmation might be drawn to the talk show.

In *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity,* Joshua Gamson explores the possibilities that talk shows provide in facilitating a space that is "both spectacle and conversation."[63] Gamson considers the talk show as a potentially important site of progressive discourse. However, he argues that the talk show also presents a problem of spectacularization, capitalizing on the atypical nature of its subjects. Drawing upon an episode of *The Jenny Jones Show,* Gamson reveals how talk shows manipulate how a subject is made visible.[64] The episode entitled, "Same-Sex Secret Crushes," reveals the pervasive prejudices against homosexuality and how queer sexualities have been instrumentalized in television for shock value. While the outcome of this particular episode of *The Jenny Jones Show* was surprising and horrifying, resulting in the murder of Scott Amadure at the hands of Jonathan Schmidtz. It is not the outcome that I wish to discuss, but instead the role the talk show played in framing homosexual desire as an "unusual spectacle," and relying on this to

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[61] Rosemary Hennessy, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," in *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), [111].
[62] Hennessy, "Queer Visibility," [111].
[63] Joshua Gamson, "Do Ask, Do Tell: Freak Talk on TV," in *The Columbia Reader on Lesbian and Gay Men in Media, Society, and Politics*, ed. Larry P. Gross and James D. Woods (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), [333], excerpt from *American Prospect* 23 (Fall 1995): 44-50.
[64] Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talks hows and Sexual Nonconformity* (Chicago, United States of America: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), [212].

arouse public interest, that I wish to focus on. In neglecting to inform the "crush" that the set up was with a person of the same sex, *The Jenny Jones Show* exploited both Amadure and Schmitz capitalizing on the shock value of a heterosexual male being publicly and unexpectedly propositioned by his homosexual friend. Through the spectacularization of Amadure's outing, *The Jenny Jones Show* illustrates heterosexuality as the social norm, while homosexuality is posited as the axiomatic other.[65] The episode would lose its shock value if the encounter were between a heterosexual man and woman. This episode of *The Jenny Jones Show* perfectly illustrates how homosexuality is only allowed to be visible in the dominant public sphere under the conditions of the dominant public. The episode was not focussed on facilitating a romantic union between two people but instead anticipated that the encounter would arouse contention between Amadure and Schmidtz and used this opportunity to capitalize on the spectacle of an awkward confrontation. *The Jenny Jones Show* exploits Amadure's homosexuality for comedy, mimicking the dominant theme in cinema of deploying homosexuality as an ironic gesture.

Heteronormativity in *The L Word*

The pattern that has evolved through different strands of film and television, approaching gender and sexuality through comedy occurs as a reaction to the threat of masculinity and the fragility of the heteronormative structure. The "acceptance" of homonormative bodies, stands in opposition to queer individuals that refuse to subscribe to these roles and tend to be shunned and stigmatized as sexually deviant as a consequence.[66] As a result the lesbian and gay male relationships portrayed in television mirror and aspire to heteronormativity. In contrast, when queer characters appear single, their reckless approach

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[65] Sedgwick, *The Epistemology*, [2-3].
[66] Jasbir K. Puar, "Mapping U.S. Homonormativies," *Gender, Place and Culture* 13, no. 1 (August 23, 2006): [72].

to sexuality is central to their character. The *L Word*,[67] might be considered the lesbian *Sex and the City*, abundant with glossy, provocative romance and relationship drama between friends and lovers. Exploding with popularity into primetime television, *The L Word* was a refreshing perspective on lesbian visibility in television. Lesbian representations have typically occupied a less prominent space as opposed to gay men.[68] For the majority of the show, heterosexuality exists off-screen but remains actively present in the spectatorial supposition established by the romantic genre and the idealization of domestic partnerships consistent throughout the show. In this way *The L Word* works both for and against heterosexual institutions, diverting heterosexuality through the emphasis on lesbianism, yet conforming to heteronormativity through the repeated insertion of masculinity through performative instances and masquerade. Homonormativity refers to homosexual bodies that replicate heterosexual traits and customs.[69]

Assimilationist lesbian and gay politics necessarily replicate this model of homonormativity.[70] Despite carving out space for lesbians to be freely visible in their sexuality, *The L Word* confines lesbian visibility by adhering to assimilationist values. In the first episode, Tina Kennard and Bette Porter appear in the opening sequence, revealing a scene of lesbian domesticity. Their monogamous commitment is emphasized when it is revealed they're trying for a baby. Bette clearly assumes the masculine role while Tina slips demurely into a feminine trope of passivity. The interaction between Bette and Tina expressly prescribes to heteronormative standards, relaying a message that assures the show's heterosexual spectators that lesbians can be just like them. Later on, Bette is shown running

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[67] *The L Word*, Showtime, January 18, 2004 (originally aired January 18, 2004), written by Cherien Dabis and Ariel Schrag.
[68] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," 1982, in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), [239].
[69] Puar, "Mapping U.S." [71-72].
[70] Warner, "Media Gays," [15].

late for therapy—a trope typically coupled with heterosexual males—revealing the instability of their relationship. Throughout the remainder of the episode, various lesbian stereotypes are invoked. The quintessential bisexual character, Alice introduces her project entitled "The Chart," a diagram mapping lesbian promiscuity and incestuous couplings. "The Chart" illustrates the kinship of the lesbian community, connected through a polarity of monogamous and polygamous relationships. Toward the end of the episode, Jenny Schecter appears. Jenny's character identifies as a heterosexual, who has newly relocated to LA to reunite with her long-term boyfriend, Tim. By the end of the episode, Jenny has been seduced by the alluring lesbian Marina. The sequence of events in the pilot of *The L Word*, reinforce stereotypical fictions about lesbians, align lesbianism with heterosexual characteristics and reaffirm heterosexual fears that homosexuality is a threat to heterosexuality. Jenny eventually leaves Tim and becomes a lesbian, confirming the heterosexual anxiety rooted in the myth of lesbians as predatory and scrupulous.[71]

Furthermore, the "new lesbian" which Arlene Stein elaborates on in her article "All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go," is reflected in the characters in *The L Word*. For the most part, the lesbians who populate *The L Word* embody a hyper-feminine style resembling the femme lesbian aesthetic. However, *The L Word* taps into what Stein attributes to the new generation of lesbians, revival of the butch-femme style and romanticization of "butch-femme roles and forbidden love in smoky bars."[72] Swap "smoky bars" for "The Planet," the cafe by day, bar by night, frequented by *The L Word's* tightly knit gang and you've got a match! *The L Word* self-consciously recreates the cultural scene of the 1990s, using the show as a platform for communicating progressive representations of lesbians that keep up with the

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[71] Larry Gross, "Up from Visibility: Film and Television," in *The Columbia Reader on Lesbian and Gay Men in Media, Society, and Politics*, ed. Larry Gross and James D. Woods (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), [292].
[72] Stein, "All Dressed," [37].

times. While *The L Word* appears to pay close attention to the complexities of female and queer representations. Throughout the entirety of the show, the audience is exposed to various instances of misrepresentation and misconception of lesbians, almost always on the behalf of men. The furthest stretch the show makes to achieve this critique of mainstream culture, is when Jenny and Shane's new (male) tenant uses hidden cameras to create a "pornographic/documentary" featuring Jenny and Shane, to proposedly better understand lesbian culture.[73] Despite efforts made by *The L Word* to trouble representations, the show's cast depicts a narrow demographic of mostly white women and the relies heavily on a heteronormative model of intimacy.

