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RED, WHITE, AND GAY?: AMERICAN IDENTITY, WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX, AND  
PINK POLICING

by

MARIK XAVIER-BRIER

Under the Direction of Wendy Simonds, PhD

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine the internal divisions in LGBT/Q communities. I illustrate how the notion of a single, unified community is not only fictive, but counter to the goals of liberation. Utilizing critical discourse analysis, I examine cultural artifacts of the contemporary gay rights movement to determine who has the power to shape domestic and international gay rights discourse. I analyze the role of gay citizenship through the same-sex marriage debates, the creation of the homonational soldier, and how gay rights is employed in international conflicts to strategically promote some countries as progressive, while denouncing others as backwards. I argue that the gay rights movement does not address the needs of all members of LGBT/Q communities, but rather, focuses on the wants of the elite and privileged. Despite recent advances, the gay rights movement has been stunted by a limited and marginalizing focus on normalization. Lastly, I present a queer perspective on gay rights and reimagine a movement that is more courageous and inclusive.

INDEX WORDS: Homonormativity, Queer, LGBT Rights, Homonationalism, Sexual  
Citizenship

RED, WHITE, AND GAY?: AMERICAN IDENTITY, WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX, AND  
PINK POLICING

by

MARIK XAVIER-BRIER

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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2016

RED, WHITE, AND GAY?: AMERICAN IDENTITY, WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX, AND  
PINK POLICING

by

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August 2016

## **DEDICATION**

To all the queers who live boldly, beautifully and unapologetically. And for those whose lives have been cut too short. Let's recreate the world together.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Irreconcilable Differences .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 Key Concepts.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>1.2.1 Homonormativity .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>1.2.2 Neoliberalism .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>1.2.3 Neocolonialism.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>1.2.4 Homonationalism.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<b>1.3 A Theoretical Map .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.4 (Re)thinking Community .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>1.4.1 The Issue with “We” .....</i>	<i>14</i>
<b>1.5 Data Collection and Methods.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>1.6 Layout of the dissertation.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LGBT/Q RIGHTS MOVEMENT.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>2.1 The Split.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<i>2.1.1 AIDS Crisis.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<b>2.2 Current LGBT/Q politics .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3 GOING TO THE CHAPEL: GAY RIGHTS GETS HITCHED.....</b>	<b>48</b>



<b>3.1</b>	<b>Context of the Gay Marriage Debate .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.1.1</b>	<b><i>Proposition 8 .....</i></b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Gay Marriage Enters the Culture Wars .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Gay Rights as Cultural Capital .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>3.3.1</b>	<b><i>Capitalism and Gay Rights .....</i></b>	<b>91</b>
<b>3.3.2</b>	<b><i>Gay Rights and Symbolism .....</i></b>	<b>101</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Marriage is a Conservative Value .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>GAYS GO TO WAR AND THE CREATION OF THE HOMONATIONAL SOLIDER .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>History of Gays in the Military .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>4.1.1</b>	<b><i>Don't Ask, Don't Tell.....</i></b>	<b>121</b>
<b>4.1.2</b>	<b><i>After DADT .....</i></b>	<b>127</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Stand and Deliver.....</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Homonational Soldiers .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>HOMO-COLLUSION AND THE LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE STATE.....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>American Exceptionalism .....</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>5.1.1</b>	<b><i>United Nations Declaration .....</i></b>	<b>156</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Sexual Exceptionalism .....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>5.2.1</b>	<b><i>War on Terror .....</i></b>	<b>165</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>White Savior Industrial Complex.....</b>	<b>174</b>

5.3.1	<i>Sochi</i> .....	175
5.3.2	<i>Uganda</i> .....	183
5.4	<b>Pinkwashing</b> .....	199
6	<b>QUEER (RE)IMAGININGS</b> .....	209
6.1	<b>What Bodies Belong?</b> .....	212
6.1.1	<i>Bringing The Battles Together</i> .....	215
6.2	<b>Moving Forward</b> .....	218
	<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	222

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 4.1 dailymail.co.uk, 23 December 2011 .....	131
Figure 4.2 dailymail.co.uk, 29 February 2012 .....	131
Figure 4.3 ethansays, October 2008.....	134
Figure 5.1 BBC, 10 November 2014 .....	192
Figure 5.2 gaytvlguide .....	200
Figure 5.3 iran180, 2012 .....	201
Figure 5.4 Lucas Entertainment, 2009 .....	202

## 1 INTRODUCTION

“VICTORY!! VICTORY!!” I heard the shouts before I saw where they were coming from. While talking with a friend who worked the door at a popular gay bar in East Atlanta, I saw a group of folks walking up to join the growing line that had already formed to get in to celebrate the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage. I looked around at the smiles of the excited patrons. The man who was previously yelling was dressed in an ill-fitting, somewhat deconstructed wedding dress with matching veil, and he carried a bouquet of faux flowers. Tonight everyone at the bar was out to celebrate. As I looked around before quickly slipping inside, I wondered why didn't I feel the same excitement? I wanted to be just as happy as everyone else, yet something held me back. Later, my friends and I headed to a less populated bar, yet we still were bombarded by celebrants decked out in dizzying amounts of rainbow swag: necklaces, flags, tutus, and wigs. Throughout the bar people laughed and drank, as the muted television flashed varying reactions to the day's historic events. I chuckled softly to myself and scoffed aloud to the table, “I wish I could be that happy.” The others laughed and said they shared my sentiment. While we were happy that marriage now included lesbian and gay couples throughout the U.S., but perhaps it was recognizing that the fervor surrounding gay rights had been wasted on something that did not greatly affect us. We quietly shared a moment of sadness, because we recognized how alone we felt in the midst of our own “community.”

As a southern queer activist and scholar, I want to interrogate current events occurring in the United States regarding the gay rights movement. On one hand, I, like many of my friends, watched anxiously as judiciary officials debated the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and I marched on the streets of San Francisco with fellow queers and allies to demonstrate our frustration with the Proposition 8 legislation. I remember when DOMA was declared

unconstitutional, the media flashed many images of lesbians and gay men all over the country as they waved their rainbow flags in celebration. Like that night outside the bar, I still struggled to accept the legislation as a “victory.” While I acknowledged the successes accomplished by overturning the law—because I do think that lesbians and gays should be able to marry if they want to—what kept me from celebrating then, and what keeps me from celebrating now is one poignant question: what, if anything, are we helping? Why focus on gaining marriage rights and the federal benefits associated with them, when so many pressing issues persist? Further, why do gays seek inclusion within an institution deeply rooted in notions of capitalism, property rights and misogyny (Conrad 2010, Spade and Willse 2013, Sycamore 2008)?

### **1.1 Irreconcilable Differences**

The purpose of my study is to offer a queer critique of the lesbian and gay movement. While the media typically refers to the lesbian and gay community as a unified group, I do not support this perception. There are many LGBT/Q communities with vastly different ideologies that are too often collapsed into an imagined, singular LGBT “community.” As such, throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the LGBT/Q community as *communities* to better highlight the divisions within these groups. However, I do recognize that quotations from activists, politicians, and other scholars may refer to the LGBT community as a singular entity and use this reductive form. I believe this conceptualization may elucidate significant theoretical underpinnings that will be crucial to my argument. I hypothesize that the message of gay rights may not be one of acceptance or equality, but rather, about supporting nationalist and imperialist campaigns, both within and outside LGBT/Q communities. I hope to identify divisions within the LGBT/Q community and center this project not on the voices of mainstream lesbians and gays, which we often hear and privilege, but rather on the voices of the marginalized and oppressed. In this

dissertation, I suggest that gay rights' discourse now promotes a national propaganda message often tied to capitalist and imperial strategies and wielded by the nation-state to appear more open-minded, liberal, and progressive. Additionally, I investigate the extent to which the support for gay rights are employed as a new global barometer to measure countries as either "progressive" or "barbaric" (Puar 2007); these distinctions, however, do little to change the systemic issues faced by individuals within LGBT/Q communities.

In this dissertation, I focus on how queering these debates highlights the ways in which lesbians and gays have been complicit with the agendas presented within mainstream understandings of LGBT/Q communities and institutions. Contemporary representations of the lesbian and gay community often focus on the most mainstream members of communities seeking integration into heteronormative society through protesting for rights such as same-sex marriage, social security and health benefits, and adoption rights. However, I hope to offer an alternative message to the homonormative (defined below) direction of the gay rights movement. Thus, I will not be examining individuals' identities and how they operate within the community; rather, I will investigate how these battles for rights operate at the institutional level, and I will utilize them to critique the politics of the LGBT/Q movement. Queer scholars have argued that while studying issues of equality, liberation, and discrimination on an individual level is important, much of the scholarship has lacked analyses concerning how these issues function on the institutional level (Duggan 2003, Green 2002, Seidman 1996, Stein and Plummer 1996). Therefore, I will explore how the role of the nation-state affects arguments for supporting gay rights and citizenship. I will offer a nuanced discussion about how gay rights is now deployed by several nation-states (such as the U.S., Israel, Russia, and Uganda) and how the mainstream gay rights movement's objectives may function in collusion with these states' goals.

## 1.2 Key Concepts

To purposefully discuss how discourse about the gay rights movement is intertwined with questions of power in national and international debates, I will present an initial discussion of the key terms used in the subsequent analysis. My aim is to offer definitions of the concepts “homonormativity,” “neoliberalism,” “homonationalism,” and “neocolonialism,” as well as a discussion of the relationship between these terms.

### 1.2.1 *Homonormativity*

Before addressing homonormativity, I need to define heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity, according to Schilt and Westbrook (2009) is the “suite of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex, and that only sexual attractions between these ‘opposite’ genders is natural and acceptable” (441). Moreover, it refers to the privileging of hegemonic structures that govern society—the gender binary, patriarchy, monogamy, white supremacy, and transphobia. Michael Warner (1993) first popularized the term to reference the assumption that every person is straight. By building upon Gayle Rubin’s (1975) sex/gender system and Adrienne Rich’s (1986) theory of compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity represents the basic assumption that heterosexuality is the only natural sexual identity possible, hence socially privileging those who fit this norm and positioning anyone else as abnormal, deviant, or wrong. White supremacy is a fundamental component of heteronormativity because it is defined through the experiences of whiteness and maleness, thus all other masculinities and racial identities are disavowed or marginalized.

Duggan (2003) extended the theory of heteronormativity to discuss how these practices also operate within the gay community. She coined the term homonormativity to describe a

political direction of the lesbian and gay movement that focuses on monogamy, procreation, and traditional gender identities and performance (Duggan 2003). She argues that homonormativity is a “form of neoliberal sexual politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2003:50). Homonormativity refers to the sexual and gender policing that occurs within LGBT/Q communities. The concept explains how some members of LGBT/Q communities can perpetuate values, beliefs, and assumptions that contribute to the subjugation and marginalization of other members of LGBT/Q communities. Due to the societal privileging of heteronormativity, those who subscribe to its ideals reap political and economic benefits because they assimilate into conventional society. Thus, homonormativity rewards those who mirror heteronormative standards and establishes a hierarchy within LGBT/Q communities based on how well its members subscribe to mainstream ideological values.

Homonormativity signifies how privilege and representation create problems within the contemporary gay rights movement. The concept embodies gay aspirations of acceptance in existing political, economic, and social institutions (Duggan 2003). Homonormativity explains how aspects of LGBT/Q communities can perpetuate and reify normative assumptions, values, and behaviors and create divisions among members. Hence, for those members who support heteronormative culture, they will experience more acceptance than those who do not subscribe to mainstream ideals. These divisions in LGBT/Q communities are especially prevalent as they intersect with white privilege, capitalism, sexism, transmisogyny, and cissexism. Lastly, it describes the problematic role of corporate interests and consumerism within LGBT/Q spaces and politics.



### ***1.2.2 Neoliberalism***

Neoliberalism is often understood as an ideology and a model for economic policies that emphasize free market competition and values laissez faire economics. Neoliberalism draws upon the principles of neoclassical economics and suggests that governments should reduce deficit spending, limit subsidies, reform tax law, favor free trade, privatization of social services, minimize government involvement in the market and business, and reduce social welfare expenditures. While many focus on the economic aspects of neoliberalism, it is crucial to understand how these policies affect social and cultural structures as well. Duggan (2003) argues that despite neoliberal politicians' and policymakers' "overt rhetoric of separation between economic policy on the one hand, and political and cultural life on the other, [they] have never actually separated these domains in practice" (Duggan 2003:XIV). Thus, neoliberal economic policies in the U.S. have relied heavily on identity and cultural politics (Duggan 2003).

One of the central goals of neoliberal politics has been to attack the coalescing of social justice movements or movements of "downward redistribution" especially those of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Civil Rights, Black Power, Feminist, Lesbian and Gay Liberation) (Duggan 2003). The ideological underpinnings of neoliberalism promote individualism and competition, so within this framework from the 1980s forward, fights for equality have focused on gaining individual rights (e.g., marriage) versus collective rights (e.g., universal health care). Specifically investigating the gay rights movement, Elia and Yep (2012) posit that neoliberalism creates the illusion of societal acceptance for LGBT/Q communities due to the increased visibility provided through consumerism; however, this superficial acceptance firmly keeps oppressive structures (e.g., heterosexism, cisnormativity) uninvestigated and untouched.

In addition, neoliberalism promises the idea of human rights and equality; however, under the actual implementation of neoliberal policies, it is impossible. Specifically, because neoliberal policies are built upon a system that promotes corporate profits, capitalistic endeavors, and dismantling social welfare programs. Costas Douzinas (2013) argues that “social and political systems become hegemonic by turning their ideological priorities into universal principles and values” that all citizens are expected to support (58). Therefore, scholars argue that politicians use human rights discourse as a platform to spread neoliberalist thought, capitalism, and colonialist goals instead of working to end institutional discrimination and inequality across the globe (Morgensen 2010, Puar 2007, Puar and Mikdashi 2012, Schotten and Maikey 2012, Schulman 2012). Thus, in this era of neoliberal hegemony, when human rights discourse is invoked as an agent of social change it becomes problematic because developed nations use it as justifications for “civilizing” or “peace-keeping” missions launched against developing nations (Atanasoski 2013, Duggan 2003, Schulman 2012).

### ***1.2.3 Neocolonialism***

Due to the global spread of neoliberal ideologies, neocolonialist practices become a mechanism employed by the West onto parts of the developing world. Post-colonialist theorists argue that colonialist ideologies and practices are often justified in the name of “Western humanism,” because the West sees itself as the core of civilization, reason, and progressiveness. Therefore, Europe and the United States believe it is their duty and destiny to spread enlightenment and progress throughout the rest of the world (Seidman 2004). I utilize the concept of neocolonialism in this project to reference the practice of external control primarily through the economic manipulation (e.g., threatening to withdraw aid, coercive aid conditioning) of developing nations by developed nations, which impose Western politics onto non-Western

nations (Morgensen 2010, Puar 2007, Schulman 2012). I seek to illustrate and expose the central ideologies and the praxis of neocolonialism and neoliberalism related to gay rights discourse.

#### ***1.2.4 Homonationalism***

Homonationalism is a concept developed by Jasbir Puar (2007) to critique the liberal discourse and connection between the nation-state and mainstream gay lives, while separating racial-sexual others from national identity. She originally coined the term to analyze “the complexities of how ‘acceptance’ and ‘tolerance’ for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated” (Puar 2013a:336). Western countries use homosexuality and ideas of tolerance as a marker for national and cultural identity and as an indicator of progressiveness, even though many of these same countries have endemic issues of homophobia (Bracke 2012, Puar 2007). Homonationalism plays a central role in exposing how human rights discourse is utilized to extend Western imperialism by exposing the “collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national rhetoric of patriotic inclusion and by gay queer subjects” (Puar 2007:39).

Homonationalism is also used as a strategy to challenge the racial and sexual hierarchy that establishes “queer” as synonymous with “white”; and “straight” being synonymous as “non-white”: because, through this structure, queerness equals whiteness and queers of color experience marginalization within LGBT/Q communities (Puar 2007). Therefore, the concept of homonationalism is used to critique liberal discourse and the connections between the nation-state and mainstream gay lives, while separating racial-sexual “others” from national identity. This construction of queerness works to deny the existence of a racialized gay subject, which produces a particular type of homophobic nationalism. Puar (2013a) calls the organized response

to homophobic nationalism a type of homonationalism, referring to a gay agenda that seeks to identify with the normative values of the state in an attempt to claim sexual citizenship. Thus, as lesbians and gays seek to normalize, they are allowed to reinsert themselves into state discourse as “good citizens,” often through invoking heteronormative nationalistic claims to power.

Puar and Rai (2002) argues that the United States (and other Western countries) create a space for specific gay bodies (e.g., white, upper-middle class) to be recruited and incorporated into the nation-building project through the promise of citizenship rights, protections, and recognition of personhood. Further, she argues that this process not only allows for the management of homosexual bodies but also normalizes and disciplines them. In doing so, “the state bestows the benefits of intimate citizenship in return for a patriotic gay subjectivity that supports the nation’s political, cultural, and economic projects” (Carson 2013:5). This promise of citizenship is contingent upon lesbians and gays’ assimilation into the heteronormative and racist models of American respectability. These assimilated and respectable gay bodies then become transformed and disciplined into “docile patriots” (Puar and Rai 2002), and the U.S. can flaunt this achievement (that is packaged as equality) to the world, thus effectively positioning itself as a progressive and modern nation. Therefore, the homosexual body becomes a tool for “U.S. sexual exceptionalism” (Puar 2007).

Specific to gay rights, we witness the rhetoric of sexual exceptionalism in recent Western LGBT/Q activism deployed against homophobic policies around the world (e.g., the Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda, the protesting of the Sochi Olympics). This activism hinges upon creating monolithic images of a homophobic and barbaric citizenry, while promoting non-Western countries as violent and hateful. We now observe “gay rights as human rights” discourse operating in a way to establish power relationships between nations and condone state-

sanctioned violence (e.g., invasion, withholding aid) in the name of “rescuing the gays.” Therefore, it becomes the role of the “liberated” white, gay Westerner to save foreign gays from their “savage” and “primitive” cultures. These dichotomous representations emerge alongside the image of the neo-imperialist savior as the white gay activist who “carries the white man’s burden of gay liberation” (Bracke 2012, Morgensen 2010). This neo-imperialist gay savior presumes that not only do “brown gays” need rescuing from their oppressive cultures, but also gays need rescuing from homophobia. Thus, the U.S. and other Western countries can portray themselves as “pro-gay” and become the saviors of the gay community. In doing so, they can maintain not only Western moral superiority and power, but also establish Western gays as saviors and the “brown gays” or “racialized-others” as helpless victims.

### **1.3 A Theoretical Map**

Scholars argue that most sociological research on lesbians and gays focuses on bettering individuals’ lives, but has failed to examine the connections between the gay rights movement and the hegemony of heterosexuality, and has largely been silent in challenging heteronormativity (Epstein 2006, Seidman 1996, Ward 2008). Queer politics, and by extension queer theory, work in tandem with a poststructural critique of mainstream, normative gay politics. (Seidman 2004) argues that poststructuralism can act as the theoretical framework for queer politics and resistance by focusing on the ways identities operate and denote power. Queer theorists argue that even if scholars work toward the objective of equal rights, in the end, they not only reproduce how sexuality is conceptualized, but they also reify how society reaffirms the differences imputed onto sexual categories (Eng, Halberstam and Munoz 2005, Seidman 1996, Warner 1999).

Over a decade ago, Stein and Plummer (1996) proposed the need for a “more queer sociology.” They argued a queer sociology would be “more critical of its categories, would consider the way knowledges, including sociology, shape sexual and social orders, and would take seriously the texts of mass culture” (17). A queer sociology would not only analyze the socially constructed nature of the hetero/homo binary but it would also integrate the focus of discourse found in queer studies with a sociological perspective on social institutions (Seidman 1996). Further, Seidman (1996) asserted that sociologists could bring an “analysis of the institutional formation of desire and identity, the interrelation of knowledges, discourses and social structure, the cultural dynamics of purity and pollution, and the shaping of movements and civil society to queer theory and queer work” (24). So it is in this spirit that I ground my work, with the hope of extending the bridge between queer theory and sociology. It is my attempt to develop “hybrid knowledges” or “social knowledges” that are interdisciplinary in nature, while also “postdisciplinary” to better understand our multicultural, global world (Seidman 1996:24).

I position this work as a poststructuralist critique within the field of sociology. I choose to align myself with theorists who argue theory itself is multidisciplinary, if not “postdisciplinary” (Leavy 2014, Sayer 1999, Seidman 2004). In order to properly examine and explain what we are seeing, we have to rely on multiple theoretical perspectives and grapple with the complexities of the postmodern global world. Seidman (2004) argues that, for scholars to see the multifaceted connections of social life, we must look at theoretical problems as clustered debates and conceptualize theories in a postdisciplinary fashion.

A chief domain of struggle in a poststructuralist critique is how to deal with the multiple sites of cultural production, such as “high-brow” literary work, peer-reviewed scholarly work, and popular culture. Thus, I want to show that how knowledge is created and disseminated is, in

fact, a political act. I want to demonstrate that *how* discourse is distributed informs the public's ideas and perceptions about the gay rights movement and the gay community. This project analyzes the creation of the central gay figure as the assimilated and largely normalized subject who assumes the power to speak on behalf of the community. My intention is to document the discursive creation of this central gay figure as it operates within the sexual and gender binary. Further, I seek to deconstruct this figure's centrality, challenge the dependency of the hetero/homo binary, and expose the instability and susceptibility of the gay subject so it can be subverted and challenged.

#### **1.4 (Re)thinking Community**

For this study, utilizing an intersectional perspective is crucial. Historically the LGBT/Q movement has employed an identity-based politic (Epstein 2006, Seidman 2004, Warner 1999), which inevitably privileges particular voices and messages while disavowing others. This identity-based model cannot (by definition) examine the intersection of identities nor fight to stop discrimination on multiple levels. One of the critiques often used against the mainstream gay organizations are their inability to see the multiple levels of oppressions that members of the community face. I posit the contemporary rhetoric of gay rights is the message of white, middle or upper-middle class, cisgendered, normative individuals who set the discourse for the movement both nationally and globally.

Patton (1993) building on the work of Bourdieu, argues there is a "field of power" that refers to a "domain in which there are shifting, ongoing, and appropriative constructions of difference" (148). These different fields embody different positions of power, and have differing levels of privilege and persuasion to shape discourse and policy. We see these fields of power operating in the division between assimilated, homonormative lesbians and gays versus queers.

While both groups are concerned with equal rights, social justice holds vastly different meanings for them. Further, these fields are seen in the hierarchy between normalization and resistance, because society ultimately rewards assimilation. The schisms between the mainstream lesbian and gay community and queer community becomes evident in the political rhetoric used by mainstream gay organizations that disavow and ignore queer activism, claiming that queer strategies run counter to the image of the respectable gay citizen. One of the central issues in these divisions is that *queer* is inherently messy and grounded in an anti-identity politic based in poststructuralist conceptualization of identities. Hence, queer citizenship would be unintelligible to most because it does not abide by the rules that govern heteronormative society.

My central focus in this dissertation is to reveal how knowledge is being disseminated and constructed; thus, it is crucial to employ the work of scholars who demonstrate how Western thought is privileged throughout the world (Anzaldúa 1999, Davis 2007, Mohanty Talpade 2004, Morgensen 2010, Parpart and Zalewski 2008). Even though there have been many challenges to Western hegemony, Western thought is still the prevailing dominant discourse globally. Said (1978) argues that we must examine the power of discourse concerning how we construct our cultural narratives and the relationships between nations and man-made geographical boundaries. Although cultures existed long before Western thought, made them, the idea of the foreign other is a discursive construct set by dominant Western discourse. Nevertheless, it is not just *the other* that is being constructed. Just like every other cultural entity, we are crafted and shaped by language, discourse, practices, and beliefs. By establishing the dichotomy of *the other*, we can distance ourselves from *them* and create a sense of *us*. The same discourse that shapes *the other* also shapes the perceptions of *us*; but this does not ignore the very real fact that the othering discourse is grounded in racist, sexist, heteronormative, and ethnocentric idioms and ideas (Puar



2005, Said 1978). The creation and understanding of *the other* is particularly pertinent in my project. I investigate how modern ideas of *the other* are being constructed in the media and by Western LGBT/Q organizations and used to perpetuate discrimination.

#### ***1.4.1 The Issue with “We”***

In contemporary debates in the United States, there is a growing fracture between members in LGBT/Q communities concerning the goals that the gay rights movement strives to accomplish. Too often in public discourse, members of LGBT/Q communities are conceptualized as unified in their fight for rights. When these divisions are elucidated, members are often illustrated in dichotomous terms, suggesting that you are either normative or queer. Differences within either of these categorizations inherently exist. However, previous literature demonstrates that there are clear divisions between messages espoused by gay assimilation groups and those by queer or revolutionary groups (Eng et al. 2005, Goldsmith 2012, Sycamore 2008, Sycamore 2012, Warner 1993). Through my analysis, I will demonstrate how this division has increased over time. Mainstream gays, lesbians, bisexuals, queers, and transgender folks may all belong to the broad LGBT/Q community; however, they can embody vastly different stances concerning politics, advocacy, and social justice.

On one side of the debate, mainstream members of the LGBT/Q community subscribe to similar structures and values that govern heteronormative society. Duggan (2003) argues that these members align with the structures comprising heteronormativity. Heteronormativity refers to the privileging of hegemonic structures that govern society (e.g., the gender binary, patriarchy, monogamy, white supremacy, and transphobia). Therefore, homonormativity refers to individuals in LGBT/Q communities who aspire to the normative goals of society. Thus, homonormativity works to establish a hierarchy within LGBT/Q communities based on levels of

subscription to a specific mainstream presentation and mainstream values. On the other side of the debate, there are individuals who choose to actively speak out against mainstream politics and seek to destabilize social institutions, power structures, and the gender binary. These individuals are characterized as working against the structures of heteronormativity and homonormativity with the hope of destabilizing the status quo.

When speaking about LGBT/Q politics, individuals often synonymize the words “queer” and “gay.” Gamson (1995) warns that, for many writers, queer becomes easy shorthand for LGBT/Q and erases the hierarchy, power structures, and differences embodied by these different groups. Similar to how the term “people of color” has become an inclusive, yet homogenizing shorthand that erases differences for a long list of ethnic, national, and racial groups (Gamson 1995). Thus, when queerness becomes shorthand for gay, the potential for queer politics—in order to normalize queer—is limited through the manipulation of these discursive devices.

Previous literature thoroughly documents the struggle to operationalize the term “queer” (Eng et al. 2005, Gamson 1995, Seidman 1996, Sycamore 2008); therefore, I must distinguish my use of this term. For this project, I do not focus on the sexual identity of individuals who identify as queer. However, like early queer activists, I do hold onto the radical potential of queer sexuality. This study will utilize the conceptualization of queer as those who subscribe to a political movement invested in anti-identity politics and anti-oppression social justice activism that purposefully separates itself from the normalizing trends of the contemporary gay rights movement. Therefore, the term queer can be used as a way to identify oneself as *not* gay and a conscious way to align oneself with a politic distinct from the mainstream gay rights agenda.

Thus, gay and queer are not interchangeable and they hold distinctively different meanings for members of the LGBT/Q community. However, due to the common discursive

practice by the media, organizations, and government bodies to lump all LGBT/Q people together, queer individuals are often folded into the broader community “gay community” and queer struggles (e.g., fighting against racism, colonialism, neoliberalism) are not even understood to be gay issues because these struggles focus on more than just sexuality. Therefore, these queer struggles are erased as “gay” and “queer” are combined into a singularity and absorbed into one mainstream gay politic. In this project, I hope to show the complications and contradictions in the conflation of a unified community. It is important to note, that even within the categorization of “queers” or “mainstream LGBT” there are differences, especially in relation to power and privilege. The conceptualizing of a diverse group of people under one identity category exposes the shortcomings of identity politics.

The concept of identity politics has come to signify a wide range of political mobilizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice by members of social groups. Generally, it is the political argument that those with similar identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) will experience the world in similar ways and have similar political goals due to this shared identity. Proponents of identity politics argues that “it is politically transformative to associate with people who confront the same life circumstances...[and] organizing around the identity may help their feelings of self-worth” (Ryan 2009:40). Critics contend that while there may be strength in a collective identity, this strategy tends to erase differences within groups (Crenshaw 1991). For example, investigating social issues affecting transgender individuals, one cannot argue that all transgender people will hold similar ideas about social and political issues. There are transgender people who hold very heteronormative beliefs and embrace the goals of assimilation while others embody a much queerer politic and resist this normalization of the LGBT/Q community.

As with any group that is discussed collectively, there will be variations within both the “mainstream” and the “queer” groups. I recognize that these two different groups are inherently complex and that establishing them as a dichotomy oversimplifies the debate. I have built my research project on the literature surrounding the gay rights movement, which often utilizes the same dichotomous relationship between mainstream lesbians and gays and queers. So throughout the project, when I refer to either the “mainstream” or “queer” perspective, this categorization is more focused on the politics and discourse (as either normative or queer) espoused by people that will bind them together. Lastly, since individuals do not typically refer to themselves as “assimilationist” or “mainstream,” I will refer to those who embody the normative politic as merely lesbian or gay.

In my investigation of the discursive construction of the gay rights movement and the media’s representation of the community, the distinctions between what I will call the mainstream contingency of the community opposed to the queer contingent are quite obvious. However, when investigating the media portrayal of the political objectives of the gay rights movement, I found that the majority of the coverage on LGBT/Q communities show a unified and cohesive community with all members sharing the same goal. Therefore, in this dissertation, the way I conceptualize and utilize “gay” and “queer” in this dissertation does not necessarily line up with how the words are used in mainstream parlance. I deconstruct the illusion of a unified LGBT/Q community and expose the divisions that lie within. I will argue that fissures between mainstream lesbians and gays and queers exist on a political and institutional level, however these categorizations do not necessarily apply to how individuals self-identify. Thus, my analysis does not focus on how individuals understand or deal with gay rights issues, but

rather, I will examine how the fight for gay rights figures into national and international debates and discourses.

While analyzing the direction of the gay rights movement over the past several years, I have participated in many arguments with gay friends about the trajectory of the LGBT/Q community, and I have witnessed many straight friends discuss their surprised about my skepticism concerning gay progress. I position this dissertation alongside other queer voices which critique the trajectory of the gay rights movement, but may be less recognized in more formalized sources (e.g., the academy, mainstream media). I want to delve into the concept of the margins. I want to discover how the messages of anti-assimilation that are not backed by the large gay organizations sustain and maintain themselves, and discover where they happen. Many queer activists have critiqued the gay rights movement's direction for some time, but their voices are less often heard in the academy and in the media. This project occurs during a critical time for LGBT/Q communities, as we see an increased acceptance of lesbians and gays and witness them gaining more rights in many societal institutions; and the academy is also developing more "Lesbian and Gay Studies" programs and minors. While this growing societal acceptance of LGBT/Q people is positive on some levels, from other perspectives, it may be a bit troublesome.

Halperin (2003) argues that the academy has "absorbed" and co-opted queer theory, transforming it into something "unqueer." Halperin (2003) states that de Lauretis started using the term *queer* to mean something purposefully disruptive, with the hope of "unsettling the complacency of 'Lesbian and Gay Studies'...which implied that the relation of lesbian to gay male topics in this emerging field was equitable, perfectly balanced, and completely understood" (Halperin 2003:340). Therefore, the use of queer was meant to challenge the homogenizing discourse of homosexual difference and to offer a possible escape from the hegemony of white,

male, middle-class models of analysis (Halperin 2003:340). So, what happens when queer is too often used as shorthand for gay or lesbian, and thus stripped of its once radical potential, and loses its ability to challenge the social order?

I believe there is a place for queer critiques and the radical potential for queer politics in the academy and beyond, but we may have to look further than just the “formal” or traditional avenues that often define our disciplines. With these things in mind, I asked myself the following question: if large corporations, government bodies, and organizations all back the dominant discourse of assimilation, how can the alternative messages survive? More importantly, how can these queer messages, which are ignored by mainstream media, exist beyond the echo chambers of the internet? How, therefore, can we integrate a queer, anti-assimilation argument for sexual and social justice into public discourse that is acknowledged and privileged as much as the normalizing rhetoric that dominates public and institutional knowledge about the LGBT/Q community? Though I hope to answer these questions, I also want to resist the urge to further homogenize or institutionalize the essence of queer potential. The paradox embedded in this desire to write a queer dissertation is clear: no sooner are these queer knowledges or what may be called “illegitimate knowledges” (Foucault 1976) brought to light, does their radical potential risk becoming codified, colonized, and de-radicalized through being assimilated and institutionalized.

These distinctions are more than just a matter of semantics. I argue that there are important distinctions between ascribing to a gay politic versus a queer politic that need to be made, especially as the LGBT/Q community becomes more prominent in national and international politics. Throughout the project, I consciously use the term “gay rights” instead of the more popular term “LGBT rights.” Following queer scholar and activist Mattilda Bernstein

Sycamore, who argues “‘LGBT’ usually means gay with a lesbian in parentheses, throws out the bisexuals, and puts trans on for a little window-dressing” (Sycamore n.d.), I show that gay rights too often center on gay men. Bernstein’s assertion highlights how media discussions about “gay rights” are too often concentrated on the lack of rights for married gay couples and rarely on discrimination against queer people of color, transgender people, and gender non-normative people (Sycamore n.d.). Thus, in this project I analyze how the media discursively and visually constructs the “gay rights movement” for both the heterosexual and homosexual public.

Not only is this project timely in current U.S. politics and culture, but it also holds significance as acceptance for lesbian and gay communities grows around the world. Though polls show a steady increase of support for lesbians and gays and their rights, I argue that this acceptance is limited to a specific segment of LGBT/Q communities. Therefore, when I refer to the “mainstream gay community” I am generally referring to middle- and upper-class white men and women who hold traditional ideas about family, monogamy, and gender presentation. These groups actively embody the motto of “we’re just like you” and aspire to assimilate into mainstream, hegemonic heteronormative culture.

With these global changes about gay rights, the question arises: where does queerness enter the conversation? In my experience as a queer-identified person and also a sociologist, I find that queerness represents something other than sexual identity, and many queers have little in common with mainstream gays or lesbians. In many cases, a queer person may enter the LGBT/Q community because of same-sex attraction or because they embody a gender identity more complicated than what heteronormative society allows, and they seek others who share similar experiences and/or identities. However, the embodied otherness that a queer person experiences is incomparable to the relative privilege that many gay people experience; and these

differences of privilege are especially prominent along racial, gendered, and class lines. Hence, for many queers, the term *queer* itself takes on a symbolic and important distinction.

The queer movement tends to focus on the complex and systemic issues affecting people who exist outside the normative boundaries of the gay rights movement. For instance, there is a need for the mainstream lesbian and gay movement to address the multitude of issues that affect the most marginalized and subjugated members of LGBT/Q communities, such as the predatory policies of the prison-industrial complex, and the experiences of violence often faced by young transwomen of color, the stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS, or the increasingly violent detaining and deportation policies against immigrants. Other issues often overlooked by the mainstream gay community include how racial and class privilege confer unseen advantages in society, access to social services, and health-care. For many self-identified queers, claiming *queer* becomes an act of outward defiance and critique, and embodies the claim that (as one queer writer states) is “about more than being gay or straight, it is about the fucked up system and where I reside within it” (Faucette 2012). However, I do not want to portray the queer community as a place devoid of racist, ableist, imperialist, transphobic, and classist actions. There are plenty of individuals within the queer community who may claim *queer* because they feel like they are transgressive, but do not recognize how their privilege perpetuates systems of oppression.

## **1.5 Data Collection and Methods**

As LGBT/Q rights legislation becomes more politicized, it has increasingly become a common topic of conversation, it is important to examine the dominant discourses molding these debates. Understanding the discourses shaping the gay rights movement requires a methodological framework capable of analyzing the relationship between the role of power and



the production of knowledge, which I believe lies at the center of my core questions. The focus on discourse is crucial because it frames, for the members of LGBT/Q communities and the mainstream public, their understanding of these debates. This project centers on how the rules of power and the power of discourses are distributed, circulated, and acknowledged as true. Thus, it becomes increasingly important to examine the production of this discourse, by asking questions such as: who is given the right to speak for entire communities? Also, who is silenced? Which debates enter the public discourse, and which remain on the sidelines? I ground my analysis in examining the power of discourse and how this discourse not only shapes people's opinions and their ideas about LGBT/Q communities as a whole, but also how the discourse of equality and progress shapes national and international policies.

In this dissertation, I utilize critical discourse analysis (CDA). As a methodology, critical discourse analysis examines how socially produced ideas and objects are created and sustained. CDA is the systematic study of texts and other social artifacts to find evidence of meaning and discover how this meaning translates into social reality (Hardy, Hardy and Phillips 2004). Unlike other qualitative methodologies that seek to understand the meaning of social reality for individuals, critical discourse analysts attempt to uncover the original production of any particular reality (Hardy et al. 2004, Laffey and Weldes 2004).

Discourse analysis examines textual meanings in relation to other texts and practices of production, dissemination, and consumption. Similar to grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), data collection is not a specific phase that needs to be completed before analysis begins. There is little focus on how discourse analysis meets the classical criteria" of methods such as reliability, validity, and objectivity. Rather, this methodology uses a criterion of "completeness" or saturation when evaluating social artifacts (Wodak and Meyer 2009).

Critical discourse analysis differs from discourse analysis because the former specifically integrates the role of power relations in discourse, where the latter focuses more on the construction of the discourse. Thus, researchers utilizing CDA focus on how elite groups and institutions enact, legitimize, and reproduce dominance through social artifacts. Van Dijk (1993) argues that critical discourse analysts look at the relationship between power and discourse to examine how different social groups have access to public discourse; therefore, “CDA aims to investigate social inequality, critically as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)” (Wodak and Meyer 2009:10).

CDA allows researchers to investigate the relations between discourse, power, social inequality, and the analyst’s positionality within social relationships (Van Dijk 1993). The process of critical discourse analysis focuses “on the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (Van Dijk 1993:249). Researchers need to be aware of their social positions and understand the social, economic, and political motives driving their work (Hardy et al. 2004, Van Dijk 1993, Wodak and Meyer 2009); therefore, reflexivity becomes paramount to critical discourse analysts. True to poststructuralist thought, this methodology can be used to examine “top-down” power relations or “bottom-up” strategies of resistance, compliance, and acceptance. It is also imperative to look at the dissemination of power and how power (and its abuse) can be jointly produced (Foucault 1977). If we accept that power encompasses more than just following direct orders (as Foucault argues), then we need to understand how power perpetuates social inequalities on the micro and macro-levels (Foucault 1977). Van Dijk (1993) argues that to understand how discourse aids in the reproduction of dominance and inequality, critical discourse analysts need to look at the role of social reproduction in the minds of social actors.

One of the greatest challenges in critical discourse analysis involves establishing the “boundaries” of texts for analysis (Crawford 2004). Since there are thousands of news articles and websites discussing the politics of gay rights, it was not possible to analyze all of the documents about gay rights for this study. Therefore, I focused my research within a specific timeframe and my analysis covers contemporary media sources from January 2008 until September 2014. I began collecting social artifacts from 2008 due to highly publicized gay rights debates, such as Proposition 8 in California, as well as the importance of gay rights in that year’s election. Proposition 8 became one of the most expensive social issue campaigns in United States history and started a new era for and discussion about gay rights on the national and international stages.

I began collecting materials during the fall of 2014 based on how their theoretical relevance would aid in mapping of the discourse surrounding gay rights. I examined social artifacts that focused on the debates about gay marriage, gays serving in the military, and international gay rights issues. My data include news articles, photographs, and websites emerging from the top three nationally distributed media that target gay audiences: *Out*, *The Advocate*, and *Instinct*. Each of these magazines publishes physical periodicals and maintains active websites. These magazines specifically target the gay community, so I incorporate them as an attempt to understand how the members of the gay community respond to media sources specifically directed to them. I treat these sources as my “mainstream gay sources,” since they are nationally distributed and have traditionally targeted a gay male audience. According to cision.com, which is an online media database, the magazines’ audited and reported circulation figures are 203,039, 187,791, and 128,258 respectively (Staff 2012b). Here Media, Inc. owns both *Out* and *The Advocate*, and Curtis Circulation Company distributes *Instinct*. For over 40

years, *The Advocate* is the longest-running magazine marketed for the gay community.

Examining articles published in these three sources will give me a well-grounded understanding of the mainstream and contemporary gay communities interests in national and international politics.

I also examine well-respected news media outlets that do not explicitly target the gay or straight communities in order to analyze their coverage of national and international news regarding gay politics, and I choose articles from some of the most widely circulated newspapers and magazines. These include the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *The Huffington Post*. While these news sources do cover some international gay issues, I also choose to examine the *BBC*, *The Guardian*, and *Al Jazeera* as a point of comparison to how international media outlets cover international gay politics and create greater access to an international audience.

Regarding my selection of “informal” sources, I use a variety of keywords to locate my sources (e.g., gay rights, gay marriage, gay equality) and select blogs and websites based on their popularity within search engine results. I also examine the websites of national gay organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Lambda Legal, as well as the websites of international gay rights groups such as ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association) and IGLHRC (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission). This gives me an initial impression of the “voices” being heard by the public and who potentially holds the most power to shape the discourse about internal divisions among LGBT/Q communities (which is essential to CDA); and what unifies these social artifacts is their scope and potential to reach millions of people nationally and globally.

For this project, I examine how elite groups and institutions frame the debate about LGBT/Q rights, how they frame the trajectory of the gay rights movement, and how they frame the portrayals of LGBT/Q communities, both nationally and globally. I first work to identify *who* embodies the role of “elites” in LGBT/Q politics, or those with special access to discourse. According to CDA, elites are defined by the “symbolic power” they wield to shape the discourse and the extent to which they can disseminate their message (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991, Van Dijk 1993). Foucault (1976) argues that “there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse” (93). Thus, examining access to public discourse becomes crucial in relation to *whose* messages are heard, (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004, Laffey and Weldes 2004, Rubin 1999, Ward 2008). I investigate how social actors utilize these mainstream messages to either perpetuate or destabilize contemporary power structures.

To begin investigating who employs this symbolic power to set the discourse and trajectory of gay rights, I examine how the mainstream messages of the LGBT/Q movement gained power by analyzing popular news sources regarding LGBT/Q politics and policies. Foucault (1976) argues that any exercise of power manifests itself through an economy of discourses of truth, and they operate through the relationships between knowledge, power, and discourse. Thus, “we are subjected to the production of truth through power, and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (Foucault 1976:93). However, power and dominance are rarely totalizing. Many scholars and activists argue against the mainstreaming of the LGBT/Q movement, and queer critiques offer challenges to the hegemony and power abuse disregarded by mainstream activists (Eng et al. 2005, Ward 2008, Warner 1993, Warner 1999).