Conclusion

A 1993 article entitled "Women in Love" declares, "young lesbians: They're fresh, they're proud, they're comfortable with their sexuality."[74] This statement touches on the shifting attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in of the early 1990s as a result of queer politics. However, the article delineates between the new generation of lesbians and earlier generations, boldly claiming that "coming out" isn't even an issue for the "baby dykes" of the 1990s.[75] While there was more sexual freedom in the 1990s, the reaction of ABC executives after Ellen came out as a lesbian in 1997—four years after *Mademoiselle* published the article proclaiming that the closet no longer exists—clearly shows that the times had not changed as much as this optimistic article assumes. Representations of queer people continue to rely on outdated stereotypes, and there remains to be apparent inequity in the value of a character relevant to the character's sexuality and gender. Television and film continue to facilitate

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[73] *The L Word*, "Labyrinth," episode 5, March 20, 2005 (originally aired January 18, 2004), directed by Burr Steers, written by Ilene Chaiken.
[74] Elise Harris, "Women in Love," *Mademoiselle*, March 1993.
[75] Harris, "Women in Love,"[108].

hegemonic masculine power through reinforcing heterosexuality as the dominant cultural norm. The entrenchment of heteronormativity in American culture suggests that even queer people may harbor heterosexist ideology. The vulnerability of queer people to mass media stereotyping and inferiorization is primarily due to the segregation and invisibility of sexual minorities. Sexuality remains to be an essential element of American citizenship. Thus the exclusion and regulation of queer sexualities will continue to persist until heterosexism is destabilized as the dominant cultural norm and sexuality is considered a flexible concept.

Chapter 3.

Activist Responses to AIDS: Challenging Cultural Conventions Through Visual and Performative Action

In the summer of 1981, the center for Disease Control reported several highly unusual cases of pneumonia and skin cancer (Kaposi's Sarcoma) affecting young gay men.[1] This was later recognized as the first officially documented cases of AIDS, marking the beginning of an incessant and devastating crisis that defined the politics and culture of the 1980s. By 1987 the AIDS crisis had escalated considerably without commensurate government action . The news media, the Government, and federal medical establishments declared that AIDS did not affect the general public. This misapprehension of a crisis promulgated the disease's merciless effect on the gay community.[2] In response to government inaction and the harrowing effects of the disease, the AIDS crisis was met with direct action by the activist collective ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), which went on to become one of the most important movements of the era. In New York, artists and cultural practitioners united under ACT UP. Dedicated to ending the epidemic, the collective channeled all of their theoretical and artistic acumen into the collective, elevating traditional forms of protest and forging a new. Drawing on a network of collectives, artists held a prominent place in ACT UP and were paramount in the design of demonstrations enacted by the group. As a result, ACT UP's demonstrations cultivated a strong visual semblance; the artistic contribution gave rise to innovative, politically astute posters, banners, and politically charged performance. These various mechanisms of speech, articulated ACT UP's intent to end AIDS and fight rigid social and cultural structures. ACT UP set itself in contrast to an earlier "politics of

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[1] Helen Anne Molesworth et al., *This Will Have Been: Art, Love, and Politics in the 1980s* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2012), [30].
[2] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [30].

respectability"[3]that enforced a restrictive form of visibility onto the gay and lesbian community.[4] In many ways, ACT UP drew from earlier forms Gay Liberation politics in their embrace of a more disruptive approach. This translated as a move toward a more militaristic tactic of activism. This chapter explores the impact of the cultural and political climate in the America during the 1980s in correlation with the emergence of AIDS. I will focus on the work of two AIDS activist groups, ACT UP and Gran Fury. These groups responded to government inaction and disproved the conflation of AIDS and homosexuality to draw attention to other groups affected by the AIDS epidemic. In doing so, they expanded the parameters for positive queer visibility.

Gran Fury had some of the most memorable visual components of the movement. Observing Gran Fury's collaborative contribution to ACT UP, I will show that the activist group challenged normative social structures rooted in a dominant heterosexual ideology. his was done through a militaristic form of dissent that relied on the breaking of boundaries between public and private spheres. Through the mobilization of the space and the destabilization of conventional categories through various mechanisms of disruption, ACT UP developed a new reality in contrast to the reality promoted by the mass media. The collective was able to challenge systems of gender and sexuality as a result of the AIDS epidemic. As visibility was more possible than ever before and the divide between public and private spheres was weakened, ACT UP permitted the entrance of private values into the public space.

Despite astronomical increases in AIDS-related cases, the Reagan administration remained silent on the matter. Conservative religious figures disseminated vicious and phobic

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[3] Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), [60].

[4] Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (n.p.: University of Chicago Press, 2009), [52].

assumptions about the disease and the connection to a so-called "homosexual lifestyle."[5] Reagan's silence on the matter and the proliferation of homophobic rhetoric distributed through mass media led people to believe Reagan implicitly aligned himself with the conservative Christian Right.[6] Moreover, Reagan was labelled a murderer for his injurious inaction and negligence toward the AIDS epidemic. ACT UP activists acutely connected the events of the AIDS epidemic to the holocaust. They labelled the AIDS epidemic a genocide and took on the symbol of the pink triangle as their emblem.[7] In the 1970s the lesbian and gay movement adopted the symbol of the pink triangle that homosexual prisoners had been forced to wear for identification purposes in Nazi concentration camps.[8] The invocation of the pink triangle in the context of the AIDS epidemic establishes an immediate connection to the holocaust. This positions the targeting of homosexuals amongst other groups of individuals fatefully discriminated against in history. ACT UP's adoption of the pink triangle illustrates the collective's reclamation of the symbol within its own terms. The pink triangle is a significant emblem for the movement because it emphasizes issues of visibility. Through the appropriation of the pink triangle, ACT UP stripped the symbol of its power as mark of ostracization and reclaimed it within a queer politics transforming the mark into a symbol of positive visibility.

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[5] Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," *The MIT Press* 43 (October 1987): [238].

[6] Crimp, "How to Have," [238].

[7] While the atrocities of WWII extend far beyond affecting homosexuals, it is necessary to consider the political and social hostilities toward homosexuals that have persisted and been overlooked throughout history. ACT UPs pink triangle symbol does not directly replicate the pink triangle homosexuals were branded with in Nazi Germany—ACT UP flips the triangle right side up, redefining its purpose and connotation—but the significance of the triangle is maintained through its emblematic presence. When the outside viewer confronts the triangle, ACT UP has succeeded in making the dominant public recognize a history of oppression, discrimination, and violence against homosexuals that stretches across decades and connects the political oppression, and violence occurring in the space of the 1980-90s to the horrors of the Holocaust. The symbolism and connotations attached to the pink triangle forces people to acknowledge that the atrocities of the Holocaust, generally assumed to skeleton in history's past, still remain to be very real and detrimental components of modern society. For more information on the history of homosexuality in Weimar and Nazi Germany, see: Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, inc.,1986), [67-68].

[8] Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (n.p.: University of Chicago Press, 2009), [167].

In the formative years of ACT UP, framing the AIDS epidemic in the image of the holocaust helped establish the serious emotional framework of the movement.[9] When Larry Kramer, a prominent leader in the ACT UP collective, published "1,112 and Counting" in 1983, he likened AIDS deaths to murders and employed the powerful metaphor of gay men marching off to the gas chambers to indicate the AIDS crisis was equitable to the Nazi holocaust.[10] Kramer condemned those who remained silent on the matter, targeting members of the gay and lesbian community as well as government and health officials.[11] While the majority of gay men and lesbians agreed that the aggravation of the disease was largely due to government inaction, Kramer's allusion was perceived as a hyperbolic.[12] However the link to the emotional trauma of the Nazi holocaust and the AIDS crisis was an important element of AIDS activism. The pink triangle supported this notion while adding another element that expressed that the gay and lesbian community was not going to slip into a demure silence while the AIDS epidemic rampaged the nation. The pink triangle enforced the visibility of ACT UP and Gran Fury embodied by their dissenting in-your-face tactics of militaristic mobilization against the dominant and hegemonic heterosexist order.