Alongside these mainstream messages, I explore the modes of resistance utilized by queer scholars and activists. To find these counter-messages, I look to other sources (e.g., blogs, websites, art shows) that are less formally recognized in the social sciences and less represented in the existing literature. Following Foucault (1976), I conceptualize these data as forms of “subjugated knowledge” (81). These data represent those arrangements of knowledge often seen as less legitimate, because of their absence from formalized or institutionalized contexts. I also conceptualize these data as being obscured by the more dominant ideologies, but they can be revealed through their critiques of the mainstream dominant discourse (Foucault 1976:82).

There is a dearth of sociological examination concerning the debates about LGBT/Q rights happening online and on social media. As more of our social interactions take place online, it is imperative that scholars pay attention to these “informal” spaces for public discourse (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman and Robinson 2001, Hall 2009, Zhao 2006). I believe that through the re-emergence of these “low-ranking knowledges” (Foucault 1976), a more diverse and holistic understanding of LGBT/Q communities occurs. If these informal sites (e.g., blogs, forums) of social critique are esteemed at the same level as all other forms of knowledge (i.e., ones that appear in mainstream discourse), then these queer critiques will have the potential to (re)shape public opinion and knowledge about the LGBT/Q community. I argue that more effective criticism can, therefore, take place through the integration of these oppositional voices into public knowledge. Additionally, since the internet—accepted as a collective entity—does not rely upon donors or fundraisers to distribute or publish information, this suggests that social actors may have the potential to critique the status quo more freely.

Although I identify as a queer scholar and postmodern critic, attempting to “correctly” represent the gay community is not my goal; my purpose is not to define the boundaries of

inclusion or exclusion in the community or settle on some “true” representation. Rather, I will examine the visual and linguistic texts that have constructed the fictive notions of a unified LGBT/Q community. I analyze this constructed notion of community as a discursively produced subject rooted in particular structures of narration and modes of intelligibility. Hence, the texts I deconstruct can be seen as both a portrayal of a real and an imagined LGBT/Q community. Consequently, I regard this process as “a state of being in culture while looking at culture” (Clifford 1988:9).

## **1.6 Layout of the dissertation**

Recall my guiding questions that inform the study. First, how did gay rights emerge as a new discursive formation in the politics of equality and citizenship? Second, how are the current conceptions and meanings of the lesbian and gay community (and sexuality/sexual identities) constructed through media depictions and discourse? Third, what are the implications of this emerging relationship between the lesbian and gay community and the nation-state for understanding the construction of the gay rights movement nationally and internationally?

To investigate these questions, this dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter 2, A Brief History of the LGBT/Q Rights Movement, I layout the significant moments in the history of the gay rights movement and illustrate how the divisions within the gay community developed. I believe that by understanding the historical context of the gay liberation movement we can better comprehend the trajectory of the contemporary movement for rights.

In the next three chapters, I analyze the current portrayal of the lesbian and gay community by highlighting the controversy and analyzing its central connections to neoliberal ways for producing political (gay) subjects. I argue that through analyzing the political debates about same-sex marriage, lesbians and gays serving openly in the military, and international

attention to gay rights will reveal the development of a new form of sexual citizenship. Through examining these debates I believe it will show how nationalist discourses have co-opted the gay rights movement and how rights discourses are now used in nationalist and imperialist projects. My investigation of the transformation of the gay community (and by extension the gay citizen) in mainstream politics will expose the ways in which sexuality intersects with other aspects of citizenship, thus representing the site where different power relations are played out, reinforced, and sometimes contested.

In Chapter 3, *Going to the Chapel*, I trace how the emphasis on same-sex marriage demonstrates a normalizing strategy focused on individual citizenship rights instead of gaining rights for all members of LGBT/Q communities. The debates about same-sex marriage within LGBT/Q communities divided members based on their adherence or resistance to assimilating into heteronormative culture and adopting measures of respectability. These normalizing campaigns (often raising millions of dollars) utilize tactics that call on gays to be model minorities to prove that they are no different—read: not scary or deviant—to heteronormative society. The mainstream lesbian and gay community fighting to be integrated into the institution of marriage also allows for the production of the “good gay” citizen who is worthy of citizenship rights compared to the “bad queer” subject who is not deemed as acceptable. Analyzing how society constructs this good gay subject lends itself to the exploration of the new ways in which sexual citizenship produces both a disciplined and docile body and a homonationalist subject.

In Chapter 4, *Gays Go To War*, I trace how the creation of the good gay citizen, that is now integrated into the nation-state, can operate as the good gay patriot who can be deployed for nationalist campaigns designed for nation-building and neocolonial practices globally. Though there have been some positive changes regarding equal rights for LGBT/Q communities, I will



demonstrate how the focus on citizenship rights continues to generate further exclusions within communities.

In Chapter 5, *Homo-collusion and the Love Affair with the State*, taking the homonationalist subject as my focus, I will explore how the discourse of gay rights not only complies with homonormativity, but also how the newly achieved rights for lesbians and gays have increasingly become markers of “civility,” “progressiveness,” and “superiority” when judging foreign nations. In the context of the post 9/11 “War on Terror” climate, these concepts (taken together) serve as a means through which racially and ethnic-coded discrimination and military attacks are justified. With this framework, I will show how the rights of sexual minorities are increasingly a part of nationalist and imperialist projects utilized by Western nation-states. I argue that in this new era of homonationalism, the rights of sexual minorities are domesticated into the neoliberal framework of modernity and tolerance, often resulting in a reassertion of the boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, and nation – and reaffirming existing privileges.

By employing Puar’s (2007) concept of homonationalism, I will demonstrate how the limited recognition of sexual minority rights functions as a “regulatory script” against nations that defines the new “racial and national norms” that they are expected to support. This articulation constructs the hierarchical distinction between the tolerant, progressive “self” and the homophobic, uncivilized “other” (Puar 2007:2). The logic underpinning the homonationalist discourse represents one of the most visible means through which the unequal division between the “Global North” and the “Global South” is constructed. This discourse reinforces the portrayal that any place outside “The West” is a place of barbarism replete with violent homophobic attacks and anti-gay sentiments.

In the concluding chapter of the study, *Queer (Re)Imaginings*, I summarize the study's main arguments, outline the implications of the study for a critically queer, post-colonial social theory, and elaborate on the broader sociological significance of the study. Overall, while the previous literature has focused on these issues (i.e., marriage, military, and international conflicts) separately, I argue that they are interconnected through the idea that being pro-gay involves a strategy to achieve the image of progressiveness and serves as a symbol of Western thought. I argue that the same political machine that fuels positive gay propaganda in this country is utilized to demonize other cultures around the world. This project expands the ongoing dialogue about the issue of LGBT/Q rights by showing that gay rights now operates as a type of propaganda tool for individuals, organizations, and nation-states to superficially brand themselves as "gay-friendly."

## **2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LGBT/Q RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

"The First Gay Pride Was a Riot" –Anonymous

On November 11, 1950, social advocates Harry Hay and Rudi Gernreich, along with friends Dale Jennings, Bob Hull, and Chuck Rowland, held the first meeting of the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles under the name Society of Fools (Hogan and Hudson 1998). Their primary purpose was to protect and improve the civil and political rights of gay men. Just a few years later in 1955, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon organized the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), also known as the Daughters, in San Francisco. The DOB was formed to provide a social alternative to lesbian bars, which were subject to frequent police harassment and raids. Other early lesbian and gay organizations were One, Inc. and The Society for Individual Rights (Thompson 1994). These early groups called themselves "homophile" organizations; they emerged in response to state-

sponsored harassment and criminalization of homosexuality in the United States. In the 1950s homosexuality, like communism, was associated with moral and social stigma. Due to the political and social climate of the times, these early homophile organizations chose to remain only partially visible to the mainstream heterosexual public. They spoke through heterosexual proxies, like tolerant doctors or lawyers, to legitimize their concerns on critical issues affecting lesbians and gay men (Hogan and Hudson 1998). However, homophile groups had some successes. For example, One, Inc. sued the American postal service in 1958 for refusing to mail their monthly magazine and won (Thompson 1994). Nevertheless, a strong, vocal and truly organized LGBT/Q political movement did not get underway until the late 1960s.

During the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, a riot broke out between the New York City police and the patrons of the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village; the clientele that morning consisted of drag queens, transgender people, dykes, stone butches, and gay men who were angry about the raids, violent assaults, and the rampant homophobia that characterized the New York Police Department's interactions with the gay community. The riots continued on for six days—and though far from the single reason—many activists credit the Stonewall Riots as the catalyst for the modern gay rights movement. Armstrong and Cragg (2006) argue that the riots were “not the only time gays fought back against the police; nor was the raid at the Stonewall Inn the first to generate political organizing,” rather the other actions failed to achieve the “mythic stature of Stonewall and indeed have been virtually forgotten” (725). While the gay community felt persecuted by the police, not all its members agreed that resisting the police or engaging in the riots that persisted for several days afterward was the proper way to handle the situation. Some of the conservative, often older members of the community, who had been part of the Mattachine Society during the 1950s, felt that this revolt was a negative step for the community and was not

a good strategy to encourage acceptance from the public. The Mattachine Society sought equality on the basis that homosexuals and heterosexuals were inherently the same, with the only difference being the gender of their sexual partners. The Mattachine Society took the approach of teaching and educating the public rather than protest, which caused fractures between members in the organization; and led to an overall disenchantment with and longing for more radical change from nonmembers (Duberman 1999). The frustration with the passive measures of the earlier homophile groups and with the spirit and excitement from the rebellion at Stonewall, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was born.

Martha Shelley, Craig Rodwell, and Jim Furrat organized the GLF three weeks after the Stonewall Riots. As their name suggests, the GLF espoused a “liberationist” approach to gaining equality for the community. According to liberationists, the United States is a society that systematically demonizes and criminalizes all forms of sexual and gender expression that do not conform to a narrow standard of heterosexual “normality” (Hogan and Hudson 1998). The GLF spoke out against the methods of the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis and demanded rights for the gay community through more direct means (e.g., protests, demonstrations) with the goal of revolutionizing politics in the United States (Duberman 1993). They argued that older homophile groups took an apologist approach towards the procurement of rights for the lesbian and gay community (Shepard 2001). The GLF focused on obtaining rights for the community but did not want to use the assimilationist language previously adopted by the Mattachine Society. Instead, they chose to focus their message on broader social justice issues and argued that lesbians and gays should not be apologetic about being gay, and that rights should not be based on if homosexuality was biological or not. The GLF wanted to change the message from a gay identity being a deficiency that one was born with and could not change to a

message that celebrated gay identity and demanded acceptance (Wolf 2009). For example, on the front page of the GLF's newspaper, they made it clear that gay people were no longer content remaining invisible. The first editorial begins: "Come Out for Freedom! Come Out Now! Power to the People! Gay Power to Gay People! Come Out of the Closet Before the Door is Nailed Shut!" (Lauritsen 2004). Unlike the previous homophile groups, the GLF argued for public visibility, personal sexual freedoms, and maintained that oppressions should be understood in a broad social context.

## 2.1 The Split

These emerging critiques against earlier assimilationist strategies centered on the idea that struggle and resistance cannot be limited to demanding civil rights, reform, or tolerance. Rather, revolution—sexual revolution in particular—is the only viable option. Borrowing an idea from second-wave feminism, groups like the GLF argued that "the personal is political" and that only by transforming sexuality could they revolutionize the broader social fabric of society. The groups' organizers encouraged their members to experiment with new forms of "liberated" sexuality and social relationships—like non-monogamy and communal living (Thompson 1994). The GLF identified connections between the lesbian and gay community's plight and other structural inequities faced by communities of color, "third world" people, refugees, victims of American and European military aggression, and members of the working class. Members of the GLF protested alongside the Black Panthers and critics of the Vietnam War to demand justice for all oppressed people (Lauritsen 2004). An editorial in the *San Francisco Free Press* outlined this liberationist strategy: "The same oppressive government and society that massacres Vietnamese and victimizes American servicemen conscripted to fight an unjust and imperialistic war

oppresses and alienates all of us who fail or refuse to comply with its concept of accepted behavior” (as cited in Shepard 2001:52). Members of the GLF argued that all oppressions stemmed from a white, heterosexist, male-dominated, capitalist society and that equality would never be achieved if activists only focused on issues related to sexuality (Shepard 2001). Mary Shelly, a co-founder of the GLF, argued, “Other organizations were for people who wanted to join the mainstream, who thought the only thing wrong with American society is that they excluded gays” (Teal 1995). Thus, GLF activists sought to address the pervasive racism and militarism that they believed plagued U.S. culture as much as homophobia.

While this broad social justice mission was one of their greatest strengths, it also caused an internal division among members in the organization who wanted to focus specifically on issues faced by lesbians and gay men. These discontented members were those who conformed to societal expectations (in most ways except for their sexuality) and did not share the broader political vision of the GLF. Shortly after the GLF formed in 1969, this internal tension spawned a separate group calling themselves the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA). Members of the GAA split from the GLF to begin a single-issue group for the purpose of lobbying the U.S. government for legislative reform for lesbians and gay men.

Following in the footsteps of the older homophile groups, GAA members did not see the connections between homosexuality and other forms of oppression, like racial discrimination or socioeconomic status. They also did not believe that American society was systematically anti-queer, as suggested by liberationists; rather, they believed the United States was a tolerant and just society and a nation that had successfully integrated many minority groups (Thompson 1994). American institutions, they argued, were open to change but had not yet extended their tolerance to lesbians, gay men, transgender people, and bisexuals. The GAA’s constitution stated

that the group was “exclusively devoted to the liberation of homosexuals and avoids involvement in any program of action not obviously relevant to homosexuals” (Teal 1995:83). This fissure between the GLF and the GAA would deepen and continue for the next several decades with the more radical GLF members accusing the GAA of being “overly white, patriarchal, and assimilationist” (Teal 1995:98).

According to the GAA, a sexual revolution was not the answer. They were not liberationists, but assimilationists. They believed lesbians and gay men would win tolerance and respect through the slow, incremental reform of existing institutions. Groups like the GAA argued that rights would be granted through the politics of respectability and assimilation. They believed that lesbians and gay men must fight to be recognized as respectable Americans, just as Black Americans and women struggled to gain civil rights reforms in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, the GAA worked on legislative reform such as passing civil rights ordinances in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Unlike liberationists, they eschewed attempts to connect lesbian and gay justice to the struggles of other groups and did not emphasize sexual differences between heterosexuals and themselves.

Scholars argue that nothing divided the liberationists (the predecessors of today’s queers) from the assimilationists or mainstream gays (the descendants of the older homophile groups) more than the role of sex within the movement (Duberman 1999, Highleyman 2002, Shepard 2001). The goal of liberationists was to create awareness and global solidarity around issues of sex and sexuality. They believed that sexuality should be celebrated, not something that was shameful or needed to be kept hidden. One of their central messages quickly became “Perverts of the world unite!” (Bronski 1998:69). While assimilationists wanted society to see homosexuals as “just like everyone else,” liberationists knew that the dominant culture did not (and would not)

see them that way. These early queer activists, in alliance with women's liberation groups, created and fought for a vision of sexuality as an agent of cultural transformation. Both the liberationist and feminist movements questioned the fundamental tenets of the nuclear family and patriarchal authority in the United States. As a central principle, activists fought the state for an "autonomy of the body," believing that liberation would be created by embracing one's sexuality and transforming a culture that chastised those who rejected heteronormative standards (Bronski 1998:67).

Liberationists believed that claiming a gay identity was a revolutionary act, one that was capable of dismantling institutions that pathologized, silenced, and criminalized sexuality (Shepard 2010). They believed their movement would free all people (gay and straight) from the shame, guilt, and morality that mainstream society attached to sexual activity and would expose the social constructs of the gender binary. Members of the GLF favored dissolving the rigid gay/straight division in society in order to create a sexually integrated society in which everyone could be free to love and make love without having to identify with any sexual labels (Shepard 2001). By focusing on pleasure and the relational aspects of sex, these activists argued that sexuality was an experience to be embraced and enjoyed, instead of a tool for the production of social status. A generation later, queer theorists and activists would build upon the cultural conversations started by these early gay liberationists about sexual and gender emancipation.

Liberationists and assimilationists used very different tactics to pursue equality, but undeniably the Stonewall Riots ignited conversations about what a unified lesbian and gay community encompassed. The riots began uniting members of the burgeoning LGBT/Q community who were divided along race, gender, and class divisions; yet these fissures still plagued the community. These fractures existed in both mainstream, homonormative groups and



radical, queer groups although the latter (arguably) engaged with these inequities instead of attempting to erase differences.

In celebration of this new politically engaged faction of the community, the first Gay Pride Parade was held in 1970 on the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. The parade celebrated and made gay culture visible to the mainstream heterosexual world; although a momentous occasion, fractures still existed and grew. The anger of queers was the catalyst for the riots, but those who assimilated into heteronormative society started taking control of the movement. Thus, the “face” of Pride and the gay community became increasingly male, white, and class-privileged. As the ex-chairman of the GLF, Dr. Leo Martello stated, “It’s not my enemies that bother me. It’s my so-called friends that I have to worry about” (Martello 1970).

Throughout the rest of the 1970s and into the early 1980s, the gay rights movement became increasingly normalized and institutionalized. The struggle for acceptance and recognition in society shifted from the hands of community members engaged in grassroots organizing to legal battles fought by lawyers. As early as 1973, the changing trajectory of the movement became apparent. An editorial in *The Advocate* stated that the gay rights movement should be run by “responsible, talented, experts with a widespread financial backing from all strata of the gay community” (as cited in Shepard 2001:54). Mainstream members of the gay community believed that adopting a politic of respectability would be in the best interest of the lesbian and gay community, even though it required trust in the capitalist social structures that only a few years earlier GLF had described as racist, sexist, and homophobic.

Along with rising concerns about legitimation, the GLF also struggled with their internal discord. While the GLF’s mission focused on a broad vision of liberation and intended to be a “unisexual” group, many lesbians were torn between gay liberation and the women’s movement.

Many women grew frustrated with the chauvinism in the group and ultimately left the GLF over conflicting notions of what “sexual liberation” actually meant (Shepard 2010).

As the GLF began dismantling, queer members found themselves no longer fitting in or having an interest in participating in the mainstreaming of the lesbian and gay rights movement. I argue that this division—obeying the tenets of heteronormativity versus rejecting and challenging the status quo—is what largely divides homonormative lesbians and gays from queers today. Although the GLF and the GAA have long since disbanded, the worldviews that animated their activism persist. For instance, we witnessed the rebirth of liberationist ideals in the radical sexual politics of the 1980s and 1990s in groups like ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and Queer Nation. For homophile and mainstream ideals, they became embodied in organizations like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), GLAAD, the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), and other large gay non-profits.

### ***2.1.1 AIDS Crisis***

Another pivotal epoch characterizing the external and internal struggles within the LGBT/Q community began during the 1980s AIDS crisis. During this horrific period in history where entire communities were being devastated, for a time, it appeared that members of LGBT/Q communities were uniting as they struggled to gain public attention and governmental aid to deal with this ravaging disease. Scholars argued that the 1980s Reagan Administration had largely ignored the growing AIDS epidemic because gay men were the most visible victims of the virus (Duberman 1999, Shepard 2001, Thompson 1994). Further, the only drugs on the market to treat HIV at that time were so expensive that only the wealthy could afford them. In response to the government’s silence and the unfair gouging of the pharmaceutical companies,

activist groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation grew in large numbers as lesbians and gays started working together again. For a brief time, ACT UP was able to reinvigorate the legacy of gay liberation and moved the gay rights movement away from assimilationist civil rights lobbying groups. Shephard (2010) argues that AIDS activism and the social justice activism driving it, were linked with queer activism that surpassed the gay civil rights agenda. Their advocacy consisted of protesting the actions of health organizations, government agencies, and pharmaceutical companies in hope of receiving attention and the much-needed aid to combat the disease. These groups actively fought against the growing stigmatization facing queer and gay people due to the AIDS epidemic.

Boehmer (2000) argues that while the community in some regards did rally together, the AIDS crisis also highlighted the internal factions the lesbian and gay community because the early AIDS organizations were predominantly male and white, thereby often ignoring the needs of women and people of color. Due to the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, the celebratory climate about sexuality was largely silenced and was replaced with public health messages that promoted safe-sex and demonized any expression of sexuality outside a heteronormative framework. For instance, being gay had long been stereotyped as being promiscuous, especially regarding gay men, so the dominant message emphasized monogamy in hope of combating this image. Many Americans believed that if a person contracted HIV, they deserved it—a sentiment that held salience for decades following the crisis (CDC 2000). In attempt to combat these negative perceptions, mainstream gay organizations formed to change the image of gay culture and gay lifestyles. The messages from mainstream gay activists worked to reinforce and privilege certain bodies and identities over others; and they accomplished this by casting non-normative gender presentations and sexuality as “deviant,” “risky” and “deadly” versus those

subscribing to homonormative ideas that focused on monogamy and gender-appropriate presentations as “clean,” “safe” and “respectable” (Warner 1999).

The mainstream groups that espoused respectability politics launched national campaigns in hopes of “cleaning up” the image of homosexuality. Warner (1999) argues that the strategy for gay rights and current trajectory of the movement operate through the politics of shaming. The mainstream movement had been successful in challenging the stigma associated with gay identities but only by reinforcing the shame associated with sex. Thus, we witnessed a de-stigmatizing and normalizing of gay identities start to happen, by disassociating the identity from the sexual act, because sex between two people of the same-sex is still largely considered perverted by heterosexual society. The mainstream gay community believed that in order to win rights and acceptance from a heterosexist society, “good gay citizens” needed to work to divorce their identities from any sexual act. These mainstream gay groups focused on closing bathhouses, bars, and targeting public sex locales. However, this strategy certainly did not end with the AIDS crisis. These goals of assimilation and respectability remain central to many of the most visible and contemporary lesbian and gay organizations today; and the desire for normalization can be seen in the desexualizing discourse still utilized in contemporary gay politics as well.

Queer activists have long argued that the normalizing strategy coming from mainstream lesbians and gays collude with the structures of heteronormativity. They argue that homonormative lesbians and gays privilege assimilation, which ultimately marginalizes those who do not adhere the values that govern heteronormative society. On the contrary, queers posit that the gay rights movement should be about speaking out against mainstream politics that are

racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic, and work to destabilize social institutions, power structures, and the gender binary.

Both types of groups are fighting for equality, yet have very different perspectives on what equality looks like and how to gain rights in this country. For the past several decades, the mainstream lesbian and gay organizations focused on overturning homophobic policies such as Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) and Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). They argued that equality would be reached when all people can access any social institution, specifically the right to serve in the military and the right to get married. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this argument, queers critique this logic and argue that buying into these institutions will not truly grant freedoms or bring social justice. Rather, this effort only perpetuates inequities within this country through the patriarchal institution of marriage and the spread of violence and imperialism through participation in the military industrial complex.

## **2.2 Current LGBT/Q politics**

By the mid-1990s, as mainstream acceptance for lesbians and gays grew, most ACT UP chapters had either fallen apart or lost much of their radical edge. At the Republican National Convention in 1992, Pat Buchanan made a call for a new “culture war” against the lesbian and gay community, which rallied the community behind President Clinton (Buchanan 1992). Bill Clinton's 1993 presidential victory marked an important point in the gay rights movement because his administration was the first to publicly address the lesbian and gay community during a presidential campaign (Highleyman 2002). During this political and social climate, the large gay rights organizations such as the HRC, the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (Lambda) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) gained strength (Duberman 1999, Thomson 2001). By focusing on marriage, military, and hate crime legislation and

demonstrating the economic and political power of the gay voting bloc, homonormative lesbians and gays worked to make gay rights issues mainstream and revitalized previous assimilation strategies.

During this time gay culture became increasingly commodified and more attractive to consumer markets, which further downplayed the radical potential that the gay rights movement once had (d'Emilio 1997, Duberman 1999, Highleyman 2002, Thomson 2001, Warner 1999). For example, in the weeks leading up to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall, advertisements and credit cards with rainbow flags on them began appearing throughout the gay press (Shepard 2001). Thomson (2001) argues, "It's not surprising that the thorough interconnection of corporate power and [gay] activism has discouraged the development of even mild criticism of capitalism and state power." Queer activists have started using the term "Gay, Inc." to refer to this commodification of gay culture and to reference the large gay non-profits that support the further normalization of LGBT/Q communities. Critics of the corporatizing of gay identities and gay culture argue that these powerful gay nonprofits have co-opted the gay rights movement by turning it into a lucrative business venture.

The early 1990s brought about the beginning of queer theory that emerged out of the queer activism of the time, while simultaneously, support for the mainstream contingent also grew. The early 90s also marked the beginning of the "sex panic" debates between queers and homonormative groups, the latter becoming labeled as "neocons" or neoconservatives (Poling and Kirkley 2000, Shepard 2001). For instance, Andrew Sullivan's 1995 book, *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality* called for the gay community to abandon queer politics in favor of campaigning for the right to marry, which he argued was the epitome of social respectability and acceptance. Sullivan (1996) claimed that this focus would demonstrate a level

of maturity and morality that the gay rights movement had previously lacked. Sullivan and other gay journalists like Gabrielle Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile, and Larry Kramer suggested that marriage should be the movement's goal because it was a good defense against the spread of HIV and AIDS; and Rotello even argued that AIDS would not be eradicated as long as gay men continued to participate in risky sexual behaviors (Rimmerman 2002). They argued that gay men's sexual behavior in circuit parties, in sexualized venues like bathhouses, and in public cruising areas was endangering their health and destroying gay culture (Poling and Kirkley 2000). Therefore, they argued that "good gays" needed to divorce themselves from their "alter ego, 'the promiscuous queer' in order to gain acceptance in society (Warner 1997:7). Eric Rofes (1997) argues that these "moral crusades" are typically made against "sexual outsiders" that leads to a crackdown on their behavior, but in this case, (ironically) these arguments were being spearheaded by gay men themselves. For these men, their notion of gay life "favored military service, the pro-life movement, marriage, tax cuts, and law and order policies" (Shepard 2001:56).

In response, queer activists such as Michael Warner, Doug Crimp, and Christopher Murray founded Sex Panic! which was a group to combat this normalizing rhetoric. Murray, in a 1997 opinion piece to *The New York Times*, stated that the group formed as a way to combat the "gay neo-conservative movement" and the crackdown on gay venues in New York City (Murray 1997). Their mission statement clearly reflected their aims: "Sex Panic! is a pro-queer, pro-feminist, anti-racist direct action group. Our multi-issue agenda aims to defend public sexual culture and safer sex in New York City from police crackdowns, public stigma and morality crusades. We are committed to HIV prevention through safer sex, sexual self-determination for all people, and democratic urban space" (Pendelton and Goldschmidt 1998:30). The members of

Sex Panic! argued that this mainstreaming of gay culture demonized gay people and portrayed gay sexuality as unsafe, deadly, and a vector of disease (Warner 1999). Eric Rofes, who was one of the organizers of Sex Panic!, argues that the group believed that “sexual empowerment is healthier than sexual shame, and that gay men who value pleasure, sexual liberation, and community-building have been increasingly marginalized in the growing moral panic and the deepening entrenchment of anti-sex values within gay male communities” (as cited in Poling and Kirkley 2000). Therefore, it was important as a group to affirm and protect the variety of ways queers choose to organize their sexual behaviors and relationships that might not fit the monogamous couple or nuclear family models.

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, Gay, Inc.’s influence to shape the course of the gay rights movement grew and the divisions intensified. For the homonormative and conservative contingent of the lesbian and gay community, their attention was focused on trying to fully integrate into social institutions by focusing on overturning discriminatory legislation, while queer individuals and groups fought to remain staunchly outside of the controlling forces of these institutions (Shepard 2001, Thomson 2001). By 2000, the dissonance between the groups was apparent and tensions peaked over the organizing of The Millennium March on Washington. Many queer activists felt disregarded and silenced, while the professional organizations, such as the HRC and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) which is the largest religious organization serving lesbians and gays, called for the rally (supposedly) in the name of gay rights.

The call for The Millennium March sparked outrage as the organizers, HRC executive director Elizabeth Birch and Troy Perry of the UFMCC, stated in a press release they wanted to host the march “on behalf of the community” to show “what it means to be gay in this nation at



the turn of the century [and that] the priorities of our community have changed dramatically” toward the pursuit of “stability in our relationships, health, homes, and communities...[and] the desire to legally marry and return to the churches of our youth” (as cited in Gamson 2000). Unsurprisingly, “the tone of conservative, hypernormative cheerleading” did not sit well for many people in the LGBT/Q community, especially for those who did not subscribe to these mainstream values (Gamson 2000).

Opponents to the march argued that it had little to with helping members of LGBT/Q communities, and rather it was to be “a patriotic family-values affair pitched to the right-wing media” (Shepard 2001:57). Organizers said that the march was “an unprecedented opportunity to celebrate our diversity as a community of family, spirituality and equality” (Gamson 2000). Joshua Gamson (2000) argues that for the opponents of the march, it symbolized a gay rights movement that was “increasingly run by what is essentially a national, corporate, business-as-usual political lobby, which collects funds while local and state groups struggle against attack.”

The anger queers felt in many ways stemmed from the HRC endorsing Republican Al D’Amato for the U.S. Senate just months before the march was announced (Gamson 2000, Nagourney 1998, Walsh 1998). For many who supported the HRC, the endorsement felt like a slap in the face since D’Amato supported Reagan’s budget cuts, repeal of abortion rights, and neglected the AIDS crisis. The HRC’s action brought the tensions between mainstream groups and queer activists to the forefront and reignited debates about the trajectory of the gay rights movement (Gamson 2000). For queers, they wanted to bring about social and economic justice for all citizens, whereas gay advocates wanted to focus the movement on the single issue of gaining rights for lesbians and gays.

In many ways, the fights over The Millennium March demonstrated just how deep the

tensions were in LGBT/Q communities. For queers, the march signaled a gay movement that is “dominated by arrogant, corporate-style, money-driven organizations geared toward assimilation through the marketing of acceptable gayness” (Gamson 2000). This version of “acceptable gayness”—read: white, normative, class-privileged—that was successfully marketed, is exactly what has allowed the growth of Gay, Inc. These digestible representations of gayness have had great success assimilating into mainstream U.S. culture through television shows like *Will and Grace*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Glee*, and Ellen DeGeneres’ show *Ellen*, to name only a few. On the other hand, the less-desirable and queerer representations of gayness—ones that are “poorer or darker or older or more radical in their gender and sexual practices” continue to remain largely invisible (Gamson 2000). Historian John D’Emilio argues that regardless of one’s opinion about the march, he states that it signified “the fundamental way in which the movement has changed over a long decade” (as cited in Gamson 2000). For many queers, the march symbolized a direction of the gay rights movement that disregarded their needs and a “community” that was quickly not interested in representing them.

In this supposedly “post-closet” era of gay equality, some argue that being gay has never been so easy (Bronski, Pellegrini and Amico 2013, Peters 2013). If this is true, then how do we balance the celebration for the gains in equality with the concern about the LGBT/Q community’s inclusion into the oppressive structures and institutions that dominate society? How do we negotiate the historical legacies of racism, sexism, internalized femmephobia, and body fascism that still plague the community while exposing the fractures within the fiction of a unified LGBT/Q community? How do we deal with the silencing of the most oppressed voices within this fictive community and what do these actions mean for the community moving forward? Lastly, how do we negotiate the co-opting of gay rights by the state for propagandistic

tactics domestically and colonialist campaigns abroad? In a time of heightened nationalism, where other social groups are experiencing a diminishing of protections and mainstream gays are steadily gaining rights, I aspire to produce a narrative that exposes how intricately connected these issues are through the globalizing ideologies and power structures that continue oppressing those bold enough to speak out.

### 3 GOING TO THE CHAPEL: GAY RIGHTS GETS HITCHED

“Hanging out the pride flag is a statement of support that’s fun and costs nothing. But the fact that it costs nothing is the problem.” – Laurie Penny, 2014

Between 2008-2014, national and international media coverage focused a great deal of attention on the same-sex marriage debate. When searching the online databases of the two largest U.S. news sources, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, both newspapers had a substantial increase in covering the marriage debate from year to year. In the six years of media coverage that I was investigating, beginning in 2008, *The New York Times*, published 271 articles which rose to its peak in 2014 with 1,354 for a total increase of 1,073 articles. In 2011 *The Wall Street Journal* published 254 articles covering gay marriage, which rose to 649 in 2012, and peaked in 2013 with 801 articles. While it is impossible to know if media coverage increased over these years due to changing public opinion or if changing public opinion spawned the increase of media coverage, regardless, we witness a proliferation of news sources covering the same-sex marriage debate. Images of ecstatically cheering lesbians, gays, and their straight allies dominated several news cycles, as states continued to legalize gay marriage and courts affirmed its legal recognition. These celebrations were certainly not lauded by everyone. The media also covered many demonstrations against same-sex marriage, along with reports on

several states attempts to enact religious freedom bills. The debate on legalizing same-sex marriage is not a new one, but the fervor on both sides surrounding the arguments grew to an unprecedented new high. Therefore, I argue that if images are changing public perception about the lesbian and gay community, it is essential to analyze what portrayals are being used and what types of messages are being utilized by marriage advocates.

In this chapter, I ask: why has the fight for same-sex marriage become the defining battle for equality in the U.S. and globally? What does this mean for queer politics? What does this mean for those who do not believe that equality will be gained through marriage? Lastly, what do these debates mean for queer activists who state they are against inclusion (i.e., not wanting to be included in heteronormative institutions such as marriage). Kate Bornstein, a prolific queer writer, argues:

Marriage is a privileging institution. It has privileged, and continues to privilege people along lines of not only religion, sexuality and gender, but also along the oppressive vectors of race, class, age, looks, ability, citizenship, family status, and language. Seeking to grab oneself a piece of the marriage-rights pie does little if anything at all for the oppression caused by the institution of marriage itself to many more people than sex and gender outlaws...[and] it's time to stop fighting on that front [marriage equality] as a first priority of the LGBT/Q etc. movement. (Conrad 2014a:25)

Queer scholars and activists assert that not only is marriage a privileging institution, but also, marriage has become the predominant gay rights issue, while other pressing issues affecting LGBT/Q communities such as transphobia, homelessness, and sexual violence are not given the same attention or support (Conrad 2010, Sycamore 2008, Warner 1993). Through the copious amounts of media coverage that has centered on the same-sex marriage debate, it is not surprising that gay marriage became the predominant symbol for how society views the gay community. In 2011, Brian Ellner, who headed the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) efforts to win legislative approval for marriage equality in New York, stated, "Right now is when folks

need to step up and support [marriage] battles” (Bruni 2012). Ellner clearly advocates a need for people to come out and support marriage initiatives, but most importantly, what we are not seeing are organizations like the HRC, demanding the same level of activism on other social issues. For these mainstream lesbian and gay organizations (i.e., Gay, Inc.) they send the clear message that marriage equality is the only cause that carries any real significance in the gay rights movement. Throughout this chapter, I argue that to position marriage rights as the central battle for the gay community was a strategic and purposeful move by the large gay non-profit corporations. The battle for same-sex marriage was about gaining economic rights and federal benefits. Gay, Inc. shaped the discourse of movement, which established the political agenda as one that only benefits particular members of LGBT/Q communities. Thus, the focus on marriage equality diverted much-needed attention to the inequities within communities. I am not arguing that same-sex couples should not be able to get married if they choose to; therefore, when I speak of being against inclusion that is not a statement of support for the bigoted rhetoric against same-sex marriage. Rather it is a critique of 1) the desire to be folded into the institution of marriage and 2) the homonormative trajectory of the gay rights movement.

### **3.1 Context of the Gay Marriage Debate**

The national debate on same-sex marriage sparked in 1993 when the Supreme Court of Hawaii ruled in the *Baehr v Lewin* case that the state could not ban same-sex marriage without “a compelling reason” to do so (Levinson 1993). The case was sent back to the lower courts, but the voters approved a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, so the courts never settled the issue. Although no same-sex marriages were performed in Hawaii, the issue gained national attention and prompted states all over the United States to debate the constitutionality of banning

same-sex marriage for the next several decades. These debates led to over 40 states making constitutional bans against gay marriage and legally defining marriage as a legal union between one man and one woman (Masci 2009). In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defined marriage at the national level as between one man and one woman. The federal statute guaranteed that no state would be forced to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states and prevented same-sex couples from receiving the same federal protections and benefits given to married heterosexual couples (ProCon.org 2016).

In December 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Baker v. Vermont* that same-sex couples were entitled to the same rights, protections, and benefits as heterosexual couples (Amestoy 1999). Then in July 2000, Vermont became the first state in the U.S. to institute civil unions that gave same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual married couples without officially calling it marriage.

Four years later, on May 17, 2004, Massachusetts became the first state in the U.S. to allow same-sex marriage. However, this did not generate a public or political shift in acceptance of gay marriage. Prior to 2004, only four states had bans on same-sex marriages. Following the Massachusetts ruling, 13 states amended their constitutions to ban gay marriage. In July 2004, both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives endeavored to pass a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, but neither bill passed (Dewar 2004). Between 2005 and 2010, 14 more states followed suit, which brought the total number of states with constitutional bans on same-sex marriage to 30 (Masci 2009).

The framing of the same-sex marriage debate was quite significant, because it established marriage equality as the principal gay issue and the central concern that the gay community

needed to divest their attention, activism, and resources into. *New York Times* reporter Frank Bruni (2012) states this clearly:

The passage or defeat of marriage equality isn't just about weddings. It's about worth. It's about the message a society delivers to men who love and pledge commitment to and maybe start families with other men, and to women who love and pledge commitment to and maybe start families with other women. Voters in states with marriage equality on the ballot can tell us that we matter as much as anyone else. Or they can tell us that we don't.

There are several pertinent points that Bruni addresses here. First, we see the argument that people should support gay marriage because it is about love and starting a family. Similar to earlier normalizing strategies by assimilation groups, this tactic is utilized to normalize gay couples by focusing on heteronormative ideals such as commitment, monogamy, and the family. Second, Bruni states that marriage equality is about worth. On the surface, he is making a case to straight people who oppose same-sex marriage based on the assumption that framing same-sex marriage on the basis of worth will change dissenters' minds; but there is a more complex meaning.

The idea that having the right to marry will establish your relationship as "worthy" and "legitimate" was a dominant strategy in the success of achieving marriage equality in many states and the overturning of The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). With this discursive frame, advocates for marriage equality can utilize an argument about lesbians and gays being second-class citizens that speaks to American citizenship rights and equality. The rhetorical strategy of attaching a person's or a couple's worth to marriage positions those who are not married as somehow less worthy than those who are; thereby, solidifying the power of the institution of marriage wields in this country.

Centering the debate of marriage equality on notions of worth transforms the argument into a statement about the individual, and not about the institution or the rights. It works to

humanize the issue, while also supposedly demonstrating how assimilated lesbian and gay couples have become. The campaign to sanitize the image of gayness that followed the AIDS crisis was incredibly effective. As a result, lesbians and gays have internalized the messages of normalization and thus, have become more normal in their gender presentation and expressions of sexuality. In the public imagination it is now possible to be both “normal” and gay. For those lesbians and gays (who are normative and privileged along race, class, and gender lines) the state not allowing them to get married is of particular importance to them since they see themselves as good, moral citizens. They are upholding heteronormative expectations; thus, they feel it is unfair that they do not have the same rights. They experience not being able to marry as an affront to their rights as a citizen in the United States. Specifically, since mainstream lesbians and gays are privileged in many other ways, marriage equality quickly became the defining battle for the gay rights movement because they had little need to fight for anything else. Along these lines, Conrad (2014b) critiques the fervor of marriage activists stating: “Gays and lesbians of all ages are obsessing over gay marriage as if it’s going to cure AIDS, stop anti-queer/anti-trans violence, provide all uninsured queers with health care, and reform racist immigration policies. Unfortunately, marriage does little more than consolidate even more power in the hands of already privileged gay couples engaged in middle-class hetero-mimicry” (59).

One of the queer critiques of the focus on marriage was that it ignored those in LGBT/Q communities who are in the most need of resources and social support, most often queer youth, transgender folks, and communities of color. Ironically, some critiques from queer activists and scholars have superficial similarities to the arguments launched by opponents to same-sex marriage. In Maryland, when a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage came up for a vote in 2012, Reverend Frank Reid accused gay groups of forging convenient ties with Black



and Latino communities in order to encourage them to vote against the amendment, but of doing little else to champion other minority causes (Arce and Costello 2012). Reid asked, “Where is the money for education to pour out to Latino and African-American communities?” In the Maryland race, gay rights groups raised millions of dollars in support of same-sex marriage, but demonstrated how they were not concerned with other social issues such as education and poverty. Largely, gay advocacy groups disregarded these pressing social matters because they are not the issues affecting those in charge of these organizations (Arce and Costello 2012). Moreover, the gay organizers do not deny it. Kevin Nix, who was a spokesperson for Marylanders for Marriage Equality, stated that the group’s focus was on the marriage bill, and not other minority ballot issues like the local version of the Dream Act, which would protect young undocumented immigrants from deportation (Arce and Costello 2012). Nix’s statement demonstrated not only a focus on single-issue politics, but also that these gay organizations who courted minority voters did not care about broader social justice issues.

Mainstream lesbian and gay marriage advocates have proclaimed legalizing same-sex couples to marry would ultimately extend rights to the rest of the community. The assumption that marriage equality is the last barrier to full citizenship is extremely problematic while also insulting to those who face multiple levels of institutional oppressions on a daily basis. For example, in an editorial from *The Independent* entitled “Gay Marriage Will Lift the Last Barrier to Equality,” the reporter commented many lesbian and gay people felt that civil partnerships, while a step forward, was only a transitional measure of rights. Only full equality would be achieved when gay people could marry, just like their heterosexual friends and family (Staff 2012d). What is lacking from this editorial (and the vast majority of articles addressing gay marriage rights) is any discussion of how marriage actually equates to full equality, especially

when there are rampant issues of homelessness, poverty, and violence that still occur in the U.S. against transgender people, queer people of color, poor queers, undocumented queers or those who make up the less assimilative components of LGBT/Q communities. Marriage equality became the primary focus of Gay, Inc. because the members wanted to integrate into heteronormative culture, and the fight for marriage is one of these crucial last steps. Lastly, by using the rhetorical strategy of connecting a person's or a couple's worth through marriage, states for those who are not married, they are as somehow less than those who are. Ultimately this continues to solidify the power the institution of marriage wields in this country.

Queer activists argue that marriage is seen as the legitimization of a relationship by the government and mainstream society; however, even if gays can get married, legitimacy does not necessarily follow (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004; Duggan 2003; Warner 1999). They argue that mainstream gay and lesbian groups sought the right to marry for the federal and monetary benefits associated with marriage. They argue that these financial benefits (e.g., inheritance, health insurance, tax deductions) would only serve a select portion of LGBT/Q communities, who largely are white, cisgender, and class mobile (Ferguson 2005; Bailey, Kandaswamy, and Richardson 2008; Warner 1999). Warner (1999) argues that marriage became the central focus of the LGBT/Q movement, instead of continuing a queer fight (pre- and post-Stonewall) toward social justice. "The national gay marriage campaign is NOT a social justice movement..." (emphasis in original Conrad 2014: 59). The fight for marriage equality works as a tool for gay activists, serving as a symbol that gays and lesbians are "civilizing" themselves and ascribing to traditional values of the family, divorcing themselves from the stereotype of being promiscuous and sex-focused (Warner 1999). "As long as people marry, the state will continue to regulate the sexual lives of those who don't" (Warner 1999:96). By using mainstream activists' logic and

prioritizing marriage, the lesbian and gay community can separate those who are susceptible to public scrutiny and state regulations because of their relationships and identities (i.e., queers), from those who are homonormative and thus entitled to protections.

The fight for gay marriage has entered into public discourse as one of the culture wars in the United States, alongside women's reproductive rights and the legalization of marijuana. In *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution*, Linda Hirshman (2012) argues that the gay rights movement has been wildly successful in its fight for equal rights. She claims that lesbian and gay activists engaged in a campaign that brought about a cultural change that will serve as a model for all future social and political movements. What she ignores, however, are the very complexities within which I situate this project. She overlooks the contradictory messages which frame the mainstream lesbian and gay rights movement and ignores any queer analysis or critique. Seidman (1993) argues that a gay liberation movement focusing on issues such as marriage equality will not destabilize the normative gender order that privileges men, and uncritically upholds patriarchy and heteronormativity.

### ***3.1.1 Proposition 8***

California, the state with the nation's largest lesbian and gay population, has played a significant role in the modern gay marriage debate. In February 2004, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom ordered the city to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Only a month later, the California Supreme Court ordered a halt to same-sex weddings, then voided the marriages in August 2004 (ProCon.org 2016). In a surprising move in May 2008, the California Supreme Court overturned the state law banning gay marriage (Pizer 2010). Between May 2008 and November 2008, there were an estimated 18,000 same-sex couples married in California

(Legislatures 2010). However, these celebrations were short-lived. A poll taken on November 4, 2008, showed 52.3% of California voters approved ballot measure Proposition 8 (or better known as Prop 8) that made same-sex marriage illegal in the state (ProCon.org 2016). The passing of this bill set off an eruption of protests all over the country. The proposition was created by opponents of same-sex marriage in California and reversed many same-sex marriages that had been performed during the interim period, May to November 2008. But the confusion and political struggles did not end there. In May 2009, the California Supreme Court upheld Prop 8; but, in August 2010, US District Judge Vaughn R. Walker struck down Prop 8 as unconstitutional (Walker 2010). Many opponents of same-sex marriage filed appeals, but on February 7, 2012, a panel of the US 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, upheld Walker's ruling making same-sex marriage officially legal in California (ProCon.org 2016).

Prop 8 was not just like any other state amendment against same-sex marriage. The campaigns for and against the bill spent over \$70 million, making it one of the most expensive social issue campaigns in United States history (Mooney, Knox and Schacht 2013, Staff n.d.). This proposition sparked national attention and debates, and exposed an old and deep division within LGBT/Q communities. One of the reasons that Prop 8 garnered so much attention was because when the proposition passed, members of the lesbian and gay community specifically blamed it on Black and Latino communities. Polls released immediately after Prop 8 passed showed that a majority of Black and Latino voters voted for the bill (Cillizza and Sullivan 2013, Coates 2009, Saletan 2008, Vick and Surdin 2008). For instance, Saletan (2008) claimed, "The gay marriage problem is becoming a black problem" and stated that "blacks made the difference" on the bill passing. The lesbian and gay community and opponents of Prop 8 argued that due to these communities being homophobic, this bill was allowed to pass. What is more, even after

these polls were proven false, the sentiments of white lesbians and gays and their allies still lingered.

Many LGBT/Q leaders of color around the U.S. were very critical about how the “No on 8” campaign seemed to ignore the issue of race, especially the lack of voices from communities of color. During the campaign to repeal Prop 8, activists of color, both heterosexual and members of the LGBT/Q community, spoke to leaders arguing the need to take people of color seriously and focus more of their marketing strategies on appealing to these communities, or regret it on Election Day. The “Repeal Prop 8” campaign ads often only featured white families making appeals to the public on the importance of family, love, and marriage. These ads were meant to convince the public that banning gay marriage was not about protecting the institution of marriage, it was about state-sanctioned discrimination. For example, one of the “No on 8” commercials features several celebrities and lesbians couples with their families making appeals to the public that Prop 8 was stripping away rights of lesbians and gays and was “not about protecting marriage, it’s about discrimination” (Films 2008b). In the ad, actress Amy Brenneman says that people should not support Prop 8 because “marriage strengthens the mental and physical health of couple [and] provides greater legal and financial security for children, parents, and seniors.” Another actress, Melonie Diaz pulls from the rhetoric of the Civil Right movement and states that “denying gay and lesbian couples the right to marry relegates them to second-class status – separate, but not equal” (Films 2008b). Although some of these ads featured a diverse cast, many activists claimed the campaigns against Prop 8 were inadequate at reaching the Black community and failed to show the relevance of this issue for Black voters.

One of the only “No on 8” commercials that featured a Latina was an ad with Dolores Huerta, who is a prominent figure in California’s Latino politics. She has been championing gay

rights since the 1960s. Huerta stated that one of the downfalls of the “No on 8” message was “the campaign just was not done in the Latino community” (Wright 2009). Huerta and others pointed out that the supporters of Prop 8, funded largely by the Mormon Church, aggressively targeted communities of color with door-to-door knocking, church-to-church campaigns, and producing commercials in Spanish. Therefore, the voters who spoke Spanish heard significantly more anti-gay marriage arguments that centered on fear mongering, especially around educating children about same-sex relationships (Press 2009, Sharp and Leff 2009, Wright 2009).

Additionally, the “Yes on 8” campaign lied in many of its marketing campaigns. In calls and mailers targeting Black voters, it implied that Obama supported the initiative against same-sex marriage. At that time, he did not openly support same-sex marriage; however, he opposed Prop 8. Consequently, since the opponents of Prop 8 did not reach out to the Black community to refute this claim, it should not be surprising that many voters believed it (Wright, 2009).

However, the “No on Prop 8” campaign claimed that they did try to reach out to Black and Latino communities, but when activists started examining the actual strategies—or lack thereof—they exposed some fundamental issues in the campaign’s tactics. For instance, the “No on Prop 8” campaign made a commercial called the “Conversation” that was a television ad meant to reach the Latino community. This ad featured what appeared to be two white women sitting in a nice kitchen, one woman showing the other several family photos. One of the photos is of her niece Maria’s lesbian wedding. The friend pauses and says: “Listen, honestly, I just don’t know how I feel about this same-sex marriage thing.” The other woman responds calmly and places her hand on her friend’s and offers: “No, it’s okay and I really think it’s fine that you don’t know how you feel. But are you willing to eliminate rights and have our laws treat people differently?” And after a moment hesitation, the friend firmly states: “No” (Prop 8 2008).

Advocates of same-sex marriage criticized the ad, stating that it was unsuccessful because it affirmed anti-gay sentiment. Even the director of the commercial, Tom Donaldson, said that it was problematic because the mother's character was supposed to be Latina and her portrayal was meant as an outreach strategy to central California Latinas. He stated, "We tried very hard to find a woman who looks Hispanic, but not *too* Hispanic—not to be too dark, not have an accent... and we did. We found someone who had a grandfather from Mexico, I think" (emphasis added, Wright, 2009). Donaldson further stated that none of the decision makers for the commercial were people of color (Wright, 2009). Not only were these ads heteronormative and employed assimilative strategies, but also they demonstrated the raced, classed, and gendered divisions within LGBT/Q communities.

Another example of the assimilative strategies used by the "No on Prop 8" campaign were the "Get to Know Us First" ads, which were considered very successful by activists at the time. The philosophy behind these ads was, "If you are going to vote against me, get to know me first" (Films 2008a). These ads featured lesbian and gay families playing with their children and talking about how they worried about the same things as any other parents. In one commercial, we see a lesbian couple (who both seem to be Latina) playing with their children and then sitting closely together on a loveseat, and one of the women states, "We worry about the same things: our kids drinking too much juice, how are they doing in school... Even after 12-years I still admire her" and the other woman states (after another scene with the kids that represents Christmas morning) "I'm always taken by how brave she is." The first woman who spoke responds back laughing "I drag her along" with her partner saying "Okay, I'll be brave too" and the ad ends with both of the women laughing (Films 2008a). In another ad, two white gay men are seen playing with their black son, then are shown sitting on the couch holding hands and one

of the men states, “Marriage is important to kids...They do understand commitment and what it means to be together...” And the ad ends with one of the men stating, “Get to Know Us First” and the partner repeating the phrase (Rees 2011). These parents emphasized how normative their relationships were and how normal their families were. Here again, the message only focused on trying to reassure heterosexuals that lesbians, gays, and their families were just like everyone else. Even the group that organized these ads, *Power Up Films*, recognized that it needed more diversity in their marketing strategies (Films 2008a). These advocates were indeed correct.

After the Prop 8 results were collected, a CNN exit poll of the Prop 8 results showed that 69% of Black voters supported the proposition, along with 52% of Latino voters (Wright, 2009). This poll was quickly proven to be inaccurate by several news sources; however, the damage was already done. Instead of lesbian and gay activists recognizing the racial bias that these polls reflected, the results ignited outrage among white lesbians and gays directed at people of color, and the Black community in particular. The social climate of anger and racism directed at communities of color was already in full swing, even though the actual statistics showed that the majority of supporters for Prop 8 were indeed white. Thus, the only thing these polls accomplished was to expose issues of racism that many already knew existed within LGBT/Q communities. For instance, Dan Savage (2008) wrote in his blog: “I’m done pretending that the handful of racist gay white men out there—and they’re out there, and I think they’re **scum** (emphasis in original)—are a bigger problem for African Americans, gay and straight, than the huge numbers of homophobic African Americans are for gay Americans, whatever their color.”

A few months later when Savage appeared on *The Colbert Report*, he modified his statement and chose to refocus his attention on older voters (61% had voted for Prop 8) and decided to open the interview with a joke about having sex with Black men (Report 2008).



When Colbert asked Savage: “how mad are you at Black people?” Savage laughs, and Colbert continues: “You must be furious, because they got their African American president and they said, hey let’s have someone else be persecuted for a while, right? Black man is keeping you down?” And Savage responds: “A few Black men have kept me down in the past” (Report 2008).

This statement by Savage was not only insensitive, especially in light of his previous comments, but also considered offensive by many.

Similarly, Andrew Sullivan reported in *The Atlantic* “people of color voted overwhelmingly against extending to gay people the civil rights once denied them” (Sullivan 2008). Many lesbian and gay people of color reported being harassed and heckled by white lesbians and gays who blamed them for the outcome at rallies across the country in the direct aftermath of Prop 8 passing. One man talked about his experience at a Los Angeles rally on a popular Black gay blog, Rod 2.0, stating the “Three older men accosted my friend and shouted, ‘Black people did this! I hope you people are happy!’ A young lesbian couple with mohawks and Obama buttons joined the shouting and said they were ‘very disappointed with Black people’ and ‘how could we?’” (Rod 2008). Rod rightfully (and bluntly) states “Unfortunately these ‘blame the blacks’ meme is being commonly accepted by some-so called ‘progressive’ gay activists” (Rod, 2008).

This attitude was reiterated in several news sources. For example, William Saletan from *Slate* magazine stated that, nationwide there was a clear pattern of Black voters turning out to vote against gay marriage and gay adoption bills. He offered statistics from a pro-gay organization, the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC), which states that, when surveyed “African-Americans are virtually the only constituency in the country that has not become more supportive over the past dozen years” (Saletan 2008). Karl Vick and Ashley Surdin of *The Washington Post* stated, “The same voters who turned out strongest for Barack Obama also

drove a stake through the heart of same-sex marriage” (2008). They offered several quotes from people in the black community suggesting that their opposition to same-sex marriage was due to their religiosity and overall being a close-minded community. For example, Jasmine Jones, stated, “I think it’s mainly because of the way we were brought up in the church; we don’t agree with it”; and Keisha Young stated, “I’m going to tell you something about the black race: We love to pass judgment. I think that’s just a smoke screen about the church thing” (Vick and Surdin 2008). Similarly, Anthony Maurice-White, who is black and gay, stated that he learned “early in life to keep his sexual orientation to himself around fellow blacks as a matter of routine. ‘Closed minds...And they’re afraid of change” (Vick and Surdin 2008).

These statements do little more than continue to fuel the racism within LGBT/Q communities toward the Black community. Saletan (2008) argues the reason we see these statistics is that for the Black community, “they think sexual orientation is different from race” versus whites who are starting to believe that sexual orientation, like race, is immutable. For mainstream lesbians and gays, the latter is exactly what they have been striving to accomplish for the past several decades. Utilizing strategies from the Civil Rights Movement, they have actively worked to convince the public that being gay is not a choice, but is a biological trait; thus it is unconstitutional to discriminate on the basis of homosexuality. And this strategy has been quite successful.

Over the past three decades, Gallup polling shows that, 30 years ago, most Americans saw homosexuality as a product of upbringing and environment, but now this opinion has almost reversed. With this change, the U.S. has witnessed a 20-point shift from people stating they were not supportive of homosexuality to now stating they were supportive and a 30-point shift from people not supporting equality in job opportunities to them now stating they feel there should be

protections for lesbians and gays (Saletan 2008). These numbers suggest that, as more people believe that homosexuality is immutable, it is more likely that they are going to hold positive attitudes towards lesbians and gays. Saletan (2008) also argues that as scientists continue to try and “nail down homosexuality’s biological origins” it will become “easier and easier to persuade African Americans that being gay is a lot like being Black [and] the lesson of Proposition 8 is not that Blacks have stopped the march of gay rights. The lesson is that when they turn [their support for gay marriage], the fight in blue America will essentially be over.” Saletan’s line of thinking is problematic and offensive for two reasons. He perpetuates the idea that 1) the LGBT/Q community is overwhelmingly white, which erases the experiences and identities of queer people of color and 2) he suggests that homophobic Black people are the impediment to same-sex marriage.

While certainly not all white gays and lesbians blamed communities of color for the passing of Proposition 8, but this example demonstrates the continued racism and divisions within LGBT/Q communities. Further, many of the national lesbian and gay leaders said nothing about how this race-based blame was unfounded. It took days for the “No on 8” campaign to call for unity, but it never fully addressed the racism that was palpable during this aftermath. One of the only vocal members from the National Center on Lesbian Rights, Kate Kendall (who is white and was one of the “No on 8” leaders) said that the hasty reaction to the exit poll revealed that the LGBT/Q community was all too ready to see people of color as oppositional. “The reason [the Black community] was an easy target,” she bluntly explains, “is that there continues to exist among many white LGBT folks outright racism or, at least, a relentless otherness when it comes to people of color” (Wright 2009). Similarly, H. Alexander Robinson, who runs the National Black Justice Coalition (a Black gay advocacy group) stated, “it was a preexisting sentiment... I

don't think that folks all of a sudden have negative attitudes about African Americans because of one vote. I think that those are opinions that were there, and this created an excuse for them to bubble up" (Wright 2009).

Kendall stated that in an ideal campaign, people of color would have been better represented, but she correctly argued that it was not just this campaign. The problem is a broad, structural issue within the LGBT/Q movement. To date, there are few large LGBT/Q organizations led by people of color, and the ones that are do not have the resources to donate their staff for a massive statewide campaign. In many ways, losing the battle on Proposition 8 helped expose a real failure in the gay rights movement to reach communities of color, both within LGBT/Q communities and without.

The problem is that these white gay and lesbian groups ignore the voices and opinions of people of color and erase representations of queer people of color from the "community," which further creates a gay rights movement that many do not want to be a part of. Lawrence Ellis, who is a LGBT/Q organizer of color in the Bay Area, stated, "I don't want to be a part of the world they are creating" (Wright 2009). This is a significant point, because he is explicitly pointing to the racial divisions in LGBT/Q communities and how the idea of a unified community is an illusion. For Ellis, during the Prop 8 protests, to counter the problems he was witnessing with the "No on 8" campaigns, he went out and started building connections with the small lesbian and gay organizations that were already active in the Black, Latino, Asian, and Native-American communities. It was their work that was ultimately responsible for getting people like Dolores Huerta to speak out in the television ads (Wright 2009). Ellis stated that with two days' notice, they were able to gather hundreds of volunteers to help with the get-out-and-vote canvassing work in their communities, suggesting that it would have been possible for the "No on 8"

campaign to reach communities of color if they actually had interest in trying to build a true coalition (Wright 2009).

The anti-black and racist rhetoric from these white lesbian and gay activists obviously did not start with Prop 8 or with the same-sex marriage debate. It has long been part of the history in lesbian and gay communities, thus allowing for the possibility of groups, such as the Christian Right to try and drive a wedge between the two communities. In the 1990s, the Christian Right tried to convince the black community that it would be morally superior to not support gay marriage, while simultaneously the media portrayed the black community as immoral and dysfunctional (Sycamore 2008). For instance, gay opposition groups like the Traditional Values Coalition produced short films that framed “gay rights” as “special rights” (Farrow 2014). These films targeted black churches in hope of convincing members that non-heterosexual people were sexual deviants and only white and upper-class, while painting black people as “pure, chaste, and morally superior” (Farrow 2014). Farrow argues that since mainstream media continue to portray black people as hypersexual and sexual predators, the community is going to hold onto the only other image that is available to them—one that is asexual and morally superior. Since the Christian Right has the resources and access to corporate media, they are able to shape the discourse around race and sexuality. The Christian Right worked to portray all lesbians and gays as rich and white who do not need more protections, while conversely rendering black people as a homogenous group who are Christian, heteronormative, morally superior, and have the right type of “family values.” However, this was not the predominant portrayal of black communities because the media and public policy worked to depict Black families as dysfunctional (Farrow 2014).

Black families have consistently been portrayed in the media, in academic research, and through social and legislative policies as pathological and criminal. Anti-poor and anti-Black discourse and policymaking frame poverty both as an individual deficit and a result of the lack of marriage in Black populations (Spade and Willse 2013). This attitude can be traced back to Clinton's 1996 dismantling of welfare programs that disproportionately harmed Black families and the community. These actions were considered justified because poverty was supposedly the result of unwed parents, and specifically unwed Black mothers (Spade and Willse 2013). For instance, the "Healthy Marriage Initiative" that was implemented by George W. Bush's administration and continued through the Obama administration's "responsible fatherhood program, was designed to help low-income couples remain married and urge poor unmarried parents to get married, with the hope of reducing the need of public assistance programs (Families 2005). Critics argue that these programs have been used "to encourage low-income women to marry, at times even offering cash incentives for doing so" (Spade and Willse 2013). Furthermore, the money for the programs was diverted from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and largely went to religious groups working "to combat the divorce rates in their communities by sponsoring date nights and romance workshops" (Mencimer 2012). Studies conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services show that these marriage performance programs either had very little effect on the couples and actually in some cases, they made the situation worse (e.g., couples were more likely to break up, fathers were less involved, and there was a drop in financial support) (Mencimer 2012). Queer activists Dean Spade and Craig Willse (2013) argue that these programs continue to perpetuate the government's "demonizing, managing, and controlling Black people [and their families] by

applying racist and sexist family norms to justify both brutal interventions and ‘benign neglect’ [that] has a long history in the U.S. and remains standard fare.”

The racial tensions within LGBT/Q communities are further exposed when white lesbians and gays claim that they understand the violence of racism and marginalization because they are gay, thus equating homophobia with racism. This analogy is terribly flawed. The United States was built upon the privilege of whiteness, and this privilege extends to white people regardless of their sexuality. There have always been racial divisions in the gay community and they will continue as long as racial tensions exist in the United States. Television shows such as *Will & Grace*, *Queer As Folk*, and *Modern Family* centered on portrayals of white, gay men. When a television series does depict gay people of color, often it does not get the same notoriety or is canceled after a few seasons (e.g., *Noah’s Arc*). Furthermore, white gay culture participates in the appropriation of black culture and ballroom culture in terms of dance (e.g., twerking and voguing) and appropriating language and other black cultural norms. In many ways, white gay men continue to function as cultural imperialists (like their heterosexual counterparts) which perpetuates racist ideologies and racial divisions in LGBT/Q communities.

From the 1990s onward, as the gay community fought for further assimilation into heteronormative society, it pushed gay and queer people of color out of the visible aspects of the gay rights movement. In order to appeal to the mainstream U.S. citizenry, Gay, Inc. presented lesbians and gays as upstanding citizens (read: white and gender-normative). Being that not only is the American citizenry seen as white, but also what (or who) is normative is defined through whiteness, so for these assimilative gays, “gay rights” needed to be synonymous with white; and thus, people of color were rendered as the racialized-sexual *other*.

The history of the gay rights movement is important, because it provides a context for understanding current racial conflicts. During the 1990s and into the 2000s, homonormative lesbians and gays consistently employ Civil Rights rhetoric, for instance claiming that they are relegated to being second-class citizens. Farrow cites an example from Jason West, the mayor of New Paltz, New York, who began officiating over same-sex marriages: ““The same people who don’t want to see gays and lesbians get married are the same people who would have made Rosa Parks go to the back of the bus”” (Farrow 2014:40). There are several issues with these comparisons. First, they are not entirely accurate because these are not the same fight. While there may be similarities, these type of oppressions operate in distinct and specific ways. Second, these types of claims rightfully anger the black community because the comparison does not acknowledge racial inequalities that the black community continues to face in the U.S. Third, this comparison also perpetuates the notions that all gay people are invested in anti-racism justice work and that there are not racist lesbian and gay people, which simply are not true.

The strategy to compare “gay civil rights” to “black civil rights” is a tactic used by mainly white-led and majority-white organizations. Black activists argue that equating these movements is flawed because culturally, homophobia does not operate in the same ways as racism; and this fallacious connection demonstrates a severe lack of an intersectional understanding of identities and power. The most prominent representations of black lesbians and gays (beginning during the 1990s, and continuing on for about a decade) was through sensationalized or pathologized images in the media about black men “on the down low.”

Given the history of racial tension, both in mainstream society and within lesbian and gay communities, a lack of significant support for same-sex marriage from the black community was inevitable, since there has been a severe lack of any coalition building in the first place. Farrow



(2014) argues that as a black gay man, he does not support the fight for same-sex marriage, because the fight does nothing to address the consequences of systemic racism that still disenfranchises communities of color in the U.S. today. This flawed rhetoric employed by marriage advocates works to erase queer people of color from LGBT/Q communities, because it establishes people of color and gay people as mutually exclusive populations. Moreover, stating that gaining marriage rights means equality-for-all is blatantly false and completely disregards Black history and contemporary racist politics in the U.S. where people of color face violence on a daily basis (Sycamore 2008).

The institution of marriage is based upon a system that is inherently racist, and will never be an institution that grants the black community any true measure of equality. The level of skepticism from gay and queer people of color and from straight black allies is understandable given the deployment of the white, heteronormative constructions of the nuclear family that have been consistently used against black people and black families. In addition to marriage equality being championed as the last barrier for white lesbians and gays to be full citizens. Gaining marriage rights does nothing for poor queers and poor people of color who (regardless of sexual preference) are struggling to meet the most basic needs (e.g., housing, food, gainful employment) which are not provided through same-sex marriage (Farrow 2014). The disconnect between prioritizing marriage rights versus the needs of communities is due to the powerful gay elites not considering class and race issues that affect marginalized members of LGBT/Q communities. Marriage advocates do not speak to the problems of homelessness, lack of jobs, education, or any other basic needs. Spade and Willse (2013) argue: “It is unethical for movements to prioritize those with the most access. We should prioritize those vulnerable to the most severe manifestations of homophobia and transphobia. Legalizing same-sex marriage puts a stamp of

‘equality’ on systems that remain brutally harmful, because a few more-privileged people will get something from the change.” But the populations that are the most vulnerable are also the same populations with the least access to shape the discourse, the politics of the gay rights movement, and to have their issues heard. Instead of working to address these systemic problems, mainstream lesbians and gays chose to devote millions of dollars towards same-sex marriage campaigns.

It is understandable that lesbians and gays of all races and classes cheered the victories for marriage equality because they want their relationships to be recognized and legitimized, and want to reap the federal and state benefits that are associated with marriage. But the fight for gay marriage was not a battle for true equality or liberation, or even to end homophobia. Farrow states: “It does not address my most critical need as a black gay man to be able to walk down the streets of my community with my lover, spouse, or trick, and not be subjected to ridicule, assault, or even murder” (Farrow 2014:43). Gay marriage does not (and cannot) adequately address homophobia, transphobia, or misogyny, because at its core, it relies on binary conceptions of sexuality, sex, and gender. It fails to address the very real needs of those who do not fit neatly into the homonormative expectations of the gay rights agenda.

Queer activists often argue against Gay, Inc.’s fight for marriage equality because they do not want to reify marriage as the hegemonic standard for a relationship to be considered “legitimate” by the state. Instead, queer politics focus on dismantling the institution and redefining societal notions of valid intimate relationships and family structures. Marriage equality solves very little for those queers who do not want to support heteronormative expectations of the nuclear family or uphold the hegemony of monogamy.

Marriage as an institution is about property, and preserving and maintaining wealth within particular families, therefore it remains tied to economic disparities that keep disadvantaged groups from acquiring wealth (Conrad 2010, Nair 2014b, Sycamore 2008, Warner 1999). Queer activists have long asked why certain rights, such as health care, should be tied to the institution of marriage. Stanley asks: “Why do the fundamental necessities marriage may provide for some (like health care) have to be wedded to the State sanctioned ritual of terror known as marriage?” (Stanley 2014:28). Queer scholars have long proclaimed that these rights (such as health care, visitation, adoption, immigration) should not be tied to marriage or awarded only to couples who are married. Rather, these rights should be reframed as fundamental rights to which every citizen should have access, regardless of marital status. Conrad argues that: “Gay marriage [also] reinforces the for-profit medical industrial complex by tying access to health care to employment and relational status” (Conrad 2014b:59). If the state rewards these rights only to those relationships it recognizes as “legitimate,” then it continues advantaging those who are already class privileged.

The battle for marriage equality serves as just one example of a political strategy that is not intended to benefit everyone in the “community.” However, this critique is not only coming from queers. Some of the more mainstream activists have spoken out against seeing marriage as the marker of victory for the LGBT/Q community. Rebecca Isaacs, the executive director of the Equality Federation, argues that it is important that marriage should not be seen as the end goal for LGBT/Q people:

Marriage equality will not keep LGBT young people in their homes and loved by their families. It will not keep them in school and out of the criminal justice system. It will not ensure transgender people access to accurate identity documents or critical healthcare services. It will not make our streets and our communities safe and free from violence. It will not make our military, our prisons, our immigration system, or our healthcare

inclusive and just. It will not erase the vulnerability our community feels as we age in a world without an adequate safety net. (Isaacs 2014)

While Isaacs' statement is commendable; it remains an outlier when analyzing the vast majority of articles that appear in mainstream news media. Most of the articles offer very little in terms of questioning the trajectory of the movement; so the only thing the mainstream public witnesses are debates about marriage equality, which in turn portrays marriage as seemingly *the* battle for gay rights. Moreover, this is not solely referring to the article's text, but also in the images that accompany them. For instance, in the mainstream media outlets, I found countless pictures of lesbians and gays hugging, cheering, and waving rainbow flags and celebrating as states began overturning their bans on gay marriage. While these pictures are meant to be heartwarming and at times emotional, there is little diversity shown in these pictures and little discussion about other issues that affect the less mainstream members of LGBT/Q communities. These photos too often show two lesbian women or two gay men who are presumably white, cisgender, and gender normative embracing and cheering and sometimes holding their children who are cheering as well. I am not advocating that they should not be excited or celebrate, but it leaves me wondering: what about the queers or transgender members of the community? Where are the people who were responsible for the beginning of the gay rights movement in the first place? Why do we not see images of them?

The portrayal that is so often utilized to represent the "face" of the lesbian and gay movement is white, monogamous, class-privileged individuals who are living the "American Dream," further demonstrating the divisions that are inherent in this fight for equality. These types of displays are problematic and exclusionary, especially against those who do not uphold or live in these homonormative relationship structures (Bailey, Kandaswamy and Richardson

2008:118). Despite the fact the media show only a fraction of the community, there are families and relationships existing outside of their narrow portrayals. Similarly, although the media is dominated by same-sex marriage debates there are protests and demonstrations occurring to address critical issues such as immigration enforcement expansion, ending border militarization, and deportation. However, Gay, Inc. has not centered its attention on these battles because its funds are all directed towards expanding marriage rights and military service, and furthering its own capitalist endeavors (Spade and Willse 2013). The fight for marriage equality is a part of the mainstream lesbian and gay agenda, not a queer one. So while gaining the right to marry is thought to be one of the “last barriers” for some in the lesbian and gay community; for many, marriage is not even the first step in addressing any of the needs of queer people (Bailey et al. 2008, Nair 2014b).

### **3.2 Gay Marriage Enters the Culture Wars**

The Prop 8 protest and campaigns helped spark a renewed interest in the debate about same-sex marriage and the news media paid a lot of attention to how the 2008 Presidential candidates were going to handle this issue. Sarah Wheaton from *The New York Times* argued that the May 2008, California Supreme Court ruling may have given the “constantly simmering culture war new salience” (Wheaton 2008). In previous elections, the debate about gay rights and gay marriage had come up, but not gained much traction. Just four years earlier, we witnessed 13 states passing bans against same-sex marriage and many political scholars and news pundits stated that many Americans were not thinking about the issue of gay rights during the 2004 election cycle especially compared to other issues, such as the war in Iraq and the economy (Dowd 2012, Lewis 2005). However, with the aftermath of the California decision and reaction to Prop 8, gay rights were solidly back on the political table.

Shortly after the California ruling in May 2008, all the Presidential nominees issued statements regarding gay rights. None of the candidates fully embraced the ruling, but none outright dismissed it either. The two Democratic candidates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama talked about their positions on gay rights and being supportive of civil unions, but neither endorsed the idea of legalizing same-sex marriage. Clinton's campaign released the statement that "[she] believes that gay and lesbian couples in committed relationships should have the same right and responsibilities as all Americans and believes that civil unions are the best way to achieve this goal...and [she] continues to believe that the issue of marriage should be left to the states" (Wheaton 2008). Similarly, the Obama campaign stated: "[he] has always believed that same-sex couples should enjoy equal rights under the law, and he will continue to fight for civil unions as President...[he] continues to believe that states should make their own decisions when it comes to the issue of marriage" (Wheaton 2008). For Republicans, Senator John McCain said that he supported the "right of the people of California to recognize marriage as a unique institution sanctioning the union between a man and a woman, just like he did in Arizona... [and he] doesn't believe judges should be making these decisions" (Wheaton 2008). The question of whether judges could make decisions supporting and/or overturning state bans against same-sex marriage became a significant debate at this time and in subsequent years. As the November election drew closer, the media persistently asked the three candidates about their respective stances on gay rights, and the public witnessed all three delicately avoiding the issue; while simultaneously trying not to ostracize the gay community and gain the gay vote. It is in the months leading up to the November 2008 election that we witness the emergence of the "gay voting bloc" (Solmonese 2014).

After Obama won the 2008 election, his administration wanted to show that he was committed to working with the lesbian and gay community to increase protections and rights. But it was not until the 2012 election cycle that the American public witnessed a true shift in gay politics on the national level. Not only did the public witness both Democrats and Republicans being forced to deal with the issue of gay rights and gay marriage, but we also observed the issue of gay rights take on a symbolic cultural meaning. In 2008, candidates could largely dodge the issue of gay rights; however just four years later, we see the political rhetoric completely change. For Democrats, being portrayed as supportive of gay marriage operated as a symbol of being “more progressive,” than their Republican counterparts. For Republicans, being portrayed as against gay marriage was a tactic for them to signal to their base they were “more traditional” than their Democratic competitors. The President of the HRC, Chad Griffin said: “When the history books are written, 2012 will be remembered as the year when LGBT Americans won decisively at the ballot box... The dreams of millions of fair-minded Americans were realized as discrimination crumbled and equality prevailed” (Semuels 2012). Not only does Griffin argue that gay rights have become a national conversation and a significant issue in the United States’ cultural wars, he also asserts that if gay marriage is legalized nationally, then the LGBT/Q community will achieve equality. As I have previously discussed, the glaring flaw with his claim is that, despite the legalization of same-sex marriage, many in LGBT/Q communities still face discrimination, and marriage equality does nothing to solve this problem.

One of the main reasons gay marriage became a central topic in the 2012 election cycle was that President Obama became the first sitting president to announce his support for same-sex marriage. President Obama officially announced that he supported same-sex marriage and declared DOMA unconstitutional on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2012. He said that, whereas previously he

supported civil unions and thought marriage was a states' rights issue, he always personally believed in marriage equality (Rosenthal 2013c). Many noted that his announcement came only after Vice President Biden announced his support for gay marriage, which focused the attention of the general public, and especially of the lesbian and gay community, on the President's stance. Officially, Obama responded that Biden got out "over his skis" and felt that in some ways Biden forced his hand on the issue of gay marriage. However, he quickly remarked he would have gotten around to declaring his "evolved" position on the matter before going to the Democratic National Convention (Cushman Jr. 2012). In an interview with ABC's Robin Roberts that was aired on "Good Morning America" shortly after President Obama's announcement, he said: "would I have preferred to have done this in my own way, in my own terms, without I think there being a lot of notice to everybody? Sure. But all's well that ends well." He continued: "I have to tell you that part of my hesitation on this has also been I didn't want to nationalize the issue...there's a tendency when I weigh in to think suddenly it becomes political and it becomes polarized" (News 2012). And Obama insisted that his change was not driven by politics, "I think it'd be hard to argue that somehow this is—something that I'd be doing for political advantage—because frankly, you know—you know, the politics, it's not clear how they cut... In some places that are going to be pretty important — in this electoral map — it may hurt me. But — you know, I think it — it was important for me, given how much attention this issue was getting, both here in Washington, but — elsewhere, for me to go ahead, 'Let's be clear. Here's what I believe.'" (News 2012). He then changed the subject to talk about the economy and the troops in Afghanistan.

Advisers to the Obama administration stated that Obama had intended to announce his support for gay marriage since early 2012, in order to define his position before Democrats



nominated him for re-election. However, many of the President's allies did not actually think he would formally declare his support because he needed to be cautious, given the "unpredictable fallout the President could face by taking a clear stand on one of the most contentious and politically charged social issues of the day" (Calmes and Baker 2012). At this point in 2012, even while polls showed swelling support for same-sex marriage, many pollsters did not know how this announcement would affect President Obama's chances for re-election.

Obama referred to his position on gay marriage as one that had "evolved" because he did not want to appear inconsistent or opportunistic as he headed into his second campaign for President. Obama certainly was not the only one who used this language; Hillary Clinton also invoked the notion that her position on gay marriage had "evolved." In 2014, Clinton gave a rather tense interview on the National Public Radio (NPR) show *Fresh Air*, in which Terri Gross asked her about her stance changing on gay marriage. During the interview, Clinton argued that she did not "flip-flop" or change her stance about gay marriage; rather, she just "evolved." Gross asked if Clinton thought "there are politicians who, you know, in their heart really support it but don't publicly support it?" Clinton responded:

I did not support gay marriage when I was in the Senate or running for president, as you know, and as President Obama and others held the same position... And then when I was out of the Secretary of State position and once again free to comment on domestic matters, I very shortly came out in favor of fully equality, including gay marriage.

Gross challenged Clinton on her position, pressing her to state that explain why she previously did not support gay marriage, which Clinton repeatedly refused:

Clinton: "I think I'm an American. [Laughing] And I think we have all evolved and it's been one of the fastest most sweeping transformations.

Gross: No, I understand, but a lot of people already believed in it back the '90s. A lot of people already supported gay marriage.

Clinton: But not - to be fair, Terry, not that many. Yes, were there activists who were ahead of their time? Well, that was true in every human rights and civil rights movement, but the vast majority of Americans were just waking up to this issue and beginning to, you know, think about it and grasp it for the first time... And we ought to celebrate that instead of plowing old ground, where in fact a lot of people, the vast majority of people, have been moving forward.

Gross: I'm pretty sure you didn't answer my question about whether you evolved or it was the American public that changed [Laughing].

Clinton: I said I'm an American, so we all evolved. And I think that that's a fair, you know, that's a fair conclusion.

Gross: So you're saying your opinion on gay marriage changed as opposed to you - you just felt it was comfortable...

Clinton: You know, somebody is always first, Terry. Somebody's always out front and thank goodness they are. But that doesn't mean that those who joined later in being publicly supportive or even privately accepting that there needs to be change are any less committed. You could not be having the sweep of marriage equality across our country if nobody changed their mind. And thank goodness so many of us have.

Gross: So that's one for you changed your mind? [Laughing].

Clinton: “You know, I really - I have to say, I think you are very persistent, but you are playing with my words and playing with what is such an important issue.

Gross: I am just trying to clarify so I can understand.

Clinton: No, I don’t think you are trying to clarify. I think you’re trying to say that, you know, I used to be opposed and now I’m in favor, and I did it for political reasons. And that’s just flat wrong. So let me just state what I feel like you are implying and repudiate it. I have a strong record. I have a great commitment to this issue and I am proud of what I’ve done and the progress we’re making” (NPR 2014).

One of the possible reasons Secretary Clinton may have been so adamant about her stance not changing could be the result of critics accusing her of “flip-flopping” on the issue in hope of securing the gay vote for the 2016 election. It was important for Clinton to establish herself as gay-friendly, not only to distinguish herself from Republicans, but also to gain the cultural capital of being a progressive candidate. Mitt Romney (the Republican nominee in 2012) stated that he opposed same-sex marriage. Regardless of being pro-marriage or against marriage or if these politicians beliefs had “evolved,” the historical significance of a sitting president endorsing gay marriage is irrefutable (Calmes and Baker 2012).

The new framing of gay marriage during the 2012 election was significant, because not only did these politicians not want to appear that they “flip-flopped” on the issue when it became politically safe or expedient, but also because marriage rights advocates had solidified the marriage debate as a moral and progressive argument. Gay marriage advocates successfully framed the debate that established opposition to marriage equality to mean you are anti-progress and too traditional, i.e., a bigot. While President Obama’s announcement was cheered, we can

also ask, does it really matter? Did his announcement actually accomplish anything in terms of rights for LGBT/Q communities? At the time of his revelation in 2012, polls showed that “public support for same-sex marriage [was] growing at a pace that surprised even pollsters as older generations of voters who tend to be strongly opposed [were] supplanted by younger ones who are just as strongly in favor” (Calmes and Baker 2012).

In many ways Obama’s announcement can be seen as a politically-motivated strategy to symbolically align himself with more liberal and progressive voters. As a political gamble, it indeed paid off. After his announcement, Obama spoke at many mainstream lesbian and gay events and his statement was heralded by Gay, Inc. as a big step toward achieving equality (Calmes and Baker 2012). The HRC’s website stated the organization had raised \$7 million to mobilize and motivate LGBT/Q voters and their allies to vote for “pro-equality” candidates in 2008 (HRC 2016). In the 2012 election cycle, the HRC publicly endorsed Obama for re-election and in the largest electoral campaign in the history of the organization, it contributed more than \$20 million to his campaign and won the marriage equality battles in the three states, and elected people to Congress who were either openly lesbian, gay, bisexual or straight allies (HRC, 2016). One of the early success of that campaign cycle was Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) who became the first openly gay Senator in U.S. history. While on the surface these can be seen as promising steps for mainstream acceptance of lesbians and gays, ultimately these successes are not accomplishing much for the majority of people in LGBT/Q communities. Millions of dollars went to congressional and presidential campaigns instead of to community-based organizations that could make a true difference in people’s lives.

### 3.3 Gay Rights as Cultural Capital

Ross Douthat (2012) of *The New York Times* argues that Obama's hand was basically pressured after Biden's announcement because of the "power of moral absolutism in politics." Douthat (2012) argues that part of the extremely fast success of the marriage debate (especially in comparison to other civil rights and political movements) was because the supporters were able to shift the message into one that calls up ideas of morality, bigotry, and hate. No politician wants to be plagued with the label of "bigot." So even though Obama had previously spoken out against anti-gay policies such as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and DOMA, it behooved him to distance himself from anyone who would think he was not supportive of gay marriage, in fear of being labeled as not being on the right side of history.

It is also important to consider why this political movement has gained so much traction, and so fast, while other battles for rights (e.g., reproductive rights, the black lives matter movement, transgender rights) have not seen the same type of success. As the U.S. witnesses growing public support for same-sex marriage, simultaneously we are witnessing a rolling-back of rights such critical components of the Voting Rights Act, women's reproductive freedoms, and transpeople's rights. These other equality battles are not garnering the same support or momentum, which suggests that the framing of the gay rights movement has been crucial. Katha Pollitt wrote in *The Nation* that she believes "reproductive rights are inescapably about women," whereas, same-sex marriage is something that men want. Even though lesbian couples represent the majority of same-sex marriage, the phrasing of "gay marriage" establishes it as a male-centered issue. Moreover, due to the structures of patriarchy, male issues are presumably of interest to everyone, because men's interests are society's interests; and, since gay men have a

“great deal of social and economic power... they have used it, brilliantly, to mainstream the cause” (Pollitt 2015).

Pro- and anti-gay marriage factions agree that the speed in which public opinion has changed is quite shocking. Many attribute this speed to how the wealthy gay organizations have framed the argument as “you’re either pro-marriage or against equality” (Conrad 2014b, Spade and Willse 2013). Others argue that it is due to a generational shift; polls show that people who were born after 1980 are more likely to support gay marriage, and seem to be less homophobic than people in previous generations (Bollier 2014). However, the shift in public support is also occurring among older adults too. Data suggest that this is a result of seeing more images of gay people in the media, and to having “out” gay friends and family members (Becker and Scheufele 2011, Bollier 2014).