In *This Will Have Been: Art, Love, and Politics in the 1980s*, Helen Molesworth draws upon cultural critic Fredric Jameson to articulate the impact of conservative politics in the moment of the AIDS crisis. In 1984, approximately halfway through the Reagan era, Jameson stated that the developments made in the 1960's led to a worldwide restoration of a dominant social order and the renewal of an authoritarian state power.[13] While Reagan remained silent on the issue of AIDS until 1987, the figures dominating the political scene

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[9] Gould, *Moving Politics*, [165].
[10] Larry Kramer, "1,112 and Counting," www.indymedia.org.uk, last modified March 5, 2003, accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2003/05/66488.html.
[11] Gould, *Moving Politics*, [166].
[12] Gould, *Moving Politics*, [166].
[13] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [26].

during the 1980s were pushing for a restoration of old values. They framed their prerogative as a form of new politics that valued elements of the old political order. This marked a return to a political emphasis on the American family as the heart of a society.[14] Public interests were largely grounded in the glossy commodity culture that came to define the 1980-90s. With the new commodity culture and the focus on neoconservatism, the divide between religion, state and popular culture, were almost indistinguishable.[15] Discussing the end of Reagan's second term in office, Michael Warner remarked, "more than any other, his figure blurs the boundary between the iconicities of the political public and the commodity public."[16] The new emphasis on visual media and commodity culture that Reagan embodied through his televisual presence confused the boundary between mass media, commodity culture and politics.[17] Given that Reagan was highly televised and documented, Helen Molesworth notes that it is logical that anti-AIDS activists deployed his image to directly connect the Reagan administration and the effects of the AIDS epidemic.[18] Reagan's relationship to commodity culture explains ACT UP and Gran Fury's emphasis on appropriative art forms. ACT UP and Gran Fury inserted queer politics into the format of an advertisement as a mechanism of disrupting the mass media and creating a counterpublic in which queer sexualities could freely exist. This mechanism worked both to challenge the assumed cultural norm of heterosexuality and to capture the public's attention through employing commercial rhetoric and visuals that enticed people into engaging with anti-AIDS activism ploys that would inspire support for the cause. The re-imagination of advertising campaigns in the form of politically charged art work challenged the mass media, the

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[14] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [26].
[15] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [26]
[16] Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and Mass Subject," in *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: zone Books, 2002) [173].
[17] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [26]
[18] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [26].

government, and the conservative religious Right's misrepresentation of AIDS. Further, these activists groups visibilized homosexuality as a healthy figure in opposition to negative representations homosexuality received in association with AIDS. The visual media produced by ACT UP and Gran Fury refocused the blame from being directed at homosexuals and the so-called "homosexual lifestyle."[19] The assertive activism indicated that the Government's gross silence regarding the AIDS epidemic marked their complicity in what anti-AIDS activists referred to as a homosexual genocide.

Breaking Art Out of the Museum: Mobilizing the Movement

In 1987— ACT UP's first year— roughly thirty members of the group collaborated on a site-specific artwork for the window of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York.[20] The work, entitled *Let the Record Show*…,featured a pink neon sign announcing "Silence = Death," a photomural of the Nuremburg trials and a series of six cardboard cutouts depicting public figures who had aggravated the AIDS crisis (Figure 5).[21] Accompanying each cardboard silhouette was a concrete slab symbolically replicating the headstone of a grave. Each slab was inscribed with a quote connecting each cardboard figure to the epidemic. [22]

In the New Museum's archival collection, *Let the Record Show*… is coupled with an artist statement explaining what inspired *Let the Record Show*…, which included contributions from both ACT UP and Gran Fury. The text reads,

> The intention is to make the viewer realize the depth of the problem and understand that history will judge our society by how we responded to this calamity, potentially the worst medical disaster of the century. Finally, the installation is more pointedly

[19] Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," *The MIT Press* 43 (October 1987): [238].
[20] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, [225].
[21] ACT UP, *Let the Record Show…,* 1987. Mixed media, installed in New Museum window, detail. Courtesy New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.
[22] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, [225].

> directed to those national figures who have used the AIDS epidemic to promote their own political or religious agendas. It is intended to serve as a reminder that their actions or in-actions will soon be a matter of historical record.[23]

Let the Record Show… catalogues the AIDS crisis in motion, publicly naming political and religious proponents who capitalized on the AIDS epidemic in order to disseminate religious doctrine and homophobic sentiment. In *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth Century American Art,* Richard Meyer points out that one of the cut-outs pictures the provocative political figure William F. Buckley. The concrete block presented below the figure mimics Buckley's proposition that anyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed accordingly.[24] The exhibition's reference to the Holocaust and placement of the cardboard cut-out figures in front of a photomural of the Nuremberg trials speaks to ACT UP and Gran Fury's self-conscious acuity. This self-consciousness is particularly apparent in *Let the Record Show*…, which employs a penetrative conceptualization of the AIDS crisis, connecting the AIDS epidemic to the Holocaust as two instances of genocide.[25]

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[23] New Museum of Contemporary Art, "'Let the Record Show . . .,'" archive.newmuseum.org, accessed April 15, 2018, https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/158.

[24] William F. Buckley, "Crucial Steps in Combating the Aids Epidemic; Identify All the Carriers," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), March 18, 1986, [Page #], accessed April 16, 2018, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/07/16/specials/buckley-aids.html?mcubz=1.

[25] Deborah Gould notes that ACT UP was not the only group linking the incident of the AIDS crisis to the Holocaust, "A letter to President Reagan that was signed by 431 people with AIDS, their friends, and relative in Chicago, for example, accused the government of genocide for its foot-dragging in testing drugs." See Gould, *Moving Politics*, [169].

Figure 6. ACT UP and Gran Fury AIDS Activism Public Window Installation at The New Museum, NYC, *Let the Record Show...*[26]

Let the Record Show…, is framed by the arc of the window it sits within. The electrified pink triangle, and symbolic text ("Silence = Death") sat at the top of the display, pulling the audience toward the piece by immediately establishing a connection to the flashy symbolism invoked in mass-marketing strategies. ACT UP assumed the pink triangle and phrase "Silence = Death," as emblems for the movement. The art installation references the conservative writer William F. Buckley, who in March 1986, calling for the mandatory

[26] ACT UP and Gran Fury, *Let the Record Show...*, November 20, 1987, photograph, accessed May 2, 2018, https://archive.newmuseum.org/images/3295.

tattooing of people infected with AIDS.[27] In an op-ed piece for the *New York Times* published in 1986, Buckley proposed, "Everyone detected with AIDS, should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common-needle users, and on the buttocks, to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals."[28] ACT UP inverted the dominant notion positing homosexuals as a threat to the nation-state by drawing on Buckley's proposal as a means of indicating who the *real* threat to America was.

In response to the parallels ACT UP presented through their display of *Let the Record Show*…, Meyer explained that the combination of imagery and rhetoric of ACT UP's counter politics illustrated how "ACT UP drew out the link between Buckley's proposal and the compulsory tattooing of inmates of Nazi death camps."[29] Meyer suggests that the mechanism employed by ACT UP in their politically infused photomural, rather than fixating on homosexuals as the center of the AIDS crisis, exposes the inhumaneness of Buckley's regulatory regime.[30] Buckley's model of signification demands a recognition of the function of the body within the AIDS crisis and connects the doctrine of Nazism to the conservative religious Right and government attitudes toward the AIDS crisis. The body remained central to this discussion and, through a process of reclamation, became a tool for combatting oppressive notions of gender and sexuality. [31]

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[27] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, [225].

[28] William F. Buckley, "Crucial Steps in Combating the Aids Epidemic; Identify All the Carriers," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), March 18, 1986, [Page #], accessed April 16, 2018, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/07/16/specials/buckley-aids.html?mcubz=1.