Marriage equality has been fashioned as a battle for fairness and to end discrimination; a battle about love and basic humanity, and not about “gay rights” that were once synonymous with “special rights” in the nineties. Consequently, this successful reframing (along with being championed by privileged white men) has made it easy for individuals and corporations to line up behind and support gay marriage, largely so they can reap the cultural and financial benefits that come along with being perceived as pro-gay. Along these lines, Jay Michaelson author and contributor to *The Daily Beast* writes, “I can’t think of a single A-list brand that is out, loud, and proud for reproductive freedom” (Michaelson 2014). So while many queer activists lament and oppose the corporatization of the LGBT/Q movement; capitalism has a way of winning.

Interestingly, shortly after Obama’s announcement, many members of Congress come out in support for gay marriage, especially Democrats. These revelations signified that publicly supporting gay marriage was no longer considered political suicide, and some politicians actually

gained public support. From 2008 onward, gay rights (specifically gay marriage) slowly became a mainstream issue that had little to do with actual gay relationships. Looking back to 2004, according to a *New York Times* poll: 44% of Americans said they *would not* support same-sex marriage, where in 2012, 38% stated that they *do* support gay marriage, showing that opinions nearly flipped. By December 2012, a *USA Today* Gallup Poll showed that 53% agreed that same-sex couples should have the same marriage rights as heterosexuals, nearly twice the percentage who agreed in 1996. Equally noticeable, 36% of those polled said they had changed their minds about the issue over the course of their lives, with 35% saying they were more tolerant, 18% more aware of gay issues, and the rest scattered across varying responses; but only 8% who said they had decided against gay marriage (Raasch 2013).

These changes in public opinion suggest the reframing of the debate by advocates caused a cultural transformation about the meaning of gay marriage. Being pro-marriage took on symbolic significance for individuals and served as cultural capital for politicians. Politicians and the U.S. public are now able to demonstrate they are “progressive” and to distance themselves from the bigot label by stating they support gay rights, but are not beholden to actually aiding members in LGBT/Q communities. For the Democratic Party, this strategy works in its favor. It is able to capitalize on this symbolic shift to demonstrate that its party is superior to the Republican Party, and to portray Republicans as a close-minded party of the past. Rosenthal (Rosenthal 2013a) argues that, by the beginning of 2013, for many senators, not supporting gay marriage turned into a bad political move because now many in the general public will view them as discriminatory. In March 2013, in a poll from *The Washington Post* and *ABC News*, 58% of Americans said that lesbians and gay men should have the right to marry, compared to 37% in 2003, and just barely over 50% in 2011 (Cohen 2013). Rosenthal argues that former

“traditionalists” needed to realize that “they can gain a small PR [public relations] advantage by switching sides before someone else does” (Rosenthal, 2013b). Rosenthal argues that with public opinion changing so quickly, for those who wanted to claim that they are “liberal” (but had not previously declared their position), they realized that they needed to publically state their support because the public was expecting it. For example, Secretary Clinton released a video she made for the HRC in March of 2013, where she stated her support for full marriage rights. In the video she stated that lesbians and gay men “are full and equal citizens and deserve the rights of citizenship. That includes marriage” (Chozick 2014). David Jackson of *USA Today* said her announcement puts her “in line with other potential 2016 Democratic presidential candidates” (Jackson 2013). As political candidates started looking toward the 2016 election, Democratic strategist Steve Elmendorf declared that anyone who has aspirations for the presidency has to favor gay marriage to be successful in the 2016 Democratic primaries. Elmendorf argued that the issue had taken on great symbolic significance for many voters, particularly young ones. He said “It’s become a civil rights issue... a progressive issue” (Jackson 2013).

However, these declarations of support for gay marriage are not just coming from the Democrats. Rosenthal argues: “It’s becoming positively fashionable for Republicans who no longer think they have a shot at national office to drop their opposition to gay marriage” (Rosenthal 2013b). Specifically, he was referring to Senator Ron Portman who was a potential running mate for Mitt Romney’s 2012 Presidential campaign. In March 2013, there were only 12 Republican Senators in support of gay marriage, and Rosenthal’s statement suggests that more Republicans will come out in support of gay marriage as it becomes less politically dangerous in some races (Rosenthal 2013a). On the contrary, many in the Republican Party are trying to prove they want to uphold “traditional” values by opposing marriage equality and disavowing these



new “progressive” changes, further demonstrating how this political battle has been elevated to a symbolic debate in the United States.

Nate Silver, a renowned American statistician, wanted to see if he could mathematically understand the cultural and political shift toward the acceptance of gay marriage by senators. In March 2013, Silver found in an analysis of eight national polls that support for gay marriage had exceeded opposition to it. On average, the polls showed 51% saying they approved and 43% stating their opposition. Silver reports that from the Massachusetts same-sex marriage ruling in 2004, support for gay marriage began to rise at a rate of about 2 percentage points every year, and this trend has continued to increase at a similar rate since (Silver 2013a).

In April 2013, *The Washington Post* reported that 50 senators had stated their support for same-sex marriage, which was a substantial increase from only eight in 2008 and 16 in 2010 (Silver 2013b). This surge of support is presumably tied to public opinion, but Silver argues that it is notable because public opinion has been “pretty steady and linear,” whereas there was a sudden wave of Senate approval. When Silver calculated the logistical regression of support rates for same-sex marriage of senators, the two variables that proved to be highly significant were the senator’s “ideology rating” and the estimated support for same-sex marriage among voters in their state. While this may not be all that surprising, because politicians often modify their opinions and votes in the direction of their constituents’ opinions, Silver also argued that this surge of senators’ support was largely due to their *perception* of gay marriage being an issue that would gain them favor with voters and would boost their public relations image. Silver argues that once same-sex marriage becomes a position that the majority of the nation supports, endorsements by senators supporting same-sex marriage will “begin to decelerate once it has become unambiguously the majority stance” (Silver 2013b). Therefore, for those senators and

representatives who come out in support of same-sex marriage before their colleagues or the majority of the public, they are able to “cash-in” on the idea of being “progressive” and seemingly being more enlightened stance on the issue; but if they actually support LGBT/Q communities becomes irrelevant because it is ultimately about the public’s perception. In this way, we not only witness how claiming support for gay marriage can symbolically demarcate a person as progressive or oppressive, but also stating one’s support serves as a neoliberal propaganda strategy that rarely results in any real support or change for LGBT/Q communities. Therefore, these senators can come out and support gay rights and gain the cultural capital of being “progressive,” while at the same time they continue to pass legislation and defend discriminatory practices that affect members of LGBT/Q communities, especially against those who are most disenfranchised.

While the same-sex marriage debate may indeed signal how socially progressive or socially conservative a politician, corporate leader, or individual is, this issue is much more complicated. For example, in the United Kingdom, a reporter from *The Independent* stated that Lord Carey, an archbishop of the Church of England, was wrong for attacking their government’s plan to legalize same-sex marriage. The reporter stated that he saw the archbishop’s statement as “one of the greatest political power-grabs in history” and in doing so Carey places himself “on the wrong side not just of history, but of morality, compassion and reason” (Staff 2012d). This statement demonstrates how successful Gay, Inc. has been in shaping the rhetoric and public perception about marriage equality. This rhetoric demands that individuals *must* support marriage equality if they want to be seen as compassionate and reasonable or enlightened people. But queer scholars have argued that it is not that simple. Paradoxically, queer activists and opponents to gay marriage make seemingly similar arguments,

even though they are not politically or socially aligned. Queer activists resist being folded into the institution of marriage (not because they are anti-gay), but because it is an institution that is unfair, unjust, misogynistic, and racist while also privileging heterosexuality and monogamy.

Spade and Willse (2013) argue that the bifurcated framing of the issue as either being pro-marriage or against equality hides how the same-sex marriage battle has been part of a conservative gay politics that de-prioritizes people of color, poor people, transgender people, women, immigrants, prisoners, and people with disabilities (Spade and Willse 2014:31). They argue that marriage is a coercive institution that perpetuates racism and sexism through forced gender and family norms; so expanding the “definition of marriage to include a small portion of lesbian and gay couples only strengthens that system of marginalization and supports the idea that the state should pick which types of families to reward and recognize and which to punish and endanger” (Spade 2014:31). Queer advocates are not aligning themselves with those who are depriving members of LGBT/Q communities of rights; they argue that the marriage debate is not actually an argument about equality or rights, because the very institution is based upon and supported by inequalities and oppression. Eric Stanley (2014) argues this narrow framing of you are “one of us” and support gay marriage or “one of them” and are a homophobe works to silence the much needed debate and public discourse around such issues (Stanley 2014:30). He posits that if you look at the rhetoric coming from the Freedom to Marry Movement and the Republican Party, their similarities are frightening apparent:

In their ideal world we would all be monogamously coupled, instead of rethinking the practice of “coupling.” They want us working at our jobs, not working towards collective and self-determination, remembering anniversaries not the murder of trans-people, buying wedding rings not smashing capitalism. The vision of the future the Republicans and the gay marriage movement have offered will render most of us already in the margins of the picture (trans-people, sex workers, queers of color, HIV positive people, non-monogamous people, etc.) as the new enemy of the regime of married normalcy they hope to usher in. (Stanley 2014:30)

The gay marriage debate has made normative lesbians and gays strange bedfellows with many social conservatives and those in the Republican Party, because ultimately to support and advocate for gay marriage is a conservative maneuver. It is not about equality; it is about further assimilating into the heteronormative culture. This is why it should not be surprising that more politicians are publicly declaring their support for gay marriage: they are not doing anything revolutionary or advocating on behalf of LGBT/Q communities. All they are actually doing is reifying and upholding the heteronormative standards that govern society.

Many political commentators hypothesize that gay marriage will be a dividing issue in the 2016 Presidential campaign. In 2014, President Obama stated that in 2004 he felt that same-sex marriage was the most divisive issue in the United States, where many Republican nominees ran as strict opponents to legalizing same-sex marriage (Jackson 2013). Obama stated that, with more states legalizing same-sex marriage and public support growing, he believed Republicans were not going to make blocking gay marriage a significant part of their platform in 2014 (Jackson 2013). However, in 2016, political strategists have seen almost a reversal in these opinions, even for the Republican Party. While many nominees may not be supportive of same-sex marriage, they are much less likely to explicitly state their opposition. In national polls, support for same-sex marriage has routinely exceeded 50% and as of 2012, the Democrats fully embraced the idea of “gay rights as human rights,” even going so far as adding it to the party’s national platform (Noble 2014, Platform 2016a). The Republican Party remains against same-sex marriage; their official position is “preserving and protecting traditional marriage” as a part of their national party’s platform (Platform 2016b).

Political commentators also suspect that the 2016 caucuses will bring the “old testament Republicans” or the “hard-liners” who will speak out against marriage versus the “new testament Republicans” which will downplay the marriage issue in their candidacy (Noble, 2014). The Democrats have started to use the issue of marriage equality as an example of how Republicans are not evolving with the cultural changes of the U.S. and are a party of the past (Noble, 2014). These divisions and political strategies reveal how the issue of gay marriage has become a cultural symbol of who is progressive versus who is conventional in their beliefs.

Mainstream lesbians and gays fought for access into the institution of marriage, not to dismantle or disrupt it, because the latter would profoundly challenge how the general public viewed them. Proponents of the marriage equality movement have been triumphant in making gay marriage “palatable to middle-of-the-road Americans” (Bollier 2014). By controlling the representations of lesbians and gays in the media they have been able to change the impression of what mainstream Americans visualize when they hear the word “gay”; homonormative lesbians and gays have successfully conveyed their message of “we’re just like you.” These victories have changed the public appearance of the gay community into a digestible, heteronormative image. Ostensibly, this strategy seems like a positive step because lesbians and gays are winning rights, but it also disregards those in LGBT/Q communities who do not want to assimilate into heteronormative society (e.g., queer transgender people, queer people of color, non-monogamous queers, queer immigrants). These queer groups and individuals actively resist normalization into a society that refuses to recognize them and renders their experiences as unintelligible or deviant. Therefore, strategies to gain marriage equality are clearly grounded in the expectation (and imperative) to be normative, assimilative, and ultimately anti-queer.

### 3.3.1 *Capitalism and Gay Rights*

The shifting discourse toward normalization is not only occurring in politics, but can also be seen in the rhetoric of corporate culture. Even before the 2012 election and just prior to the Prop 8 vote, media coverage of gay rights increased significantly, especially as corporations entered the cultural war of gay rights. In October 2008, a group of prominent Silicon Valley executives and investors publicly denounced Prop 8. The group consisted of founders and current and former top executives of companies, including Google, Yahoo, Adobe, eBay, Facebook, Intuit, and Palm (Helft 2008). These companies made a public statement in a full-page advertisement in the *San Jose Mercury News* urging readers to vote “no” on Prop 8. The ad read: “Silicon Valley Leaders Urge You to Stand for Equality” (Helft 2008). These executives, especially those from Apple and Google, donated thousands to defeat the Prop 8 campaign. However, the question arises, why? The answer lies within *what* the fight for gay rights began to represent, even as far back as 2008.

The cultural battle for marriage equality has not operated as a traditional political issue, but one that positions supporters as “morally right” and “progressive” versus those who oppose it as “bigots” or “hateful” (Douthat 2012). And for corporations, public perception is crucial. It was imperative for corporations such as Google and Apple to secure early media attention demonstrating their opposition to Prop 8, in order to prove that they were pro-gay. Employing Derrick Bell’s theory of interest convergence is helpful to understand the changing corporate support of same-sex marriage. Bell (1995) originally forwarded the theory in his work as a critical race scholar in which he posits “whites will promote racial advances for blacks only when they also promote white self-interest” (Bell 1995). Utilizing this idea, I assert that corporations claim to support gay marriage because it advances their self-interests. They claim to

support gay marriage because it increases their profit margins and rewards them with positive public relations images.

Catherine Rampell of *The New York Times* asserted that corporations' support of gay marriage is economically profitable (Rampell 2008). She argues that companies can support "gay rights" because of the potential to make money, not because of their own politics or beliefs. Rampell points out that, generally speaking, same-sex weddings can present opportunities for local economic growth. Just like heterosexual couples, lesbian and gay couples spend exorbitant amounts of money for venues, florists, and bridal gowns; and gay weddings have even spawned specifically targeted new product lines. But it is not only consumer markets benefiting from gay couples, cities and states that brand themselves as gay-friendly have reported economic booms due to the new gay marriage industry. For example, Provincetown, Massachusetts experienced an influx of tourists as lesbian and gay couples flocked to the city to get married because they could not in their hometowns (Richburg 2008). San Francisco Mayor Newsom told *The New York Times* he lamented losing revenue from destination wedding businesses due to his state's ban (McKinley 2008). In 2008, the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, which studies sexual orientation and the law, estimated that legalizing same-sex ceremonies in the state of California would result in approximately \$63.8 million in government taxes and fee revenues over three years (McKinley 2008). Even as far back as 2004, the Congressional Budget Office, the nonpartisan research arm of the United States Congress, put together a study investigating the economic effects of overturning DOMA and legalizing same-sex marriage in all 50 states. It estimated that legalizing gay marriage would "improve the federal budget's bottom line by \$1 billion a year over the next ten years thanks to additional revenue through the marriage penalty and estate taxes" (Rampell 2008).

Instead of balking at the inclusion of a capitalist argument, gay marriage advocates fully embraced it and argued it was in a state's best interest to legalize same-sex marriage because it would benefit state economies (Peters 2009). In New York, the state comptroller stated that the "state's economy would gain up to \$210 million over the next three years if same-sex marriage becomes legal.... Legalizing gay marriage for same-sex couples is not only good for the couples but also for our economy" (Peters 2009). This indicates that supporting gay marriage is a profit making strategy, so when framed in these terms, it makes logical sense that same-sex marriage gained the support of many state governments and corporations. Moreover, this also demonstrates that gay marriage advocates have fully embraced the role of capitalism in these debates, instead of contesting its inclusion.

While several corporate leaders realized as far back as 2008 that claiming to be supportive of the lesbian and gay community was a fiscally beneficial decision, many more CEOs realized that adopting this position would gain them substantial benefits in terms of their public relations image. However, several of these companies (e.g., Target, Mozilla, Urban Outfitters) claim to support the lesbian and gay community to increase business, but also simultaneously donate money to anti-gay political initiatives or refuse to offer job protections to their transgender and gay employees. Part of what we are witnessing with corporations is a strategy queer activists call "pinkwashing." This concept refers to masking objectionable policies under the guise of being "gay-friendly." By March 2013, there were nearly 300 company leaders that spoke out against DOMA, from the more socially progressive and conscious ones such as Google to more conservative ones like Goldman Sachs. I argue that this corporate opposition to DOMA was a public relation maneuver, because they discovered it was "bad for business" to be on the wrong side of the gay marriage cultural war (Saloomey 2013).



For instance, the large retailer Target came under fire in 2011 from gay rights activists who threatened to boycott after the company—along with Best Buy and 3M—donated \$150,000 to an organization that supported a Republican candidate for the Minnesota governor’s race who was a vocal opponent of gay marriage in 2010. Through its federal political action committee (PAC), Target gave large sums of money to anti-gay national politicians like Michele Bachmann, Orrin Hatch, Jim Matheson, Pat Tiberi, and Roy Blunt in 2011 (Sauer 2011). Even though Target did donate money to some pro-equality candidates such as Shelley Berkley, Ron Kind, and Mark Begich, it was, combined, still \$8,000 less than what it donated to anti-gay campaigns (Sauer, 2011). Many in the lesbian and gay community called for protests and a boycott of the retailer, which spurred a public apology from CEO Gregg Steinhafel and the creation of a social media video to demonstrate Target’s “commitment to equality.” Some argue it was just an empty ploy to placate protestors. Just two months after Steinhafel’s apology, Target PAC donated the maximum annual amount to former Speaker John Boehner, even though he was against the national Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) (Sauer 2011). Target claimed that its donations to anti-gay equality politicians was just business and had nothing to do with its support for gay rights. While it simultaneously sent its company’s LGBT Business co-chair, Daniel Duty to lecture about how “leveraging LGBT groups is good for the bottom line” (Sauer 2011), Target continued to donate money to anti-gay campaigns.

Similar cases can also be seen with corporations such as Gold’s Gym, that is known to be very supportive of gay rights; however its CEO has donated millions of dollars to anti-gay legislation (Jean 2014, Terkel 2010). Another clear example of corporate pinkwashing is with the “Pink Palace,” a renowned Beverly Hills Hotel (Jean 2014). The hotel’s official policy states that it is non-discriminatory work environment and the hotel is supportive of the gay community;

however, the hotel is owned by the sultan of Brunei who in 2014 implemented a new law that mandates death by stoning for LGBT people and public beatings of women who have abortions (Gummow 2014, Jean 2014). Gay activists called for a boycott of the hotel, but when CEO Christopher Cowdray was asked about the sultan's new policies, he replied that he "had no opinion whatsoever" on whether LGBT people should be stoned to death.

One of the most prominent battles between gay rights activists and a corporation was the highly publicized incident with Chick-Fil-A. In June 2012, Dan Cathy, the owner and CEO of Chick-Fil-A, a fast-food restaurant known for its religious ties, came under protests after Cathy publicly stated that he supported the "biblical definition of the family unit" (Severson 2012). His statement was supported by anti-gay organizations such as the National Organization for Marriage (NOM) who called Cathy a "corporate hero for marriage" (Staff 2012c). Cathy also gained support from Mike Huckabee, former Arkansas governor and Fox News host, and Rick Santorum, the former Pennsylvania senator, both of whom are known for their staunch opposition to LGBT/Q equality. In opposition to Cathy's statement, many college students across the nation called for Chick-Fil-As to be removed from their campuses. Chicago Alderman Proco Moreno stated that he would not move forward on legislation the company needed in order to open a second restaurant in that city; Boston Mayor Thomas Menino told the *Boston Herald* that "Chick-fil-A doesn't belong in Boston... You can't have a business in the city of Boston that discriminates against a population... we're an open city, we're a city that's at the forefront of inclusion" (Turner 2012). The Jim Henson Company that creates toys for the corporation also spoke out against Cathy's statement, and said they would no longer make toys for Chick-Fil-A and would donate the money they had received to GLAAD (Severson 2012).

Huckabee initiated a public relations stunt, “Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day,” on August 1, 2012 to counter the “vicious hate speech and intolerant bigotry” coming from the left aimed at Chick-fil-A (Staff, 2012b). On the Facebook page for the event he encouraged people to patronize the fast food chain and to support “a business that operates on Christian principles and whose executives are willing to take a stand for the Godly values we espouse by simply showing up and eating at Chick Fil-A” (Huckabee 2012). In direct opposition to Huckabee’s “Appreciation Day,” hundreds of lesbians and gays showed up at various Chick-Fil-A locations on August 3<sup>rd</sup> to stage a “kiss-in” protest. Carly McGehee, a political activist in Dallas, used social media to organize what she called “Same-Sex Kiss Day” (Palmer 2016). On the event’s Facebook page, there were about 15,000 people who said they would join the protest. Unlike some of the other strategies to protest opposition to same-sex marriage, this demonstration seemed to have some of the older liberationist spirit. However revolutionary this “kiss-in” may have been, it was still couched in the normalizing rhetoric of homonormativity. For example, McGehee stated: “I like to liken it to a married couple sharing a light kiss over a romantic meal, it's the same thing. We're here, and our love is just as good” (CNN 2012). In Atlanta, the home of Chick-Fil-A, one of the protest organizers, Marci Alt, made an online petition inviting Cathy to come to her home and have dinner with her partner of 12 years and their two children (Palmer, 2016). Alt stated that she believed if Cathy could see just how normal her family was, then he might change his stance on gay marriage. Her protest message centers on the assimilationist “we’re just like you” rhetoric that insists on rights being attached to respectability and civility. These protestors are not calling for social equality, but rather wanting to demonstrate that they just want to get married like their heterosexual counterparts. In some ways this protest can be

seen as successful because it does show a desire to combat anti-gay rhetoric; but ultimately it still lacks the queer possibility of a broader social justice message.

Another controversy regarding gay rights surfaced in 2014, as Brendan Eich took over as chief executive of the web browser Mozilla Firefox. The issue became public when the online dating site, OkCupid! would not allow members to log into the site with Firefox. OkCupid! stated that their decision was a direct result of Eich being an “opponent of equal rights for gay couples” (Bilton 2014). The controversy, which was reminiscent of the Target issue a few years earlier, arose when it was revealed that Mr. Eich had donated \$1,000 in 2008 to support Prop 8. Shortly after he was announced as CEO, headlines reported that three board members quit in protest. Many Mozilla employees also expressed their frustrations publicly on Twitter, voicing their concerns about Eich and questioning his commitment to have an open and inclusive working environment; several even called for his resignation (Bilton 2014). Mozilla is owned by the Mozilla Foundation, an independent non-profit organization, and its corporate slogan is: “doing good is part of our code” (Mozilla 2016). The controversy ended with Eich resigning from the position just two weeks after taking the job (Bajaj 2014).

Interestingly, some found the public campaign against Mr. Eich unseemly and disturbing, and the objections emerged from religious conservatives and prominent gay activists alike. For example, Andrew Sullivan, a conservative political commentator who was one of the first gay activists to write about gay marriage said: “if we are about intimidating the free speech of others, we are no better than the anti-gay bullies who came before us” (Bajaj, 2014). Sullivan who is a vocal proponent for the assimilation of the gay community, also proclaimed that current gay rights advocates are “hounding our opponents with a fanaticism more like the religious right than anyone else...” (Sullivan 2014). However, several gay rights advocates countered by stating their

organizations did not call for Mr. Eich's resignation, but rather thought an apology would have sufficed. Evan Wolfson, the founder of the Freedom to Marry movement, said that Mozilla was "deciding who best represents them and their values. There is no monolithic gay rights movement that called for this" (Bilton and Cohen 2014). Sullivan's statement that gay activists are "intolerant" "bigots" is strangely akin to Huckabee's remarks during the Chick-Fil-A controversy, which demonstrates a number of things about the social climate of the U.S. when it comes to the issue gay rights (Bradley 2014).

Perhaps unexpectedly, conservative religious leaders and conservative gay commentators are utilizing similar rhetoric as they reprimand activists who are speaking out against anti-gay sentiment. On the surface, it would seem that they should not hold congruent attitudes because religious conservatives are against LGBT/Q equality. I argue that we are witnessing an evolution of conservative convergence. These commonalities between the religious right and conservative gay activists should be quite striking, but they are not, especially in the context of this homonormative trajectory of the gay rights movement. Sullivan clearly shows his subscription to the neoliberal and conservative ideologies that dominate U.S politics. He belongs to the privileged faction of gays who speak about gay rights in an exclusionary way that does not call for equality for all members. Sullivan is a classic spokesperson for the assimilative side of the gay rights movement; he is white, cisgender, moneyed, and gender normative so is privileged in all other aspects of his life besides being gay. A Foucauldian reading of this conservative convergence between anti-gay and conservative gays demonstrates that these actions work in the favor of those who actually oppose queer people or anyone who does not subscribe to the heteronormative expectations of society. No longer are critiques against queer folks coming from anti-gay individuals and organizations; rather these new criticisms are emanating in the discourse

among fellow gays who are chiding those who challenge social issues. Second, these cases with Mozilla, Chick-Fil-A, and Target also show the broadening support for same-sex marriage by the majority of Americans. Bruni (2014) in his article “The New Gay Orthodoxy” argues that the issue of same-sex marriage in many circles:

has rather suddenly become nonnegotiable. Expected. Assumed. Proof of a baseline level of enlightenment and humanity. Akin to the understanding that all people, regardless of race or color, warrant the same rights and respect...At least beyond the offices of Chick-fil-A, it's widely believed — no, *understood* (emphasis in original) — that being pro-gay is better for business than being antigay. Hence the inclusion of a same-sex couple in the famous faces of America commercial that Coke played during the Superbowl. (Bruni 2014)

Bruni is right. The normalization of gay rights has worked to make opponents who are against gay marriage appear backward and cruel. Jo Becker who is a writer for *The New York Times* said that opposition to gay marriage is now being equated with racism, something that is indefensible and un-American. She argues that “what was once a wedge issue became wrapped in the American flag” (cited in Bruni 2014). Becker is correct; the issue of gay marriage and the push for assimilation has transformed the once deviant gay subject into an *American* citizen. Marriage equality has been successfully marketed as not being about bestowing rights to a sexually deviant “other,” rather it was framed as depriving good gay citizens of their right to have a legitimate relationship recognized by the state. This rebranding has been essential in the contemporary gay rights movement.

Framing marriage rights in terms of family values and commitment has won over a majority of Americans. But for people like Sullivan and Becker, both proponents of marriage equality, also believe gays have largely won this battle by making the public sympathetic to their cause, not by shaming opponents for their beliefs (Bruni, 2014). Bruni believes Sullivan was justified in his concerns about the public outcry regarding Mr. Eich, even though prominent gay

rights groups did not officially comment on the Mozilla decision. Sullivan criticized gay advocates and called them “bullies” while Bruni seconded his comment arguing that vilifying people will not speed up the victory towards equality, and does not portray the LGBT/Q community in a positive light. However, I argue it is more nuanced than what either of these men are stating. Bruni is right, it does not reflect well on those in the lesbian and gay community who are trying to portray themselves as model gay citizens (read: homonormative) and uphold the idea of American respectability. Further, Sullivan’s and Bruni’s remarks also reify the erroneous idea of a single, unified LGBT/Q community. What is lacking is any public recognition of counter voices; activists who do not care to win over a public that demands assimilation or threatens to withhold rights. Lastly, there is a false analogy transpiring through the comparison of gay activists to “anti-gay bullies.” The members of the religious right are claiming they are being oppressed, and some groups of conservative gay men would agree. However, the fact remains they are not being oppressed for their beliefs, because they are the ones who hold power in society. Gay folks calling into question corporations that support anti-gay legislation, is not the same thing as being a “bully” or oppressing Christians’ beliefs. Since Mozilla claimed to be a progressive company, once they discovered Mr. Eich’s support for Prop 8, they had to make a decision if that claim was more than just an empty slogan.

Many companies are realizing that they can capitalize on the image of being gay-friendly to further their own goals and the neoliberal tenets of “progression” and “diversity.” They profess wanting a more diverse and inclusive workplace, and more diverse employees, yet upon closer examination these words quickly become meaningless. Ward (respectably queer-2008) argues that there is an “instrumentalization of diversity” that has increased the demand for predictable and easily measurable forms of difference, a trend at odds with queer resistance. Due

to the conflicts within LGBT/Q communities, Ward (2008) finds there is a standoff between the respectable world of “diversity awareness” and “the often vulgar, sexualized, and historically unprofessional world” of queer life. It is a way to profit from a “culture of diversity” that is propagated simply for financial reasons. Ultimately these corporations are looking for employees who just *happen* to be gay, but are mainstream and assimilative in every other way. These strategies highlight how some corporations claim to be gay-friendly because it is good for business, not because they are invested in making a difference for LGBT/Q communities. Essentially they want to reap the benefits of an ostensible inclusive environment that celebrates diversity, as long as it does not challenge heteronormativity; thus “diversity” regarding being LGBT/Q denotes an absurdly narrow representation of the community.

### ***3.3.2 Gay Rights and Symbolism***

Corporations and politicians are not the only ones to use the strategy of claiming they are supportive of LGBT/Q communities by stating they are pro-gay marriage and believing a public statement is sufficient while simultaneously supporting anti-gay campaigns. Individuals, largely through social media, have begun declaring in mass they are pro-marriage equality, but are palpably silent regarding the broader issues facing LGBT/Q communities. This suggests that marriage advocates believe their statements of support are adequate stand-ins for caring about people in LGBT/Q communities. Thus people can feel virtuous when stating to their friends and family they support marriage equality, but never actually *do* anything to enact real change. This mindset is largely attributed to how the marriage debate have been framed as the predominant issue affecting lesbian and gay communities.

In March 2013, millions of Facebook users changed their profile pictures to the iconic HRC’s equal sign. The HRC asked gay marriage supporters to “paint the town red” by wearing



red clothes and changing their Facebook profile pictures as the Supreme Court decided the constitutionality of same-sex marriage bans (Milano 2013). The social media campaign was intended to demonstrate support for the lesbian and gay community and the opposition to the marriage initiative bills in several states. In less than 24 hours, the red equal sign littered millions of pages, and the post garnered more than 25,000 likes and 78,000 shares on the HRC's Facebook page (Yang 2013).

According to Facebook's Data Science team, analyzing users around the world, they identified 3.05 million users who changed their profile picture in support of marriage equality. 2.77 million were in the U.S., followed by 52,000 in Canada, 37,000 in Australia, 33,000 in the U.K., and 22,000 in Germany (State and Adamic 2013). Further, they found that 1.9% of Facebook users in the U.S. were "susceptible" to change their profile image or upload an image related to the movement during the same period. The investigators categorized these people as "susceptible" because these individuals had at least one friend who displayed the HRC equal sign at the time. This is interesting, because when considering motivation, while these members were showing support by changing their profile pictures, concurrently, we see a degree of social desirability taking effect as well. In a research study conducted by State and Adamic (2015), they analyzed the possible factors that predicted support for marriage equality on Facebook. They found a profound difference between users who changed their profile pictures to support marriage equality and how most information spreads on Facebook. They discovered that while users are more quick to share funny pictures and text, but with the equal sign campaign in 2013, users apparently needed "social proof" or needed to see that their friends and people in their networks also supported marriage equality, before joining in themselves (State and Adamic 2015). State and Adamaic (2015) concluded as more people changed their pictures in support,

then individuals who had seen their friends change their photos were more likely to do the same. People did not want to *not* change their profile picture or *not* upload supportive images because that would implicitly label them as *not* being supportive of gay marriage, and thus possibly losing the social and cultural capital of being progressive and open-minded. For example, one Twitter user tweeted, “My profile is red b/c I am joining @HRC in support of marriage equality during the Supreme Court hearings: [hrc.org/standformarriage](http://hrc.org/standformarriage)—Join us! [sic] (Yang 2013). As a result, millions of users changed their profile pictures, but yet nothing really substantial followed. Even several people on Twitter commented about the efficacy of this social media tactic and were skeptical about how it would affect the SCOTUS ruling, calling it an empty attempt and ploy to look popular (Yang 2013). For example, a Twitter user sarcastically tweeted, “Hurry up and change your Facebook profile pictures for marriage equality! The Supreme Court Justices are tallying them all up right now!” (Yang 2013). While most people understand and admit that changing one’s Facebook profile picture will not actually have any real effect on legislation, it can have effect on your Facebook friends. Tannenbaum (2013) argues that people can be influenced by what they perceive to be social norms. Therefore, if someone sees that all of their friends are pro-gay marriage and perceive it as the new norm, they may feel inclined to adopt the same stance or risk being scrutinized (Kleinman 2013).

I argue we are witnessing another instance of gay marriage being used as a tool of propaganda by Gay, Inc.; and individuals are able to claim they are progressive while not actually doing anything concrete to help the community. These trivial symbols of alliance have long frustrated many minority groups, as organizations and individuals claim they are inclusive of people of color, women, or LGBT/Q rights, and state they are supportive of “their causes” but change rarely follows. These actions and hollow statements of inclusion serve to allow

individuals to feel good and congratulate themselves on being an “ally” without ever having to do the activism work besides changing their profile picture or reposting a picture or quote on their Facebook profiles. However, media scholars have argued that this type of digital activism (also known as hashtag activism) can work, because it is an effective way to spread a message quickly and to millions of people (Anschuetz 2015, Berlatsky 2015). While critics of hashtag activism, often call the trend “slacktivism” argue these online displays of support are not followed by real-life actions (Anschuetz 2015). For example, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in 2014 is one often cited as a failed social media campaign because while it did garner international attention, it failed to bring about real change. During a performance at the 2015 Triumph Awards, rapper T.I. spoke to this disconnect between online support enacting substantive action. Later he commented to the Huffington Post, “Our society’s issues are deeper than social media posts, there’s a long list and if you think solely making them a trending topic is going to solve them, then you are a part of the problem” (Williams 2015). While I do think social media activism can result in positive changes and social media platforms can be spaces for social justice movements, I do not believe this is what was happening with the “paint the town red” HRC campaign. Social media activism can be effective because it allows everyone’s voice to be heard, not only those with the power and resources to start or shape the discourse. I argue this type of activism is most effective when it comes from activists fighting for their own communities, not by corporate or media moguls who co-opt it to further disseminate their ideologies that end up recapitulating the already dominant messages.

The discourse of gay rights has been so successfully framed by marriage advocates as you are either “pro-marriage” or “against equality” it causes people to ignore how marriage has been used to perpetuate gender, racial, and economic inequality both within LGBT/Q

communities and without. The discourse has been shaped to convince liberals (i.e., straight and gay people on the Left) that backing marriage is the only way to support LGBT/Q communities (Spade and Willse 2014:31). Thus, for well-intentioned allies, they have been sold the message that once marriage equality is gained, the important problems facing queer people will be resolved (Spade and Willse 2013).

This strategy of symbolic and misplaced support does not only happen when it comes to the marriage equality movement. Other examples include how people express support for members of the transgender community. For instance, transgender people and transgender activists have stated they want people to stop telling them they are “so brave” and “courageous” because these are insulting statements and hollow words of support (GLAAD n.d., Matz 2015). They argue that these statements only operate to make the people saying them feel positive about themselves, because they state how “supportive” they are of the transgender community while concurrently not actually fight for transgender rights (e.g., bathroom bills, anti-discrimination legislation) (Chess 2008, Matz 2015).

Over the past several years there has been an increase of transgender representation in the media, from Laverne Cox’s *Time* magazine cover, Caitlyn Jenner’s *Vanity Fair* cover, to the show *Transparent* on Amazon, suggesting a growing amount of support and acceptance for the transgender community, but simultaneously statistics show that violence against transgender people are at epidemic levels especially for transwomen of color (Bolles 2012, Catalano and Shlasko 2013, Ennis 2015a, Ennis 2015b). According to the official website for the Transgender Day of Remembrance, there were 81 names listed for worldwide vigil-goers to memorialize in 2014 alone (Smith 2007); and The Transgender European site listed 226 (project 2014). Reports show that violence against LGBT/Q people overall is decreasing, but assaults and even murder

targeting transwomen and queer people of color may actually be increasing (Ennis 2015a). The federal law enforcement does not yet track or report hate crimes on the basis of gender identity or gender expression, as they do with others such as race, religion, and sex (Catalano and Shlasko 2013). Therefore, the estimates are widely considered to be underreporting the dire nature of the situation. Community organizations show that between November 2010 and 2011, there were at least 221 people killed in anti-trans hate crimes worldwide (Catalano and Shlasko 2013:426). From 2013-2015, there were 53 murders, and not one of them was prosecuted or reported as a hate crime (HRC and Coalition 2015). In 2015, there were 22 victims, almost double than the year before; showing the murder rates against transgender individuals who are disproportionately transwomen of color, are actually increasing (Ennis 2015a, Steinmetz 2015). Osman Ahmed who is the Research and Education Coordinator of The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVAP) at the New York City Anti-Violence Project argues that there is an “undeniable epidemic of fatal violence against transgender and gender non-conforming women, specifically transgender women of color in the United States... and we need immediate action on a national level to address the alarming violence against transgender women in the United States” (Kerr 2014). Grisham (2012) argues when the topic of homophobic violence comes up, most people in the United States think of well-known cases such Tyler Clementi and Matthew Shepard, both white gay men; but not Sakia Gunn, a black working-class lesbian or Brandon White, a black gay youth. Grisham (2012) suggests that this may be due to how the national gay media outlets want to frame the issue and whose voices they choose to prioritize.

The transgender community continues to face horrific instances of violence, paradoxically alongside more visible transgender people in the media than ever before. Laverne

Cox and Janet Mock have become outspoken activists for their community and have been giving inspirational speeches all over the United States, serving as icons and role models for many young transwomen. Jazz Jennings, a transgender teenager, became the new face of Clean & Clear and published a children's picture book about her life (Brydum 2015) and Aydian Dowling won the "Ultimate Men's Health Guy" contest becoming the first trans person on the cover of Men's Health magazine (Daniels 2015). Meanwhile, many transgender youth have committed suicide after enduring endless bullying and systematic brutality; and the counts of trans murders and suicides continue to grow.

These vastly different worlds for transgender people are seen in the embodied differences of lived experiences of transgender folks. For the trans folks without the genetic predisposition, material wealth, or desire to transition into cisnormatively beautiful bodies, they are disproportionately homeless, sexually exploited, incarcerated, or murdered. Analyzing the media representations of trans-ness, the media is establishing a dangerous dichotomy. Either trans people fit models of cisnormative femininity and masculinity or they are invisible or worst, dead. It becomes easy to be supportive of these success stories and to publicly gush about figures like Laverne Cox, but what about those who do not fit into the strict ideals that govern heteronormativity and cisnormativity? It is easy to celebrate these trans people's successes (and they should be celebrated) but if people want to truly be supportive and not just self-congratulatory, then real change needs to happen; nevertheless, that is not the image the mainstream lesbian and gay community or the media focuses on. They want to highlight those who are "appropriate" representations of the trans community and downplay others who may not fit neatly into their message and definition. The dominant message conveyed through the images of trans people in the media becomes abundantly clear: only "productive" and "successful"

transgender people are to be shown, not those who struggle or do not fit into the image of what trans-ness should look like, which is ultimately not defined by the transgender community themselves, but by those with the money, privilege, and power to shape these images. This narrow spectrum of transgender representations ends up leaving the great majority of transfolks, particularly those who are desperate for resources, silenced by the louder, more privileged, more lucrative, and more digestible transgender narratives. Because then the public (both mainstream gay and straight people) can comfortably post and repost about transgender people on Facebook and Twitter, and feel proud of themselves and not have to confront the very real lived realities of discrimination and violence that many trans people face on a daily basis.

### **3.4 Marriage is a Conservative Value**

As I have shown, legalizing same-sex marriage is beneficial to the state and to the economy. Even though there are many conservatives who definitely disagree. Rather they choose to see it as a “threat to democracy” and a “threat to American values,” whereas on the other hand, marriage advocates argue they just want to be treated as full citizens and bestowed full citizenship rights, which includes the right to marriage. As previously presented, for many mainstream lesbians and gays, marriage equality represented the last right they did not have. Part of their argument centered on the fact that in all other aspects of their lives (besides their sexuality) they were “good” and “upstanding” U.S. citizens (e.g., paid their taxes, supported the economy, voted). For them, not having this right felt extremely unfair because they were doing the “right thing” and had proved their support of heteronormative culture.

This claim to citizenry has been part and parcel to the normalizing contingent of LGBT/Q communities for decades. For these assimilated lesbians and gays and the large gay organizations, they worked hard to push away the stereotype of the promiscuous, partying, drug-

using gay man, one that did not want to settle down, or buy a house, or have kids, and ultimately who challenged the directives of heteronormative culture. David Brooks of *The New York Times* even commented on this change. He stated:

In 3,000 years of Western civilization, no major culture has shifted this fast to give gays and lesbians equality, as the U.S. and Europe have recently... the deal was sealed once the issue became about marriage. That is, once gays and lesbians were seeking access to one of the most traditional institutions in society, then they were bound to win more support. (Brooks and Collins 2013)

Brooks rightly points out the same argument that queer activists have been making now for decades. There is nothing revolutionary (or queer) about gaining marriage equality, and lesbians and gays getting married is not going to challenge the institution of marriage or heteronormativity. By seeking entrance to this institution, it is only going to further the conservative progression that has long dictated over the gay rights movement. Brooks states as a general rule “if you want to win respect for your formerly excluded group, try to be more culturally conservative than anybody else” (Brooks and Collins 2013), hence following this logic, it makes sense that victory has come about so quickly for marriage equality.

Mainstream lesbians and gays successfully accomplished to distance themselves from the “bad queers” (i.e., those who fight against heteronormative imperatives and inclusion) and distinguish themselves as the “good gays” (i.e., we are just like you, we hold the same values and want the same things as mainstream America). Gay Inc. made gay marriage digestible to middle America. They controlled the discourse, the message, and the image of the gay community to make lesbians and gays no longer threatening to most Americans; thereby making it easy for them to see gay couples as normal couples. For instance, in a Honey Maid commercial that played during the Superbowl, viewers see two well-dressed white men in a large, beautiful home with one young son and a family dog. One of the men states: “we’re kind of traditional guys.



Marriage and a family and having kids were always important.” After small glimpses of the family’s life together and heartwarming statements by the son, viewers are then shown a tender moment with one of the fathers cradling a newborn, with his husband’s hand lovingly stroking the baby’s head. And the ad finishes with the motto: “This is Wholesome” (Maid 2014). These two represent the epitome of Gay, Inc.’s campaign of respectability. This commercial makes the audience focus on how loving the family is and dares viewers to hold anti-gay sentiments after watching it, while giving Honey Maid some positive PR in the process. My claim here is not to argue that these images should not exist or that there is something negative about lesbians and gays who want to get married and have children, because indeed they should have that right. The problem lies in the fact that these are the *only* images we see of the LGBT/Q community; and these images continue to erase the diversity in the community and portray it as a unified group. These desexualized and “wholesome” images keep the public from thinking about “gay sex” when it comes to the issue of same-sex marriage, and rather refocuses the attention on easily palatable ideas such as love, commitment, and family. Thus, these images of the gay community are not challenging the idea of marriage at all; they are merely reifying its position and power in society.

By utilizing the discourse of love and family they are tapping into the conservative ideas about sexuality and love, and marriage advocates are purposefully opting into an extremely conservative institution. Ironically, lesbians and gays are becoming strange bedfellows with those who previously (and many still do) disavowed gay people’s existence. The marriage debate has put the mainstream gay community and the religious right on the same side of the argument, even though many conservatives do not see it that way. Lesbians and gays who want to get married are wanting to uphold the institution of marriage and prove they are committed in

monogamous relationships, while more straight couples are choosing not to get married and explore different forms of relationship structures (Martin, Astone and Peters 2014, Waggoner 2015). Paradoxically, the gay marriage debate has put these two political and social enemies on the same side of the issue stating there is a need for this institution and it should be upheld and supported. Thus, it becomes clear, the fight for gay marriage is a conservative cause.

While Republicans and social conservatives have not come out in support of same-sex marriage at the same rate as Democrats and liberals, overall acceptance is increasing. This shift is occurring through the combination of rights discourse and the discourse of conservatism. For instance, in the United Kingdom, Prime Minister David Cameron, who is the leader of the Conservative Party stated, “I don’t support gay marriage in spite of being a Conservative. I support gay marriage because I am a Conservative” (Staff 2012d). The idea of entering into a state defined and regulated institution that defines families and centers on “family values” and monogamy is at the heart of conservative ideals and heteronormative culture. Similarly, in the U.S., some members of the Grand Old Party (GOP) who define themselves as “traditional” Republicans are becoming more accepting of marriage equality for two reasons: first, because they realize that legalizing same-sex marriage does not pose any real threat to elites or how political and economic power is distributed. If legalizing same-sex marriage does anything, it bolsters hegemonic power structures, because it completely and harmlessly assimilates a previously excluded group into existing institutions. By integrating these newly acquired groups into social institutions, the state incentivizes them to accommodate those institutions and adopt a hegemonic mindset (Greenwald 2013). Secondly, they are recognizing that to remain politically relevant, they need to get on the right side of history, which harkens back to Bell’s theory of interest convergence. Moderate Republicans recognize there is an obvious shift in public opinion

and that whether or not they personally support marriage equality or oppose it is not the issue; they just need to be silent or run the risk of being labeled a bigot. Glenn Greenwald of *The Guardian* remarked “It really is a bit shocking how quickly gay marriage transformed from being a fringe, politically toxic position just a few years ago to a virtual piety that must be affirmed in decent company” (Greenwald, 2013).

Through analyzing the shift (both politically and socially) on the issue of legalizing same-sex marriage, we can see how it has been more of an institution-affirming than an institution-subverting battle. Gay marriage revitalizes a traditional institution that heterosexual couples have actually been in the process of delegitimizing through ridiculous marriage reality shows, impetuous divorces, and serial new spouses. Thus, ironically the fight for gay marriage has reinforced the hegemony of the institution and rehabilitated it in the name of anti-homophobia (Spade and Willse 2013). These changes are taking a once marginalized and culturally independent community and fully integrating it into mainstream society, thus making that community invested in conventional societal institutions. Shortly after Jon Huntsman, the former Utah governor, endorsed marriage equality and called for the rest of the GOP to join him in supporting the issue, Yasmin Nair, a queer activist and scholar, argued that this was emblematic of a larger issue:

There has never been a separate left case for gay marriage. Nothing that the left, progressives, or liberals have stated in support of gay marriage has ever been anything but a profoundly conservative argument.... The surprise is not that gay marriage is now being embraced by conservatives and neoliberals. The surprise is that it took them so long to do so. (as cited in Lang 2013).

Nair highlights that the fight for marriage equality is a conservative cause that reifies heteronormativity, and also a political campaign that supports neoliberal ideologies like the privatization of basic human rights (e.g., health care) and association of them with marriage

(Lang 2013). Nair argues that marriage and neoliberalism go hand-in-hand, because the act of marriage is an effective and economical way for the state to alleviate its responsibility for citizens' health and well-being (as cited in Pavan 2011).

In the LGBT/Q community, critics of gay marriage fall into several broad camps. For some, the fight for marriage equality was problematic because, as I have argued, it represented assimilation and the demise of the queerer, liberationist potential of gay rights. For others, gay marriage represented the further widening and strengthening of the neoliberal state, where access to basic rights are mostly available through marriage. Instead of fighting for open access to rights (e.g., universal health care, open inheritance and adoption laws) gay marriage advocates argued that same-sex marriage is necessary because it would allow access to these benefits, thus naturalizing the role of the neoliberal state as a necessary one (Nair 2014a). Nair argues that mainstream lesbians and gays, such as Dan Savage, like to criticize queer critiques of marriage by claiming they are not assimilationists or that somehow their marriage can (re)imagine what marriage looks like. For example, in Savage's blog and radio show he references non-monogamy or being "monogamish" with his husband (Savage 2012). Queer activists and scholars focus their critiques of gay marriage on what the "costs of inclusion" will mean for LGBT/Q communities. Nair argues that mainstream lesbians and gays claim they are anti-assimilationist (like Savage for example) and that lets them "off the hook" because "they can pretend that it's not marriage's central role in the state that's the problem – it's just how marriages are conducted" (as cited in Pavan 2011). Queers argue claim is a failed argument, because once a couple is given the right to marry, the state does not regulate what they do within that marriage. Couples can choose to have multiple partners nightly and the state will not dissolve their marriage; this is the right to privacy the institution is supposed to preserve. Moderately well off or relatively wealthy LGBT/Q

Americans like Dan Savage probably will never have to worry about the state policing or surveilling their sexuality. Moreover, for the LGBT/Q super-rich, gay marriage plays an active role in further privatizing and securing wealth by providing tax loopholes (Nair 2014a). This is why the mainstream gay community's argument is flawed, even having a "queer" marriage structure will not change the relationship between the institution and the state; nor how the state endows marriage with certain benefits that it will not give to the unmarried (Pavan 2011).

Under the semblance of social progressivism, gay marriage becomes a perfect neoliberal tool that is able to obscure the real inequalities faced by those who do not want to get married or cannot marry into economic stability or wealth. The discourse of legalizing same-sex marriage is framed as though there are no alternatives to this capitalist driven, conservative institution. The discourse, images, and portrayals of the marriage debate by Gay, Inc. and the mainstream media keep liberal and socially progressive straight people (along with lesbians and gays) from imagining alternatives. Therefore, they are convinced that the only option available is to minimally alter the institution to let a few more people in instead of rethinking the institution all together (Spade and Willse 2013). Legalizing same-sex marriage is not a step toward changing the lives of queer and trans people or helping less represented members of LGBT/Q communities. It has become a movement that at best ignores them, if not causes them more harm as the community becomes further divided by the members who are deserving of rights versus those who are undeserving (Spade and Willse 2013). Stein (2013) posits that there is a clear disconnect between the mainstream gay community's argument that marriage will bring economic and psychological benefits to lesbians and gays. She argues: "It will benefit some queer people, diminish many of those who cannot and do not wish to marry, and have a negligible impact upon others. It is particularism masquerading as universalism" (Stein 2013).

Stein, like many other queer activists, claims that what is needed is a reintegration of queer politics and support for more diverse formations of family and relationship structures.

Tracing the battles for the legalization of same-sex marriage demonstrates a collusion between the mainstream gay community and the neoliberal state that seeks to integrate good, respectable gays into the folds of heteronormative society. The mainstream gay community has fought to be recognized and included into the institution, even though it is one that is discriminatory and anti-queer by its very definition. Mainstream lesbians and gays seek this integration, even though it is counter to the foundational goals that launched the gay rights movement. By focusing on gaining individual citizenship rights and casting off the hope of collective rights, the mainstream gay community is calling for its right to be a part of the state and thus, also participants in the violence the state enacts against disadvantaged members in society and against members in their own communities.

As the mainstream lesbian and gay community continues to fight for its place in heteronormative culture, and continue to emphasize its normative and assimilative tendencies, it further solidifies the divisions within LGBT/Q communities. Mainstream groups argue they should be recognized and given citizenship rights and not relegated to being second-class citizens; while simultaneously, they offer up non-normative members of society as stand ins of “bad citizens” or “undesirable others” to help sell gay marriage to the general public. These “others” can then be positioned as bad for and dangerous to heteronormative society and a drain on state resources and mainstream lesbians and gay are seen as respectable citizens by comparison. The fight for gay marriage has conspired with neoliberal ideologies, because it is ultimately a battle that reinforces the social order, instead of challenging, subverting, or deconstructing it. Once the right kind of sexual minorities (i.e., monogamous, cisgender, class

mobile, white, gender normative) are admitted into state institutions, these institutions can then use the newly admitted gay subjects as evidence that equality has been achieved, thus effectively dismissing larger concerns about the rights of those who remain marginalized and subjugated. The inclusion of the gay community under the terms of individual rights can then be utilized by the state to demonstrate an enlightened, modern, civilized, liberal, and democratic society that can be deployed against other nation-states, which I will further discuss in subsequent chapters. Once these gay subjects and now gay citizens are admitted into social institutions, they are able to corroborate in the marginalization of others (both queers and heterosexuals), so the state no longer has to.

These cultural transformations are not only happening on the level of nation-states, but as I have demonstrated, gay marriage is now a cultural marker for those who want to claim being “progressive” against those who are “backwards” and occurs with politicians, corporate leaders, and individuals. The media and gay marriage activists have positioned the debate as a cultural turning point in the U.S., often posing the question: “which side of history do you want to be on?” (Jeske 2016, Toobin 2015, Vagins 2009). This framing of the debate is crucial, because it establishes gay marriage not only as one of the cultural wars, but also because this rhetoric alludes to something larger. By positioning the debate about gay marriage as a historical turning point, this discourse asks a deeper question: what *type* of person are you? Therefore, I argue that the cultural shift in accepting same-sex marriage had much less to do with the public carrying if people did not receive the federal benefits associated with marriage, but more on the symbolic meaning the debate took on in our society.

I argue that this cultural shift is happening because it is in their best interest to seem gay-friendly, since it is good for their public image. Moreover, as gay rights became one of the

cultural wars in the U.S., people did not want to be caught on the wrong side of history. What the discourse of the marriage battle (and ultimately the legalization of gay marriage) has done is produce neoliberal subjects who can now be constructed, controlled, and deployed by the state. By fighting for marriage rights, the mainstream gay community has proven its members are good citizens and good subjects who embody not only the rules of heteronormative society, but who also embody stable identities that are easily understood, categorized, and digestible. It is through this creation of the stable (gay) identity that the new homonormative gay subject is produced and becomes a tool of state power.

My goal is not to criticize those in LGBT/Q communities who choose to get married, rather I hope to get people engaged in a dialogue and reflect on what these political and cultural shifts mean within the context of neoliberalism. While there have been (and continue to be) many scholars who debate the legality of gay marriage and trace the arguments from both sides, that is not my point here. My argument shows how mainstream lesbian and gay communities through the large and extremely wealthy gay organizations have not only focused society's attention onto same-sex marriage, but also the LGBT/Q community's as well. Gay, Inc. has successfully a) shaped the discourse and trajectory of the gay rights movement, b) portrayed the gay community as a unified community, and c) ignored the critiques coming from queer scholars and activists.

#### **4 GAYS GO TO WAR AND THE CREATION OF THE HOMONATIONAL SOLIDER**

“It becomes clear—for some — that the more closely one resembles the invader, the more comfortable one's life may become.” —James Baldwin



#### 4.1 History of Gays in the Military

Many countries around the world allow for lesbians and gays to serve in their armed forces. The majority of these countries are industrialized Western countries, but also include Brazil, Chile, South Africa, Israel, and South Korea. However, while these countries may have an open policy to lesbian and gay soldiers and personnel, this policy does not assure that LGBT/Q citizens will be free from discrimination in civil society. For instance, in Israel lesbian women and gay men are actively recruited, activists argue that despite the country having an open policy for “out” lesbian and gay service members, their society still struggles to implement LGBT-positive social policy (Sherwood 2012, Yaron 2013). Ironically, in this case it appears that military acceptance of gay soldiers has progressed beyond the overall socio-political climate. Therefore, I ask: how do we make sense of the armed forces recognizing that lesbian and gay service members benefit the state, yet the state fails to grant the community equal protections under the law in other respects? More importantly, what does this partial integration into society mean for lesbian and gay service members and broader LGBT/Q communities?

In the United States, gay men and lesbians have long served in the armed forces, yet typically remained “closeted” throughout their careers due to a lack of a unified policy about homosexuality. In 1941, the U.S. Army Surgeon General’s office issued a report that classified “homosexual proclivities” as a disqualifying criteria for military service and the U.S. Navy and the Selective Service adopted similar exclusionary policies (Bérubé 1990). Prior to the 1950s, each branch typically charged personnel caught engaging in “homosexual conduct” with sodomy, which would result in a court-martial and a dishonorable discharge. However, with the massive number of soldiers needed for operations during World War II, it quickly became impractical to conduct court-martials for offenses of homosexual conduct. After the attack on

Pearl Harbor, the military wanted to enlist every available body, and this regularly included lesbians who were allowed to enlist in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and gay men. These service members were "closeted" and the military's policy technically still excluded lesbians and gay men, but official actions would not be taken unless they were caught in a sexual act.

Instead of the previous policy of court-martialing individuals accused of being homosexual, commanders instead switched to issuing "blue discharges." These discharges were a form of administrative military discharge given to gay men, lesbians, or anyone who was perceived to be homosexual. The blue discharge, was neither honorable nor dishonorable, but these women and men often faced difficulties when they returned to their civilian lives because of its negative association (Bérubé 1990). These discharges were often reserved for those deemed "undesirable" to the military, and these women and men were often marked with an "HS" or another code for homosexual (Bérubé 1990). The Veterans Administration's general policy was to routinely deny veterans with blue discharges the benefits of the G.I. Bill (Bérubé 1990). It was not until 1945 that four honorably discharged gay veterans would form the Veterans Benevolent Association, the first organization for lesbian and gay veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. They formed the organization largely in response to the injustices experienced by many gay service members who were given blue discharges (Archer 2004).

Even though blue discharges were discontinued in 1947, they were replaced with two new forms of discharge: "general" and "undesirable" discharges (Bérubé 1990). A general discharge fell under the honorable conditions, though was distinct from an "honorable discharge"; and, an undesirable discharge fell under conditions other than honorable, yet distinct from a "dishonorable discharge" (Jones 1973). The Army maneuvered its regulations to ensure that gay men would not qualify for the general discharge and under this system. Any service

member found to be homosexual, but who had not committed any “homosexual acts” while in service, received an undesirable discharge (Bérubé 1990). Those who were found guilty of “engaging in homosexual conduct” were dishonorably discharged (Newsweek 1947). Stricter regulations and exclusions followed.

In October 1949, the newly consolidated Department of Defense standardized the anti-homosexuality regulations across all branches of the military. Its official policy stated: “Homosexual personnel, irrespective of sex, should not be permitted to serve in any branch of the Armed Forces in any capacity, and prompt separation of known homosexuals from the Armed Forces is mandatory” (Bérubé 1990:261). Soon after this new policy was implemented, in 1950, President Harry Truman created legislation entitled the Uniform Code of Military Justice that established a single justice system for the U.S. Armed Forces (Times 1950). This legislation specifically prohibited sodomy among all military personnel and defined an offender as any person “who engages in unnatural carnal copulation with another person of the same or opposite sex or with an animal is guilty of sodomy. Penetration, however slight, is sufficient to complete the offense” (Institute 2016).

The armed forces did not succeed in screening out gay and bisexual people, as evidenced by the significant number of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people who managed to pass through the screening process and serve in the military. For example, Harvey Milk, who was a San Francisco politician and gay rights advocate, served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War. In 1955, he was discharged from the Navy at the rank of Lieutenant, junior grade, and in his political campaigns he often mentioned that he was dishonorably discharged due to being gay (Foss 1994). By the 1970s, a disproportionate percentage of undesirable discharges were issued to gay

service members (Shilts 1993); and ironically during the Vietnam War, some men pretended to be gay in order to avoid the draft (Kusch 2001).

By the 1980s, several Democratic Party presidential candidates began expressing interest in modifying the regulations concerning gay service members. These changes marked an initial shift in public opinion toward greater sympathy for lesbians and gays in the armed forces, especially since many in the general public saw the investigations of service members' sexual behavior and/or sexual orientation as witch-hunts. "Gays in the military" became a heated political issue during the 1992 Presidential campaign, when President Bill Clinton, the Democratic candidate, promised to lift the military's ban on homosexual and bisexual people. This became a core issue of the gay community at the time; it was part of the "marching demands" and platform for the 1993 March on Washington that specifically called for the integration of the gays in the military (Washington 1993).

#### ***4.1.1 Don't Ask, Don't Tell***

In the 1992 Presidential campaign cycle, President Bill Clinton promised to end the ban on homosexuals in the military and to press Congress for a lesbian and gay civil rights bill (Schmalz 1992). In an effort to uphold his promise to the lesbian and gay community, he signed the legislative policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in 1993. At the time, it was regarded as a "compromise" bill. However, some activists claimed this policy did not fulfill Clinton's campaign promise because it continued to prohibit openly LGB people from serving in the military, and if discovered, their discharge was required. However, this policy did offer some protections because it forbid the investigation of a service member's sexual orientation without reasonable suspicion and restricted military efforts to discover or reveal closeted LGB soldiers or applicants.

Pressure to overturn the ban continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as public support for gay rights continued to build. Many lesbian and gay activists argued that the seventeen-year ban against lesbians and gays serving in the military was discriminatory and needed to be repealed. The Human Rights Campaign stated that DADT needed to be overturned so gays and lesbians could serve the country without compromising who they were as individuals. This fight was seen as a step toward lesbians and gay men being able to be honest with their comrades about who they love and having the freedom to be openly “out” (HRC 2011b). On the contrary, some queer activists argued against the repealing of DADT, because they saw it as a way for the Department of Defense to increase the size and power of the U.S. military (Nopper 2010). For instance, Cecilia Lucas (2014) states:

Don't Ask, Don't Tell IS bad policy...Banning gay people from serving in the military, however, is something I support. Not because I'm anti-gay, nope, I'm one of those queer folks myself. I'm also a woman and would support a law against women serving in the military. Not because I think women are less capable. I would support laws against any group of people serving in the military...Because I support outlawing the military. And until that has happened, I support downsizing it by any means necessary, including, in this one particular arena, sacrificing civil rights in the interest of human rights. (109)

All the while, service members discharged under DADT continued to seek redress through the courts, without much success. According to the OutServe-Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), a policy advocacy organization for LGBT service members and veterans, they found that the DADT policy hurt women service members more than men. They found while women made up only 14% of Army personnel, 46% of those discharged under the policy in 2007 were women; likewise, 20% of Air Force personnel were women, but 49% of the discharges in 2007 were women (Shanker 2008). The SLDN, under the Freedom of Information Act, found that in 2007, there was an overall increase in the numbers of discharges in both the Army and Air Force, where women accounted for 35% and 36%, respectively. Overall,

according to Pentagon statistics, the number of lesbian and gay men discharged from the military in 2007 rose to 627 from 612 in 2006 (Shanker 2008). Interestingly however, these figures represent a drop of about 50% from their peak in 2001, notably, which was prior to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Across each of the branches and for all service members, in 2007 the Army discharged 302 soldiers under the DADT policy, which was an increase from 280 in 2006. The Air Force dismissed 91 people, a decrease from 102 in 2006. The Navy discharged 166, which was the same in 2006; and the Marine Corps discharged 68, an increase from 64 in 2006 (Shanker 2008). According to a study released by the Urban Institute, they estimate that there are 65,000 gay men and lesbians who serve in the United States Armed Forces and more than one million gay veterans (Advocate 2004).

President Obama's 2008 Presidential campaign brought a renewed interest regarding the constitutionality of the DADT policy and gays serving openly in the military. The main opponents to overturning DADT cited the compromise of "military readiness" and "unit cohesion" (West 2009). However, Owen West (2009) posits that this argument was similar to when President Truman tried to racially integrate ranks in the 1940s, where the public and troops alike said they wanted to continue having segregated ranks. Supporters of DADT claimed gay people would jeopardize unit cohesion because of the presumed reaction by homophobic and xenophobic troops, who did not want to cohabitate with people different from themselves (West 2009). However, one of the main differences in the arguments against integration was that a majority of people believe race to be a biological distinction (albeit incorrect) and view homosexuality as a "behavioral" or "lifestyle" choice, thus discrimination of the latter was more justifiable (West 2009). West (2009) argues, the fact that DADT was still being upheld in 2009 proves that the U.S. public was still socially stuck in 1993. Contrary to public opinion, in a 2006

poll asking Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans about their feelings about integrating ranks, it showed that 72 percent stated they were “personally comfortable interacting with gays,” and the data indicated that there were “no associations between knowing a lesbian or gay unit member and ratings of perceived unit cohesion or readiness” (West 2009). Findings found that veterans stated that leadership and “instrumental quality” were much more important in shaping unit cohesion and readiness than a service member’s sexuality (West 2009). By 2009, there was a general shift happening throughout the armed forces towards accepting lesbian and gay service members, which allowed the eventual overturning of the policy to become unexpectedly easy for President Obama.

In a letter to President Obama, the HRC argued that DADT needed to be repealed because it was “contrary to our core values as a nation,” and that the policy had “deprived our military thousands of service members, many with critical skills in fighting terrorism” (HRC 2010). This letter appealed to a sense of nationalism and made the case that gay soldiers were needed for the “good of the country.” This transformation toward the inclusion of lesbian and gay people is quite striking because just decades ago, they were considered deviant and immoral. Now the gay body is reconfigured by the state into a useful, homonational subject, one who willingly puts their life on the line for their country, the most extreme example of nationalism.

Many advocates for overturning DADT argued that the government especially needed to overturn the policy because of the United States’ continued “War on Terror.” General Shalikashvili wrote an article for *The New York Times* stating his view:

If gay men and lesbians served openly in the United States military, they would not undermine the efficacy of the armed forces [and] our military has been stretched thin by our deployments in the Middle East, and we must welcome the service of any American who is willing and able to do the job. (Shanker 2008)

The general's statement is telling on a few accounts. First, his statement is not actually about equality. He is merely stating that the military needs bodies, and they will take whoever is willing and able due to the United States' decades-long war efforts. Secondly, he is supporting the integration of gay service members only because it behooves the armed forces to have these members as participatory agents in the military-industrial war machine.

Despite changing public support and desire to repeal DADT by the mainstream gay community, there were critiques about the efficacy of this strategy. Queer activists argued that focusing on DADT distracted from the very things the queer liberation movement was founded on: "anti-imperialism, anti-racism, equal access to housing and health care, and struggles against patriarchy" (Jones 2010:143). Jamal Rasad Jones (2010) criticized Gay, Inc.'s attention to overturning the policy, stating:

It seems almost irrelevant to me whether or not gay soldiers can "come out" in the military when the U.S. military is not only carrying out two genocidal campaigns [Iraq and Afghanistan] for U.S. imperialism and corporate profit, but also when the war budget is draining the funds needed for almost every other service we so desperately need in this country. (Jones 2010:143)

Jones not only questions whether allowing more gays and lesbians into the military was a valuable strategy towards equality, but also challenges the idea that large mainstream gay organizations should be financially supporting the war machine instead of funding much-needed social programs and services.

In a similar manner, the change in public opinion on gays in the military happened much in the same way as it did for same-sex marriage. The well-funded, corporate-friendly, and media-savvy gay lobbying groups developed a monopoly on popular representations of not only what it means to be gay for LGBT/Q communities, but also what it means to be "pro-gay" for straight allies. Through controlling and shaping the discourse and media images, they projected the



notion that the only way to be “pro-LGBT” was to support marriage “equality” and military inclusion (Sycamore 2014:103). For example, The American Jewish Committee wrote a joint letter to Congress denouncing DADT, the letter stated: “We believe this policy is unjust and [has] become an anomaly among western nations. Advanced militaries throughout the world, including many of our NATO allies and Israel, allow gay, lesbian and bisexual personnel to serve openly” (Oster 2010). Therefore, for many Americans they believed repealing DADT would bring the U.S. in line with many of the other countries in the international community that support open service.

Furthermore, the rationalization to repeal DADT deliberately did not address the expansion of the military and militarism in the U.S. and abroad; rather it covertly centered on messages of patriotic love and duty and the policy being “out of step” with national identity (Editors 2010). Ultimately, this rhetoric circumvented valuable and critical conversations about military-state violence and imperialism. Nair, Conrad and Chavez (2012) argue:

Given that gay rights, and human rights discourse in general, are used in the service of imperialism and that violence against women, queers, and people of color continues to permeate all aspects of the military apparatus, radical LGBTQ people should be the first to be ever vigilant and opposed to the any expansion of the military industrial complex. (Nair et al. 2012)

Advocates supporting the repeal of DADT argued that it was lesbians and gays’ civil right to serve in the military; indeed, they are correct, anyone should be allowed to serve if they choose to. However, the control of the discourse is significant for several reasons. First, the framing of the discourse gives the false perception that all members of LGBT/Q communities are supportive the military and are wanting access to serve. Second, how the discourse is presented restricts the ability to have any meaningful debates about the goals of the gay rights movement. Third, the

discourse gives straight allies the impression that they need to support LGBTQ military inclusion to be supportive of the gay community and, by extension, progressive.

Despite the critiques from queer activists and scholars, the mainstream gay organizations and lobbying groups won their battle. On December 22, 2010, President Obama signed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010 which created a pathway to allow LGB people to serve openly in the military (Broverman 2010). Under this bill, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy remained in place until the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs could attest that the repeal would not harm military readiness, followed by a 60-day waiting period (O'Keefe 2011, Stolberg 2010). However, in July 2011, a court order required the Pentagon to immediately suspend the ban, and the government complied. The legislative repeal of the DADT policy took effect on September 20, 2011 (Barnes 2011). The HRC's website celebrated the repeal and reported that the organization had worked steadily to overturn the policy by dedicating over \$3 million in financial resources, and sent over 650 thousand emails to members of Congress. They proclaimed that this repeal signaled a "new chapter for the nation's military...Gay and lesbian Americans eager to serve their country but not willing to compromise who they are as individuals will, for the first time ever, be able to openly join. Finally, the brave men and women currently serving will have the freedom to come out and be honest with their comrades about who they are and who they love" (HRC 2011a).

#### ***4.1.2 After DADT***

The overturning of the DADT policy in 2011 was considered by most lesbians and gay men to be another huge success in the fight for equality, while many critics of the repeal were concerned the military would be negatively affected by the removal of the policy. Several studies have found that integrating openly LGB service members has not produced any negative

repercussions to the U.S. military (Press 2012, Staff 2012a). At the one-year anniversary of overturning DADT, the Pentagon stated that the “repeal has gone smoothly, with no adverse effect on morale, recruitment or readiness” (Press 2012). First Lady Michelle Obama celebrated the anniversary by tweeting: “DADT was repealed one year ago today. Our country is stronger, freer, and fairer because of it. Just one more way we’re moving forward -- mo” (Obama 2012). Yet critics voiced their opposition to the repeal, stating that it was a “type of social experiment” that it also infringed on heterosexual service members’ religious beliefs which condemn homosexuality (Press 2012). While anti-gay harassment and discrimination still exists, studies have shown that these incidences have not increased since the repeal. Overall, there is a “clear consensus the repeal has produced far more joy and relief than dismay and indignation” (Press 2012).

Despite the repeal of DADT, discriminatory policies still existed. For instance, gay advocates expressed frustrations because lesbian and gay military families were denied the same benefits and services heterosexual military families were provided (Press 2012). Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee passed two amendments stating that lesbian and gay service members could not marry or have any “marriage-type” ceremony on government land or a military base (Rosenthal 2012). The amendment also stated that chaplains could not perform same-sex marriages even if they were based in a state which allowed them. This ban also applied to chaplains who supported the repeal and wanted to perform a same-sex ceremony; and when challenged, committee members stated that it was meant to protect those chaplains who were against same-sex marriage. The amendment stated that the military could not force chaplains to perform any duty contrary to their “conscience, moral principles or religious beliefs” (Rosenthal 2012). However, analyzing the specific language used in this amendment, it stated that they were

relieved from any “duty” that was against their religious beliefs; therefore, the purposefully broad wording allowed for discrimination against lesbian and gay service members (Rosenthal 2012). Activists pointed to the obvious disconnect between politicians who proclaimed their patriotism and support of the troops, yet passed legislation which was clearly unsupportive of LGB service members and their families. Rosenthal (2012) argues that these amendments were meant to undermine the law that lifted the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy and interfered with the states that allowed same-sex marriage.

Without dispute, the repeal of DADT was a necessary step toward equality; however, it failed to be equally beneficial for all members of the LGBT/Q community. For instance, transgender service members are still barred from enlisting in the armed forces (Halloran 2011). The repeal of DADT only allowed for open service by lesbian, gay, and bisexual members; it said nothing of transgender service members. The ban remains in place for transgender people and is effective via enlistment health screening regulations that state: “current or history of psychosexual conditions, including but not limited to transsexualism, exhibitionism, transvestism, voyeurism, and other paraphilias” (DoD 2010:48). Unlike DADT, this policy is not a law mandated by Congress, but an internal military policy. Despite this discriminatory policy, studies suggest there may be a disproportionately high rate for trans individuals serving in the U.S. military compared to cisgender individuals. In the Harvard Kennedy School’s 2013 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 20% of transgender respondents reported having served in the armed forces, compared to 10% of cisgender respondents (Brydum 2013, Harrison-Quintana and Herman 2013). Yet despite these findings, gay rights organizations like the HRC have failed to speak publicly on the behalf of transgender service members, illustrating another example of bias from the mainstream gay establishment.

Former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel stated his support for the right of transgender people to serve in the military, as long as the armed forces could resolve the “issues” related to transgender health and safety, which he believed were more complicated than the decision to repeal DADT (Radnofsky 2014). Opponents to transgender people in the military assert that transgender soldiers cannot be stationed in austere locations or “hardship posts,” due to lack of access to necessary hormone treatments (Eilperin 2015). This argument is largely flawed for two reasons: one, trans advocates state that troops with other medical requirements, such as diabetes, are not automatically disqualified from service; and two, there are an estimated 15,500 transgender people already serving in the military, according to the Williams Institute (Eilperin 2015). However, this number may actually be an underestimate because the Pentagon will not disclose how many transgender service members have been discharged, nor can it count trans service members who are “closeted.” Despite Hagel’s stated belief that anyone who is willing and able to serve should have the right to do so, transgender troops have always been treated differently than their gay counterparts.

Following the elation of the September 2011 DADT repeal, the Internet was flooded with images of celebrants and lesbian and gay service members. Perhaps some of the most iconic viral pictures were the images of a lesbian sailor kissing her girlfriend upon her return home (Figure 4.1), which was intentionally staged to mimic the famous Eisentaedt’s World War II photograph, and the other was of two male soldiers kissing, one with his legs wrapped around the waist of the other (Figure 4.2). Nair et al. (2012) reminds us that the original Eisentaedt photograph was meant to invoke the feeling of “pure patriotic joy”; however, it concealed the fact this kiss was not consensual and would nowadays be considered sexual assault (Nair et al. 2012). These images, while heartfelt and emotional, also function to turn our attention away from the violence

of the military. Instead of questioning the active recruitment of lesbians and gays into imperialist wars, we can celebrate their love. These couples can now be “defined only by their love, a love assumed to be untouched by the violence of the state” (Nair et al. 2012).



*Figure 4.1 dailymail.co.uk, 23 December 2011*



*Figure 4.2 dailymail.co.uk, 29 February 2012*

Even though the media chose to focus on the celebrations, many queer critics contend that overturning the ban may not be as liberating as it seems (Belkin 2008, Puar 2005). These activists assert that buying into the military-industrial complex allows the government to recruit members of the LGBT/Q community to serve in wars which do not benefit anyone except the power elite (Belkin 2008, Goldsmith 2012). Queer critics argue:

The end of don't ask, don't tell comes with the expansion of bloodthirsty imperialism and neocolonialism by the United States. At this time, American gay soldiers are celebrating Pride weekend in Afghanistan even as the same army continues blasting out the innards of a country already eviscerated by ruinous U.S. foreign policy. (Conrad, Chavez, Nair and Loeffler 2014:4)

These festivities celebrate how mainstream lesbians and gays have become integrated into the military, which demonstrates their acceptance and promotion of the connection between militarism, national identity, and citizenship (Nair et al. 2012). Thus, these images of couples ecstatically embracing and pictures of Pride celebrations serve as an effective distraction to obscure the reality of the United States' role in perpetrating violence, here and abroad. The state is now able to publicize that the armed forces are "gay-friendly" and position itself as a "progressive" country concerned with the rights of gay citizens. Through the use of these propagandistic images, these homonational subjects (who are now gay soldiers) can be utilized by the state in the name of imperialism as it executes foreign policy sanctions in the name of protecting human rights.

For many years, queer activists and scholars have raised the question of *whose* interests are being served when examining the trajectory of the gay rights movement (Conrad 2010, Gamson 1995, Nair 2014a, Sycamore 2008, Sycamore 2012, Warner 1999); and the repeal of DADT further demonstrates these distinctions and disagreements within LGBT/Q communities. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore argues:

Support for the U.S. military in this day and age always comes at the cost of social programs and social justice. A movement that should be about gender and sexual, social, political and cultural self-determination, not just for queers in this country, but for everyone in this country and around the world is instead centered around accessing dominant systems of oppression. (Sycamore 2014:104)

For queer activists like Sycamore, not only was repealing DADT unimportant, but heralding it as a critical step for equality was completely against the idea of what the gay rights movement was supposed to stand for: liberation and offering protections for all members of LGBT/Q communities. All this repeal accomplished was to firmly implant lesbians and gays into the institution of the military, albeit they have always been a part of the military, even as invisible or a “closeted” part. However now, with the overturning of DADT, the gay community is visibly implicated in the destruction and imperialist campaigns of the armed forces.

For the homonormative faction of the LGBT/Q community to win the battle of repealing DADT, it meant they had to change the image and discourse about gays in the military that hinged upon a very particular portrayal of lesbian and gay soldiers. Gay, Inc.’s soldier was a strong and virile soldier who just wanted to do his patriotic duty and serve his country. They wanted a soldier who is only incidentally gay, who assimilated perfectly into heteronormative society, and “returns home from the front to a respectable profession and a faithful spouse and children” (Goldsmith 2012:136). Larry Goldsmith contends that the creation of the “butch patriotic homosexual...who Defends Democracy and Fights Terrorism with a virility indistinguishable from that of his straight buddies was... central to the gays in the military campaign [sic] (Goldsmith 2012:136). An example of this strategy can be seen on the October 2008 cover of *Gay Times* (GT) magazine, “Buns and Guns” edition (Figure 4.3), that features male model Pedro Virgil posing on a beach in nothing besides his speedo and a rifle strapped to



his leg (ethansays 2008). Around his shoulders is an army belt with a grenade attached to it, one hand is grasping the rifle, and the other is clutching a handgun.



*Figure 4.3 ethansays, October 2008*

The text reads “Get Militant,” which has a dual meaning in this context. An interpretation of the title is calling for the gay community to “get militant” in its fight for equality; and potentially, it is also meant as a challenge to conservatives who accuse gays and lesbians of

“militant” in their struggle for rights. Further, Virgil is the perfect image for this agenda. He is broad-shouldered and extremely muscled, embodying the ideal virile and masculine man, whom you would not know was gay. He stands confidently and boldly looking at the camera, cocked and ready to fight. His shoulders and thighs are lightly covered with black dirt, giving the impression that he has already seen some combat. Virgil embodies the exact image that Gay, Inc. wants to portray to the world about gay men and by extension, gay soldiers. Through this image we see the ideal embodiment of the macho, nationalist homosexual who confidently wants to fight for his country and fulfill his duty as a good (gay) citizen. Through this image and the many other images circulated by the media, we can visualize the creation of the homonationalist soldier, one that is ready and willing to be deployed for the service of the state. While, Gay, Inc. continues to declare and promote this masculinist, pro-military agenda, the expansion of the military to include lesbians, gays, and bisexuals results in people all over the world becoming more vulnerable to U.S. military aggression (Nopper 2010). Tamara Nopper (2010) argues that there is a lack of critical perspective “regarding the U.S. military as one of the main vehicles in the expansion and enforcement of U.S. imperialism, heterosexuality, white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, and repression against political dissent and people’s movements in the United States and abroad” (127).

Accompanied by their pro-military agenda and the new trumpeted masculinist image, the mainstream lesbian and gay organizations reified the idea that there was something inherently good about being a part of the military. Moreover, they rejected decades of anti-military opposition from the left in favor of the “smiling, happy, proud, and pumped-up face of the new gay patriot” (Sycamore 2014:102). Decisively, with the overturning of DADT, we witness the

homonational subject become firmly entrenched into the military-industrial war machine (Spade and Willse 2013).

#### 4.2 Stand and Deliver

One of the high profile cases during the height of the DADT debates was the media coverage of Lt. Dan Choi. Choi, by all rights, should have been the activist and poster-boy hero Gay, Inc. sought. He was a West Point graduate, an environmental engineer, and an Arabic linguist. He served in the United States Army and in the Iraq War during 2006-2007, and quickly became a LGBT rights activist and the face of the repeal movement following his coming out on *The Rachel Maddow Show* in March 2009 (News 2009). On the show, he publicly challenged the DADT policy and received his discharge letter following his appearance. In a letter to President Obama and Congress, he stated the DADT policy was “a slap in the face to me. It is a slap in the face to my soldiers, peers, and leaders who have demonstrated that an infantry unit can be professional enough to accept diversity, to accept capable leaders, to accept skilled soldiers” (Choi 2009).

Many spoke out in support of Choi’s efforts to get DADT repealed and his willingness and courage to take a stand. Sara Haile-Mariam, writer for the Huffington Post stated that he is “one of the bravest, strongest, best people I know. He’s got a whole lot of guts and passion and love...” (Haile-Mariam 2013). A fellow Iraq war veteran Rob Smith told *The Advocate*, Choi was “a true symbol of the modern day gay rights movement and a hero to others” (Smith 2013). Although Choi was seen by many people in the public as the face of the movement to repeal DADT, it seemed that Gay, Inc. wanted to distance itself from him.

One instance of this disassociation was at a 2010 rally to repeal DADT in Washington D.C. that took place at Freedom Plaza. Choi asked Joe Solmonese (President of the HRC at the

time) and Kathy Griffin (the spokeswoman for the event) to come with him to the White House and protest. However, he was blatantly ignored by both, and Solmonese chose to remain next to Kathy Griffin and do a photo op instead (Aravosis 2010). Later, in an interview with *Newsweek*, Choi said he felt “so betrayed” by the HRC and its lack of real (i.e., more than financial or for PR) involvement in repealing DADT. Similar to many queer activists, Choi clearly points to the divisions within the LGBT/Q community:

The movement seems to be centered around how to become an elite. There is a deep schism [in the gay-rights movement], everyone knows this. But this shouldn't be about which group has better branding. There is a tremor right now in every gay and transgender youth that these groups are not grasping. I would say to them—you do not represent us if all you are looking for is a ladder into elite society.... We are tired of being stereotyped as privileged, bourgeois elites. Is someone willing to give up their career, their relationships with powerful people, their Rolodex, or their parents' love to stand up for who they are? I'm giving up my military rank, my unit—which to me is a family—my veterans' benefits, my health care, so what are you willing to sacrifice? Gandhi did not need three-course dinners and a cocktail party to get his message out... Who are they trying to influence? I felt like they were just trying to speak to themselves. If that's the best the lobbying groups and HRC can do, then I don't know how these powerful groups are supposed to represent our community. (Conant 2010)

Choi's statements are indeed correct; although they claim to be representing the LGBT/Q community, the powerful gay organizations are not actually fighting for the community; rather, they are fighting to become elite members of society, gain access at the policy table, and increase their budgets. These organizations cannot actually be in service to all members of LGBT/Q communities because they are afraid to lose their large financial donors or challenge heteronormative society.

The problem lies in the fact that they are the ones with the power, the influence, and the money to set the discourse of the gay rights movement. The movement becomes watered down and more about raising money and hosting fundraising galas that are a hundred dollars a plate, instead of creating social justice and equality. This co-opting of gay rights by Gay, Inc. is even

more problematic because most people in both the gay and straight community are not aware that these divisions within LGBT/Q communities exist. The HRC is extremely good at branding itself through its merchandise and press releases, people buy the HRC equal sign decals and bumper stickers, and donate money to the organization believing they are aiding all LGBT/Q communities. Ultimately these actions allow people to feel good about their deeds and display the symbol proudly as they profess they are “progressive.” But at the end of the day, supporting the goals of the large gay organizations does not make someone progressive, because too often these policies run counter to the very real needs of communities.

In 2013, just a few years after DADT was overturned, national attention returned to the issue of gays in the military as Chelsea Manning, formerly a soldier in the U.S. Army and a transgender woman, was convicted of espionage charges for leaking military documents to WikiLeaks and the public. Goldsmith (2012) argues that the Manning case is a prime example of the many pitfalls in Gay, Inc.’s campaign, especially along the intersections of class, gender, and the war machine. While lesbians and gays are now able to serve openly, due largely to the millions of dollars mainstream gay organizations dumped toward the cause, Goldsmith (2012) contends that these very same organizations were silent when Manning’s case became public knowledge. He argues that their silence is because Manning does not represent the virile, nationalist homosexual who was imperative to the gays in the military campaign because she is a transgender woman (Goldsmith 2012). Her gender identity certainly does not fit the macho gay soldier propaganda, nor does Manning fit the homonormative ideal that Gay, Inc. promotes.

Not only does Manning not represent the epitomized (gay) soldier due to her gender, but she is also a poor Southerner, which works against the idyllic class-mobile soldier Gay, Inc. wanted as a representative to show the success of their campaign. Many queer scholars argue that

war and the military are institutions that reify a class-divided society (Furumoto 2005, Goldsmith 2012, Halbfinger and Holmes 2003, Harvey 2003), because poor people make up the majority of those recruited into the armed forces. In the United States, wars are not fought by children from upper-classes families, they are fought by the economically disadvantaged, and Manning (being poor herself) serves as a clear example of this class bias.