[29] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, [226].

[30] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, [226].

[31] C. J. Pascoe, *Dude You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* (n.p.: Regents of the University of California, 2007, 2012), [51]. "Compulsive Heterosexuality," is explained as the invocation of heterosexual expression of hyper masculinity as ritualistic, a repeated performance, functioning on the micro level.

Capitalism and Political Reorganization: Misapprehension in the Media

Appropriation was integral to ACT UP and Gran Fury's process of artistic labor. The works developed by the collective played on cultural tropes and customary assumptions of gender and sexuality as monolithic cultural constructions. The group incorporated themes specific to commodity culture and mass-market representations, realizing appropriation as the perfect site for cultural intervention and radical revaluation. In "Where the Streets Have No Name: A Democracy of Multiple Public Spheres," Kobena Mercer incisively notes how the emerging cultural emphasis on commodity and consumer consumption, converged with a political imperative to form a unitary nation-state. Demonstrating how this cultural shaping occurs through individual relationships to specific consumable products, Mercer states:

> Where deregulated markets expanded the 1980s culture industries, the view that commodification was the only inevitable outcome was challenged by the view that crossover practices had actually led to the pluralisation of popular culture. Instead of the mass culture prevalent during the monopoly capitalism, which attempted to align citizenry and nation-state around one language, one religion, and one ethnicity, Fredric Jameson indicated the economic importance of cultural production in an age of multinational capitalism and the symbolic value of product differentiation where consumer choices are implicated in the self-fashioning of identities.[32]

Contrary to the media coverage of the AIDS crisis, which operated within the dominant discursive and ideological framework, ACT UP and Gran Fury's visual commentary on the AIDS crisis revealed the internal reality of the individuals experiencing the epidemic. In an interview entitled, "The Narrative of Reality," Stuart Hall focuses in on the function of ideology through modes of representation. Hall notes that in any society there is a consensus of frameworks and interpretations that are employed to make sense of our cultural surround. This set of frameworks influences how people respond to social situations.[33] Elaborating further on this concept, Hall provides an example of how he perceives these mechanisms to

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[32] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [138].

[33] Stuart Hall, "The Narrative Construction of Reality: An Interview with Stuart Hall," by John O'Hara, *Southern Review* 17 (March 1984): [7].

have played out in the case of the Falklands war specifically. However, Hall's observation can also be applied to mass media representations of the AIDS crisis. Hall states, "What I see those stories moving into is that precise field of the distribution of the dominant ways in which a society makes sense of what is going on around it or what is happening to it."[34] While the AIDS crisis was portrayed by the news media, the early years of the AIDS crisis were wrongfully represented and homosexuals became the mainstream media's scapegoat for cooling mass hysteria around the disease and its modes of transmission.

There was a significant division between what was represented and what was actually felt by the community experiencing the crisis first hand. Hall asserts that the ideology embraced by mass media and news sources is not a conscious commitment to a particular philosophy. Rather, it is the cultural circumstances that shape the configuration of mainstream news.[35] The frame in which the news media sources are established is thus rooted in a cultural habitus that works to adhere to an ideology shared by the "general public" but fails to represent or cater to those who push against the dominant ideological framework in which the news media is constructed. Considering this, Gran Fury's reticulation of mass media content undermined the "reality" that news media sources enforced. Given Hall's evaluation of the media's representation of the Falkland war and the manipulation of events to favor a dominant ideology within the space of the AIDS crisis, the American media similarly constructed the AIDS crisis to affirm the heterosexual or "general population" as the cultural norm. AIDS was utilized by these mainstream actors as an opportunity to reify a homogenized nation-state in which heterosexuality is the presumed norm. AIDS was also used by ACT UP and other anti-AIDS activists as an opportunity to visibilize social and cultural issues embedded within the state.

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[34] Hall, "The Narrative," interview, [8].
[35] Hall, "The Narrative," interview, [9].

Feeding into the dominant social surround, mass media sources assuaged anxieties connected to the AIDS crisis by locating the "homosexual lifestyle" as the source of the problem. This action ideologically quarantined AIDS within the homosexual community. A message was relayed to the "general public" that assured heterosexual identifying people of their safety. This was particularly harmful to the gay and lesbian community as the assumption that homosexuals were the source of AIDS lead to increased discrimination against homosexuals and wrongly justified the government and medical researchers negligence on the matter of AIDS.[36] Additionally, the misinformation administered through mainstream sources gave people the false assumption that heterosexual people could not contract the disease.

Another damaging result of the media's incessant fixation on homosexuality as the primary source of transmission was the disregard for other communities affected by AIDS. The government, mass media, and the conservative Christian Right initially overlooked intravenous drug users as a social group subject to contracting AIDS. A *New York Times* article published in 1987 revealed that intravenous drug users significantly suffered in the AIDS epidemic, showing that the cases of AIDS in intravenous drug users made up a larger percentage than that of homosexuals affected by AIDS within the time frame of 1982 to 1986.[37]

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[36] Crimp, "How to Have,"[239].

[37] A New York Times article published in 1987, already six years after the discovery of AIDS, noted the statistics of AIDS cases within the homosexual community and amongst intravenous drug-users. The result revealed that Intravenous drug-users were significantly affected in the AIDS crisis, but due to inherent racism within the state and the intractability of homosexuality from AIDS, people suffering from AIDS that were not homosexual were detrimentally overlooked. "City health officials said a study of all drug-related deaths in the city from 1982 through 1986 found that an estimated 2,520 AIDS-related deaths were not officially included in the city's AIDS Surveillance Registry. They said this meant AIDS-related deaths involving intravenous drug users accounted for 53 percent of all AIDS-related deaths that have occurred in the city since the epidemic began, while deaths involving sexually active homosexual and bisexual men accounted for 38 percent. Sharp Contrast." See, Ronald Sullivan, "AIDS Deaths in New York Are Showing New Pattern," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), October 22, 1987, Archives, [Page #], accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/22/nyregion/aids-deaths-in-new-york-are-showing-new-pattern.html.

Confronting AIDS and Homophobic Hysteria

The information on AIDS in the early years of the epidemic was fundamentally false and reified America's history of entrenched homophobia as an accepted cultural norm. The dominant fixation on the "homosexual lifestyle" as the presiding cause of AIDS became a harmful trope of the epidemic. With the South Carolina senator Jesse Helms, Jerry Falwell and other Evangelical figures receiving national attention during the height of the AIDS crisis, the divide between the conservative Religious Right and the state was blurred. The negligence exhibited by government officials and the superfluous distribution of homophobic epithets, illustrated how conservative leaders on the far Right, would as Molesworth sharply notes, "rather see gay men die than allow homosexuality to invade their consciousness."[38] Rather than responding to the crisis as a just a health issue, anti-AIDS activists realized the cultural influencers in the construction of the disease, and designed their various mechanisms of protest accordingly.[39] In response to the proliferation of homophobia, ACT UP produced incisive political graphics brought into being through a collective effort. The result was mass production of posters, banners, performance, and political art exhibitions that transcended the space of the gallery, pushing into the street—like all of ACT UP's products of protest—in order to ensure the mobilization of the political content.

Responding to AIDS: Political Mobilization and Capitalizing on Public Visibility

While AIDS had extremely detrimental effects on the queer community, the disease also provided the opportunity to illustrate the internal homophobia harbored within the state. However, while the grim reality of AIDS devastated the queer community, Mercer asserts

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[38] Yingling, "AIDS in America," in *Inside/ Out*, [244]. This is not from molesworth

[39] Thomas Yingling, "AIDS in America: Postmodern Governance, Identity, and Experience," 1991, in *Inside/ Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), [295-6].

that “the fear provoked by AIDS acted as a desirable political asset, capitalized on in the call to return to family values.”[40] The Neoconservatives took an attitude toward AIDS which offered only non-intervention or denial. The renewed emphasis on family values became the impetus for condemning the "homosexual lifestyle" as the site of both AIDS transmission and the protest of the traditional family structure.