Furthermore, Gay Inc. sought to distance themselves from Manning due to the initial charge of aiding the enemy and espionage (Tate and Londoño 2013). This is significant because the perception that gays were traitors to the state, and thus likely to engage in treason, was part of the original justification on the ban on lesbians and gays in the military (Adam 1994). As mainstream LGBT people seek to integrate into the military, it was imperative for their cause to disavow Manning. Manning posed a danger to Gay, Inc.'s carefully crafted image of the homonational soldier because she disturbs the narrative and threatens its work to solidify its position as part of the American citizenry.

A combination of factors led to Manning's decision to leak information to Wikileaks, such as the lack of economic and educational opportunities, and the absence of a community and culture that supported her gender identity (Goldsmith 2012). Large gay organizations refused to acknowledge Manning's case as a LGBT/Q issue; however, they were quite vocal in their support for her removal as San Francisco's Pride Grand Marshal. Lisa Williams, Board President for San Francisco Pride, released a statement asserting Manning would absolutely not be Grand Marshal:

[Her] nomination was a mistake and should never have been allowed to happen...[Chelsea] Manning is facing the military justice system of this country. We all await the decision of that system. However, until that time, even the hint of support for actions which placed in harm's way the lives of our men and women in uniform -- and countless others, military and civilian alike -- will not be tolerated by the leadership of San Francisco Pride. It is, and would be, an insult to everyone, gay and straight, who has

ever served in the military of this country. There are many, gay and straight, military and non-military, who believe [Chelsea] Manning to be innocent. There are many who feel differently. Under the US Constitution, they have a first amendment right to show up, participate and voice their opinions at Pride this year. (Anderson-Minshall 2013)

This decision to remove Manning caused heated debates and internet petitions, both in support of her removal as well in opposition to SF Pride's decision. Many argued that the Pride Committee was being hypocritical by pulling its support for Manning before her trial began, based on the allegations that she harmed people in the military, while it continued to support large corporations, such as Bank of America and Wells Fargo, which foreclosed on hundreds of military families' houses (Nagrani 2013). Queer activists, such as a previous SF Grand Marshal Kate Raphael, argued that the Pride Committee caved from "pressure from militaristic and authoritarian forces" that betrays the legacy of queer activism and history, and ignores the diversity in the community (Raphael 2013).

Gay, Inc.'s issue with Manning is that she undermined its carefully constructed narrative of gays in the military, and I argue that Manning's case should be seen as not only an LGBT/Q issue, but also a classed and gendered issue.

With [her] slight frame, lower-class background, questioning of [her] gender identity, inability to hold down a typical job, general dorkiness and dysfunctional family life, Manning does not fit the poster boy image that GLAAD or the HRC would hold up and promote. It's bizarre because Manning is actually what many, if not most, LGBT people have been at one point or another – an outsider, a loner, a person who does not fit in or conform. (Carbone 2013)

Nothing about Manning fits into Gay, Inc.'s desired portrayal. On the contrary, if anything, the public attention to the Manning case runs counter to the message to overthrow DADT. It needed a masculine, virile, patriotic soldier to keep the stereotypes at bay, not a transgender woman who was ridiculed and treated cruelly by her fellow service members and

superiors. Therefore, it was inevitable that Gay, Inc. was going to distance itself from the Manning case.

Many of Manning's supporters commented on the palpable silence from the two best-funded gay organizations, the HRC and GLAAD, regarding her treatment in the mainstream media. When the HRC finally did make a statement, many saw it as a way for the organization to discredit Manning and distance itself from her. The HRC stated:

What should not be lost is that there are transgender servicemembers and veterans who serve and have served this nation with honor, distinction and great sacrifice. We must not forget or dishonor those individuals. Pvt. Manning's experience is not a proxy for any other transgender man or woman who wears the uniform of the United States. (HRC 2013).

Even when the HRC did make an announcement stating that Chelsea Manning should be referred to by Chelsea (and not her birth name) and with female pronouns, its statement was still considered insulting and criticized by members of LGBT/Q communities (HRC 2013b). Several commenters on the Human Rights Campaign's website accused the HRC of only saying something about Manning when it became politically expedient and safe to do so. The HRC disavowed her through the entire investigation and trial process, and only released a statement about her mistreatment in jail. Many of the commenters pointed to how hypocritical this action was especially from an organization that is supposed to speak out and advocate for trans rights and trans people. For example:

She deserved to be treated as a community member, which mainstream LGBT organizations like HRC utterly failed to do. And of course there has to be an assertion here that the HRC would never dare say anything against the imperialist military industry complex. Y'all are so predictable, vultures ready to pick up any trans cause as soon as you know it will be politically correct to do so. Please go back to campaigning on marriage equality and leave trans activism to trans activists. (HRC 2013)

Another commenter stated:



This statement is a slap in the face to Chelsea Manning and her supporters. It delivers the clear implication that Chelsea Manning did not serve this nation with honor, distinction, and great sacrifice... Shame on you, HRC. Once again, you have used trans women as a political football for your own ends while claiming that you are working for us. Shame. Chelsea Manning's name is too good for you to utter. (HRC 2013)

These commenters' statements are highlighting the inherent contradictions in LGBT/Q politics and the portrayal of LGBT/Q communities as a single, unified community. On one hand, we have the large organizations that raise millions of dollars for the repeal of DADT and marriage equality, while they simultaneously disavow members of their supposed community. A trans activist stated:

As a trans man, I am bursting with pride that courageous whistle-blower-on-military-atrocities Chelsea Manning is trans! HRC should honor her, not disavow her while paying lip service to her medical care in prison. What is the HRC actually DOING for Chelsea Manning to get her requested gender transition care while in Leavenworth or to get her pardoned and early released?! (HRC 2013)

He is pointing out two things here, one: just releasing a statement does not actually do anything to help Manning or the treatment of transgender service members; all it does is serve as political lip service. Second, even though they made a public statement on their website, the HRC still seemed ashamed and reluctant to take on Manning's case as an LGBT/Q issue, and I argue this is because they are out to protect their assets. One of the reasons why an organization like the HRC could not come out in support of Manning is because it has the financial backing of major military-industrial corporations, including Lockheed Martin, which was one of the sponsors for their 2015 national gala in Washington D.C, and Booz Allen Hamilton, which was a corporate partner for their national event (Carbone 2013). The Human Rights Campaign spent millions of dollars and countless hours of volunteer work lobbying for the repeal of DADT in order to insure that "patriotic and law-abiding gays and lesbians can continue to serve in the US

military and fight its wars in far-flung places” (Carbone 2013). It behooves these defense organizations to partner up with the HRC, because they depend on federal money, meaning “the more able-bodied young men and women who sign up for the US military, the better” (Carbone 2013). What we are witnessing here is the creation of homonational soldiers funded by defense organizations and rallied together by gay organizations. Lesbians and gays are now able to serve openly and prove they are willing and ready to be deployed by the state for its new imperialist missions. Repealing DADT also serves as a frightening example of “the banal, duplicitous intertwined relationships between the military industrial complex, the US government, and corporate nonprofits” (Carbone 2013). Organizations like the HRC, whose net assets were over \$32.7 million at the end of 2012, do not want to risk offending these large corporations because then they might stop donating the millions of dollars that helps sustain it (Carbone 2013).

### **4.3 Homonational Soldiers**

In this chapter, I have investigated how the discourse surrounding overturning DADT and the campaign to get lesbians and gays into the military are part of a much larger conversation about gay politics in this country and abroad. My hope is to urge mainstream groups to examine their role and participation in the nationalistic and imperialist campaigns of the military-industrial complex, and also continue to expose the power structures within LGBT/Q communities. The questions I have posed here are: what does this discourse (that is being shaped by the mainstream lesbian and gay organizations) about gays in the military say about the trajectory of the rights movement? What are the implications with the collusion of gay rights and equality, and the military-industrial complex that is built on war and imperialism? How can a fight for liberation and equality be “won” when it includes the death of others?

Queer anti-military activists argue that “nothing could be more hypocritical than a movement centering around the rights to go abroad and kill people and get away with it” (Sycamore 2014:104). Ironically the state is bestowing rights to one community for the unequivocal purpose of the legitimized killing of “others” whom the nation deems as a threat. These actions demonstrate that the national debate to repeal DADT was not put forth by the diverse members in LGBT/Q communities, but rather by those who had great political and financial stakes in the issue. Gay Inc. was able to successfully control the discourse and had the power to publicly shape the voice and image of the community for mainstream America; and ultimately, it did not care who was being left out and silenced.

The DADT policy was successfully repealed largely due to how the discourse was sold to middle America. Advocates framed DADT as homophobic, and its supporters as closed-minded bigots against patriotic lesbian and gay soldiers who wanted to openly serve their country. Similar to the marriage debate, activists constructed the battle as you are either progressive and support the modernization of the armed forces by allowing gays to serve in the military or too traditional and intolerant to support the integration of such a storied and prestigious institution. This framing, once again, exposes how gay rights was being used as the indicator for what it means to be “modern” or “enlightened,” while simultaneously being attached to an institution that is anything but progressive. Further, allowing lesbians and gays to serve openly contributes to the image of the U.S. being a modern state which supports the narrative of American exceptionalism that politicians espouse. However, being against the inclusion of LGBT/Q individuals in the armed forces is not the same argument as those who seek to limit rights, because the debate is more nuanced. One can be against inclusion, but supportive of LGBT/Q rights; and I argue that fighting for inclusion into the military is a misplaced goal. A queer

argument demands activists to fight for equality and liberation by distancing the LGBT/Q community from the military. It is a destructive institution that decides what bodies are rendered as legitimate and thus allowed to survive, and which are deemed illegitimate and must be destroyed. Sima Shakhsari (2014) asks: “How does the government of the life of one population connect to the techniques of killing another population?” (p. 95).

It is through the critique of military inclusion that queer organizing and protest can (re)enter the conversation, because these advocates can refuse to be used in a system that legitimizes death and destruction (Laska and Speck 2012). Mainstream lesbians and gays seem to have forgotten (or perhaps are deliberately ignoring) that for many in the U.S. and abroad, the U.S. Armed Forces are a symbol of Western imperialism (Jones 2010). Jones (2010) writes: “queer assimilation is the sinister nature of the State and Capitalism at its finest” (142) because other issues, such as affordable housing, health care, stable employment, and resistance to police brutality have become issues associated with other groups such as people of color and immigrant rights groups. Thus, by prioritizing the fight for inclusion into the armed forces mainstream lesbians and gays demonstrate these other crucial social issues are not *their* issues and do not carry the same significance. Moreover, when these other fundamental concerns are deprioritized and not seen as “gay issues,” it supports the stereotype that most, if not all, LGBT/Q people are white and class privileged.

The fight for military inclusion fits into the neoliberal social order that seeks to reinforce the division between the right kind of sexual minority (i.e., homonormative) who is admitted into state institutions, from those who are not believed to be deserving of rights. The masculine, patriotic gay man (now homonational soldier) can be tolerated as “out and proud” when he enacts hegemonic notions of masculinity and occupies the role of the “protector of the nation”

(Shakhsari 2014:95). Subsequently, the state can use these newly acquired gay citizens as evidence that equality has been achieved, thereby effectively dismissing the larger concerns about the rights of those who remain marginalized and subjugated. Hence, the inclusion of gay people into these institutions, in the name of human rights, the state can now use gay rights as propaganda to demonstrate how the West is civilized, modern, liberal and democratic. This construction is particularly convenient when the discourse about non-Western countries renders them as backward, pre-modern, and non-democratic states. However, this strategy is not new; and this tactic is reminiscent in much of the colonialist narratives of Orientalism (Haritaworn, Tauqui and Erdem 2008, Puar 2007, Said 1978, Spivak 1988). Minoo Moallem (2002) posits that “the barbaric other is there to legitimize and give meaning to the masculine militarism of the ‘civilized’” (300). Thus, normalized lesbians and gays who have been incorporated into these social institutions are complicit and participate in the marginalization of others, without formal directives from the state. A Foucauldian reading of this maneuver by homonormative lesbians and gays exposes how state power operates, as individuals and groups become subsumed by the state and become agents of state power, they no longer need to be monitored or regulated. They have become the “docile body” (Foucault 1977) and “docile patriots” (Puar and Rai 2002) the state needs to support Westernization, the spread of Western power and imperialism, and the spread of militarism around the world.

Puar (2006) argues that we can see how these normalized and assimilated lesbian and gay American bodies are procured and absorbed into the nation-building project, through the promise of citizenship rights and a liberal sense of belonging. As a part of this process, when seen as advantageous to U.S. national interests, the state extends space for the incorporation and managing of lesbian and gay bodies into heteronormative society as it further normalizes and

disciplines them. (Carson 2013). The state confers the benefits of intimate citizenship (e.g., legalizing same-sex marriage, repealing DADT) in exchange for “patriotic gay subjectivity that supports the nation’s political, cultural, and economic projects, such as the War on Terror” (Carson 2013:5). Therefore, the acquisition of these rights becomes contingent on lesbians and gays being assimilated into the heteronormative and racist model of American respectability.

In order to demonstrate Western progressiveness, the state project also seeks to normalize (white) gay bodies in order to secure an unambiguous distinction between “us” (Western, white) versus “them” (Middle East, Africa, racialized minorities). Hence, this rendering demarcates the West as enlightened and gay-friendly compared to perceptions of non-Western cultures as barbaric and inherently homophobic.

Now having respectable gay bodies (or docile patriots) among its subjects, the United States can “flaunt this achievement to the world, effectively positioning itself as a progressive nation” (Carson 2013:5) which figures into the narrative of “sexual exceptionalism” (Puar 2006) that allows Western governments to cast LGBT/Q rights as a foundation of their liberal democratic self-perception and political commitments (Thoreson 2015). The homosexual subject, now fully integrated, becomes a tool in perpetuating U.S. sexual exceptionalism through the incorporation of gay rights in U.S. foreign policy, both in their human rights rhetoric and in more coercive practices like aid agreements and sanctions, which I will discuss in the proceeding chapter.

Being “pro-military” is antithetical to what it means to be queer, and the prioritizing of the DADT repeal only accentuates the division between assimilated, homonormative gays and queers. Nair asks: “Where are the queer anti-war voices that also give us a critical perspective on DADT and have a critical analysis of the reasons why a dependence on a war economy is

disastrous for our country's youngest and poorest people of color, the main targets of the military's current recruiting tactics?" (Nair 2010). Her question gets to the heart of my analysis. My investigation suggests that these voices, those critical of the repeal, were essentially ignored by the media and normative members in the gay community. I refer to the silenced voices who argued that there could be "no queer support of the military machine" and those "who refute the kind of pro-war militaristic rhetoric spewed forth by Choi and his compatriots" (Nair 2010). I, like many other queers, did not want to hear about how liberating the DADT repeal was for the community and the country, but rather we wanted to hear rhetoric exposing the ways militarism is sexist and rooted in heterosexist gender norms. Or rhetoric revealing the fact that militarism relies on and recreates racist world orders, which tells us whose life is worth defending and whose is not. Or rhetoric showing how militarism is sustained through the creation of the "other" that is grounded in nativist and xenophobic discourse, which in turn creates the united "we" which is always defined through heteronormative, racist, cissexist, and sexist ideologies. The crux of queer analysis is the critique that illuminates, cultivates, and nurtures differences. It challenges the existence of the homogenous "we," and thus, is counter to the precise logic behind the objective reality of the military.

I have argued that integrating lesbians and gays into the military is not a sign of progress or acceptance. The military and the state have used this strategy to exploit members of LGBT/Q communities to legitimize their own activities. They seek to gain acceptance for militarism and military "solutions," by creating a false public image of an "open" and "modern" military." Through the cultivating of this representation, we witness another example of pinkwashing occurring, demonstrating how the state uses gay rights as a propaganda tool. Nation-states can herald their progressive politics for gay rights because they allow service members to openly

serve, yet simultaneously ignore human rights violations, often against the very communities they are using for propaganda. The following chapter will offer a detailed investigation of these pinkwashing and homonational strategies by the U.S. Armed Forces and foreign nation-states.

The fight to overturn DADT so lesbians and gays can serve openly in the armed forces is problematic because it ties the community to war, but also has broader implications. Militarism and patriotic discourse serve not only to sustain the military-industrial complex, but also perpetuate social inequities in our societies and our daily lives. The fight for integration into an imperialist institution, whose missions are based on the destruction of cultures and people we inscribe as “other,” is not a definition of queer liberation. Queer liberation cannot be found within a patriarchal and militaristic system; it must go beyond and resist simple politics of inclusion. True liberation will strive to create a queer future that is not complicit in (re)creating systems of power repackaged under different names.

## **5 HOMO-COLLUSION AND THE LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE STATE**

“As queer and trans people we must refuse conscription into the war on terror which will now be fought in our names. We cannot allow ourselves to be the cover story for US imperialism. Our call to ban guns must begin with disarming the military and police.” –Craig Willse

In the previous two chapters I demonstrated how the message of equality has been co-opted for capitalist endeavors and as a tool for state propaganda. This appropriation of gay rights allows for individuals, corporations, and nations to hide under the guise of progressivism without having to do anything to combat issues of anti-LGBTQ violence and discrimination. In this chapter, I analyze Clinton’s United Nations “gay rights are human rights” declaration, the connection of gay rights and the War on Terror, how activists invoke the white savior complex in complicated international situations such as in Sochi and Uganda, and how nation-states utilize



pinkwashing tactics to promote themselves as gay-friendly and progressive while simultaneously engaging in human rights abuses.

### 5.1 American Exceptionalism

As gay rights have become an increasingly discussed and debated topic, we see American politicians invoking the belief of American exceptionalism when it comes to protecting the rights of LGBTQ people. Over the past two centuries, prominent U.S. leaders, from Presidents to politicians to media personalities, have repeatedly declared that America is the ideal model in terms of freedom, democracy, and equality that the rest of world should emulate (Moss 2003, Walt 2011). American exceptionalism is the belief that that United States is unique or exceptional when compared with the historical development of other countries. It is the notion that the U.S. is divinely sanctioned to bring civilization, liberty, and democracy to the rest of the world—by means of war if necessary—which has been a hallmark of American history. For example, during Ronald Reagan’s farewell address in 1989, he quoted Governor John Winthrop’s words from 1630, calling the U.S. the “shining city on a hill” (Library 1989). In 1996, President Bill Clinton declared, “America remains the indispensable nation [and] there are times when America, and *only* (emphasis mine) America, can make a difference between war and peace, between freedom and repression, between hope and fear” (Simon 2014).

The narrative of American exceptionalism asserts that the U.S. is not only superior to other countries, but also it is *exceptional* in its foreign policies. Political pundit, Peggy Noonan wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*:

America is not exceptional because it has long attempted to be a force for good in the world, it attempts to be a force for good because it is exceptional. It is a nation formed not by brute, grunting tribes come together over the fire to consolidate their power and expand their land base, but by people who came from many places. They coalesced around not blood lines but ideals, and they defined, delineated and won their political rights in accordance with ground-breaking Western and Enlightenment thought. That was

something new in history, and quite exceptional. We fought a war to win our freedom, won it against the early odds, understood we owed much to God, and moved forward as a people attempting to be worthy of what he'd given us (Noonan 2013).

Noonan invokes the idea that America, over all others, is exceptional; and with her thinly-coded racist language, her proclamation defines a national identity that is white and Christian. Furthermore, one has to ask: what does her statement of being a “force for good” entail and what if those actions are the opposite of actually *doing good*?

For years, especially following the attack on September 11<sup>th</sup>, the public has witnessed every presidential candidate invoke the narrative of America's greatness and exceptionalism. Many politicians are deeply entrenched in the narrative and believe it to be quintessential to our national identity, so much so, that *any* deviation from this rhetoric is met with intense condemnation. For example, former President George W. Bush convinced the public that the war in Iraq was imperative for the humanitarian reason of saving the Iraqi people, especially Iraqi women. This action resulted in almost two decades of wars and the rise of more extremist groups, all in the name of being a “force for good in the world.”

President Obama has been criticized many times for not passionately touting the rhetoric of exceptionalism. Notably in 2009, Obama was criticized by presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, for remarking, “I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism” (Reifowitz 2012). Obama's statement garnered much criticism from conservatives because his comments did not reflect the brand of patriotic masculinity and American superiority that they expected from the president. Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee responded that Obama's “worldview is dramatically different from any president... he grew up more as a globalist than an American. To deny American exceptionalism is in essence to deny the heart and soul of this nation” (Smith and

Martin 2010). Former New York City mayor, Rudolph Giuliani said to a group of Republican donors, “I know this is a horrible thing to say, but I do not believe that the president loves America...He wasn’t brought up the way you were brought up and I was brought up, through love of this country” (Jaffe 2015).

Throughout Obama’s presidency, he has consistently reaffirmed the idea of exceptionalism to prove his “American-ness” to his dissenters. For example, in a graduation speech to cadets at the U.S. Military Academy he stated, “I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being” (Jaffe 2015). Also during a speech at the American Legion National Convention in August 2014 Obama stated, “The United States is and will remain the one indispensable nation in the world” (House 2014). This statement, at best is confusing, but more importantly he is justifying and furthering the idea of American superiority even when it is not necessarily true.

Most statements about American exceptionalism are based on the presumption that America’s values, political system, and history are unique; and more strikingly, worthy of universal admiration (Walt 2011). This discourse further implies that the U.S. is both destined and entitled to play a distinct role on the global stage. Scholars and activists contend that the rhetoric of exceptionalism fuels international peacekeeping endeavors and missions to spread democracy, instead these actions work to impose American power and promote imperialist goals (Atanasoski 2013, Haritaworn 2008, Kohut and Stokes 2006, Puar 2005). Thus, the notions of exceptionalism and the U.S. being an “empire of liberty” and the “last best hope of Earth” have often been invoked to justify war and remain a foundational component to American nationalism (Walt 2011). State and military officials also emphasize the superiority of the U.S. when it comes to the rule of sovereignty, such as in the unilateral missions of the Bush administration. Moss

(2003) argues these “unilateral inclinations” have always been a distinct part of U.S. foreign policy and that they “combine ideas of national uniqueness, of democratic self-determination and of a special civilizing mission” (135).

Foreign leaders have declared that United States’ foreign policy can be quite disconcerting because of the blind patriotism that is embodied in the belief of American exceptionalism. In September 2013 at the United Nations General Assembly, President Obama said, “America is exceptional” because it stands up not only for its own “narrow self-interest, but for the interests of all” (Madhani 2013). In response, the President of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, retorted that Obama’s statement was the type of propaganda that was reminiscent of Nazi rhetoric before WWII, and “such words and ideas pose extreme danger” (Staff 2013). Russian President, Vladimir Putin agreed with Correa’s sentiment, stating, “it is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation” (Mullen 2013). Unfortunately, in this case Putin may be correct. This brand of nationalism has contributed directly to the spread of U.S. military power and covertly framed imperialist missions as missions for peace. The belief of global superiority has increased American isolationism and has encouraged the public to ignore many of the inequities that are occurring domestically and internationally. What is more, individuals and politicians alike criticize those who oppose the rhetoric of exceptionalism. They claim that dissenters are unpatriotic and anti-America, which too often quells their opposition. For instance, at the 2004 Republican National Convention, keynote speaker Zell Miller accused former Senator John Kerry of being unpatriotic and defaming America because he was refusing “to support American troops in combat” (Murphy 2004). Miller stated: “While young Americans are dying in the sands of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan, our nation is being torn apart and made weaker because of the Democrats’ manic

obsession to bring down our commander in chief” (Murphy 2004). Kerry was also derided by former Vice President Dick Cheney for wanting to show al-Qaida America’s “softer side”; and even though these claims are false, Republicans were attempting to subdue any criticism of Bush’s foreign policy (Saletan 2004).

While many critics focus on international policies and actions, scholars also point to the ways in which exceptionalism masks domestic inequalities. Howard Zinn (2005) argues that it is impossible and unfounded for the U.S. to claim to be an exemplar of virtue and freedom if we look at American history, which is rife with slavery, civil rights violations, and social welfare issues (Video 2005). Pease (2009) in *The New American Exceptionalism* posits American exceptionalism is a “state fantasy” and “state fantasies cannot altogether conceal the inconsistencies they mask” (37). He offers examples such as the prisoner abuses in Abu Ghraib and the combination of incompetence and racism in the government’s handling of Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana (Pease 2009). The myth of exceptionalism cloaks human rights violations and allows the U.S. to claim that it is the pillar of freedom and equality, despite the very real violations and consequences of the government’s actions. This same narrative has also been essential in the contemporary discourse about gay rights.

As gay rights have become a symbol for a multicultural and diverse society, the U.S. and other Western countries have utilized rights discourse to assert their “progressiveness.” Thus, the discourse of gay rights has emerged as a marker for the “civilized West” (Bracke 2012:245). The United States has co-opted rights discourse as a strategy for decades to declare that it is not only a progressive and modern nation, but also exceptional in the treatment of its citizenry. For many years, feminists have challenged U.S. exceptionalism by arguing that it reproduces “first-world-third-world power hierarchies and maintains a trajectory of ‘development’ where the U.S. subject

is positioned as one who has ‘rights’ and serves as the standard by which the ‘Other’ is judged” (Grewal 1999).

The U.S. has sold the narrative that it is the vanguard of human rights and a bastion for freedom to the global community. Many scholars and activists have argued that this narrative is fictive and downright false; however due to the pervasive rhetoric of U.S. exceptionalism, it is still salient in the public imagination –with striking consequences. State leaders claim that the U.S. is one of the most progressive countries in the world, which allows the public to disregard systemic discrimination, and silences opposition to nationalistic ideology.

Ironically, the United States is far from “exceptional” and lags behind many countries in regards to extending rights and protective legislation for LGBT/Q communities. For example, if marriage equality is an accurate gauge of rights (as *Gay, Inc.* argues) then it is clear the U.S. was not a global leader. The U.S. was over ten years late to be on the forefront in legalizing same-sex marriage, and in fact, even trailed behind “lesser developed” countries such as South Africa, Uruguay, and Argentina. The same is true when comparing other presumed measures of equality for lesbians and gays, such as serving openly in the military. We find the United States’ upholding its military ban on “out” LGBT service members longer than many other Western countries such as Canada, where LGBT people could serve openly since 1992, Germany since 2000, the United Kingdom 2000, as well as many “lesser developed” countries, including Albania in 2008, Bulgaria in 2006, Colombia in 1999, and the list continues. What is more, despite the repeal of DADT, the U.S. still upholds its ban on transgender service members, while 18 other countries allow them to openly serve<sup>1</sup> (Pasulka 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom

### *5.1.1 United Nations Declaration*

Secretary Clinton delivered a speech to the United Nations (UN) in 2011 declaring that all nations needed to recognize that LGBT rights were human rights, and in doing so, she asserted that LGBT rights should be added to the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” LGBT advocates and allies deemed her speech a historic moment, not just for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights movement, but also for the nation (Dorf 2011, Thompson 2011).

In this speech she declared:

Today, I want to talk about the work we have left to do to protect one group of people whose human rights are still denied in too many parts of the world today. In many ways, they are an invisible minority. They are arrested, beaten, terrorized, even executed. Many are treated with contempt and violence by their fellow citizens while authorities empowered to protect them look the other way or, too often, even join in the abuse. They are denied opportunities to work and learn, driven from their homes and countries, and forced to suppress or deny who they are to protect themselves from harm. I am talking about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, human beings born free and bestowed equality and dignity, who have a right to claim that, which is now one of the remaining human rights challenges of our time. (Clinton 2011)

In some ways Secretary Clinton’s statements are accurate, however she falls into the conceptual trap of referring to LGBT people as “one group of people” even though these communities are comprised of diverse members who often have vastly different needs. I argue that this conceptual slippage is even more problematic when referring to the needs of global LGBT/Q communities. Further, many folks in lesbian and gay communities are not “invisible minorities” because they are largely privileged in society (albeit being gay). There are some LGBTQ people who may be “invisible,” but I argue that it is because they have successfully assimilated into mainstream society. So their “gayness” is “invisible” because they are often white, cisgender, gender normative, and class-mobile. Clinton’s statement about the violence

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enacted against LGBTQ individuals is indeed correct, it is a severe global issue; and the purpose of this speech is to shine a spotlight on the issues affecting LGBTQ people. By making the statement that “gay rights are human rights” she is proclaiming that LGBTQ individuals should be made into a protected class of people. And on a certain level this declaration is positive, because rights should be extended to those who are terrorized and brutalized on the basis of their queerness; however, I argue that this speech also may have a more insidious purpose. I posit that Clinton declaration is not directed at those members of LGBT/Q communities who are at the most risk of violence (e.g., those who are gender non-conforming, racial and ethnic minorities, transgender individuals), rather I argue that Clinton is using her declaration as a neo-imperialist tool that can now chastise other countries for their rights abuses. Through her speech Clinton extends American neoliberal propaganda as she promotes the U.S. and the West as champions for LGBT/Q rights, and her statements operate as political lip-service to LGBT/Q communities. This declaration firmly solidifies “LGBT” with “Americanness.” Moreover, as the U.S. Secretary of State, Clinton is not only promoting American exceptionalism, but also establishing grounds for the U.S. to apply political sanctions or use coercive aid conditions against countries that the government inscribes as illiberal and barbaric. Clinton continues:

I speak about this subject knowing that my own country’s record on human rights for gay people is far from perfect. Until 2003, it was still a crime in parts of our country. Many LGBT Americans have endured violence and harassment in their own lives, and for some, including many young people, bullying and exclusion are daily experiences. So we, like all nations, have more work to do to protect human rights at home. (Clinton 2011)

For many, this speech was emotional and heartwarming, and the above statements were significant because she acknowledges that the U.S. has not been the exceptional example in



protecting LGBT/Q individuals. However, I see these statements as a way to placate the community, especially when considering Clinton's record on not supporting LGBT/Q rights. For instance, Clinton came under fire for the praising the work that Nancy Reagan did about the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s (Chozick 2016). This misstep showed at very least an inadequate knowledge about the history of the crisis, but also demonstrated a lack of genuine concern about issues affecting LGBTQ lives. Mark Stern, a writer for *Slate*, argues that Clinton has done little to advocate for LGBTQ rights and has largely been indifferent about the needs of communities (Stern 2014).

Speeches like Clinton's encourage the American citizenry to feel proud of its leaders and government officials, and to put trust into a justice system that has often worked (and in many ways continues to work) to subjugate members of LGBT/Q communities. For example, in North Carolina, the governor signed into law the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act, or more commonly known as HB2 or simply the "bathroom bill" (Carolina 2016). One of the most contentious aspect of the bill is its regulation of bathroom usage on the concept of "biological sex" that many see as discriminatory towards transgender people.

Clinton concludes her speech by signaling an extremely significant shift in U.S. foreign policy:

And finally, to LGBT men and women worldwide, let me say this: Wherever you live and whatever the circumstances of your life, whether you are connected to a network of support or feel isolated and vulnerable, please know that you are not alone.... And you have an ally in the United States of America and you have millions of friends among the American people. The Obama Administration defends the human rights of LGBT people as part of our comprehensive human rights policy and as a priority of our foreign policy.... And we have created a program that offers emergency support to defenders of human rights for LGBT people.... Building on efforts already underway at the State Department and across the government, the President has directed all U.S. Government agencies engaged overseas to combat the criminalization of LGBT status and conduct, to enhance efforts to protect vulnerable LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, to ensure that our foreign assistance promotes the protection of LGBT rights, to enlist international

organizations in the fight against discrimination, and to respond swiftly to abuses against LGBT persons. (Clinton 2011)

Her statements suggest an optimistic direction for the global community in extending protections and ending discrimination against LGBTQ people. However, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, discrimination is not meted out equally among LGBT/Q communities. Furthermore, the portrayal of the U.S. as the defender of LGBT/Q communities is directly opposed to reports showing an increase of violence towards some members of the community (Ennis 2015a). Reports show that queer and trans people are often the target of violence and discrimination, which exposes how this narrative of exceptionalism is false. Zillah Eisenstein (2015) accuses politicians and political leaders of refusing to take action against discrimination and violence against gender, racial, and sexual minorities in the United States. Eisenstein (2015) argues that the narrative of exceptionalism operates in a very particular way when it comes to dealing with these issues. First, the U.S. claims to be exceptional in the opportunities, democracy, and freedoms that it grants to its citizens; therefore, when something bad happens (e.g., violence against transgender folks, police brutality against people of color), the explanation given is that action or person is an *exception* rather than the rule. Thereby, those atrocities are ignored and made into “exceptions” which perpetuate the delusion of American exceptionalism. Consequently, the narrative of exceptionalism allows political leaders (and the general public) to deny the serious issues of transphobia, racism, and homophobia that occur in this country.

The media also reinforce the exceptionalism narrative by focusing the public’s attention on the celebrations of marriage equality and victories for normative lesbians and gays, yet not reporting on the deeply entrenched stigmas and discrimination against the most vulnerable members in LGBT/Q communities. I argue this may be purposeful, because if the media covered

the incidents of violence and murders happening against all members of LGBT/Q communities (and not just the assimilated and normative members), it would prove the fabrication of this narrative. Because violence against queer and trans people occurs with alarming frequency, I ask: how can people in the U.S. maintain that they are exceptional in their acceptance toward LGBT/Q people while blatantly refusing to address the high morbidity of this population?

Mira Patel (2015), who served in the Obama Administration from 2009-2013 and Special Advisor on Secretary Clinton's Policy Planning Staff at the U.S. State Department, argues that Clinton's declaration that "gay rights are human rights" was "more than just a rhetorical play on her 1995 women's rights speech in Beijing" where she declared "women's rights are human rights." One notable difference was this speech was backed with a three million dollar pledge from the State Department's Global Equality Fund and had "the *full force* (emphasis mine) of the U.S. government" (Patel 2015). This rhetoric raises several questions, and Clinton's impracticable statements that the U.S. will be the global champion of gay rights has serious implications. First, how is the U.S. government *really* going to ensure protections of all LGBT/Q people and not limit protections to only those who embody the heteronormative standards of respectability? What does this declaration that the U.S. is the defender of LGBT/Q communities imply on a global scale? What retaliation is Clinton implying if a country does not want to protect its gay citizens? Will the U.S. invade them, impose sanctions, force isolation from the global community?

This declaration to protect *all* LGBT/Q people, regardless of origin, allows Secretary Clinton, the Obama Administration, and gay rights advocates to link "gay rights" to American exceptionalism. Her speech invokes the notion that "Americanness" is synonymous with being tolerant, progressive, and democratic in pursuit of sociopolitical ends. Thus, Clinton's statements

reinforce the “American” identity in gay rights movements. This rhetoric may bring to light the very real discrimination and prejudice that occurs all around the world. However, this discourse simultaneously supports manifestations of neoliberal propaganda that can illuminate the collision of gay rights with state power. Through this speech, Clinton aligns gay rights to the neo-imperial goals of U.S. foreign policy. This relationship with state power makes members of LGBT/Q communities complicit with state-sanctioned violence and coercive state practices. While I support equality and protection against discrimination for all people, it is imperative to investigate what it means when a superpower (that has a long history of engaging in imperialist projects) declares that it is going to champion any minority group’s cause.

The explicit purpose of Clinton’s speech was to convince members of the UN that gay rights needed to be included in the charter of protected human rights. She stated: “some have suggested that gay rights and human rights are separate and distinct; but, in fact, they are one and the same... Like being a woman, like being a racial, religious, tribal, or ethnic minority, being LGBT does not make you less human. And that is why gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights” (Clinton 2011). However, many scholars have questioned the concept of human rights and their universality, since they are often defined through Western criteria. Scholars argue that the discourse of human rights can be used as a platform for the spread of neoliberalist thought, capitalism, and colonialist goals (Morgensen 2010, Puar 2007, Puar and Mikdash 2012, Schotten and Maikey 2012, Schulman 2012). “The definition and conceptualization of human rights bear a western bias, whether one likes it or not, having been written under American influence, via mainly western concepts” (Laurent 2005:165). Human rights can be understood as the result of geo-political debates and bargaining; therefore, specific cultural ideologies and assumptions continue to influence human rights discourse (Atanasoski

2013, Laurent 2005). Human rights are neither transhistorical nor transcultural; they stem instead from a particular history and cultural background. “In other words, human rights are culture-dependent” (Laurent 2005:165). Laurent (2005) argues that in the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” many of the rights emerge from ideas of Western modernity (e.g., freedom to marry, right to vote) and address access to specific rights rather than general humanitarian ideals.

Various groups and nation-states across the globe support the notion of expanding human rights; however, the deployment of the discourse of human rights can be problematic. Hancock (2007) argues that believing human rights exist only to protect the weak from abuse is short-sided, because powerful nation-states are increasingly using them in political debates by. Too often when activists invoke human rights, they claim universality, despite being conceptualized through Western formations. It is significant that Clinton used human rights language in her UN speech because she asserts that the United States gets to define the standard for human rights. The power to define human rights means the ability to shape the concept, but also works as political and rhetorical tool that benefits (largely Western) international foreign policies and political strategies. Therefore, due to the United States’ power to largely define the political sphere, the state can exercise a degree of ownership over the idea of universal human rights (Jahren 2013).

Many countries, especially those societies ruled by colonial powers in the West, have anxieties about human rights discourse because of concerns over Western power (Griffin 2008, Laurent 2005). Scholars have expressed their concerns that “acting in compliance with universal human rights has become the standard by which states are measured, and accusing a state of non-compliance has become a way to challenge state sovereignty through legitimate intervention”

(Jahren 2013). Hence, those in power are co-opting human rights discourse and use it as a political instrument to advance their goals and draw divisions between the presumably liberal, progressive “Global North” and the supposedly illiberal, pre-modern, barbaric “Global South.” Politicians can systematically invoke the language of human rights not only to legitimize the interference into foreign sovereign nation-states’ domestic affairs, but also to rationalize invasion and occupation. Utilizing LGBT/Q rights discourse for political gain is the newest strategy politicians have used to forward their imperialist agendas.

Secretary Clinton suggests that lesbians and gays everywhere, regardless of race, sexuality, gender, or class, can be understood through the same human rights framework. She fails to acknowledge that her conceptualization of “gay rights” is largely informed by the histories and experiences of white, gay men in the U.S. (Mikdashi 2011). Clinton’s understanding of gay rights may be problematic for some, because this particular interpretation of being “gay” emphasizes the need (and expectation) to be visible and “out,” as well as adopting a sexual politic that prioritizes sexuality over all other aspects of an individual’s life. Thus, her construction of “gay rights” calls for an omission of the sociopolitical struggles along race, class, and gender lines that “animate the lives of the majority of the third world’s heterosexual *and* homosexual populations” (Mikdashi 2011). The central tenet of homonationalism is the belief that LGBT/Q people all over the world “experience, practice, and are motivated by the same desires, and that their politics are grounded in an understanding that ties 1) the directionality of their love and desire into a stable identity and 2) that stable identity into the grounds from which one speaks and makes political claims” (Mikdashi 2011). Hence, Clinton’s declaration can be seen as a mechanism for normative homonationalism and in service of the neoliberal ways of producing politics and subjects more broadly (Mikdashi 2011).

## 5.2 Sexual Exceptionalism

Puar (2007) argues that we are seeing an “exceptional form of national heteronormativity [that] is now joined by an exceptional form of national homonormativity, in other words, homonationalism” (2). She argues that there is an explicit connection between homonationalism and the neoliberal sexual politics of this contemporary war era and the imperialist strategies of the nation-state (Puar 2007). Puar sees complicit involvement between homosexuality and American nationalism generated through calls by gay subjects for patriotic inclusion (Puar 2007). The U.S. and other Western nations represent themselves to the international community as sexually tolerant and “gay-friendly” to justify neoliberal, militaristic actions against foreign states who are not, all in the name of protecting gay rights. Scholars argue that as gay subjects further normalize and fit into homonormative standards, they are no longer perceived as traitors to the state or symbols of moral decline and can then be invited into the panoply of American citizenry. Thus, the state can use these new gay citizens to serve as an exemplar of American exceptionalism (Carson 2013, Haritaworn 2008, O’Shaughnessy 2015, Puar 2006).

The goals of the contemporary gay rights movement and the mainstream faction’s desire to conform to the heteronormative standards of the state have continued to expose the fissures in LGBT/Q communities. Mainstream lesbians and gays not only want (and fight) to be recognized by the state, they also seek full integration into the state that seeks to use them for propaganda and colonialist missions. Puar (2007) argues that in post-9/11 America, gay subjects (who are largely white and class-privileged) have been extended a type of “symbolic” citizenship through being granted certain citizenship rights. Through this integration, the state disciplines and normalizes these gay citizens in order to make them productive citizens, as well as distinguish them from other queer subjects. In exchange for this recognition, these gay patriots or “sexually

exceptional queers” are complicit in the production of racist images and state-sanctioned violence against the foreign “other” in order to secure their legitimacy as American (Puar 2006, Puar and Rai 2002).

The state institutes sexual exceptionalism through utilizing these newly-acquired gay subjects for its needs, because gay rights have gained “significant representational currency when situated within the global scene on the war on terror” (Puar 2007:4). Thus, we witness is the state utilizing gay rights (and these newly transformed gay patriots) to project a national identity of progress and modernity, and as a means to judge other countries and justify actions against them. Homonationalist discourses portray Western nations as not only sexually exceptional in their treatment of LGBT/Q communities, but also as the global leaders and protectors of the community as well. However, these protections and rights are only extended to the “exceptional gays” or those who have aligned themselves with nationalist projects, specifically those who demonstrate the militaristic performance of masculinity and patriotism for the reproduction of the nation-state (Puar 2007). Conversely, queers who do not subscribe to these nationalist projects and reject ideas of homonormativity are disregarded by the nation. Thus, they will not become “good gay citizens” and can be refused rights (Collins 2004:74).

### ***5.2.1 War on Terror***

An essential precept of American sexual exceptionalism is the creation of the abject “other.” The creation of the “other” can be seen through much of U.S. history, through the actions to “civilize” indigenous people, in Reagan’s call for capitalism and democracy to end communism, or in the continued “War on Terror.” Time and again, “American biopower manifests in war and violence against opposing forces to American national identity... [and] the construction of ‘America’ is not based on what it is, but what it is not” (O’Shaughnessy 2015).



Since the 1990s, political discourse has centered on the idea that there is a “clash of civilizations” along the lines of gender and sexuality (Atanasoski 2013, Bracke 2012). The most recent iteration of this rhetoric can be witnessed through the decades long “War on Terror” started by the Bush administration and continued through the drone strikes of the Obama administration in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In this prolonged war era, we see the governing ideologies of homonormativity expanding into homonationalism, “wherein the state utilizes the gay liberal subject as praxis of sexual othering vis-à-vis Islamophobia” (O’Shaughnessy 2015). Western discourse continues to uphold the construction of the terrorist (read: Islamic) as the barbaric, racialized, and sexualized *other* who is rendered as the “homophobic Muslim” in order to reify colonial discourses (Haritaworn 2008, O’Shaughnessy 2015, Puar and Rai 2002). Further, “the racialization and sexualization of Islam compels American military projects to bring a binary of ‘us versus them,’ [that] enforces mandatory terms of patriotism” (O’Shaughnessy 2015). Therefore, with the discursive and visual production of the “terrorist other,” patriotism has become synonymous with American nationalism. Within the context of homonormativity and the need to establish the “other” as anti-American and foreign, the state confines the racialized terrorist body within anyone who appears to be Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim (Puar 2005). This discourse simultaneously constructs *white* to be synonymous with *gay* and the *racialized other* to be synonymous with *straight* (and a terrorist), thus also erasing any discussion of lesbian or gay Arabs in public discourse.

As discussed in *Queer Times, Queer Assemblages*, Puar (2005) asserts that one of the most explicit sexualized productions of exceptionalism can be found within the comments made by the gay media about the acts of sexualized torture at Abu Ghraib. With the release of the

photos in 2004 and the depictions of cruel acts of torture through “the specter of ‘homosexual acts’” (123), Puar comments that the majority of the gay press emphasized the obvious homophobia of the American soldiers, while ignoring how race and gender intersected with sexuality in these acts of torture (Puar 2005). When Faisal Alam, founder and director of the Islamic LGBT/Q organization Al-Fatiha, stated that such torture was “an affront to [the prisoners’] masculinity” and defied Islam’s emphasis on “sexual privacy and modesty,” he helped to reproduce the orientalist “taboo of Muslim homosexuality” that is required for portraying them as sexual others and is needed to support U.S. military goals (Puar 2013b).

Puar (2005) argues that Al-Fatiha was forced to strike a delicate balance because the organization is at the intersections of Arabness and queerness. However, Alam’s statements were meant to authenticate the “orientalist notion of ‘Muslim sexuality,’” that solidifies the narratives of normative masculinity and American sexual exceptionalism (Puar 2005:124). When the photos from Abu Ghraib were released, the media helped to “reinforce homogenous notions of Muslim sexual repression vis-à-vis homosexuality and the notion of ‘modesty,’ [that] works to resituate the United States, in contrast, as a place free of such sexual constraints” (Puar 2005:124). Ironically, the media’s emphasis on the “sexual repression” of the prisoners, and subsequent ignoring of the hypersexual acts of the guards, works to establish the American guards as “sexually liberated” (albeit repulsive) in comparison to the “sexually repressed” prisoners. By the media releasing these photos to the public, paradoxically, it allowed for a type of pumped-up nationalism needed to restore America’s battered masculinity after the 9/11 attacks. The responses to these images thereby helped to resituate the U.S. as a “progressive place free of sexual constraints and tolerance of homosexuality” which is quite ironic “given the homophobic, racist, and misogynist violence of the U.S. prison guards” (King 2009:9).

King (2009) argues that the long history between the Western gaze and “the Orient” has shifted in recent years, especially through the continued War on Terror. In the work of Edward Said and Michel Foucault, the Orient was the place of “original release, unfettered sin, and acts with no attendant identities or consequences” (Puar 2005:125). But now, the public has (re)imagined it as a space of perversion, repression, and devoid of progress, where men may have sex with men, but are socially discouraged from adopting a gay identity (Puar 2005:125). This portrayal can be seen through the rhetoric and images circulated by Western media outlets that produce ideas of these cultures through an orientalist lens. Mainstream gay media reinforces the idea of U.S. sexual exceptionalism by “constructing ‘Muslim’ and ‘homosexuality’ as mutually exclusive” (O’Shaughnessy 2015, Puar 2005) and reinforce the portrayal of Arab culture as inherently homophobic.

Another instance of the dichotomous representation of the barbaric “Arab world” versus the civil “Western world” came during the early years of the War on Terror. In 2001, the Associated Press widely circulated a photo of a bomb that was prepared to deploy to Afghanistan that had the phrase “High Jack This Fags” inscribed on it. Andrew Sullivan, in an ironic move, criticized the homophobic message and simultaneously reinforced the sexually liberal nature of the United States. He stated, “I might point out that no-one’s tougher on fags than the people we’re attacking. And part of the reason we’re attacking is a defense of freedom which includes a defense of the freedom of sexual minorities” (Sullivan 2001). Sullivan was not alone in this sentiment. Many prominent lesbian and gay organizations protested the homophobic language used, but not the fact that it was written on a bomb. This “fag bomb” was seen by many as an insult to al-Qaeda, which had emasculated the American military after 9/11, but was not intended to reference sexuality. Thus, the message “High Jack This Fags” was meant as an insult in hope

of removing the emasculated and impotent status experienced by the U.S. military through militarily effeminizing al-Qaeda through the use of bombs and invasion. Nevertheless, what this photo and the comments that followed revealed was the deployment of a masculine nationalism that inscribed the queer “Other” as an enemy of the state, while incorporating aspects of “queer subjectivity into the body of the normalized nation” (Puar and Rai 2002:126-27). As a result, over the past several decades, we have witnessed the absorption of the lesbian and gay community into nationalist actions that center on the expansion of Western militarization and subjugation of the foreign “Other.”

Puar asserts that in the post-9/11 era, gender and sexuality have become central components in U.S. foreign policy. In the years following the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. experienced a resurgence of nationalism and many of the state’s actions that followed were coded in human rights discourse to justify invasion and violence. Many critics of the War on Terror have pointed to how military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have been grounded in the language of helping and rescuing others rather than for the pursuit of state interests (Atanasoski 2013, Bracke 2012, Chandler 2002). The U.S. has consistently justified the War on Terror by centering it on protecting human rights. The Bush administration claimed that the U.S. needed to invade Iraq to save the women and protect women’s rights globally, particular saving Muslim and Arab women from the “yoke of their misogynist cultural backgrounds and religious traditions” (Bracke 2012:244). More recently, this protection has expanded to include the need to save lesbians and gays (Bracke 2012). By now, the majority of the public accept that invoking human rights was a duplicitous choice that effectively helped to justify the war (Chilton and Schaffner 1997). Through invoking human rights discourse, the U.S. sought to present itself as progressive, a champion for human rights, and a safe place for women and queers, especially in comparison to

Afghanistan, Iraq, and basically the entire Middle East. However, this “saving” was implemented through invasion, bombings, and a declaration of war.

Throughout this over a decade-long war, the media has constructed the figure of “the Muslim enemy” as *both* misogynist *and* homophobic, spawned by an essentialized and monolithically barbaric and illiberal culture (Toor 2011). This construction is then utilized as supposed proof of Islam’s radical *otherness* compared to Western civilization, and is understood as an otherness that cannot be tolerated and must be destroyed (Toor 2011). Therefore, the state turning its attention to these new “civilizing missions” to “save the gays” works as an ideological cover for racist and xenophobic wars. For instance, during a debate on foreign policy in the 2012 Presidential election cycle, Republican nominee Mitt Romney echoes the rhetoric of these imperialist “civilizing missions” regarding how to handle the Middle East, saying: “we can’t kill our way out of this mess. We’re going to have to put in place a very comprehensive and robust strategy to help the—world of Islam and other parts of the world reject this radical violent extremism... the key that we’re going to have to pursue is a pathway to get the Muslim world to be able to reject extremism on its own” (Cook 2012). His statement raises the inevitable question: what does this “robust strategy” entail? Stephen Cook from the Council on Foreign Relations argues that Romney is short-sided in his remarks because he does not acknowledge that people in the Middle East are victims of these extremists, and Romney’s interpretation of the issue makes it seem that the Middle East is “awash in al-Qaeda type violent extremism” (Cook 2012). Romney fails to mention that there are large numbers of Arab people who reject al-Qaeda’s and ISIS’ worldview. Moreover, Romney’s statements reinforce the idea that the Middle East is an inherently barbaric culture, which is intrinsically violent and needs to be controlled, by force if necessary. His team reiterates this mentality in a foreign policy statement:

Mitt Romney will make available technical assistance to governments and transnational bodies to promote democracy, good governance, and sound financial management. He will convene a summit that brings together world leaders, donor organizations, and young leaders of groups that espouse the principles of representative government, religious pluralism, economic opportunity, women's and minority rights, and freedom of expression and conscience in the Arab world. (Cook 2012)

This statement released by the Romney campaign highlights a U.S. foreign policy obsessed with trying to remake the Arab world. It is devoid of any discussion about how activists in their home countries are leading protests and demonstrations about national empowerment and dignity, and only focuses on Western interventions (Cook 2012). Not surprisingly, many in the Arab world are deeply distrustful of proposed Western "strategies" to save them from extremism due to the history of colonialist practices and ideologies.

Saadia Toor (2011) claims that discourses of race, gender, and sexuality have always served a significant ideological function within imperialist projects, from Bush invoking "women's rights" to invade Iraq to Obama legitimizing the bombings in Afghanistan. The continuation of the global war has led to an expansion of political discourse that focuses on issues of LGBT/Q rights as the new battle between "Civilization—liberal modernity as embodied by 'the West'—and Barbarism—as connoted by Islam and Arab nations" (Toor 2011). Gayatri Spivak (1988) argues that we can trace how colonialist and imperialist narratives have long been cloaked in the language of emancipation through the rhetoric of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (297). Women's freedom has become part of these neoimperialist projects that use human rights as a rationale for invasion in the name of "civilizing" other cultures. Recently, in the current sociopolitical context, the state has turned to deploying gay rights as the new battle cry to legitimize the expansion of these projects. Hence, this new rhetoric of "gay emancipation" and the need to save lesbian and gay people closely resembles the rescue

narratives that have long been invoked by people in the “developed world” toward people of the “less developed world” (Bracke 2012).

Specifically, in terms of gay rights, these international civilizing agendas to “save the gays” are coming from politicians and activists alike. This discourse is problematic because it frames members of LGBT/Q communities as helpless victims who are forced to exist in a culture that does not want to acknowledge their existence or wants to expunge them. Furthermore, Dennis Altman explains in *Global Sex* that Western gay activists have long defined what “gayness” and a rights movement should look like for lesbian and gay people around the world. He demonstrated that activists fallaciously define liberation set by Western ideals (e.g., being “out,” gaining citizenship rights) that may not be applicable in all contexts (Altman 2001). For example, in Pakistan, where homosexual acts remain illegal based on laws constructed during the British colonial rule, there are lesbian and gay activists fighting for equality and acceptance into the broader Pakistani culture. Despite these legal restrictions, gay Pakistanis argue that in some ways it is quite easy to be gay because displays of affection between men in public, like hugging and holding hands, are common (Ladly 2012). Ali, a gay Pakistani man cited by Ladly (who did not want his full name used) said that for the older generation, same-sex attraction was not a prominent issue because it did not involve adopting a gay identity, which is largely different from Western conceptualizations of homosexuality. However, he stated that the younger generation, which has been increasingly exposed to Western thought and media, increasingly adopt a more Western ideal that being gay means one must be “out” about their sexuality and publicly identify as lesbian or gay. Thus, Ali states for younger members of LGBT/Q communities express more frustrations about Pakistani culture because they are trying to carve out an identity that allows them to be gay and Pakistani (Ladly 2012).

The struggle between culture and sexual identity for LGBTQ Pakistanis is less of a generational issue; rather their conflict is more due to the involvement of Western lesbian and gay activists who started intervening on behalf of gay Pakistanis. Western activists argue that the fight for gay rights should focus on overturning legislation such as Article 377 of the Pakistani Penal Code on “Unnatural Offenses,” whereas Pakistani LGBT/Q advocates and support groups want to focus the fight on helping parents accept their gay children (Ladly 2012). Nonetheless, international gay activists and their straight allies argue that overturning this code is not sufficient, and they require Western intervention to help them become fully liberated. For instance, in June 2012, the American Embassy in Islamabad held its first LGBT pride celebration and the demonstration caused a serious backlash from Pakistanis. A year later, a spokesperson for the embassy said it held a similar event, but chose not to issue a press release about it in hope of lessening the negative reactions (Ladly 2012). When asked about the backlash, Spokeswoman Rian Harris said in an email: “it is the policy of the United States government to support and promote equal rights for all human beings. We are committed to standing up for these values around the world, including here in Pakistan” (Ladly 2012). As well-intentioned as the celebration and the declaration may have been, many in the Pakistani gay community saw the event as detrimental to the work they had accomplished. An activist said the event was a mistake and “the damage that the U.S. pride event has done is colossal, just in terms of creating an atmosphere of fear that was not there before. The public eye is not what we need right now” (Ladly 2012). This incident demonstrates that Western activists and state entities may feel like they are aiding LGBT/Q communities, but there needs to be serious consideration to whether imposing Western ideals and strategies will actually help these communities. Specifically, because minority groups may actually incur more harm due to Western activists’ lack of cultural



knowledge or activists acting on assumptions that Western strategies are always the best. When Western lesbian and gay activists maintain the belief that their strategies are the only right ways to gain equality, it devalues the work that local activists are doing in their home countries and can result in a negative backlash against the very communities that they are trying to “save.”

### **5.3 White Savior Industrial Complex**

The media discourse and coverage of the United States’ political and military actions can be understood through the cultural narrative of victims and saviors. This dichotomous conceptualization allows for gay rights to be used as a strategy to portray non-Western countries as “barbaric” cultures and their citizens in need of saving by the Western world. Therefore, the image of the oppressed gay victim figures into these debates as a way to differentiate “civilized” cultures from “barbaric” cultures. Bacchetta (2011) furthers the concept of homonationalism by expanding the concept to *homotransnationalism*, which she defines as “the production and specifically transnational circulation of neocolonialist, orientalist, sexist, and queerphobic discourses” which help to establish not only a racialized “other,” but also a subject that is believed to always be in need of rescuing by Western forces, such as Muslim women or queers in developing nations (Bacchetta and Haritaworn 2011:134).

Makau Mutua (2001) writes that this construction of “savages” versus “victims” and “saviors” serves as a grand narrative that exposes the hypocrisies in the fight for human rights that is invoked in the West, especially against emerging nations. The United States has a long history of accusing “less-developed” or “Third World” nations of barbaric practices, while simultaneously remaining silent about the violence and discriminatory practices that occur domestically (Bracke 2012, Cole 2012, Kouri-Towe 2012, Mikdashi 2011, Puar and Rai 2002). The nations of the West utilize this strategy with gay rights to position themselves as the only

ones who care about the rights of LGBT/Q communities and as a way to demonstrate their “progressiveness” in relation to those countries “barbaric-ness.” Thus, the U.S. (and other Western countries) through the neoliberal practices of foreign aid, situate themselves as saviors of the oppressed people of the world.

Teju Cole, a Nigerian-American activist, argues that the “White Savior Industrial Complex” emerges as a way of releasing the “unbearable pressures that build in a system built on pillage.... [T]he white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.... It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege” (Cole 2012). He argues that these social justice campaigns are not truly about justice, change, or equality; rather, they work to make white activists feel self-righteous. U.S. foreign policies can implement and participate in the economic and social destruction of “less developed” countries (e.g., African nations, Latin American countries, Caribbean nations), but when discriminatory legislation gets passed, human rights advocates can feel good about speaking out against hateful politics. Therefore, this savior complex relies on invoking rescue narratives and providing aid without sincerely challenging centuries of imperialism. Examples of this practice can be seen in following two cases: the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and the Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda.

### ***5.3.1 Sochi***

Before the 2014 Winter Olympic games commenced in Sochi, Russia, the world witnessed one of the first global outcries about gay rights that prompted many activists to call for a boycott of the Olympics, unless Russia changed their homophobic policies. The safety of lesbians and gays attending the games was a widespread concern due to a legislative amendment that Putin passed seven months prior to the Olympics, which banned the distribution of any

“propaganda” in support of “non-traditional sexual relationships,” in the name of protecting minors. According to the new federal law, propaganda was defined as: “distribution of information that is aimed at the formation among minors of nontraditional sexual attitudes, attractiveness of non-traditional sexual relations, misperceptions of the social equivalence of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations, or enforcing information about non-traditional sexual relations that evokes interest in such relations” (Equality 2010). Human rights groups, such as the Council for Global Equality, claimed that all these laws do is “advance vague definitions of propaganda that lend themselves to targeting and ongoing persecution of the country’s LGBT community” (Equality 2010). Activists argued that the Olympics were supposed to stand for the principles of equality and anti-discrimination for all peoples, so the decision to allow Russia to host the Olympics felt insulting to many.

Russia has a long history of human rights violations, so why did we see this issue come to light when it did? Furthermore, where are the outcries about the other violations and atrocities that Putin ignores (if not encourages), such as its crackdown on NGOs and freedom of expression, as well as the arrests and harassment of human rights defenders and government (Watch 2013)? The media coverage of this event demonstrates how gay rights are being co-opted for nationalistic propaganda by the U.S. and other Western nations. Further, we witnessed American corporations profiting from the international outrage over the bill through advertising, marketing, and products aimed at creating an image of being “gay-friendly.”

The gains in civil rights for the lesbian and gay community over the past several years directly contributed to the massive international attention the Russian law received, which led to protesters calling for a boycott of the Games. Protests ranged from gay bars refusing to sell Russian vodka to several Western leaders engaging in a type of political boycott in support of the

lesbian and gay community. Some gay rights advocates compared Putin's actions to Nazi Germany's persecution of the Jews and apartheid in South Africa (Smith-Spark 2013). British actor Stephen Fry wrote a letter to UK Prime Minister David Cameron, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Jacques Rogge, and London 2012 chief Sebastian Coe, calling for the Olympics to be taken away from Russia. In the letter he stated, Putin "is making scapegoats of gay people, just as Hitler did Jews. He cannot be allowed to get away with it" (Smith-Spark 2013). The gay rights group All Out presented a petition to the International Olympic Committee with 320,000 signatures calling for the repeal of the Russian law and also took its case to senior IOC staff (Smith-Spark 2013). IOC President Rogge rebutted All Out's concerns, saying that the IOC had received written assurances from the Russian government that the anti-gay law would not apply to visitors in Sochi, but there were "still uncertainties." Rogge offered the international community reassurance that "The Olympic charter is very clear: it says that sport is a human right and it should be available to all, regardless of race, sex or sexual orientation and the Games themselves should be open to all, free of discrimination. So our position is very clear" (Smith-Spark 2013). Despite the comments made by the IOC, the protests and public outcries continued.

The Obama administration capitalized on the situation as a prime public relations strategy to signal that the U.S. was superior to Russia. At a White House news conference, President Obama stated: "nobody's more offended than me" by the anti-gay legislation "you've been seeing in Russia" (Smith-Spark 2013). On *The Tonight Show*, Obama told Jay Leno: "I have no patience for countries that try to treat gays or lesbians or transgendered [sic] persons in ways that intimidate them or are harmful to them" (Herszenhorn 2013). In another clear political maneuver to distinguish his administration from Putin's and demonstrate his disapproval, Obama

announced that the opening ceremony delegation to Sochi would include openly gay athletes, tennis champion Billie Jean King and Olympic hockey medalists Caitlin Cahow (Boren 2013). Notably, the delegation did not include the President, First Lady, or Vice President marking the first Olympics since the 2000 Sydney Summer Games in which a U.S. president, vice president, first lady, or former president were not members of the opening ceremony delegation (Whiteside 2013).

The media coverage also contributed to the public's outrage through its circulation of gruesome pictures of violence against LGBT/Q Russians to demonstrate the "dangerous levels of homophobia" in Russia (Gallagher and Thorpe 2014, Herszenhorn 2013). But yet again, we do not witness comparative levels of outrage and public discussion about the violence against LGBT/Q communities in the U.S. Therefore, it seems that activists and allies in the U.S. can outwardly criticize other nations for passing discriminatory legislation and condoning violence, yet it seems these same activists have a blind spot for issues occurring within our own borders.

President Obama publically denouncing Putin's bill and defending gay rights was an achievement for LGBT/Q communities, but it was also politically motivated. Several media sources argued that President Putin was also using the anti-gay legislation as a political tool, claiming that passing the anti-gay legislation served as a scapegoat for the failing Russian economy (Smith-Spark 2013). Enacting this law gave Putin a way to distract the public from its declining economy and encourage a culture war. Further, many in the U.S. and Europe argued that the passage of the law was a strategy by Russian leaders to differentiate Russia from the U.S. and the rest of Europe (Fierstein 2013, Smith-Spark 2013, Zirin 2014). Professor Dan Healey of Oxford University stated, "It's kind of a deliberate strategy to define Russia against Europe and against the West more generally, as a repository of 'traditional values'" (Smith-

Spark 2013). These actions from both the American and Russian leaders demonstrate how they can utilize gay rights as a political tool to establish their respective countries as either progressive or traditional. While I can agree with President Obama's sentiments, his administration also uses gay rights as a nationalistic prop in the service of demarcating the United States as safe place for LGBT/Q people, despite the homophobic rhetoric and legislation debated domestically simultaneously.

Ironically, this outrage about Russia's anti-gay laws was occurring at the same time that many states in the U.S. were attempting to pass "religious freedom" bills, which they claimed were not anti-gay, but rather "pro-traditional values," yet were homophobic and problematic in their language. They bear unmistakable similarity to the rhetoric Putin used. For example, under the new Russian law, "any teacher who tells students that homosexuality is not evil, any parents who tell their child that homosexuality is normal, or anyone who makes pro-gay statements deemed accessible to someone underage is now subject to arrest and fines" (Fierstein 2013). Similarly in the U.S., Tennessee Senator Stacey Campfield has attempted to pass a "Don't Say Gay" bill six times that would prohibit teachers from discussing homosexuality with students in kindergarten through the eighth grade (Schwartz 2011). Both of these elected officials couch their homophobia in the need to "protect children"; however, a notable difference is that while the Russian law inspired public outcry, little was said regarding the domestic anti-gay bills.

Some LGBTQ Russians were concerned that Western strategies (e.g., boycotting the Olympics) could actually result in harming their communities. They were fearful that the Russian public would blame LGBTQ people if the Olympics was poorly attended or not deemed a success (Wolken 2014). Andrey Ozerny, a 24 year-old self-identified Russian gay man stated: "It's a bit fake, all this attention" (Wolken 2014). Ozerny stated that the belief that this attention

on Russia's gay culture would actually improve life in Russia seemed "far-fetched", at least at the current time. He stated that in some ways it was easier when gay people in Sochi could live silently and in relative safety, as opposed to all of the media attention that was placing a spotlight on LGBT/Q communities (Wolken 2014). For example, Roman Kochagov, the co-owner of one of the gay clubs in Sochi, Club Mayak said "we just want Western journalists to leave us alone" (Wolken 2014).

Many LGBTQ Russians live discreetly and engage in their own forms of activism, but Western activists insist that they are not doing enough because they are not living visibly open and demanding rights. For example, in an interview with *USA Today*, former Olympic diver David Pichler stated: "It may be scary at first, but you can't move forward if you don't help [LGBTQ Russians]. I was in Atlanta, I was in Sydney. I never had an issue. Now 14 years later you have to come to an event to stand up for gay people because they can't be safe? That's frightening to me" (Wolken 2014). Pichler makes a good point, denouncing Putin's anti-gay legislation is a positive move; however, the media's coverage seemed to predominantly focus on the voices of Western activists and their strategies for change. Hence, the media's emphasis on Western activists and their responses promotes the idea that LGBTQ Russians are sitting idly by and allowing these types of laws to get passed. Many western activists staunchly believe there is only one way to challenge these types of homophobic laws, and it is their responsibility to be the saviors of LGBTQ Russians.

If Western activists are truly interested in helping lesbians and gays in Russia, long term strategies should be the focus, particularly those that allow LGBTQ Russians to set the direction and trajectory of what *their* movement should look like, instead of imposing a "one-size fits all" solution. Ultimately Western activists can boycott and protest, but at the end of the Olympics,

they get to pick up and leave. For them, the emotional outpouring of anger and protest may feel good, but when it comes to something more than just symbolically speaking out for LGBTQ Russians, there are very few individuals and/or organizations that are actually going to remain and do the real work that is necessary.

It is undeniable that terrible things were happening to LGBTQ people in Russia, but to make matters worse, U.S. corporations such as AT&T and American Apparel used this conflict as a public relations tool and profit-making endeavor. American Apparel teamed up with Athlete Ally and All Out to produce and market “Principle 6” apparel. The American Apparel website stated that the slogan came from the Olympic charter that states, “the practice of sport is a human right” (Apparel 2014), and that these clothes were produced to speak out against Russia’s anti-gay legislation. Other organizations, like the Human Rights Campaign and Human Rights Watch, lobbied major Olympic sponsors to use their merchandise and advertising space in Russia to publicly denounce the anti-gay legislation (Gessen 2014). For example AT&T, even though not an official sponsor of the Olympics, posted on its consumer blog:

The Olympic Games in Sochi also allow us to shine a light on a subject that’s important to all Americans: equality. As you may know, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community around the world is protesting a Russian anti-LGBT law that bans ‘propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations.’ To raise awareness of the issue, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has called on International Olympic Committee (IOC) sponsors to take action and stand up for LGBT equality. (AT&T 2014)

Musicians also got involved. For instance Melissa Etheridge wrote and performed a song called “Uprising of Love” and sang it with a group of celebrities in Times Square on New Year’s Eve that was meant to be a symbol of support for LGBTQ Russians (Gessen 2014). However, even after the merchandising and the songs, nothing happened. American Apparel sold its products and Etheridge sold her song and money was indeed raised, but when investigated



further, Masha Gessen (2014) a Russian-American journalist, found that very little was accomplished for LGBTQ Russians. For LGBTQ people who live in police states or nations run by dictators, the kind of activism required is definitely not the sale of gay equality merchandise or creative song lyrics.

Critics of these mainstream (and capitalistic) tactics argue that if Western activists truly want to help LGBTQ Russians and show their support, then first and foremost, they need to work directly with Russian activists. They can work to make sure LGBTQ Russians arrests and court hearings are publicized by the Western media, help pay their fines when they are imprisoned, and keep the world's attention on LGBTQ activists in hope of making it more difficult for the Russian government to imprison or kill them (Gessen 2014). Sadly, this was not what they witnessed. Gessen (2014) argued that Russian activists came out to protest because they thought their European and American allies in Sochi would support them in substantial ways and help ensure that thousands of international correspondents in Sochi would cover their protests and expose the mistreatment they faced (Gessen 2014). Instead, their American allies watched the opening ceremony, socialized with Team USA, and visited the now famed Sochi gay bar; so in the end, their Western allies failed them. Gessen (2014) argues that the Olympic Games in some ways was the first real attempt by the lesbian and gay community in the U.S. to venture into international work, and sadly, it was an embarrassment.

The activism surrounding the Games in Sochi basically amounted to staging some fundraisers, corporations receiving good PR, and gay rights advocates congratulating themselves on boycotting Russian vodka (particularly Stolichnaya, which is actually made in Latvia). Olympic sponsors did meet with human rights advocates, but accomplished very little (Gessen 2014). As for the corporations and celebrities, American Apparel sold hundreds of shirts, AT&T received a

lot of cheap and good PR for its ad (which actually only ran in the U.S.), and Melissa Etheridge canceled her pre-Olympic appearance on Russia's only independent TV channel. So it should not be surprising that a young gay Russian like Andrey Ozerny refers to this type of activism as “fake,” because all of these tactics—from producing ads and merchandise to boycotting vodka—actually hurt progressive causes. This type of activism rewards people with the feeling that they have accomplished something, where in actuality, it leaves the valuable work that needs to be done, undone. Looking back on the 2014 Olympics, we witnessed the conclusion of activism for the Russian LGBTQ community alongside the conclusion of the Games.

While speaking out against violence and atrocities can be positive, that cannot be where activism ends. Equal attention and effort needs to be paid to what happens to LGBTQ Russians once the Olympics and the world's spotlight is gone. Further, while the emotional outpouring of anger and calls for boycotts may feel good, what may be more beneficial is asking what LGBTQ Russians want and need.

### ***5.3.2 Uganda***

In 2009, Ugandan Member of Parliament (MP) David Bahati proposed the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) that was meant to expand the criminalization of same-sex relationships and behaviors. The penalties imposed applied to individuals, companies, media organizations, and non-governmental organizations that support LGBTI<sup>2</sup> (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) people or advocate for their rights in Uganda (Chothia 2011, Houreld and Olukya 2010, Mmali 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> While I have been utilizing LGBTQ throughout the dissertation, in Uganda they use LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex] so I will utilize this abbreviation throughout the discussion of this case.

The initial bill proposed the death penalty for anyone convicted of “aggravated homosexuality” which was defined as: a) engaging in sexual behavior with a minor or a disabled person, b) if the “offender” was HIV positive, c) or if the person charged was a “serial offender” which was an ambiguous term in the bill that was never defined (BBC 2012a). It further stated if any persons who “aids, abets, counsels or procures another to engage in acts of homosexuality” including friends and family, could face up to seven years in prison (Hourelid and Olukya 2010). Landlords could be imprisoned for renting to gay people and anyone with “religious, political, economic, or social authority” who failed to report them could also face three years in jail (Hourelid 2010).

Officially known as “The Anti-Homosexuality Act,” it became commonly referred to known as the “Kill the Gays Bill” by Western media, due to the proposed death sentence penalty. How Western media sources framed the AHA and the subsequent actions taken by Western governments is significant because it directly contributed to international outrage and started numerous debates about homophobia, human rights, and modernity.

The bill gained serious attention from Western governments, African human rights groups, and LGBTI activists both in Africa and globally. During the debates about the Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda, the United States, several Western European countries, and the World Bank threatened to pull or withhold aid money if President Museveni failed to protect the rights of the LGBTI community and signed the bill into law (BBC 2012a, Callahan 2014, Sokari 2011). Sweden was one of the most vocal countries in opposition to the bill, stating that it would withdraw the \$50 million of annual aid it gives to Uganda if the bill became law (Mmali 2009).

Due to this international outrage and pressure, the bill did not pass in its original form, but was amended and re-tabled in 2011. The new version dropped the death penalty, but

proposed longer jail sentences for “homosexual acts,” including a life sentence in certain circumstances (BBC 2012a). The bill resurfaced in 2013, and was officially signed into law in February 2014. While getting the death penalty stricken from the bill was a positive move, I argue that how foreign governments, Western activists, and the media handled this bill may have contributed to making things worse for the LGBTI community in Uganda.

The LGBTI community in Uganda denounced the passage of this bill, declaring it homophobic, and supported the U.S. and other Western governments in their opposition to it (Anderson-Minshall 2014, Brydum 2014b, Callahan 2014, Harris and Pomper 2014). On the one hand, these actions can be seen as promising; but on the other, the question arises if President Museveni viewed the international community’s actions as a neo-imperialist maneuver that called Uganda’s sovereignty into question.

One of the main hurdles LGBTI advocates face is that many Ugandans believe that homosexuality has been imported into their country from the West, even though there are recorded histories of same-sex behavior existing before European colonization (Amory 1997, Fisher 2013, Thompson and Rolfe 2012). Most of the original laws banning homosexuality can be traced back to British colonialism; they were designed to punish same-sex behavior among local Ugandan people (Fisher 2013).

Anthropologists Morgan and Wieringa (2005) have found same-sex relationships among women in more than forty contemporary African cultures. They found that in many different regions in Africa, women use their status to attain wives, thereby establishing lesbian relationships and challenging gender norms. In Kenya, wealthy women are permitted to have wives in the Gikuyu ethnic groups (O'Brien and Wairimu 2000) and in Benin “female

husbandry” is practiced, where the female-husband is expected to take economic responsibility for her wife and her wife’s children (Zabus 2008).

African scholar Deborah Amory (1997) argues that, before colonialism, several African nations accepted and practiced same-sex sexuality. However, due to the conservative social and moral codes of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially throughout the United Kingdom, laws against homosexuality were severely enforced in both the UK and in the African colonies. Moreover, since colonial powers often established arbitrary borders around African colonies and wrote constitutions from scratch, it was easy to impose sodomy laws across the entire continent (Fisher 2013). Western colonialists conceptualized African sexuality as “primitive” and “bestial” in order to exploit African people as less than human, and colonizers considered same-sex sexuality in the various African cultures to be further proof of African inferiority (Thompson and Rolfe 2012). As imperialist exploitation spread, conservative Christian dogma spread along with it; homosexuality became demonized and these Christian teachings rewrote traditional African understandings of gender and sexuality (Thompson and Rolfe 2012). Morgan and Wieringa (2005) argue that due to the combination of colonizers and missionaries, what emerged was the belief that homosexuality is purely a Western phenomenon and was introduced to Africa through the repercussions of Western imperialism. When Europe began to yield control of its colonies after the end of World War II, most of the newly independent African nations retained their anti-sodomy laws and their colonial-era constitutions established by the British, French, and Portuguese (Fisher 2013). In a study conducted by Human Rights Watch, it found that half of the world’s “sodomy laws” criminalizing homosexuality are direct remnants from British colonial rule (Watch 2008). LGBTI advocates argue that homophobia was not native to the continent of Africa, but was instead was imported alongside Western religion (Mugisha 2011).

Human rights groups advocate the need to reform these colonial-era laws and demand the decriminalization of homosexuality throughout the continent of Africa. Prominent Ugandan LGBTI activists, like Frank Mugisha, publicly declare that historically homosexuality was a part of African cultures and was generally overlooked, so the problem of violence and homophobia stems from the West (Mugisha 2011). He states: “Ironically they [Western evangelicals] invoke religious beliefs and colonial-era laws that are foreign to our continent to persecute us” (Mugisha 2011). LGBTI activists argue that much of the anti-gay sentiment throughout Africa stems from the doctrine of evangelical Christian teachings spread by missionaries since they first started coming to Africa. Another renowned LGBTI activist, David Kato argued, “In the beginning, when the missionaries brought religion, they said they were bringing love. Instead they brought hate, through homophobia” (Hourel and Olukya 2010).

Many Africans believe homosexuality is un-African, un-Christian, and a danger to traditional family structures (Hourel and Olukya 2010, Mugisha 2011). Proponents of the AHA said that its main purpose was to protect children from homosexual men. This focus on the need to protect children largely stems from their belief that homosexual men are pedophiles and trying to “recruit” children into a “homosexual lifestyle” (Hourel and Olukya 2010). The Ugandan government stated that the bill’s agenda is meant to strengthen the nation’s ability to deal with “emerging internal and external threats to the traditional heterosexual family” and to protect Uganda’s “cherished culture” (IRIN 2010).

MP Bahati claimed that homosexuality is not considered a right in Uganda; however, he asserts that the bill was meant to punish the “sin, not the sinners” and believes that gay people can “repent” and then return to society (Mmali 2009). Bahati and his supporters argue that the bill is not necessarily violent towards the gay community; rather it is meant to “prohibit the

promotion or recognition of homosexuality and to protect children and youth who are vulnerable to sexual abuse and deviation” (Mmali 2009). However, all Ugandans certainly do not share this belief. Prominent Ugandan gay rights advocate David Kato contends that this bill was “a blow to democracy in Uganda...[and] it goes against the inclusive spirit necessary for our economic as well as political development. Its spirit is profoundly undemocratic and un-African” (Mmali 2009).

With the international attention on the Anti-Homosexuality Act, many advocates in Uganda and abroad have started paying more attention to the anti-gay propaganda and crusades espoused by Christian evangelicals, such as Scott Lively (Kilborne 2014). Lively and others have played a significant role in the formulation of this recent bill by encouraging anti-gay sentiment in Uganda and in many other countries throughout the world. In 2009, just shortly before the Anti-Homosexuality Act was proposed, several evangelical preachers from the United States were in Uganda leading a three-day conference on how “the gay movement was an evil institution and the threat homosexuals posed to Bible-based values and the traditional African family” (Gettleman 2010). The message these evangelicals were propagating to the Ugandan people and officials was that homosexuality was not only a sin, but also that homosexuals were coming into Uganda to recruit Ugandan children. Thus gay people were attempting to rip apart the core of Ugandan society, the family. In Uganda, where more than half of the population is under 15 and a culture that is deeply rooted in community, the family is paramount to an individual’s sense of identity (Kilborne 2014). So, Lively and the others who were preaching these lies and conspiracies were purposefully trying to fuel anti-gay hatred and violence.

Lively told the Ugandan officials that “They [gay people] have taken over the United States government, and the European Union... nobody has been able to stop them so far. I’m

hoping Uganda can” (Kilborne 2014). When asked later about the impact of Lively’s visit, one Ugandan legislator commented: “We must exterminate homosexuals before they exterminate society” (Kilborne 2014). However, when the AHA was initially introduced, many Western media sources failed to make the direct connection between the bill and these Christian extremists, which I argue helps to spread the belief that countries like Uganda are inherently barbaric. When media reports started coming out naming the Christian ministers involved, the ministers claimed that their intention was not to promote violence or stoke anger towards the LGBTI community, and the ministers actually went on to shame the Ugandan government for drafting such a bill (Gettleman 2010).

In 2014, Roger Ross Williams, a Ugandan documentarian, made a film entitled *God Loves Uganda* that explores the role of the American evangelical movement in Uganda, where American missionaries have been credited with both creating schools and hospitals, and promoting dangerous religious bigotry. The film shows evangelical leaders in the U.S. and their visits to Uganda as they attempt to eliminate “sexual sin” and convert Ugandans to fundamentalist Christianity (Williams Ross 2013). Once this bill was signed into law in 2014, rights groups and activists who condemned the law looked back at the work that Lively and others were doing in Uganda at the time of its inception and started recognizing the explicit connections.

In 2012, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) sued Scott Lively in a Massachusetts federal court on behalf of the Ugandan group, Sexual Minorities Uganda. Lively was accused of violating international law by inciting the persecution of lesbians and gay men in Uganda, but he filed for an appeal. In a video posted by the CCR, Lively is said that he thought homosexuality should be “criminalized” and that opposition would spread like a “nuclear bomb” against the



“gay movement” worldwide (Lithwick 2013). Lively claimed that he would be “launching a new international anti-gay organization based in Illinois, whose first statement was its express support for the repressive Russian laws banning LGBTI advocacy and to urge other nations of the world to follow the Russian example” (Hauser 2014). In December 2014, the First Circuit Court of Appeals denied Lively’s final request for appeal and he will stand trial on the charge of committing crimes against humanity (Parker 2014).

Lively is certainly not alone in his campaign. There is a longstanding practice of Western missionaries traveling around the world on the belief that they know what is best for the people in “less-developed” countries and continue their colonialist practices. Mugisha (2011) states:

The way I see it, homophobia — not homosexuality — is the toxic import. Thanks to the absurd ideas peddled by American fundamentalists, we are constantly forced to respond to the myth — debunked long ago by scientists — that homosexuality leads to pedophilia. For years, the Christian right in America has exported its doctrine to Africa, and, along with it, homophobia. (Mugisha 2011)

However, the problem extends beyond American evangelicals. Ironically, there are similarities in the homonationalist savior complex that Western queers and allies invoke in their belief that they know what is best for LGBTI people in Uganda (Coughtry 2014). While the messages are vastly different—one wants to abolish any form of homosexuality and the other wants to save victims from homophobic violence—both of these narratives, from fundamentalists and from Western activists, are rooted in an assumption of Western superiority.

In February 2014, there was a “Global Day of Protest” against the Ugandan bill in cities such as London and Washington D.C., and internet protests in Iceland, Ireland, and Norway (to name a few) (Brydum 2014a). Jonathan Capehart of *The Washington Post* commented on the demonstrations, “I love it when the hateful decisions of governments meet good old American democracy, when officials from those countries have to contend with Americans exercising their

right to freedom of speech on behalf of their beleaguered citizens” (Capehart 2014). While on the surface these types of statements may seem positive, nonetheless, these statements are a clear example of how the media coverage of the bill helped support the white savior industrial complex. These statements also support the perception that only those in the U.S. have the power to stand up against barbaric foreign governments, thus denying the work that Ugandan LGBTI people have accomplished.

These demonstrations by Western activists serve as symbolic actions of solidarity with LGBTI Ugandans, and are positive, but these actions also raise several issues. For one, human rights violations have been occurring in Uganda for a long time, but only in the past five years have these anti-LGBTI incidents been brought to public attention in the U.S. It raises the question about why do we only see these protests about the homophobic bill? What do these demonstrations and the media campaigns actually accomplish? Do these protests primarily only work to make Western activists feel good about themselves, while the situation does not actually change for LGBTI communities in Uganda?

The vast majority of media images covering the demonstrations mainly consisted of Western people holding signs in solidarity either looking sadly or sternly at the camera, with limited (if any) photos or comments from people in Uganda or any other African nation (Brydum 2014a, Stewart 2014). I argue that this was a purposeful decision by Western media sources, because LGBTI Ugandans were indeed protesting, but the images chosen support the Western framing of superiority. The media’s coverage of the protests reinforces the notion that people in the West inherently care more about human rights issues, and used these demonstrations as proof that Western people are more progressive than African people. By comparison, when we do see photos of Ugandan people, the vast majority were protesters in support of the homophobic bill

(Figure 5.1) (BBC 2014, Epstein 2014, Gettleman 2010, Keating 2014). To the public, the media set up a dichotomous association: Ugandan people and their culture are homophobic and barbaric in comparison to the gay-friendly and progressive West. Despite the fact that many Western countries, including the U.S., have rampant issues of homophobic violence and discrimination.



*Figure 5.1 BBC, 10 November 2014*

The international outcry against the bill from gay rights groups, the Western media, and foreign governments threatening to withhold aid created a concern about sovereignty for the Ugandan President (Allen 2014, BBC 2011, Keating 2014, Sokari 2011). Many activists in Uganda argued that the threat to pull or withhold aid is not the strategy foreign governments should impose (Coughtry 2014, Keating 2014, Sokari 2011). They argue that these sanctions will only further harm LGBTI Ugandans and increase the possible backlash against them. In February 2010, hundreds of residents in Jinja, an eastern city in Uganda, held a demonstration supporting the bill with protesters' signs reprimanding Western leaders such as President Obama to "leave

Uganda alone” and “Barack Obama Back Off” (IRIN 2010, Keating 2014). John Nagenda, a Ugandan presidential advisor and opponent of the bill, told the BBC in 2011, the discourse surrounding this bill is heavy with neocolonialist rhetoric of “you do this and I withdraw my aid” that continues to treat the Ugandan people like children (BBC 2011).