In “AIDS in America: Postmodern Governance, Identity, and Experience,” critical theorist Thomas Yingling maintains that the political climate defining America in the moment of the AIDS crisis is crucial to understanding the anti-AIDS movement. He claims that a tension arises between the Government’s desire to control the nation-state, whilst simultaneously neglecting internal issues embedded within the State. Yingling articulates this friction as the need for American politics to mark the nation-state as a political site whilst also upholding the ideology of “America” as a term that ceases to prioritize the state and denotes instead a “platonic ideal of social consensus, homogeneity, and historical transcendence.”[41] Yingling argues that Reagan was elected on the appeal of ending state domination, yet this platform was framed as a return to the ideological “America” outlined above.[42] This imagination of society represents a narrow demographic and holds in place binaristic assumptions of gender and sexuality within the context of the modern family. Echoing elements of Jasbir Puar’s theory articulated in “Mapping U.S. Homonormativities,” Yingling reveals that the state’s creation and inclusion of homonormative bodies is a mechanism for justifying the exclusion of queer bodies. Puar argues that this is achieved through a myriad of signifying factors but the state predominantly succeeds in the excluding queer bodies through connecting queer sexualities to terrorist figures, thus framing queer

[40] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [143].
[41] Yingling, "AIDS in America," in *Inside/ Out*, [296].
[42] Yingling, "AIDS in America," in *Inside/ Out*, [297].

sexualities as a threat to the state.[43]Comparably, Yingling suggests that by enforcing the ideology embedded within the signifying term "America," "conservatives are able to deny certain bodies, by ignoring the need of the nation-state to respond to population groups not visible within the "America" (predominantly gays and IV-drug users in the early years of the AIDS epidemic) but may even cast those needs as anti-American, as a danger *to* rather than *within* the state."[44] The conservative Christian Right's dissemination of homophobic rhetoric and the assertion that contracting AIDS was unpatriotic was a means of justifying the government's foot-dragging in testing drugs.

Public and Private Divide: How is the Public Defined by Private Values?

In *Moving Politics: Emotions and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*, Deborah Gould draws upon the work of sociologist Steven Epstein to explain the association of homosexuality with AIDS. Gould begins by determining what sets the affected group apart from other social groups.[45] However, this process, Gould writes, "is inevitably *normalizing* insofar as it considers the ways in which the assumed-to-be-homogeneous social group ostensibly deviates from the norm. Difference slides easily into deviance."[46] Gould's use of the word, "deviance," draws upon a history of legal statues that defined acts of sodomy as illegal regardless of individual consent. The case of *Bowers v. Hardwick* indicates the

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[43] Jasbir K. Puar, "Mapping U.S. Homonormativies," *Gender, Place and Culture* 13, no. 1 (August 23, 2006): [70-71]. Puar shows the construction of a homonormative figure and contrasty the construction of a terrorist, and thus a threat to the state, as embodying signifiers associated with queer sexualities: "And, indeed, positive attributes were attached to Mark Bingham's homosexuality: butch, masculine, rugby-player, white, American, hero, gay patriot, called his mom, i.e. 'homo-national'; while negative connotations of homosexuality were used to racialize and sexualize Osama bin Laden: feminized, stateless, dark, perverse, pedophilic, disowned by family, i.e. fag. What is at stake here is not only one is good and the other evil, rather that the homosexuality of Bingham is converted into acceptable patriot values, while the evilness of bin Laden is more fully and efficaciously rendered through associations with sexual excess, failed masculinity (i.e. femininity), and faggotry"[70-71].

[44] Yingling, "AIDS in America," in *Inside/ Out*, [297].

[45] Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (n.p.: University of Chicago Press, 2009), [72].

[46] Gould, *Moving Politics*, [72].

limitations on gay and lesbian rights to privacy.[47] Furthermore, sodomy laws were upheld in America until the very recent date of 2003, when in the case of *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Supreme Court finally ruled sodomy laws as unconstitutional. The case of *Bowers v. Hardwick* transitions us into the issue of "public" and "private" spheres, and the implied social conduct that defines both spaces.[48]

The venomous attitude upheld by the conservative Christian Right significantly contributed to a general dismissal of AIDS and delayed action toward preventing the disease and developing a medical explanation. In an essay titled, "God and the Fight Against AIDS," Helen Epstein recorded the discriminatory and phobic views of both Falwell and Helms. She explains, "Falwell called AIDS, God's judgment on promiscuity, and former Senator Jesse Helms, a long-time congressional ally of the evangelicals, told *The New York Times* in 1995 that AIDS funding should be reduced because homosexuals contract the disease through their 'deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct.'"[49] In a 1994 congressional meeting, Senator Helms delivered a narrow and credulous summation of the AIDS epidemic, specifically denouncing the political gestures of anti-AIDS activists. Helms stated, "We've got to factor in the sensitivity of those of us who feel that there's a spiritual and moral aspect to this playing to the homosexual, lesbian crowd. It makes it different from anything else. I wish they'd shut their mouths and go to work and keep their private matters to themselves and get their mentality out of their crotches."[50] This remark blatantly fails to address the detrimental effects of AIDS on the population, reducing the epidemic to a "gay issue" rather than

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[47] Janet E. Halley, "Reasoning about Sodomy: Act and Identity in and after Bowers V. Hardwick," *Virginia Law Review: Symposium on Sexual Orientation and the Law* 79, no. 7 (October 1993): [1729].

[48] Nicholas Pedriana, "Intimate Equality: The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Movement's Legal Framing of Sodomy Laws in the Lawrence V. Texas Case," in Queer Mobilizations: LGBT Activists Confront the Law, ed. Scott Barclay, Mary Bernstein, and Anna-Maria Marshall (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009), [52].

[49] Helen Epstein, "God and the Fight against AIDS," *New York Review of Books*, March 25, 2005, accessed April 15, 2018, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2005/04/28/god-and-the-fight-against-aids/.

[50] *How to Survive a Plague*, directed by David France, screenplay by David France, Woody Richman, and Tyler H. Walk, Sundance Selects, 2012. [1:00:08].

conceiving of the epidemic as the vicious disease it was. Furthermore, Helms suggestion that anti-AIDS activists "keep their private matters to themselves" raises the important issue of a public-private distinction.

Helms's remark arouses a history of private and public distinctions that were particularly impactful on the lived experience of the queer community. The terms "public" and "private" define the structure of our social and cultural experience. The "public" infers a moral respectability, a value assumed by assimilationist homosexuals in an effort to gain homosexual visibility in the years following the Stonewall uprising. This moral respectability adheres to a set of cultural standards, that are inherently rooted in heterosexuality. While the "private" indicates to the personal conduct that occurs within the space of the household. In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner defines the "private" as a dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable conduct.[51] The distinction between "public" and "private" values are deeply integrated into our physical environment and social geography, and both "public" and "private," "are scarcely distinguishable from the experience of gender and sexuality."[52] The "public" came to define and be defined by what was considered acceptable social conduct and the "private" was determined by the unacceptable. In reference to the intrinsic relationship of sexuality to the "public" and "private" spheres, Michael Warner declares that "In the case of sexualities, too, not all sexualities are public or private in the same way. Same-sex persons kissing, embracing, or holding hands in public view commonly excite disgust even to the point of violence, whereas mixed-sex persons doing the same things are invisibly ordinary, even applauded."[53] Thus, Helms's statement suggesting that anti-AIDS activists keep private matters to themselves is necessarily rooted in a deeper social and cultural rejection of homosexuality as he deems homosexuality unacceptable for the

[51] Michael Warner, *Public and Counterpublics* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2002), [].
[52] Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, [24].
[53] Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, [24].

public sphere. Given the restrictions placed on homosexuals, lesbians and gay men deduced that in order to challenge the norms of straight culture in the public is to, as Warner puts it, "disturb deep and unwritten rules about the kinds of behavior and eroticism that are appropriate to the public."[54] Queer activism did exactly this. Dedicated to promoting a radical reevaluation of the social structure and advancing an understanding of sexuality that repudiates rigid categories entrenched in heterosexist culture, queer politics carved a space within the dominant public for queer sexualities to freely express a sexuality that deviates from the heterosexual norm.