In February 2014, at least three European countries announced the withdrawal of millions of dollars in foreign aid along with the World Bank (Press 2014). Norway withdrew at least \$8 million, but said it would increase its support to human rights and “democracy defenders,” while Denmark’s aid programs, worth approximately \$8.6 million, are said to be moving away from the Ugandan government and redirected to private actors and civic groups (Press 2014). The Dutch government released a statement, joining Norway and Denmark, saying it suspended aid to Uganda’s government, but will continue supporting nongovernmental groups (Press 2014). The World Bank decided to postpone a \$90 million loan to Uganda (for its health care system) due to the backlash against this bill from Western governments, the United Nations, and other rights groups (Press 2014). Overall, Uganda depends on donors for about 20 percent of its budget (Press 2014), so if carried out, these international sanctions are predicted to have an exceedingly strong negative effect on Uganda and its people.

African social justice activists argue that “donor sanctions are by their nature coercive and reinforce the disproportionate power dynamics between donor countries and recipients. They are often based on assumptions about African sexualities and the needs of African LGBTI people. They disregard the agency of African civil society movements and political leadership” (Sokari 2011). The media coverage of these sanctions also contributes to the perception that the only aid coming to LGBTI people in Uganda is from the West. Therefore, the international community is led to believe that there are not any LGBTI people in Uganda (and other African

nations) working to change policies and fight for social change. Western activists taking on the role of the savior for the Ugandan people not only discredits the hard work of the LGBTI activists in Uganda, it completely ignores their very existence. Cole (2012) argues that if people in the U.S. want to advocate for the Ugandan people, then we need to start by understanding the “money-driven villainy at the heart of American foreign policy...and to do this would be to give up the illusion that the sentimental need to ‘make a difference’ trumps all other considerations.” And what many advocates do not understand is that their need to “save” people can play a useful role for those who have more cynical motives, such as maintaining economic and social power over countries or using these actions as a justification to invade sovereign nations (Cole 2012).

Sara Kavemi (2014), media analyst for *The Huffington Post*, argues that the U.S. focusing on the Uganda bill is a clear example of hypocrisy. Uganda is far from the only country with draconian laws against homosexuality, yet the U.S. does not publicly condemn these other countries; incidentally many of these countries are ones the U.S. has Free Trade Agreements with such as Malaysia, Kuwait, Jamaica, and Saudi Arabia (Kavemi 2014). In a statement by the Uganda Media Centre (UMC), it questioned why Uganda was the subject of “mass international criticism” when the international community has remained “mute in the face of far graver and far more draconian legislation relating to homosexuality in other countries,” such as in Saudi Arabia. The UMC argues that unlike in other countries with anti-homosexual laws, no one in Uganda has ever been charged with the criminal offense of homosexuality. The UMC claims that the “main provisions of this bill were designed to stem the issue of defilement and rape, which in the minds of Ugandans is a more pressing and urgent matter that needs to be addressed” (BBC 2012b).

There is also skepticism regarding the United States’ actual interest in ending human

rights violations. Helen Epstein (2014) of *Al Jazeera* questions why Western media chose to focus so much attention on the homophobic bill as a major international issue, while other severe human rights abuses were overlooked. She argues that the initial proposal of the anti-gay bill served as a political distraction for Museveni. In October 2009 when the bill was first introduced, it was one month after the Ugandan police killed unarmed demonstrators who were protesting the blocking of the king of Baganda (Uganda's largest tribe) from visiting Kayunga, which is the site of a land dispute between the government and the Baganda. To this day, no senior officials have been punished for this crime. Not only did the anti-gay bill distract the public, but it also distracted Western ambassadors who said little about the killings, but threatened to pull foreign aid because of the AHA. Epstein (2014) argues that the Anti-Homosexuality Act was resurrected in December 2011 and passed through parliament just in time to divert public outrage from other abuses throughout Uganda by Museveni. These violations included the collapse of Uganda's public education and health care system, opposition leader Kizza Besigye being placed under house-arrest, the harassment and murder of other government critics, Uganda's support for the M23 rebels, and Uganda's involvement in the South Sudan civil war (Epstein 2014).

Even with all of these other political and social concerns happening within Uganda and throughout Africa, none of these issues garnered nearly as much attention from Western governments or the media as the Anti-Homosexuality Act (Keating 2014). Joshua Keating, international affairs writer at *Slate* argues that when Ugandans do not hear anything from the international community concerning these other problems, it is not surprising that they see the West as "uniquely preoccupied with issues of gay rights" (Keating 2014). Some Ugandan gay activists urge the diplomatic community to stop singling out gay rights while ignoring the rest of the Ugandan people, because this emphasis reinforces conspiracy theories about Western plots to

spread homosexuality into Uganda (Epstein 2014, Keating 2014, Sokari 2011).

Many have argued that there are calculated reasons for the U.S. to be silent on these other socio-political issues. The U.S. has a political relationship with Uganda that may outweigh concerns over human rights. The Obama administration previously stated that it has a “valuable relationship” with Uganda and if Museveni signed the bill, it would “complicate” this relationship (Brown 2014b, Harris and Pomper 2014). Over the past several years, the U.S. and Uganda have developed a strong military alliance, in which the U.S. funds and trains the Ugandan military. These efforts have focused on defeating the terrorist group al-Shabaab in neighboring Somalia and working to counter the Lord’s Resistance Army. The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) was formed in Uganda in 1986, which makes it one of Africa’s oldest, most violent, and persistent armed groups (Spokesperson 2012). Therefore, it is unrealistic to say that the U.S. will be able to completely withdraw support from Uganda, because it needs African allies to help manage security issues on the continent. Critics have certainly raised the question: why is it that the administration makes a pointed comment about this bill but remains silent on the other violations occurring? Hence, it is not surprising that Ugandans are a bit skeptical of the United States’ seemingly selective concern for human rights.

After President Museveni signed the bill, President Obama did implement actions against Uganda to prove that the U.S. was going to protect LGBTI people. According to the White House Blog, these restrictions included refusing to allow entry of certain Ugandan officials, removal of funding and support for a community policing program, redirecting of healthcare funds to non-governmental organizations, the relocation of facilities to other African nations, and the cancellation of joint military exercises (Harris and Pomper 2014). However, even with these restrictions, the Obama administration said it wanted to continue working with Uganda on a wide

range of issues, including developing humanitarian support to counter the LRA and a partnership that advances U.S. security interests in the region (Harris and Pomper 2014). The administration further stated that it would work to advance these issues while working with government and non-government agencies to end discrimination against LGBTI people in Uganda and around the world. The Obama administration stated ending LGBTI discrimination is “a struggle central to the United States’ commitment to promoting human rights” (Harris and Pomper 2014).

The Obama administration’s handling of the Uganda bill is similar to how it dealt with the anti-gay propaganda amendment in Russia. However, there are stark differences in how the media have treated both of these cases. For example, headlines about Uganda said it was: “The Most Homophobic Place on Earth” but when speaking about Russia, the title is “Mr. Putin’s War on Gays” (Board 2013). The media’s implication in these headlines allow citizens of Russia to retain their humanity and autonomy, whereas the former denies them both. Thus, Western media constructs a message that Uganda is a country where gays are hated, which is simplistic and dangerous. The message is meant to stoke the sympathy of liberal Western gays and their allies, but actually obscures the issue.

The media portrayal of Ugandan people as homophobic renders them as the “immoral savages” in the Western colonial imagination (Mutua 2001). They presumably have no sense of human rights, thus Western activists see LGBTI Ugandans as helpless victims who are being terrorized by their own government and people. This image of the Ugandan people also exist alongside the perception of the Ugandan state as an “evil state,” one that “expresses itself through an illiberal, anti-democratic, or other authoritarian culture” and its redemption or salvation is solely dependent on its submission to human rights norms (Mutua 2001:203). Hence, the message becomes that LGBTI Ugandans need rescuing by people of the West who are



superior moral saviors and champions of human rights. Cole argues, “If we [people in the U.S.] are going to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement” (Cole 2012), because what the media fail to convey is that Uganda has a long history rooted in white Western imperialism, colonization, and coercion through government aid and Christian missionary work. He states that “well-meaning” Americans who want to “help” in countries like Uganda need to first demonstrate some humility towards the people in those countries. Cole states, “a great deal of work has been done, and continues to be done, by Ugandans to improve their own country, and ignorant comments (I’ve seen many) about how ‘we have to save them because they can’t save themselves’ can’t change that fact” (Cole 2012). These measures taken by the Western media and by Western allies invalidates and ignores the activism work accomplished by people like Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera who won prestigious human rights award and is the founder of the LGBTI rights organization, Freedom and Roam Uganda (International 2011) and Victor Mukasa who founded Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) in 2004 (SMUG 2016). People in the U.S. need to stop viewing Ugandans as helpless, and instead show respect for the agency they have in their own lives.

With major newspaper headlines stating “Obama Administration Takes Action Against Uganda’s Anti-Gay Bill,” readers get the impression that the United States represents freedom and social equality, but Uganda exemplifies a lack of human rights (Brown 2014a, Callahan 2014, Gjorgievska 2014). When viewed through the lens of a savior-victim model, the United States government is able to position itself the hero of LGBTI communities and this portrayal of the government allows U.S. citizens to feel good about our country and leaders. Further, journalists typically do little to expose the ties between poverty, homophobia, transphobia, racism, and sexism around the globe. They fail to analyze the funding connections between

mainstream gay rights organizations and the exploitation of the Global South, or how institutions like the World Bank prevent “developing” countries (including their LGBTI citizens) from ever developing (Coughtry 2014). While this bill is horrific, the discourse and framing of the issue distract people in the U.S. from taking responsibility for human rights abuses committed domestically and abroad, which allows people to continue reinforcing the white savior industrial complex.

#### **5.4 Pinkwashing**

Pinkwashing is the practice of using rights protections and equality rhetoric for one group (in this case lesbian and gay people) to conceal rights abuses against another group. Originally coined by Breast Cancer Action, an advocacy organization supporting people with breast cancer, which used the phrase to criticize companies that claimed to support people with breast cancer but were actually profiting from the illness (Action 2002). Expanding upon this original conceptualization, scholars have started using this term to refer to governments that highlight or exaggerate their nations’ LGBTQ rights records in attempt to demonstrate that they are gay-friendly. By emphasizing their gay rights records, the act of pinkwashing allows nations to market themselves as progressive to justify neocolonialist and neoliberal campaigns while covering up other human right violations.

One of the most well-known examples of this strategy has been Israel’s pinkwashing campaign. In 2005, Israel launched a new marketing campaign with the aid of American marketing executives called “Brand Israel.” This campaign was geared to men ages 18 to 34 with the specific purpose to depict Israel as “relevant” and “modern” instead of militaristic and religious (Schulman 2011). The government later expanded the marketing strategy by integrating the gay community into its rebranding to demarcate itself to the global community as not only

modern, but also as the predominant western and progressive nation in the Middle East to the global community. In 2010, the Israeli news site Ynet reported that the Tel Aviv tourism board started a \$90 million campaign to brand the city as “an international gay vacation destination” (Schulman 2011). This campaign included images of young same-sex couples, financing for pro-Israel movie screenings at lesbian and gay film festivals in the U.S, and free trips for gay Israelis “willing to conduct public diplomacy activities abroad (Figure 5.2) (Blumenthal 2013). The “Brand Israel” campaign further included sending openly gay Israeli soldiers to speak on college campuses and even sending an anti-Iranian float to the 2011 San Francisco Gay Pride parade that depicted a blow-up doll of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad being sodomized by a nuclear missile (Figure 5.3) (Blumenthal 2013).



Figure 5.2 gaytvlguide



*Figure 5.3 iran180, 2012*

The Israeli government is far from alone in participating in this rebranding strategy. Michael Lucas, who is one of the world’s wealthiest gay pornography producers, has been an extremely vocal advocate for Israel’s supposedly gay-friendly culture. In 2009, he produced *Men of Israel*, the first gay pornographic movie that was shot on location with an all-Jewish cast (Figure 5.4). Lucas stated that he saw the film as “a bold move to promote Israeli culture and tourism” and as a counterbalance to the biased portrayals of Israel in the mainstream media (Kaminer 2009). On the film’s website, Lucas stated: “The global media has created an image of Israel as a war-torn nation, which streets are lined with destroyed debris and crumbling ruins... Never are we shown Tel Aviv, Haifa, the Red Sea, the Dead Sea resorts, the beautiful beaches,



the amazing architecture and the embracing culture that allows its citizens to thrive” (Entertainment 2009). Lucas has devoted millions of dollars to promoting gay tourism in Israel (Blumenthal 2013); however, he is also a vehement Islamophobe who said: “I hate Muslims absolutely. It’s a horrible, horrible religion. It’s a plague” (Deger 2013, Party 2011). He is also a fervent supporter of Israeli airstrikes on Iran (Blumenthal 2013), and a vocal critic of gay and queer anti-occupation activists. In an interview in the rightwing U.S. magazine, *FrontPage Magazine*, Lucas stated: “I find it absolutely maddening that gay people, who are the number one target of Islam, are so ignorant of the facts... They are romanticizing the same Palestinians that hang gay people on cranes, but demonizing Israel, which is a safe haven for gay people” (Glazov 2011). Perhaps unsurprisingly given Lucas’ political leanings, *Men of Israel* (which is Lucas’ most promoted pornographic film) has a sex scene that was shot on the site of a former Palestinian village that was ethnically cleansed by Zionist militias in 1948 that he regularly takes tourists to visit (Blumenthal 2013). This type of rhetoric and these actions further promote Israel’s pinkwashing strategies and encourage support from Western LGBTQ people and their allies.



Figure 5.4 Lucas Entertainment, 2009

Sarah Schulman (2011) argues that what makes LGBT people and their allies so susceptible to pinkwashing is the tendency among some white gay people to privilege their racial and religious identity, especially when it comes to homophobia. In part, it is the “emotional legacy” of homophobia that has allowed the phenomenon of homonationalism to come about, because most LGBTQ people have experienced oppression in some way (e.g., from their family, media representations, legal inequality) (Schulman 2011). As the lesbian and gay community continue gaining rights, these advancements have directly contributed to many people mistakenly judging how advanced a country is based on its responses to homosexuality.

We see pinkwashing taking place as the Israeli government uses lesbians and gays serving openly in the military and its “Brand Israel” campaign to promote Tel Aviv as an international and gay-friendly city as indicators of human rights. Even though there are clear examples of human rights abuses occurring, especially against the Palestinian people (Dhoot 2012, Puar and Mikdashi 2012, Schotten and Maikey 2012, Schulman 2011). Despite the media’s portrayal of Israel as a gay-friendly tourist destination and a sanctuary for gays throughout the Middle East, it is crucial to be aware of the continued struggles of racism and Islamophobia that are happening throughout Europe, the U.S., and in occupied Palestine. This pinkwashing marketing strategy has successfully depicted Israel as democratic, modern and tolerant – as the liberal bastion in the sea of barbarism that is the rest of the Middle East.

Israel continues to assert itself as the only safe haven for LGBT people in the Middle East, even though “homosexuality has been decriminalized in the West Bank since the 1950s, when anti-sodomy laws imposed under British colonial influence were removed from the Jordanian penal code, which Palestinians follow” (Schulman 2011). Aeyal Gross, a professor of law at Tel Aviv University, argues: “gay rights have essentially become a public relations tool...

[even though] conservative and especially religious politicians remain fiercely homophobic” (cited in Schulman 2011). Therefore, pinkwashing not only discredits the hard work of the Israeli gay community, it also ignores the existence of Palestinian gay rights organizations.

There are three major organizations emerging in the Palestinian LGBT/Q movement – Aswat, Al Qaws, and Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions – that argue that LGBTQ Palestinians are being oppressed on multiple levels. They call for an intersectional analysis that has been severely lacking in the media coverage of the Israeli/Palestine conflict (Collective 2011, Puar and Mikdashi 2012, Schulman 2011). They argue that Israel is specifically using LGBT rights in their campaigns, because the Israeli government can separate homosexuality from other forms of oppression. Israel (and especially Tel Aviv) are represented as cosmopolitan and LGBTQ-friendly places, while simultaneously the government pinkwashes the war crimes it commits in the occupied Palestinian territories and condones racist discrimination against Palestinians living in Israel (Collective 2011). Issues of racism have long been a source of tension between LGBT/Q activists in the Global North and South, and these tensions are only increasing as activism becomes more transnational and networks of solidarity are built across borders. Therefore, Israel is able to exploit gay rights, while it continues to occupy Palestine and portray Palestinians as “uncivilized homophobes” (colour 2012) which continues to fuel support from Western gays for the nation of Israel and against the Palestinians. Needless to say, these pinkwashing tactics have been the subject of intense criticism by pro-Palestine and queer activists (colour 2012, Israel 2010, Kouri-Towe 2012).

I argue that these actions in Israel mirror some of the pinkwashing strategies that are occurring in the U.S., such as the expansion of gay rights in terms of marriage equality and open service in the military. However, these advances do not offset the human rights violations like

mass incarceration and police brutality. In 2013, the HRC officially endorsed comprehensive immigration reform and committed its support to aid immigrants who were seeking asylum or citizenship (HRC 2013a). Many in LGBT/Q communities lauded this action. However some advocates argued that the timing of the endorsement seemed ironic and politically convenient, since it came just days after a debacle at a “United for Marriage” rally in front of the Supreme Court. At the event a HRC spokesperson asked a trans activist to remove their trans-pride flag from behind the podium for a photo-op, and another HRC spokesperson attempted to prevent a queer undocumented speaker from talking about his legal status. After getting publicly criticized, the HRC did apologize for the “two unfortunate incidents” and released a statement saying that the HRC “will strive to do better in the future [and] remains committed to making transgender equality a reality” (Neko, Tibby and Knotts 2013, Rivas 2013). The HRC publicly supported legislation that included same-sex couples in immigration reform, but then ironically suppressed the voices of undocumented queers at the event. In my view, this is because these activists fall outside of their carefully crafted assimilationist narrative and that the HRC’s action is a clear example of the pinkwashing of immigration reform. By the HRC releasing their statement of support, it is able to make immigration reform look specifically pro-gay to garner LGBT support in order to do two things. The HRC’s support masks the severe drawbacks of the legislation such as funding to support enforcement, deportation, and expansion of U.S. militarization. And the organization is able to make itself look like an all-inclusive organization while its previous actions speak to the contrary (Lal 2013, Nair 2009).

The end result of pinkwashing immigration reform is threefold. First, it allows the U.S. to continue to promote itself as a haven for undocumented immigrants who are LGBTQ, as long as they are gender-normative, uphold assimilative values, and support U.S. nationalism. While in



actuality, despite the U.S. portraying itself as the purveyor of human rights, the government continues to detain and deport immigrants—both legal and undocumented—at record numbers (Harmon 2012). Furthermore, the U.S. detention system is especially cruel to transgender detainees, who are often kept in solitary confinement, supposedly for their own safety (Harmon 2012). According to documents obtained in 2011 by the ACLU, there have been hundreds of sexual abuse allegations filed by transgender detainees in the past several years (Harmon 2012). Second, the United States continues to expand the profiteering of immigration detention and deportation, even while appearing to pursue reforms. According to Bob Libal, co-author of *Operation Streamline: Drowning Justice and Draining Dollars along the Rio Grande*, Texas alone has diverted an estimated 1.2 billion federal dollars into “warehousing the undocumented in predominantly for-profit private jails and detention centers, while they await trial or serve sentences prior to deportation” (Nair 2009:68). Third, the United States’ pinkwashing strategies ensure that only limited legislation such as the “Uniting American Families Act” (even though it eventually died in Congress) is brought to the foreground of political debates, and any discussion of truly comprehensive immigration reform that addresses the needs of all undocumented persons, who are LGBTQ or not, is shot down (Nair 2009:70).

Critics have noted that the strategy of pinkwashing immigration reform is closely linked to President Obama’s 2012 reelection campaign. The Obama administration saw LGBT people and immigrant voters as crucial demographics they needed to target; yet, the president had not achieved much for either group at this point in his term. Hence, within the first few months of Obama’s reelection campaign, he announced his personal support for same-sex marriage and unveiled his deferred policy for undocumented youth known as the DREAM Act, in hope of gaining the support of these groups. These actions positioned his campaign as progressive and

liberal (which voters believed), and eventually secured him not only the nomination, but led to his second-term victory. Immigration attorney Prerna Lal told *The Huffington Post* that “behind [the] civil rights façade lay an illiberal reality: Obama was creating conditions that deepened the oppression of queer people, immigrants and queer immigrants. By the end of his first term, Obama had already deported 1.5 million non-citizens, more than any other president in U.S. history” (Lal 2013). In his first term, Obama also expanded the Secure Communities program, which increased the violence of immigration enforcement through immigration officials insisting that local jurisdictions provide them fingerprints of “potentially deportable immigrants” that often led to suspects being detained longer than their jail time (Linthicum 2014). In Obama’s 2013 budget, he proposed cuts to be implemented over the next ten years that would cut between \$200 billion and \$380 billion from Social Security and Medicare (Thompson 2013), and other safety net programs that are of particular importance to LGBTQ and immigrant residents (Lal 2013).

As the Obama administration works to portray itself as an ally and supporter of LGBT people in the U.S. and abroad, it engages in other pinkwashing strategies such as having Obama criticize foreign leaders. According to Stephan Lefebvre of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, while the administration has taken positive actions such as to publicly criticize leaders like Putin for his anti-gay legislation and his failure to provide basic civil liberties for Russian LGBTQ communities, the president also chooses to overlook other issues that affect LGBTQ people in the U.S. and in other countries (Lefebvre 2013). Laurie Penny (2014), contributing journalist for *The Guardian*, argues that activists are being hypocritical when criticizing Putin’s anti-gay legislation during the Sochi Olympics, yet remain silent on the anti-LGBTQ abuses in their own countries. She wrote:

While western nations flap the rainbow flag defiantly in Russia's face, actual lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are being harassed and abused at their borders when they arrive seeking safety. Supporting the rights of LGBT people worldwide is to be commended, but if that sentiment is more than pinkwashing, it should be backed up by action at home. (Penny 2014)

The Obama administration has also publicly criticized Ugandan President Museveni and Nigerian President Good Luck Jonathan for their draconian anti-homosexuality bills in their respective countries. However, the U.S. government has failed to condemn allies such as Honduras, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, all which have similar records on LGBTQ issues (Lefebvre 2013).

Dean Spade (2013) argues that Obama's support for LGBT/Q rights such as same-sex marriage and open military service has portrayed his administration (and by extension, the U.S.) as progressive and humanitarian to the general public, which obscures his "abysmal record on key issues such as austerity, his failure to close Guantanamo, ongoing drone strikes, harsh sanctions against Iran, the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and his record-breaking rates of deportation" (Spade 2013:87). Obama knows that he can gain the support of privileged lesbians and gays and liberals by declaring his support for LGBT/Q rights, while supporting horrific policies abroad such as the continued occupation of Palestine. He can engage in this political maneuver because the mainstream lesbian and gay community have proven to him that there are no political risks in these non-humanitarian moves (Spade 2013).

While we can applaud the steps the administration has taken in terms of extending rights to LGBT/Q communities, the fact that the government can brand itself as gay-friendly but not be held accountable for policies and actions that hurt LGBTQ people, is where the real problem lies. As I have shown, it is common for nations to brand themselves as LGBTQ-friendly and progressive, yet subject the community to humiliation, imprisonment, and restrict access to basic

rights (e.g., jobs, education, housing). This pro-LGBTQ rhetoric helps these nations economically and politically with progressive countries, while the leaders continue to benefit from the support of the conservatives at home.

Through the process of pinkwashing, the state has recruited, normalized, and disciplined gay bodies which are central to the production of docile patriots. These newly acquired lesbian and gay citizens accept pinkwashing strategies and gay-friendly narratives that are disseminated by Western media and activists. By doing so, these homonational subjects subscribe to and help promote the ideology of U.S. and Western superiority. The evolution of the gay rights movement requires divorcing gay rights from state powers because the state will always determine which lives are legitimate and worth saving, and which are illegitimate and need to be destroyed.

## 6 QUEER (RE)IMAGININGS

“Laugh and cry and tell stories. Sad stories about bodies stolen, bodies no longer here. Enraging stories about the false images, devastating lies, untold violence. Bold, brash stories about reclaiming our bodies and changing the world.” – Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*

As I was nearing the conclusion of this project, the LGBT/Q community was devastated by the horrific shooting at Pulse, an Orlando gay nightclub, on June 12, 2016. During the early hours of Sunday morning, Omar Mateen murdered 49 individuals and injured 53.

People often invoke the recent granting of rights to the gay community as a potential catalyst for violence against them. For example, Gregory Herek, a psychology professor at the University of California, Davis said: “The flip side of marriage equality is that people who strongly oppose it find the shifting culture extremely disturbing. They may feel that the way they see the world is threatened, which motivates them to strike out in some way, and for some people, that way could be in violent attacks” (Park and Mykhyalshyn 2016). This socio-political climate is replete with a type of white, masculinist, nationalism that encourages and perpetuates

this type of violence, summed up with slogans such as: “take our country back.” In some ways I agree with Herek; however, he fails to address how this violence is a part of American culture. The media have portrayed Mateen as foreign terrorist, but he was born in New York City and raised with American values. The violence that occurred at Pulse cannot be divorced from the hate speech that has been lobbed at minorities (race, gender, and sexual) for decades.

In the wake of this terrible event, I think it becomes increasingly important to interrogate the monolithic portrayal of the gay “community.” I have no desire to see a fracturing of LGBT/Q communities, especially at a time of communal mourning, but want to remind them that members of this “community” face different obstacles and have to navigate the world in vastly different ways. For instance, because the shooting happened so close to the anniversary of Stonewall when many cities hold gay pride celebrations, many lesbians and gays called for increased police presence in LGBT/Q communities, especially at bars and nightclubs. People were afraid for their safety and of individuals who may want to copy Mateen’s actions. While fear is a reasonable response, this desire for increased police presence illustrates the divisions within LGBT/Q communities. For communities of color, transgender people, and gender non-conforming people, an increase in police presence does not equal safety, since the lives of these individuals are so often put in jeopardy by law enforcement.

Even in the wake of such a terrible incident, we witness how the issue of policing is fraught with concerns for many communities that make up the LGBT/Q acronym. For example, in Chicago during the city’s annual Pride celebration, the police shut down the “Pride at Montrose” event at Montrose Beach. The “Pride at Montrose” event celebrates the strength and pride of the Black LGBTQ community (Podesta, Garcia and Gallardo 2016). According to the Chicago police, the event was supposed to be protected by six-foot security fences, but

organizers put up fences that were too short; so they forced the event to close early. Erik Glenn, an organizer, said that their fence was four feet tall, the same height used to control the Pride Parade crowds. Glenn argues that taller barricades “would create an incredibly unsafe environment—patrons would go into what would effectively be a cage. It’s unfathomable and unprecedented” (Cheung 2016). Ultimately, organizers and participants argue that the shutdown was racially motivated (Cheung 2016). Glenn stated: “We were peaceful, we were beautiful. But it didn’t matter. It’s very easy for the tide to turn against an event where you have black and brown people who have historically been targeted by law enforcement — who are also not contributing directly to the local economy — and for security to be used to encourage us to leave” (Cheung 2016). Echoing Glenn’s sentiments, DeoVonte Means who was a participant at the event stated:

whether it was intentional or not, slighting an event geared toward the overlooked black and Latino gay population seems wrong.... They look for ANY [emphasis original] reason to shut down this epic event that was catering directly to the urban minorities of our community. THOUSANDS [emphasis original] of dollars and MULTIPLE [emphasis original] agencies made up this year’s Montrose Pride Fest and they will all be affected by the institutional racism that occurred today. (Cheung 2016)

The recent successes by the mainstream gay rights movement have allowed white lesbians and gays to imagine themselves as a part of the American citizenry and as included in its prosperity, while queer communities of color are consistently situated as “sites of crime, illegality, and protest cultures” (Halberstam 2016). After Orlando, we must (at the very least) think about our formulations about who “we” are and how we construct simplistic narratives of “us” and “them.” In the wake of such brutality, we need to reconsider who is truly welcome into this broad LGBTQ acronym and who is excluded.

Given the events in Orlando and the different cases analyzed in this project, I return to one of my core questions: who are “we” and what does it mean to be a part of the LGBT/Q

“community”? This question is important on more than just a theoretical level, especially as reports following the Orlando shooting focus on anti-LGBTQ crime. A report released by the Southern Poverty Law Center found that “LGBT individuals face a higher risk than other groups of being the victim of an attack” (Green 2016). And while this is a striking claim, the data can be misleading. The report shows that Black and transgender people are the most at risk of violence, with Latinx<sup>3</sup> and Black trans people experiencing the highest rates of hate crimes and murder (Park and Mykhyalyshyn 2016).

As members of LGBT/Q communities come together at vigils and fundraisers for the Pulse victims, it is critical that we remember that this was not just an attack on the gay community, but specifically on the Latinx community. As LGBT/Q communities come together to mourn this terrible act of racism and homophobia, they should be diligent not to erase the multiple identities that the victims embodied or co-opt the event as an expression of white loss.

## **6.1 What Bodies Belong?**

The purpose of this project was not to demonize mainstream members of lesbian and gay communities; rather I hoped to illuminate the complexities that exist within LGBT/Q spaces. The gay rights movement has long been dominated by short-sighted and assimilationist goals. The radical potential that the movement could embody has been stunted by a myopic focus on normalization that, by definition, is limited and marginalizing. Queer scholar José Muñoz (2009) asks readers to consider how we can move beyond these homonormative goals, and look toward

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<sup>3</sup> Activists groups have recently started using Latinx because it is gender-neutral compared to Latino which is a masculine identifier or Latina which is a feminine identifier. Thus, Latinx encompasses all genders and those outside of the traditional gender binary.

a future of queerness that is “not yet here” (1). He asks readers to consider how this queer future may allow us to critically analyze the contemporary gay rights movement. Building on Munoz’s call, my hope is that this project allows us to consider how queer politics have the potential to reinvigorate conversations about equal rights, and not just for LGBT/Q communities, but for all communities.

I hoped I have demonstrated how the mainstream lesbian and gay community’s fight for normalization and integration has made it a complicit agent in the corrupt institutions of the United States. In addition, I hope I have shown how this *belonging* to the nation is contingent upon the *un-belonging* of queer subjects who proudly embody racial, gender, and sexual differences and reject the state’s promises of citizenship that are based on notions of respectability and heteronormativity.

As I have illustrated in the previous chapters, these divisions between mainstream gays and queers can be traced back to the early history of the gay rights movement. The Stonewall Riots was, at its core, a queer act of rebellion; it was a riot led by working-class transgender folks, lesbians, drag queens, and gay men to fight against police brutality. However, the discourse that has shaped public knowledge about the riots has largely erased the queer identities of those original rioters. The history of Stonewall has been appropriated by mainstream lesbians and gays who too often emphasize a single-issue politic that ignores the intersection of identities, or something that queer and Muslim activist Eman Abdelhadi (2016) calls the “New Stonewall.” The rhetoric of the New Stonewall insists that issues like police brutality and criminalization are a thing of the past or that queer identities and oppressions can be compartmentalized from political goals (Abdelhadi 2016). The co-opting of the history of the riots by the mainstream community exposes how these politics of respectability and goals for normalization have



attempted to erase or stifle any queer criticisms of the gay rights movement. Queers feel this erasure from the movement as our identities are made digestible for mainstream consumption such as in the 2015 movie, *Stonewall*. Even in moments of communal mourning, activists refuse to look at how the intersections of masculinity, violence, racism, and homophobia spawn horrible acts of murder. They erase our identities as we watch the further corporatization and assimilation of the gay rights movement that inevitably ignore the needs of those who embody the core of queer liberation.

The normalization of gay identities works in tandem with the heteronormative markers of American respectability, which are based on specific understandings of race, sex, and gender. Queers of color, transgender people, and gender-nonconforming people not only encounter state violence and racism, but are also further marginalized from the normative, white, and Western mandate of the gay and lesbian movement (Abdelhadi 2016, Carson 2013, Conrad 2010, Conrad 2014a, Puar 2005, Sycamore 2012). Queer scholar Tyler Carson (2013) argues that:

the erasure of queer bodies (both QPOC [queer people of color], transgender people, gender non-conforming folks, etc.) serves to legitimate a discourse of sexuality that is constructed in the interests of Western white gays, as well as for the maintenance and dominance of liberalism and the imperial and colonial histories that accompany it. (4)

To understand the current social and political trajectory of the gay rights movement it is imperative to understand whose bodies and identities are being represented or excluded, and who *belongs* to the community.

The purpose of this project was to demonstrate that due to homonormativity and exclusionism a “unified” or single LGBT/Q community is an illusion. I hoped to demonstrate how the discourses framing the rights movement have been employed by the mainstream lesbian and gay community to set the trajectory of liberalism and gay activism in the United States. The gay rights movement has largely rendered queer bodies invisible to the public because these

bodies cannot be reconciled with or absorbed into the goals of the homonormative gay community. My research shows how the erasure of queer bodies and queer identities recurs through the neoliberal ideologies of the gay rights movement. This removal of particular queer, racialized, and gender nonconforming bodies is necessary to construct gay narratives that affirm and support national projects because queer bodies offer challenges to mainstream lesbian and gay activists' claims to citizenship rights in the United States.

### ***6.1.1 Bringing The Battles Together***

For far too long, the media's overwhelming coverage of the fight for marriage equality solidified it as *the* issue for the gay rights movement and the last barrier that needed to be overcome for full equality. Even when mainstream activists acknowledged there were more battles to be fought, they did not deviate from the message that this was the primary battle for the gay community. These activists emphasized that equality and change is slow and incremental to placate critics, and reassured them that other important battles would be fought in time. The privileging of marriage and the lack of attention to issues such as employment, housing and healthcare made members not feel represented in the LGBT/Q movement. For example, Beth Shipp, executive director of LPAC, a lesbian political action committee, pointed out that gains for LGBT people are not felt equally along gender lines. She said:

For many, it's as simple as devoting more attention to letters in the acronym besides that capital 'G,' starting with the 'L...' We seem to be at an incredible point in our LGBT history, on the precipice of full equality; and yet, these discriminations [like Religious Freedom Restoration Acts] threaten lesbian and queer women's economic security, our political equality and our personal freedoms. All the while, the reproductive rights of women continue to erode. (Allen 2015)

The problem is, she is not wrong, there are many issues facing lesbian and queer women that marriage equality does nothing to address. Mara Keisling, the director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, contends that single-issue causes, like marriage, are problematic for other members in the community who are not represented by the “G” or the “L.” She posits: “LGB groups are a really important resource for the trans movement, and they’re fading in some states.... The infrastructure is very unsteady. That should be a real cause of alarm for us” (Redden 2016).

This dissonance in the community has become increasingly obvious as mainstream lesbians and gays settle into their newly gained rights and move away from the activism that drove the marriage equality movement. For instance, Pride Agenda, a leading gay organization which helped pass marriage equality and anti-discrimination protections for sexual orientation in New York, declared that its last major goal would be banning a transgender discrimination bill. The group later abandoned this goal in order to declare “victory” at the end of 2015, when marriage equality became legal. When a local trans rights group criticized Pride Agenda for conveniently abandoning their fight for transgender rights in order to claim success, their response was apathetic. Juli Grey-Owens, a New York trans activist, described Pride Agenda’s closure as leaving a deficit of resources that transgender groups are trying to fill. She stated that the problem is the lack of networks and resources that have largely been denied to trans folks over the decades. In contrast, gay organizations have been able to build the much-needed social capital to get their agendas accomplished. “[Pride Agenda] possessed a valuable email list and an extensive rolodex of power players. Its members were also active in training local activists around the state to get the attention of lawmakers” (Allen 2015).

In lieu of accepting the rhetoric that equality is incremental and other issues will be addressed in time, I posed the question: why? Why was the battle for marriage at the forefront, instead of focusing on housing and health care, ending the violence against queers of color and transgender people, and aiding marginalized youth and queer immigrants? Declaring that gay oppression is largely defined on the basis of being excluded from institutions such as marriage and the military is both insulting and problematic for so many in queer and trans communities.

Chelsea Manning articulated this point well:

I fear that our precious movements for social justice and all the remarkable advancements we have made are now vulnerable to being taken over by monied people and institutions, and that those of us for whom same-sex marriage rights brings no equality will be slowly erased from our movement and our history.... But despite our successes and our participation in the struggle for LGBT equality, there are still queer and trans folks who struggle every single day for the right to define themselves, to access gender-appropriate healthcare and to live without harassment by other people, the police or the government. Many queer and trans people live – and lived – in our prison and jails, in our homeless shelters, in run-down houses and apartment buildings, and on the corners of every major city. Marriage equality doesn't help them; and the potential loss of momentum for trans/queer rights after this win could well hurt them. (Manning 2015)

Examining the discourse set by Gay, Inc. suggests if gays could just gain inclusion into these institutions, then youth suicides would not happen, transwomen of color would stop being murdered, and queer youth would stop being forced to live on the streets. “For decades, same-sex marriage has been something of an *idée fixe* for the LGBT political mainstream—no other issue reached the same level of awareness nor inspired quite so much spending” (Allen 2015). For Gay Inc., these were the important battles to fight and win. Privileged members focus on upholding homonormativity in order to build networks with influential organizations that work to sustain the cycle of power. These battles will never be about social justice because those who have the power to shape the discourse will never fully advocate for the those who are less privileged in the LGBT/Q “community.” While these groups are often merged into one community under the

LGBT/Q umbrella, they have a fraught and sometimes contentious history. Abdelhadi (2016)

sums up this disconnect:

According to the logic of the New Stonewall, police oppression of queers is in the past. Our oppression is compartmentalized from our political goals. If we just ask nicely and give them the respect they apparently deserve, people in power will listen to us. Based on this thinking, the fight for job non-discrimination is separate from the fight against transphobia is separate from the fight against gentrification is separate from the fight against police brutality is separate from racism is separate from the deaths of forty-nine, mostly Latinx, folks at the hands of a raging, gun-obsessed homophobe.

So instead of a community working together for equality and liberation for all members, I see the opposite happening as politicians and corporate interests deploy gay rights discourse worldwide for personal profit. The gay rights movement is still there with a vast contingent of motivated members and staggering global bargaining capabilities; we just need to reforge it into the transformative global power it could be.

## 6.2 Moving Forward

One of the most challenging aspects of researching a contemporary subject is that, for good or ill, new events happen during the project timeline. For example, on May 22, 2016, *The New York Times* called the debates about the transgender bathroom bill the “new front line in the culture war” and perhaps this case may reveal Gay, Inc. taking a queerer stance on this issue than it has in the past. It is too early to tell, at the time of writing this conclusion, but we can wonder: will this be the issue that pushes Gay, Inc. beyond its assimilationist strategies and work to unite some of the members of the LGBT/Q community that have been marginalized?

This issue came to national attention when North Carolina passed the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act, or more commonly known as HB2 or simply the “bathroom bill” (Carolina 2016). The bill states that transgender people who have not changed the sex on their birth certificate (which requires surgery and is banned in some states) have no legal right under

state law to use public or school restrooms that correspond to their gender identity. Further, the bill does not allow any city or county to establish a different standard (Carolina 2016).

For many in the U.S. this debate seemed to materialize from nowhere. It was not an issue that appeared on any national polls, but has quickly become labeled as: “the next frontier in America’s fast-moving culture wars...” (Stolberg, Bosman, Fernandez and Davis 2016). In a surprising move the Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a lawsuit against the state of North Carolina over this bill stating that it violated students’ Title IX protections because, in essence, the bill was sex discrimination. North Carolina governor Pat McCrory argued that the federal government was “bullying” lawmakers (Brydum 2016) and supporters of the bill stated that they were angry at “the liberal left trying to push this [transgender rights] down our throats” (Stolberg et al. 2016).

In response to the passage of HB2, on May 9, 2016 Attorney General Loretta Lynch gave a speech declaring that the bill was “state-sponsored discrimination” and in a declaration directed at the transgender community she stated: “No matter how isolated, how afraid, and no matter how alone you may feel today, note this — the Department of Justice and indeed the entire Obama Administration want you to know: we see you, we stand with you, and we will do everything we can to support you going forward (Brydum 2016). Her frank and earnest statement was quite a surprise for many all over the United States; and for members of LGBT/Q communities, especially for transgender individuals, it felt like the government was, for the first time, taking their issues seriously. HRC President Chad Griffin also made a clear statement in support for the trans community by stating: “Transgender students are under attack in this country...[and] they need their federal government to stand up for them” (Stolberg et al. 2016). The HRC is not the only traditionally mainstream organization that has joined in the opposition

to HB2, agencies like the National Education Association and the National Center for Lesbian Rights issued a 68-page guide for schools intending to provide a blueprint for the White House on this issue (Stolberg et al. 2016).

Furthermore, these organizations are beginning to take action in hope of repealing the bill. Activists are utilizing many of the same strategies employed during the marriage equality battles (e.g., campaigning for acceptance state by state, massive fundraising efforts), yet this time in a surprising move by Gay, Inc. it is for transgender rights. The HRC and other gay rights leaders have started establishing new organizations like Turnout Charlotte that is meant to “identify and support and ask candidates: ‘Where are you on this issue?’” to locate potential allies among the state’s legislators (Stolberg et al. 2016). The combined support of traditionally mainstream organizations, the DOJ, and the Obama administration leads me to ask: are we seeing a queerer direction for the future of the gay rights movement? Or is this just a propaganda ploy by Gay, Inc. to allay the many criticisms that, for years, have been launched at them?

Loretta Lynch said: “This action is about a great deal more than bathrooms. This is about the dignity and the respect that we accord our fellow citizens... it’s about the founding ideals that have led this country, haltingly but inexorably, in the direction of fairness, inclusion, and equality for all Americans” (Brydum 2016). As a community we want to applaud Lynch’s statements, and celebrate transgender issues being taken seriously. As acceptance of lesbians and gays has become attached to national identity, we can wonder if the same will happen for transgender people or if the sudden concern for transgender liberty is another nationalistic, propaganda stunt to prove American exceptionalism. So hesitantly, I celebrate this small success but our government and our “community” still have a long way to go.

As a queer identified sociologist, I want my community to fight oppression in all of its

forms, not only those that directly affect me. I want us to rethink what a liberation movement can and should look like. I want us to highlight and privilege those voices who are too often pushed onto the margins, that are too often forgotten and ignored, and those who are too often the victims of violence. I situate this project as a way to reject the idea that gaining rights means we have to invest ourselves in a heteronormative present that is deeply unequal and unjust; and instead, I want to demand and fight for a future that is radically more equitable and queer. I want to find ways to fight for this queer future, and find ways to create a potential space for queer (re)imaginings in society and in our communities.



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