Gran Fury's Artistic and Political Motivation Explained

Gran Fury member Michael Nesline explains that the movement is compiled of a diverse group of individuals "interested in creating art work—or propaganda—that addressed the AIDS crisis and that will be seen by different parts of the public and affect their understanding of the crisis. It would provoke them, cause a reaction, make them think, and hopefully educate them."[55] Continuing with his rumination on the activist group's internal meaning and purpose, Nesline offers a projective summary of Gran Fury's ideological goal: "Our projects should have the effect that a demonstration by ACT UP has."[56] Robert Vazquez, another key member of the group, provides his experience and interpretation of Gran Fury. He states, "I believe that the work is meant to stimulate thought and to bring a whole new vocabulary—a whole new way of looking—to bear on the AIDS health crisis, by presenting imagery that is different from the mainstream stuff that people are subjected to by the mass media." Vazquez emphasizes the key element fueling Gran Fury's mission in the

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[54] Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, [25].
[55] Michael Cohen and Gran Fury, *Gran Fury: Read My Lips*, comp. Douglas Crimp, Robert Gober, and David Deitcher (n.p.: 80wse, 2015), [36].
[56] Cohen and Fury, *Gran Fury*, [36].

fight against AIDS: "We want people to question what is out there. One of the ways that Gran Fury does this, is by using imagery that is already in circulation."[57] Vazquez's remark, "we want people to question what is out there," indicates an important component of the AIDS crisis and draws upon a history of gay and lesbian liberation. Gran Fury's process of artistic labor was intended to reach audiences that are not normally subjected to the political issues of the AIDS crisis. The movement's dedication to depicting homoerotic expressions of desire and portraying homosexuality explicitly takes on the issue of homosexual visibility in America. The replicate nature of Gran Fury's political art projects erected and sustained within the central and highly populated space of American urban metropolises were designed to contest institutionalized patterns of discrimination and the systemic oppression of homosexuality. Gran Fury invokes homoerotic expressions of desire, implementing these images in the context of the AIDS movement in an effort to disprove misinformation about AIDS erroneously citing kissing as a risk behavior and saliva as a probable means of HIV transmission.[58] *Kissing Doesn't Kill* imitates symbols of consumerist indulgence and aesthetic charm to arrest the spectator's attention and direct it to the AIDS crisis. It insists on same-sex desire and contact amidst a relentless epidemic, affirming lesbians and gay men's dedication to resisting the efforts of the dominant culture to frame queer sexuality as atypical and life-threatening. Absorbing the critique that ACT UP and Gran Fury's campaigns focused too heavily on the white gay men, *Kissing Doesn't Kill* features a diverse group of people kissing (between men, between women, between man and woman). Additionally, the campaign dislodges the notion that white gay men and poor people of color are the central victim of AIDS (Figure 6). Producing images that presented healthy representations of homosexuality affirmed that same-sex relations and public expressions of homosexuality will not cease as a

[57] Cohen and Fury, *Gran Fury*, [36].
[58] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, [235].

result of the AIDS crisis. Additionally, the images produced by ACT UP and Gran Fury, depicted healthy people. This was in response to the proliferation of negative representations the media produced as the standard "face of AIDS."[59] Gran Fury sought to regularize homosexual desire within a mainstream context while simultaneously fighting the notion that AIDS is a result of same-sex desire.

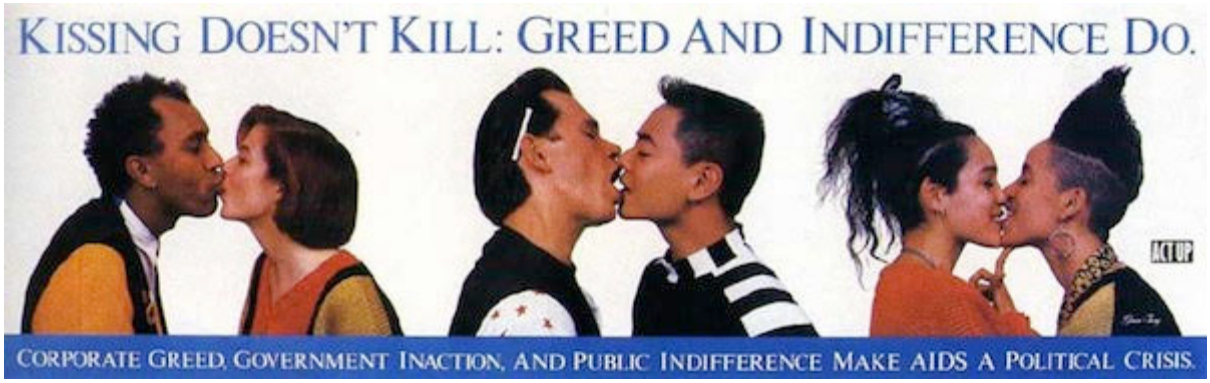

Figure 7. ACT UP and Gran Fury AIDS Activism Graphic, *Kissing Doesn't Kill: Greed and Indifference Do*.[60]

Performative Action in ACT UP and Gran Fury

Since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, gay men and activists have performed a continuous series of AIDS interventions. These tactics of mobilizations and political dissent, frequently incorporated performative elements. In an elaborate examination of patterns of masculinity and heteronormativity within the confined space of a high school, C.J. Pascoe delivers an incisive ethnography entitled, *Dude You're a Fag.* Pascoe identifies the theater as a space that allows gender and sexual fluidity.[61] Pascoe's observation of the performative space as inviting the opportunity to explore different genders and sexualities applies to ACT UP's engagement with the performative arts as a mechanism for dissent against the State and in opposition to normative constructs of gender and sexuality. ACT UP and Gran Fury

[59] Crimp, "How to Have," [268].
[60] Gran Fury and ACT UP, *Kissing Doesn't Kill (With additional text: "Corporate greed, government inaction, and public indifference make AIDS a political crisis.")*, 1989, photograph, accessed April 26, 2018, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e4-1020-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.
[61] Pascoe, *Dude You're*, [165].

embodied this challenge to the dominant cultural standards that define public space. They disrupted the norms of straight culture through the propulsion of queer sexualities into the public realm. The appropriation of advertisement campaigns and the groups insertion of the body into public space indicated ACT UP's refusal to recoil into the private sphere. Chants such as "We're here, we're queer, get used it!"[62] demonstrated how queer activists were passionately and antagonistically fixated on issues of visibility. The situationist methods of activism deployed by ACT UP similarly evince the militarized approach the anti-AIDS movement assumed.

In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler explains the instability of gender identity. Through a consideration of gender as a social construct that materializes through a series of repeated acts, set within a rigid regulatory framework that sustains an appearance of substance. Butler argues that sex and gender are regulatory fictions that reify and naturalize the intersecting power structures of masculinity and heterosexuality.[63] Butler argues that if sex is able to be emancipated from its "naturalised interiority and surface, [it] can occasion the parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings."[64] This play on gender and sexuality can then be seen as subverting the naturalized and reified notions of gender that affirm masculine hegemony and heterosexist power as the presumed social norm.[65]ACT UP and Gran Fury's propulsion of queer sexuality into the dominant mainstream space can be viewed as adopting a Butlerian approach to subverting the dominant masculine and heterosexist order by employing queer bodies a means of troubling and disrupting that natural gender order. The performative articulation of queer politics became apparent in the performative

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[62] Hennessy, "Queer Visibility," [114].
[63] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), [33].
[64] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, [33-34].
[65] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, [33-34].

demonstrations of kiss-ins and die-ins, which employ the body as a literal disruptor of the social order.

The emphasis on physicality and visibility in the AIDS epidemic and the rejection of queer bodies from public space rendered the body an important site of protest. Warner classifies this form of disruptive politics as a display of counterpublics.[66] He explains, "counterpublics are, by definition, formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment, and this context of domination inevitably, entails distortion. Mass publics and counterpublics, in other words, are both damaged forms of publicness, just as gender and sexuality are, in this culture, damaged forms of privacy."[67] Butler claims that to make gender trouble, is to perform a subversive confusion of the very norms the dissenting actor is attempting to disrupt.[68] ACT UP's performative demonstrations embody this logic in divulging heterosexuality as the cultural norm. These actions reveal the instability of the ideological construction the "America"[69] the Reagan administration and conservative religious Right allies endorse.

Thus, ACT UP's and Gran Fury's dissenting tactics that involve the body destabilize the cultural norm and simultaneously portray homoerotic desire through in-your-face activism. These actions made visible positive representations of homosexuality in response to dominant misapprehensions linking white gay men . Homosexual desire became the tool of protest in resisting the dominant heterosexual culture and a means of "exposing the heterosexual matrix as a fabrication and sex as 'a performatively enacted signification.'"[70] Through their emphasis on the body and performativity, ACT UP employed a postmodern articulation of identity politics, adhering to a Butlerian model of queer identity politics by

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[66] Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, [63].
[67] Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, [63].
[68] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, [34].
[69] Yingling, "AIDS in America," in *Inside/ Out*, [297].
[70] Hennessy, "Queer Visibility," [116].

refusing to remain invisible..[71] From an outsider perspective, counterpublic gestures can be perceived as the collapse of private and public values. However, Warner explains that in the case of counterpublics, such displays are generally driven by a desire to transform.[72] The counterpublics exemplified by ACT UP urge the viewer to recognize the various ways privacy is publicly constructed. By staging mass kiss-ins and die-ins, ACT UP and Gran Fury push the public to consider how private life is publicly relevant. Through the production of multiple and intersecting visual, performative and discursive contestations to the dominant heterosexual culture, ACT UP and Gran Fury provoked visceral reactions. For example, Jesse Helms' vehement condemnation of the political actions encapsulated under AIDS activism is a direct reaction to the assertive work of these activist groups.[73]

The explicit gestures of ACT UP and Gran Fury were integral in communicating the visceral meaning of gender and sexuality as culturally relevant. This was precisely what the activist sought to disclose as publicly relevant.[74] Kobena Mercer articulates the importance of public and private in Gran Fury's activist-artworks, noting that:

> It was precisely the generative agency of intersecting forces clustered around the shifting borders of public and private life that gave rise to multiple lines of dissenus in 1980s art. In a place of a unitary public sphere in which the identity of *demos* or 'the people' would be staged as a homogenous mass, 1980s art reveals the catalyzing antagonisms put into play by an emergent conception of multiple publics. Correlatively, where the private selfhood of liberal humanist Man was called into question by social movements that stressed the value of difference, the visual production of new subjectivities confirmed the diversification of public life.[75]

Mercer's observation intersects with Butler's theory affirming sex as a possible site of political disruption. By making the internal and private elements of sexuality publicly visible, ACT UP and Gran Fury subvert the dominant hegemony of heterosexuality as the given

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[71] Epstein, "God and the Fight."
[72] Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, [62].
[73] "Jesse Helms," Clip of AIDS Care Bill video.
[74] Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, [62].
[75] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [135].

cultural norm. Furthermore, the actions of "fringe" groups, characterized by movements like ACT UP and their collective allies, demonstrated the absorption of materials produced in the dominant culture and mass media as a mechanism of displacing these naturalized and reified notions precisely through revealing their social dominance and instability as social constructs. The dissenting actions launched in reaction to the hegemonic heterosexist culture is revealed in the ways that activists mobilized by the emergence of the AIDS crisis. They responded to the epidemic and government inaction with a radical reticulation of cultural significations. Thomas Yingling characterizes these actions exhibited in response to the AIDS crisis as demonstrating "not only their seizure of signification, for instance, but their absolute insistence on it, their insistence on the political, social, collective, and individuated meaningfulness of AIDS,"[76] Furthermore, Yingling explains that these methods of political intervention "might be read as working against the annihilating but passive power of the silent majorities."[77] This applies directly to ACT UP's first influential phrase that came to define the movement: "SILENCE=DEATH."

Activist and artist responses to the AIDS crisis were an important feature of art in the 1980s due to its radical public nature and dissenting militaristic form. In response to activist methods performed in response to the AIDS crisis, Mercer asserts, "acts of civil disobedience that upheld the ideals of civic humanism demanded that US democracy live up to its own Enlightenment values."[78] Mercer argues that the focus on the public display of homoerotic material and performance was at the center of the movement. Overt displays of public affection and unapologetic in-your-face activism forced people to recognize dominant heterosexual cultural norms. The kiss-ins and celebrations of queer sexuality liberated non-conformist genders and sexualities from the rigid regulatory frame of mainstream

[76] Yingling, "AIDS in America," in *Inside/ Out*, [296].
[77] Yingling, "AIDS in America," in *Inside/ Out*, [296].
[78] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [143].

heterosexist society. The unapologetic assertion of queer desire portrayed by ACT UP and Gran Fury engendered the queer community with the freedom to participate in a counterpublic and assert a radical politics in the face of discriminatory structures. ACT UP's radical methods of political dissent made possible the enjoyment of an erotic life that would be liberated from the fear and violence that historically permeated the regulation of the private sphere.[79]The emphasis on visibility was a vital component of ACT UP and Gran Fury's work toward ending the AIDS epidemic and elevating a human rights agenda. ACT UP's work extended beyond fighting the mismanagement of the AIDS epidemic. The group critiqued dominant cultural conventions and imagined new and alternative space to express anger and defy power structures. This created space for queer people to express themselves freely. The group's strength came from its ability to engender a non-hierarchical governance driven by the collective determination to push one another toward meeting the multiple and intersecting issues affected by the AIDS epidemic. The visual components delivered by ACT UP and Gran Fury allowed for minority political issues to enter into the public domain and be absorbed by the dominant public. The appropriation of glossy, mass media rhetoric and images allowed for the campaigns produced by the movement appeal to consumerist values and catch a viewer's attention more easily. ACT UP and Gran Fury tapped into the mainstream proclivity for a consumable product and sold their political message to the general public by infusing their posters with marketable sloganism. This tactic easily captured the viewer's attention and forced the members of society removed from the AIDS epidemic to recognize their priorities and indifference in the midst of an aggressive epidemic. Furthermore, ACT UP, and Gran Fury's visual installments brought the viewer into a more enlightened understanding of the AIDS epidemic. The activist groups provided facts and

[79] Molesworth et al., *This Will*, [143]. Note: *Bowers v. Hardwick* is an exemplar case in which homosexual individuals operating in the private realm were subject to the violence and policing Mercer refers to.

information on AIDS that the Government and health departments neglected to inform the public of.[80] ACT UP and Gran Fury absorbed the responsibility of informing the public on necessary information concerning the AIDS crisis expanding traditional forms of protest to encapsulate a march grander responsibility for the safety of the public.

Conclusion

It's important that ACT UP and Gran Fury made a point of showcasing their work in the public space of "the street." The unapologetic propulsion of AIDS activism and queer identity politics into the space of mass media and advertising was a necessary progression in the move toward positive visibility. Their acute sensitivity to public reception and exposure to the artwork lead to the innovative solution of mobilizing the artwork in order to reach communities that otherwise might not be subjected to the material. *Kissing Doesn't Kill* is an exemplar of this form of mobilization. The incisive graphic articulation of queer politics and the conception of AIDS as a human rights issue was key to AIDS activism and activist-art. ACT UP proved that a collaborative is a living system defined by growth and exchange. The collective's versatile response to criticism was proven in their ability to adjust their approach.[81] This is because the activists were reacting to the government's use of the disease to attack homosexuals and solidify "traditional" American values. Where movements such as the Gay Men's Health Crisis fell short in the meeting issues of the broader community affected by the epidemic,[82] ACT UP and Gran Fury stepped in expanding on the notion that AIDS was not just a gay issue. In the early years of the epidemic the mass media and the government's fixation on AIDS as a gay disease, neglected to consider how AIDS deeply

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[80] *How to Survive a Plague*, directed by David France, screenplay by David France, Woody Richman, and Tyler H. Walk, Sundance Selects, 2012.
[81] Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*, [235].
[82] Crimp, "How to Have," [250].

affected IV drug users and was particularly relentless among low-income minority groups.[83] The debate about safe sex education and the distribution of condoms, was perhaps one of the most alarming areas of conflict concerning the AIDS epidemic. The debate over the Helms Amendment exemplifies this. In response to the failure to act on safe sex education ACT UP launched their own programs.[84] This was integral in creating a safer environment and assisted helping to prevent further incidents of AIDS.

In response to these critiques Gran Fury adjusted their approach to AIDS activism. It is important to question why ACT UP assumed the role of spokesperson for the AIDS epidemic, and how the social structures ACT UP addresses inevitably shaped the activist's own experiences and privileges. ACT UP achieved enormous success on various fronts, however the progress made toward determining a medical solution to AIDS was perhaps one of the movements most credible successes. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of AIDS Research National Institution of Health, attributed advancements made in AIDS research largely to the efforts and will of activist to educate themselves and push their agenda forward.[85] The collective body of activists that made ACT UP gave the collective a dynamic quality that enabled the group to address a myriad of issues simultaneously. The artistic contribution of Gran Fury functions to provide the AIDS crisis with a graphic form that communicates the internal ideological, political and emotional struggle experienced by individuals affected by the AIDS crisis. The Government and mass media fixation on homosexuality in the early stages of the AIDS epidemic reveals that the AIDS epidemic and heteronormativity are completely intertwined. The AIDS epidemic necessitated that AIDS activist fight against heteronormativity in order to end the epidemic.

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[83] Crimp, "How to Have," [238-9].
[84] *How to Survive*.[1:42:14].
[85] *How to Survive*. [1:37:14].

Project Conclusion

This project has explored the confined ways in which mainstream institutions integrate queer bodies into the political public. Through engendering heteronormativity in mainstream spaces, the mass media was able to secure the cultural dominance of hegemonic masculine heterosexuality as the cultural norm. By the1980s and 1990s, representations of lesbians and gay men in mass media spheres were more frequent. This marked a positive progression toward destabilizing heterosexuality as the dominant and "natural" sexuality in American culture. However, the images that were produced often prescribed to heteronormative imaginations of gays and lesbians. This worked to augment the pervasiveness of heterosexual customs. Despite the controlled portrayal of lesbians and gay men in mass media during the 1980s and 1990s, the increased quantity of and gay and lesbian representation still troubled the heterosexual matrix. Throughout this project I argued that homonormative images worked against positive representations of queer people in the political public. However, representations of gays and lesbians enabled queer bodies to forge a new public in response to the homonormative images proliferating mainstream spaces. Furthermore, I consider how the queer community was divided by the mainstream to appeal to homonormative bodies. In order to achieve full inclusivity for queer people, minority sexualities need to work together to topple the dominant heterosexist power structures that inform the mainstream.

I focus on three vectors that I deem integral to informing personal understanding and that continue to have significant effects on cultural shaping. Mass media in the 1980s and 1990s is central to my argument throughout the project. This was a time when minority sexualities were entering more prominently into the mainstream field. For the first two chapters I analyze how the cultural fields of television, film, advertising and magazines

embrace homonormative bodies and construct cultural imaginations of gender and sexuality that enforce these fictions as natural and frame the other as unnatural. In the final chapter I consider these elements through an oppositional lens, reflecting on how queer activists realized the significance of the cultural modes outlined in chapter one and two. I show that queer politics and activism cleverly appropriated cultural symbols and mimicked the glossy rhetoric of consumerist culture. This successfully provided a visual reticulation that revealed the dominant hegemonic heterosexist culture as a repressive and regulatory regime.

The role of capitalism is integral to understanding the homogeneity of dominant heterosexual customs as the cultural norm. The monolithic nature of the global capitalist market reveals how heteronormative and homonormative fictions were able to gain cultural dominance. The tensions within the queer community show how the state strategically acted through the mass media to appeal to homonormative bodies. This divided the queer community. In fragmenting the queer community, the threat of heterosexuality's destabilization was less imminent. The framing of lesbians and gay men within heteronormative terms reified heterosexuality as the cultural norm and pushed queer people to the periphery. By excluding queer bodies from the mass media, the mainstream was able to erase non-normative sexuality from the national body. I focus on the AIDS crisis because the visibility generated as a result of the disease provided a unique opportunity for queer activists to disprove the negative representations within the same moment. The rapid increase of AIDS related deaths demanded action and commanded national attention. The AIDS crisis was a horrific event, but it enabled the production of a counterpublic where queer people were able to freely express desire and challenge repressive hegemonic heterosexist powers. The distinction between the public and private values has been an integral component in controlling the participation of queer bodies in public space. How public and private values inform the (in)visibility of queer bodies is key in understanding the State's justification for

accepting certain bodies and rejecting others. This project considers the body as the necessary catalyst in disrupting the dominant cultural norm. People are conditioned to learn cultural codes through visual media like advertisements. Thus, the militaristic gestures of anti-AIDS activism were uniquely successful because AIDS activists self-consciously engaged with relevant visual forms circulating in mainstream media during the 1980s.

The absence of queer people's participation in determining how queer identity is represented in the mainstream remains to be the heart of the problem. Until queer people are able to manage the terms in which queer identity is made visible, queer representation will be cast in the shadow of heterosexual representation. The inclusion of homonormative bodies in mainstream spaces shows that there remains to be different variations of tolerance toward queer people and that there is different types of inclusion. However, in absorbing a narrow demographic of queer people, the mainstream fractures the queer community. This makes it less possible to achieve a full inclusivity and destabilize the heterosexual matrix as the cultural norm. Heterosexuality persists as the "natural" sexuality.

The 2017 GLAAD report tells us that there have been noticeable improvements in media representations of LGBTQ people.[1] However, the negative casting and stereotypes discussed in this project continue to influence LGBTQ representation in mainstream spaces. This recreates harmful tropes that perpetuate a discriminatory culture that affirms heterosexuality and systematically attempts to push non-normative sexualities to the fringe of society. This makes me question whether full inclusion is ever possible. Unless there is a radical counterpublic that reawakens the tactics demonstrated by the activists of ACT UP and Gran Fury, repressive powers will continue to dominate the cultural fields.

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[1] Sarah Kate Ellis, *Where We Are on TV: GLAAD's Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion*, comp. Zeke Stokes, Ray Bradford, and Megan Townsend, research report no. 12, accessed December 15, 2017, http://glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT_GLAAD_2016-2017.pdf.

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